

Clacton County High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	115360
Local Authority	ESSEX
Inspection number	290218
Inspection dates	10–11 January 2007
Reporting inspector	Paula Heaney HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	1665
6th form	263
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr H A Foster
Principal	Mr J Clay
Date of previous school inspection	28 October 2002
School address	Walton Road Clacton-on-sea Essex CO15 6DZ
Telephone number	01255 424266
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four Additional Inspectors over two days.

Description of the school

This is a large, mixed, comprehensive school where attainment on entry is broadly in line with national averages, but where the number of students joining the school with higher grades is below average. The number eligible for free schools meals is above the national average as is the number with special educational needs. The number of students from minority ethnic groups is significantly below the national average, as most students are White British. The majority of students join the school from the four partner primary schools. The school has specialist performing arts status which commenced in 2001. Significant improvements to the accommodation have recently been completed.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

The inspection concurs with the school's self-evaluation that this is a satisfactory school with some good features. The school has satisfactory capacity to improve further. The standards the students reach are in line with national averages at Key Stage 3. At Key Stage 4, there have been improvements in standards, although results are still below national averages. Changes have been made to the curriculum to interest and motivate students, including more work related qualifications and options. Standards in the sixth form are broadly average, reflecting the starting point of the majority of the students, many of whom have the minimum entry requirements. The school has broadened provision effectively by introducing a range of lower level qualifications in the sixth form, including sport, childcare and performing arts diplomas, and by raising the entry requirements for some Advanced (A) Level courses. Students' achievement is satisfactory.

The self-evaluation is a fair reflection of the school and where improvements need to be made, but does not consistently include the impact of initiatives introduced to improve the school's performance. During the inspection teaching and learning were satisfactory. A third of lessons seen were good. Students respond enthusiastically and make better progress in lessons when there are activities which challenge and involve them. Where lessons are more teacher led and students more passive, opportunities for targeting students' individual needs and abilities are missed. Strategies for improving teaching and learning include the use of 'flexible days' where students can focus on a particular subject or project with the aim of improving their progress.

Students' attitudes to learning are positive and they behave well. They speak favourably about the friendly atmosphere in the school and they feel the environment is safe and caring. There is a broad range of additional activities the students can take part in, especially in performing arts, and the school has a productive relationship with a number of theatres in the area. The school has a good record of working with external bodies to improve the students' experiences. Recently completed improvements to the accommodation have included a superb new dining facility, a dedicated sixth form centre and new performing arts facilities, which students value highly. The majority of parents speak highly of the school, although a minority are concerned about the behaviour in lessons of a few students disrupting the learning of others.

The Principal provides satisfactory leadership which is focused on raising standards. However, there is not a sharp enough focus on supporting middle managers and staff to raise standards and achievement across the school. The school is not using information which relates to students' targets and achievements coherently and consistently. Governance is effective and the school provides satisfactory value for money.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 3

The effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form is satisfactory. Standards are broadly average at A Level and the progress students make is satisfactory. Students' attitudes are very positive, particularly following the creation of a sixth form centre within the school. The monitoring of students' progress is effective, as is the support they receive to improve their work. Students greatly appreciate the support from teachers, particularly when help with work is requested, and are well supported when choosing careers and opportunities in higher education. Leadership and management are satisfactory and ensure satisfactory value for money. The curriculum is

predominantly A Level courses, but also includes a range of lower courses which enable other students to continue their education in the sixth form locally.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise student achievement across the school by using data more effectively and consistently to target improvements and drive up standards.
- Ensure all students are involved and challenged actively in lessons by improving further the quality of learning, and the teaching which underpins it.
- Ensure leadership adopts a more rigorous approach with middle managers to raise standards in the school.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Achievement and standards are satisfactory. By the end of Year 9 students' attainment and progress is satisfactory with no group making inadequate progress. Over the last three years, standards in English have varied from above average to below average. However, the 2006 national tests show improvement. In autumn 2005 the school introduced measures to raise standards in mathematics successfully. Similar strategies are being extended into English and these are having a positive impact.

Students make satisfactory progress in Years 10 and 11 and school data indicates that standards and achievement are improving, though they are below average. The 2006 results show students do well in art and information communication technology (ICT) and less well in music and religious education. The school now sets more challenging targets for students' attainment with robust systems for recording and analysing their performance.

Sixth form entry standards are below average. Examination results at the end of Years 12 and 13 are just below the national average which indicates that students' achieve satisfactorily. Progress seen during the inspection suggests that students are on track to attain higher standards than has been the case in previous years.

Students with learning difficulties and disabilities also make satisfactory progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Students' personal development and well-being are good. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory. Most display positive attitudes, enjoy school and feel valued. Behaviour is generally good in lessons and around the school. However, a small minority of students disrupt the learning of others in a few lessons. The school has worked hard to improve attendance, which is now satisfactory. Students are well aware of the importance of adopting healthy lifestyles, and they participate well in the range of sports on offer.

Students acquire a good understanding of moral and ethical issues and respond generously to charity appeals. Last year over 3,000 pounds was raised for a number of charities including the Essex Air Ambulance and the NSPCC. The sixth form, too, play an active part in supporting worthy causes, such as organising a senior citizens' party.

The arts specialism of the school gives students good opportunities to take part in exhibitions and performances and they are introduced to some non western artistic traditions. Students' spiritual development is less well emphasised and this continues to be a weakness. The school effectively takes account of students' views through the School Councils and the Student Voice initiative, where students produced a video giving good advice to staff on implementing the 'Rewards and Consequences' policy.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory with some strengths. The school's process for monitoring lessons includes routine observation of all teachers both within subject areas and by senior management. Although judgements on teaching tend to be over generous, areas for improvement are clearly identified and addressed both through target setting and further professional development. This has resulted in some improvements in learning, although two thirds of the lessons observed were no better than satisfactory.

The majority of lessons are well planned. In good lessons, teachers set challenging standards, skilfully maintain a brisk pace as they change from one part of the lesson to the next and keep students' motivation throughout. Classes generally are well managed and, as a result, students' behaviour is mostly good. In a minority of good lessons, teachers counter students' passivity by adopting an upbeat, enthusiastic and challenging approach. ICT is used well by teachers, although restricted access to the internet limits students' independent research.

The school is aware that there is some inconsistency in assessment both in relation to marking of books and target setting. There are examples of good practice in subjects such as drama and English which are being shared more widely.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The curriculum is good throughout the school and the range of courses serves most students well. A good range of academic and vocational courses is available throughout the school, better meeting the needs of a wider range of students. A range of traditional and vocational courses is available in the sixth form in collaboration with partner institutions. Although the school is working hard with its partners to improve progression from 14 to 19 years, routes for students to follow are not yet well established. For example, some students who stay on in the sixth form to follow a GCSE equivalent vocational course may not currently have the opportunity to progress to the next level.

All students in the main school follow a comprehensive and effective programme of personal, social and health education. The many extra activities the school provides such as clubs, visits, drama and sport are highly valued by students. Additional activities of benefit both to students within the school and to the wider community have been introduced as a result of the school's performing arts college status. For example, all Year 9 students create a production on healthy living which is shown to local primary schools.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The school provides good care, guidance and support. Vulnerable students are monitored carefully. Liaison between the school and outside agencies is effective and ensures that students get good support. Child protection procedures are clear and the school pays careful attention to students' health and safety, for example with regard to movement around the site. The learning support department provides good support for students with additional learning needs and teaching assistants provide effective help for individuals. However, there is inconsistent practice among teachers in stretching the most able pupils and in the support offered to those who need extra help. Good systems are in place for tracking students' progress and identifying those who are under achieving, as well as those who are doing well. Learning mentors provide effective support for targeted students. The school keeps parents and carers regularly informed about their child's progress and students are knowledgeable about their future options.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory with some aspects which are good. The Principal is well respected by students, staff, parents and governors, and is developing effective leadership within the school. He has served the school with distinction for many years. The Principal has provided the vision to drive forward some important initiatives such as the impressive new build which includes new student dining facilities. A number of strategic middle manager appointments have been made to tackle specific areas of under achievement or inconsistency, for example in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science. However, the full impact of these is yet to be felt.

Senior staff have been allocated to departments to ensure that middle managers are made more accountable for subject performance. Although the support offered by the senior staff is much appreciated, their monitoring is not yet fully effective. For example, monitoring of teaching and learning in order to provide a consistent approach to planning and delivering more effective lessons has not yet had an impact on raising standards and achievement in all areas. The school's self-evaluation describes what is happening in the school but does not have a sufficiently robust focus on measuring improvements. The systems for tracking students' progress are improving and aspects are good. Where under achieving students are identified the support strategies put in place are now having more impact on improving their achievement.

Financial planning is secure and the school provides satisfactory value for money. The governing body is knowledgeable about the school's strengths, challenges the leadership team effectively and provides good support to the Principal and staff.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Annex A

Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

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

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3	
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	2	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	

The quality of provision

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

¹ 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

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3	
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	3	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	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

12 January 2007

Dear Students

Clacton County High School, Walton Road, Clacton on Sea, Essex, CO15 6DZ

As you know, your school was recently inspected and this letter is to tell you about the results of the inspection. I would like to thank you for your openness and cooperation during our visit. We enjoyed meeting you and appreciated your comments and opinions.

The inspection found that this is a satisfactory school. Test results at the end of Year 9 are in line with national averages. Although GCSE and A Level results are below national averages you are making satisfactory progress taking into account your starting points. GCSE results are improving and a range of vocational courses have been introduced in the main school and in the sixth form to meet your needs and interests.

Where we saw good lessons, these were interesting and challenging with a good range of activities tailored to your abilities. You told us you enjoy these lessons. Most of you behave well and enjoy your education. Your attendance is satisfactory. You feel you have a 'voice' in the school and we were particularly impressed by your video on the Behaviours and Consequences policy which you made for your teachers.

We have asked the Principal to take action on four things.

- Raise achievement across the whole school.
- Ensure lessons meet your individual needs and challenge you to achieve the best you can.
- Use information the school has more effectively to improve students' performances across the school.
- Develop the role of managers so that they can move the school forward.

You can help your school by ensuring that you attend regularly, discussing with your teachers through your student councils how you learn best, behaving well at all times and above all by working hard. We wish you well with your future studies.

Paula Heaney

HM Inspector of Schools