



St Helena School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 115364
Local Authority ESSEX
Inspection number 290219
Inspection dates 14–15 September 2006
Reporting inspector Mr. Denis Pittman

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

Type of school	Comprehensive	School address	Sheepen Road
School category	Foundation		Colchester
Age range of pupils	11–16		Essex CO3 3LE
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01206572253
Number on roll (school)	1019	Fax number	01206543049
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mr. Brian Watling
		Headteacher	Mr. Clive Waddington
Date of previous school inspection	30 April 2001		

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
11–16	14–15 September 2006	290219

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by four Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

St Helena is an average sized, comprehensive school. Most pupils are from White British backgrounds and very few of them have English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is lower than average, as is the proportion who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. In recent years the school has had problems in recruiting staff in some subjects. In September 2005, the school achieved specialist status in Arts and Media.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

St Helena school gives its pupils a satisfactory education. It was identified as one of the 'most improved schools' in 1999 but as a result of considerable staffing and other difficulties has struggled to sustain some of the progress made in standards and achievement. In the last three years the school has made steady if modest improvement in its test and examination results, though pupils' achievement still varies in different subject areas. This continuing improvement is clearly related to the considerable efforts to recruit new staff and develop better subject leadership, improve teaching and learning and establish a safe and positive learning environment. Pupils start at the school with broadly average standards though a significant number have limited basic skills. Overall, pupils make sound progress and as a result achievement is satisfactory. In Years 7 to 9 pupils make good progress in English, helped by a focus on effective teaching and learning. However, despite improvement, standards could be better in science and mathematics. Pupils have performed better in the most recent Year 9 science and mathematics tests, helped by new and better leadership and some improved teaching. Standards at the end of Year 11 are broadly average in English, mathematics and science. Achievement in these core subjects is satisfactory. GCSE results have been steadily improving in recent years, but in 2006 they were clearly affected by poor results in information communication and technology (ICT) and in design and technology (DT). This was due to staffing difficulties at the time. Pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities make satisfactory progress, in line with other pupils. The personal development of pupils is satisfactory and elements of it have improved since the last inspection. The majority of pupils behave well but parents and pupils commented they were concerned about a small proportion of pupils who sometimes disrupt lessons which affects the learning and achievement of others in their classes. Many pupils enjoy school; speaking highly of their teachers and the activities they are offered. Pupils learn to adopt a healthy lifestyle and contribute well to the community through contributions to charities and through arts activities. Their preparation for economic well-being is satisfactory but there is inconsistency of provision across the subjects. The quality of teaching is satisfactory. In the past, the problems of retention and mobility of staff have interrupted pupils' learning, however new appointments have improved this situation. Lesson planning is detailed and is usually well related to the learning needs of different groups. This leads to more variety in teaching approaches but some lessons are too teacher-directed and in consequence fail to hold pupils' interest. The collation of information about achievement has improved and helps with the setting of targets for pupils. However the quality of marking and homework is inconsistent, adversely affecting the continuity of learning for some pupils. The curriculum offered to pupils is satisfactory. The broadening of the curriculum to include more vocational courses has successfully motivated more pupils and led to improved attendance levels. Pupils value the opportunities provided through the schools' specialist status in Arts and Media. The curriculum is also enhanced by plenty of other clubs and activities that contribute to the pupils' enjoyment of school. However, there are inconsistencies in the development and checking of ICT and basic skills across the curriculum. Welfare and guidance are satisfactory, with strengths in

care for students and in child protection. Vulnerable pupils are well cared for. Approaches for dealing with some of the problems with behaviour have been reviewed, but the impact of these has not yet been evaluated. Systems to improve attendance have been strengthened. Attendance has improved significantly as a result and levels are now average. There has been a strong focus on dealing with bullying and all pupils know who to contact if they are subject to this. Leadership, management and governance are satisfactory; the school provides satisfactory value for money. The leadership and management team have introduced a detailed programme of self-review. It is providing a more accurate view of the school's effectiveness. For example, this has led to a better use of assessment information, particularly in relation to pupils' learning. These procedures are relatively new so the full impact has yet to be evaluated. The school recognises that there are inconsistencies in the implementation of policies on assessment and behaviour. However, given the recent improvement and the commitment and enthusiasm of many staff, the school has a sound capacity to improve.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve pupils' achievement in mathematics and science at Year 9. - Ensure greater consistency in the quality of teaching, marking and the management of behaviour. - Improve the monitoring of the curriculum so that there is great consistency across subjects, especially in ICT and DT. - Improve the use of a wide range of teaching and learning strategies including a greater emphasis on independent learning.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Standards are broadly average and pupils' progress is satisfactory. Achievement in both key stages is satisfactory. In Years 7 to 9, pupils make good progress in English but, despite recent improvement, standards are below average in science and mathematics. GCSE standards are broadly average in English, mathematics and science. GCSE results have steadily improved but in 2006 they were clearly affected by poor results in ICT and DT. Most pupils make satisfactory progress in their GCSE courses, achieving particularly well in physical education, art, food technology, media studies and drama. Girls do less well in GCSE mathematics and some boys with lower abilities make slower progress than they should. This is related to insufficient attention being given to learning styles and a poor attitude to learning.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Pupils' personal development is satisfactory and there are strengths in the pupils' understanding of how to live safely and healthily. Many pupils are polite and thoughtful. They are prepared well for future 'pathways'; the curriculum in Years 10 and 11 makes a strong contribution to this aim. The majority of pupils say that they enjoy school and there is little they would change. Behaviour is satisfactory, although there is a high rate of exclusions. The behaviour of most pupils in lessons is good and movement

around the school is orderly. Some parents registered concern about poor behaviour and some pupils spoke of lessons being interrupted by a few pupils. Spiritual, social, moral and cultural development is satisfactory. Spiritual development has improved since the last inspection, although there is insufficient promotion of this across the curriculum.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Teachers' planning is good and their focus on learning objectives has improved as a result of recent training. This is enhancing pupils' progress because they now understand the purpose of the lesson. Pupils explained how constantly having new teachers disrupts their progress. Retention of staff has been a problem over the last two years but this has improved and there was a full complement of teaching staff at the start of September. Teachers' use of pupil's individual education plans and individual behaviour plans is effective and is successfully improving progress and behaviour for the individuals concerned. Improved behaviour in the majority of classes is giving some teachers the confidence to use a wider range of teaching styles that encourages pupils to take more responsibility for their learning. However, inconsistent use of data and assessment strategies causes pupils to miss opportunities to see how they can improve. In some lessons there is insufficient attention given to different styles of learning. Reports give parents a clearer picture of the progress being made by pupils, both academically and personally.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The school has a satisfactory curriculum with some good approaches to matching the needs of all pupils. However, the lack of audits, monitoring and action to be taken results in varied provision in such areas as ICT and citizenship. Productive links with the Local Authority literacy and numeracy consultants giving support in Key Stage 3 have started to improve progress, with specific impact in English. Radical thinking at Key Stage 4 has 'opened up' the curriculum to ensure it meets the needs of all pupils. For example, the Increased Flexibility Programme has had an impact on attendance for a group of targeted pupils who struggled with the more formal curriculum. Enrichment activities involve links with the community, and planned visits and residential activities are open to all; they aim to ensure enjoyment and achievement goes hand in hand. Personal Social and Health Education in conjunction with the change in the school day and the vertical tutor groups, give more opportunities for mentoring, team work and personal development. The benefit of the Arts and Media status is not yet reflected across the whole curriculum. Although the pupils very positive support for rehearsals of the new school production 'Fame' is evidence of their enthusiasm and interest in this aspect of the curriculum.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Care, guidance and support are satisfactory overall and arrangements to safeguard pupils are good. An example is the introduction of 'Quit Smoking' run by trained staff in the school. Pupils receive effective guidance and support in relation to their academic work. Vulnerable pupils are looked after well. School leaders have tackled problems with attendance well and this has moved from being well below average to average over the past few years. The rate of exclusions is high and action has been taken to reduce this. Students spoke highly of the moves to stamp out bullying.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory. A good team spirit has been created and staff are supportive of each other. This is reflected in the curriculum initiatives which have been introduced and the commitment to activities outside of school. The enhanced curriculum has created wider learning opportunities for pupils. Day to day procedures are efficient, enabling the school to run smoothly. However, there are weaknesses in the way the school monitors and checks its work. There are inconsistencies in the implementation of policies on issues such as assessment and behaviour. Where these have occurred it has had an adverse affect on pupils' learning and subsequent achievement. Conversely, there are pockets of high performance as a result of robust and rigorous evaluation of performance such as in physical education and media studies. Teaching is monitored regularly but not all staff are sufficiently focused on the quality of pupils' learning. Governors are supportive and were actively involved with the decisions related to specialist status. However, they have not been sufficiently challenging of the school's leadership about outcomes and achievement.

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Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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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
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	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?	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3
The behaviour of learners	3
The attendance of learners	3
How well learners enjoy their education	3
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	3

The quality of provision

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

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.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	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	3
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	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

Dear Pupils 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 on behalf of the inspection team for your help and courtesy. We enjoyed the opportunity to talk to you and to listen to your views about the school. Some of your parents responded to a confidential survey and this was very helpful. We were pleased to see that the standards you achieve in tests at the end of Year 9 and in examinations in Year 11 are steadily improving, although some subjects are not as good as others. Most of you make satisfactory progress or better; sometimes your progress is affected by some pupils who lose concentration and misbehave. We could see that more of you enjoy coming to school as attendance rates have got better. We thought that the range of courses you choose from in Year 10 was good. We thought that this choice helped to make school more interesting. Your tutors offer you good support; you appreciated the care you receive when you most need it. We believe that the school is well organised, giving you plenty of opportunities to learn and develop. The school is a friendly place and we can see that mostly you get on well with each other and the adults at the school. You told us that you enjoy taking part in sporting activities and other trips or visits. The main things we have asked the school to do to improve further are - To help you to improve your test results at the end of Year 9; particularly in mathematics and science. - To make sure that there isn't too much variation in the quality of teaching, marking and behaviour in lessons. - To make sure that you have enough opportunities to use computers and talk about citizenship and your well-being in a variety of lessons. - To give you more opportunities for finding things out for yourselves and to help you learn in the way that suits you best. Best wishes for the future Dennis Pittman Lead Inspector