

# De La Salle School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	115237
<b>Local Authority</b>	ESSEX
<b>Inspection number</b>	290175
<b>Inspection dates</b>	20–21 June 2007
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Stephen Abbott HMI

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

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<b>Type of school</b>	Comprehensive
<b>School category</b>	Voluntary aided
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School	741
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The local authority
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mr M. Curnock
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	21 May 2001
<b>School address</b>	Ghyllgrove Basildon Essex SS14 2LA
<b>Telephone number</b>	01268 281234
<b>Fax number</b>	01268 288710

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<b>Age group</b>	11–16
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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three Additional Inspectors.

## Description of the school

This smaller than average school provides education in the Catholic tradition and draws learners from a wide area of south Essex. However, just over half of the learners are not Catholic. Most live in parts of Basildon that have higher than average deprivation and relatively few adults who have experienced higher education.

The proportion of learners known to be eligible for free school meals is well above the national average. Nearly 15% of the learners have minority ethnic heritage, which is just below the national average. Very few are at an early stage of learning English. Most year groups have roughly equal numbers of boys and girls, but Years 9 and 10 have three boys for every two girls. A quarter of learners have recognised learning difficulties or disabilities, which is above average, but the proportion with a statement of special educational needs is close to the average.

The school caters for all abilities, but has more learners joining the school with below average standards than above average standards, partly because some high attainers attend nearby selective schools.

## Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 2

De La Salle School is a good school where the great majority of learners enjoy their learning, behave well and work hard. It has undergone a transformation since the present headteacher was appointed in September 2004, something commented on by parents, learners, staff and visitors to the school. He has given an outstanding lead in establishing a calm and purposeful ethos that enables good achievement. By restructuring management roles and clarifying responsibilities, the headteacher has created a team who share his clear vision. Strong leadership, effective partnerships, good support from the local authority and a robust approach to under-performance have raised expectations, behaviour and achievement.

Teachers have been given clear guidance through policies for teaching and the use of assessment to support learning. As a result, nearly all lessons are at least satisfactory and many are good. Most learners know what it takes to reach their targets. They are well prepared for examinations and coursework. Senior staff monitor lessons daily, and this is helping teaching and learning to improve further. Some of the better lessons develop initiative and team work that prepares learners well for their future economic well-being. Nevertheless, some aspects of teaching are inconsistent. These include the quality of marking, the development of independent learning skills and the extent to which teaching meets the needs of all learners in the class.

The curriculum has been strengthened by new vocational and other options, but aspects such as enterprise, work-related learning and extra-curricular provision are under-developed. Provision for mathematics and English is strong but the attention to literacy and numeracy in other lessons is inconsistent. Care, support and guidance are good, although some aspects have only recently been established and their full impact is not yet clear. There are effective systems to identify and support learners who are underachieving and those with learning difficulties.

When learners join in Year 7, they are an average of nearly a year behind the typical 11 year old. The school helps them to make good progress in Key Stage 3, so the learning gap is nearly halved by age 14. Examination results show a clear upward trend and the good progress is now being maintained in Key Stage 4. Learners currently in Year 11 are reaching standards that are close to the national average. Those with learning difficulties or disabilities progress as well as their peers. Learners' personal development is good. They are well informed about healthy lifestyles, feel safe at school and know who to talk to if they have problems. Nearly all say they enjoy school and this is reflected in attendance; which is now close to the national average. Learners in Years 10 and 11 contribute strongly to the school and wider community but younger learners have fewer opportunities.

Leadership and management are good, despite some lapses in the sharpness of its improvement planning. The school has demonstrated a good capacity for improvement, by identifying and tackling six big issues: clarifying management roles; establishing an ethos conducive to learning; introducing more attractive and appropriate courses; improving lesson planning and structures; helping learners to understand examination requirements; and monitoring learners' progress to identify and tackle underachievement. However, the school's self-evaluation has not been rigorous enough to identify the complex and often subject-specific reasons behind the inconsistencies in teaching and learning.

## What the school should do to improve further

- Increase the rigour of self-evaluation by: focusing on the impact of plans and policies rather than their implementation; analysing findings in more detail to identify more precisely how to improve further; and setting more ambitious targets.
- Improve the less consistent aspects of teaching and learning, such as: quality of marking; development of independent learning; and attention to the full range of learners' needs.
- Address the less effective aspects of the curriculum including: enterprise education; work-related learning; and guidance in schemes of work on literacy and numeracy development.

## Achievement and standards

### Grade: 2

Achievement has improved considerably in the last three years and is now good. Learners progress well in science, very well in English and outstandingly in mathematics. They start the school nearly a year behind on average, but they make good progress in Key Stage 3. Standards at age 14 are still below average, but the deficit is almost halved by the end of Key Stage 3. Standards are also improving at age 16 and the school is now exceeding its targets for 14 and 16 year-olds. GCSE results had taken a substantial dip in 2005 and despite a considerable improvement were still below the national average in 2006, although mathematics and English results were relatively strong. The improvement in 2006 was the first sign that the monitoring of learners' progress, intensive test preparation and revision support were starting to work in Key Stage 4. There has been considerable further improvement in 2006/07. The school's own assessments, which have been very reliable in recent years, show that current Year 11 learners are working at a standard close to the national average, having started the school with low prior attainment. This represents good achievement. Achievement is reasonably consistent across gender and ethnic classifications. Learners with learning difficulties or disabilities progress well because they receive increasingly effective support. A handful of learners follow alternative programmes that meet their needs well but do not lead to many GCSE or equivalent qualifications.

## Personal development and well-being

### Grade: 2

Learners' personal development and well-being are good, contributing well to their improving progress. In this calm and orderly school most learners are polite, friendly, helpful and well-behaved. They enjoy school, showing positive attitudes, except occasionally when lessons are not challenging. Given the opportunity, they work very well in groups. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good, supported effectively by assemblies and in some departments and tutorials. Attendance has improved over the last two years to become average. The school's tough stance on behaviour that is bullying, aggressive or disrupts others' learning is greatly appreciated by learners, who say they feel safe. The number of fixed-term exclusions caused by this policy, though decreasing, remains fairly high; but few are excluded more than once. An enlightened water-drinking policy and firm line on smoking help learners to have healthy lifestyles. Year 10 and 11 learners contribute well to the community, but younger ones have fewer opportunities. Learners are generally well prepared for their future working lives, although some lessons do not promote literacy and numeracy skills, and opportunities for work-related learning are limited.

## Quality of provision

### Teaching and learning

#### Grade: 3

Inspectors agreed with the school's judgement of teaching and learning as satisfactory, but noted some good features. Teaching and learning in the school are improving because of the prime importance attached to them by the senior leaders. They regularly visit lessons, give feedback to teachers and prioritise the professional development of all staff. The very good relations between adults and learners, reinforced by good behaviour management and by the learners' positive attitudes, create a purposeful classroom climate. Teachers plan lessons thoroughly and choose resources carefully, but often provide insufficient variation to meet different learners' needs, especially the most able. Academic guidance is not always specific enough because both questioning and marking are sometimes too superficial.

In good lessons, teachers use their subject expertise imaginatively to stimulate or inspire, give clear explanations and widen learners' understanding with skilfully posed questions, so that progress is good. They vary the pace and activities, and readily encourage and help individuals. These lessons are enjoyable because they include independent and group work and challenge learners to think for themselves. Teaching is rarely unsatisfactory, but it is less effective in some lessons, often because activities are less imaginative, the pace is slower and tasks do not engage learners' interest. These lessons are less motivating but learners' good attitudes usually help them to maintain reasonable progress.

### Curriculum and other activities

#### Grade: 3

The curriculum is satisfactory with good features. It meets most statutory requirements and has been enhanced by new pathways in Key Stage 4, including a wider range of vocational courses and new information and communication technology (ICT) courses. These changes have been introduced with care, taking into account the needs of the community and the availability locally of suitable progression courses. The school is developing good partnerships through the local 14-19 strategy. The curriculum is also being adapted in response to the requirements of 'Every Child Matters'. Extra time for core subjects has helped to address learners' weaknesses in English and mathematics, but less attention has been given to developing literacy and numeracy skills in other subjects. Schemes of work form a satisfactory basis for planning, but give too little guidance for teachers on how to meet the needs of learners working at different levels, or how to help learners develop their initiative and independent learning skills.

The curriculum contributes well to learners' personal development and well-being but there are relatively few enrichment activities. Opportunities for work-related and enterprise learning are limited. For many learners, work experience is the only way to learn about the world of work.

### Care, guidance and support

#### Grade: 2

Care, guidance and support are good. Learners' overall progress is monitored effectively and helps staff to identify those needing additional support. Provision for those with learning difficulties and disabilities is satisfactory and is improving as it is reorganised by the new coordinator. Learners with emotional needs are cared for well, often contributing to higher

achievement. Rigorous action has improved attendance. The school has adopted an inclusive approach and takes in learners who need much support. The systems for ensuring good behaviour are effective for the majority. However, a small number of learners have been excluded repeatedly and new approaches are being considered. Many learners know their targets, and how they can reach them, due to guidance from their teachers and through regular review meetings. Effective procedures cover health, safety and child protection issues. Arrangements for safeguarding learners meet legal requirements.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 2**

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher is a strong and charismatic leader with deeply held convictions. He gives an unambiguous sense of direction to the school; a transforming culture where the central importance of learning, hard work, courtesy and respect for others is embraced by staff and learners. His capable senior team share his vision. With him, they transmit it by their responsive presence around the school and their regular and supportive visits to lessons, a practice welcomed by learners and their teachers. The school works smoothly on a day-to-day basis and an atmosphere of calm, order and purpose prevails. Senior leaders have a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Middle management has been strengthened by training, new appointments and creating posts of heads of upper and lower school and faculty heads as line managers. The school has high expectations of its staff, supporting them well through professional development. It promotes equality of opportunity but acknowledges that it does not stretch its ablest learners enough. Human and material resources are well deployed to achieve good value for money. Processes to monitor, evaluate and improve the performance of staff and learners are widespread, but insufficiently refined or systematic; weaknesses which the school is addressing. School development planning is extensive and detailed, but lacks measurable success criteria and is not always sharply focused. The governors are supportive of the school and increasingly involve themselves in its work and in holding it to account.

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## Annex A

## Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	<b>School Overall</b>
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### Overall effectiveness

<b>How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?</b>	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

### Achievement and standards

<b>How well do learners achieve?</b>	2
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2

### Personal development and well-being

<b>How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The behaviour of learners	2
The attendance of learners	3
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2

### The quality of provision

<b>How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?</b>	3
<b>How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?</b>	3
<b>How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?</b>	2

<sup>1</sup> Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

## Annex A

**Leadership and management**

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

## Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

22 June 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of De La Salle School, Basildon SS14 2LA

I am writing to tell you the results of your school's inspection. Before I do that, I would like to thank you all, on behalf of the inspection team, for your co-operation and help during our visit.

Everyone we spoke to told us how much better the school has become since Mr Curnock took over as headteacher. He and the deputy and assistant heads worked as a team to make changes. They concentrated on a few big things;

- creating a calm atmosphere for learning
- improving your mathematics and English to help in all subjects
- improving the choice of courses in Key Stage 4
- making sure that lessons are well planned
- showing you how to succeed in examinations
- checking your progress regularly and supporting anyone who falls behind.

As a result, you now enjoy your learning, behave well and work hard. You know about healthy lifestyles, feel safe at school and know who to talk to if you have problems. Your attendance is better and examination results are improving. The school helps you to make good progress, which is important because the average pupil at De La Salle starts Year 7 quite a bit below the national average.

De La Salle School is a good school but it can get even better. We suggested that the school;

- looks in more detail at each aspect of its work to identify changes that could make things better
- ensures that teachers are consistently good at things like: marking; planning for a range of abilities in the lesson; and making you think for yourselves
- improves the way it teaches you to be enterprising and to understand the world of work.

On behalf of the inspection team, I wish you all the best for the future.

Yours sincerely

Stephen Abbott HMI, Lead Inspector