



St Clare's School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 115356
Local Authority THURROCK
Inspection number 300500
Inspection dates 29–30 November 2006
Reporting inspector John Mitcheson HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary	School address	Butts Lane
School category	Foundation		Stanford-le-Hope
Age range of pupils	11–16		Essex SS17 0NW
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01375 641001
Number on roll (school)	1017	Fax number	01375 675814
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mr Ray Osbourne
		Headteacher	Mr Paul Griffiths
Date of previous school inspection	11 March 2003		

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
11–16	29–30 November 2006	300500

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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

St Clare's School is a larger than average foundation school with 1017 pupils aged 11 to 16, situated in the Borough of Thurrock. It became a specialist language college in 2001. The majority of its pupils are from White British backgrounds and come from two higher achieving primary schools in the Borough. Attainment on entry is average. The proportion of pupils eligible for a free school meal and the number of pupils who have a statement of special educational need is below average. There has been a recent increase in the number of pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds but the number of pupils whose first language is not English is below average. It has training school status and some extended provision on site, including a specialist unit for hearing and visually impaired pupils.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

The overall effectiveness of the school is satisfactory. It has a good reputation locally and is regularly over-subscribed. It uses its status as a language college to increase pupils' use of languages and broaden their horizons by developing international links with schools in America and China. It is making significant improvements in GCSE results in French, German and Spanish. Pupils perform better in modern foreign languages than in their other subjects, and almost all pupils leave school knowing a foreign language. This is an inclusive school that is responding well to meeting the needs of an increasing number of pupils from diverse backgrounds and for pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities, particularly those with a hearing or visual impairment.

A period of turbulence caused by the loss of a significant number of experienced teachers has had a detrimental effect on pupil achievement. Standards achieved in Key Stage 3 are average, however in 2006 a small but significant proportion of pupils did not make the progress expected of them in Year 9 tests, particularly in English, which was most affected by staffing changes. Standards in Key Stage 4 are average. GCSE results have stayed broadly the same during this period but have not risen in line with trends nationally. Almost all pupils achieve at least one GCSE qualification and the proportion of pupils achieving five or more A* to G grades is broadly average. Pupils who have learning difficulties and disabilities are well supported and make good progress. Standards achieved in vocational courses are well above average.

Teaching and learning are satisfactory; achievement in drama, physical education, business studies and some languages is good, but less so in all other subjects because some departments have had to replace established teachers with inexperienced ones, and also, many teachers do not provide pupils with sufficient information on how well they are doing to help them improve their work. The quality of marking is variable and homework is not used with any consistency to enhance pupils' learning. The school's status as a teacher training school has been instrumental in providing newly qualified teaching staff.

Pupils' personal development and well-being are good. They enjoy school; attendance is well above average and has been for the last five years, which is exceptional. Pupils enjoy healthy food at lunchtimes and many get involved in a good range of sporting, musical and cultural enrichment activities during and after school. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good; assemblies include an opportunities for prayer and many pupils show care and consideration for others through fund-raising events and communicating with pupils in other countries. The school council has a high profile and prefects supervise other pupils very well. Behaviour is generally good although short-term exclusions are high due to the governors' vigorous response to low level misbehaviour. Care, guidance and support for pupils are good, robust systems are in place to safeguard vulnerable pupils. Regular contact with the Connexions service ensures that pupils receive good quality careers advice and guidance on courses. Over 75% of pupils progress on to further education.

The school is led effectively by the headteacher and deputy headteacher who work well together and have strengthened the school's complement of teachers and managers. Training and support for middle managers are raising awareness of their role in leading school improvement. The school now has greater stability and the capacity to make further improvements is good. Whilst many improvements have been made, particularly to provision and pupils' personal development, not all have been successfully focused on raising achievement. The use of assessment data lacks rigour, teachers have not had the information they need to challenge and support all learners to achieve their very best. A new system has been introduced to track pupil progress and most teachers have a growing understanding of its use in raising achievement. The school's view of itself is largely accurate, although in some areas it considers itself to be better than it is. The development plan focuses on the key areas for improvement but it lacks measurable targets to raise standards in all subjects.

What the school should do to improve further

- Continue to develop the role of all middle leaders in order to raise the achievement of all pupils, particularly in Key Stage 3.
- Firmly embed the use of assessment data so teachers and managers have the information they need to challenge and support all pupils to achieve their very best.
- Ensure that pupils are provided with specific information about the quality of their work in lessons and what exactly they have to do to improve it.
- Make better use of homework to reinforce pupils' learning.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Standards on entry are average. The majority of pupils make satisfactory progress throughout Years 7 to 9 and achieve average standards by the end of the key stage. In 2006, a small but significant proportion of middle ability pupils under-achieved. They did not meet the challenging targets set for them, especially in English and the number achieving above the expected grade was below average. This was due to a number of experienced teachers leaving the school, particularly in the English department, and insufficient monitoring by teachers and managers of how well pupils were doing.

Pupils make much better progress in Years 10 and 11 where achievement is good. GCSE results are similar to those achieved nationally. All students are entered for examinations in all courses they follow in Key Stage 4 and almost all achieve at least one GCSE qualification. The proportion of pupils achieving five or more A* to G grades is broadly average, but relatively few pupils achieve the highest grades in subjects other than in drama, German, history and physical education. Results in newly introduced courses in health and social care and media studies are well above average. In 2006, above average results were achieved by a small group of pupils who took GCSE French at the end of Year 10, and a small proportion of higher achieving students

who studied French at AS level in year 11 and achieved average results. Pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities make good progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Personal development and well-being of pupils are good. Pupils are proud of their school and enjoy being a part of its life. Attendance is consistently well above the national average. Behaviour of pupils towards each other and to adults is good but occasionally some pupils are allowed to disturb others because some teachers do not consistently apply the agreed code of conduct. Pupils' spiritual, cultural, moral and social development is good. The views of students are valued and used to make improvements via a well-organised school council. Personal, social and health education, regular assemblies and advice from on-site health care specialists helps them to stay healthy and be safe. Pupils are encouraged to become active citizens by contributing to community and international projects and considering global issues. Pupils acquire appropriate literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) skills that help to promote their economic well-being and all pupils are prepared for the world of work through a two-week experience of work. A small number of pupils for whom GCSE courses are not appropriate receive additional learning in the work-place.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The school evaluates teaching and learning to be good but inspectors found it to be satisfactory. Senior leaders acknowledge that lesson monitoring has been too generous in the past and the school is providing further training, particularly for middle managers, to add greater rigour to these procedures. Established teachers foster good relationships with pupils, encourage them to contribute ideas and praise their achievements. They sustain learners' interest by making lessons enjoyable and preparing practical 'hands-on' activities that stimulate learning. Teachers provide good support for newly appointed staff by inducting them into school routines and acting as mentors to help them improve their effectiveness.

Teachers do not make effective use of assessment data to monitor pupils' progress or to intervene where necessary to support and challenge learners. A new system to track how well pupils are achieving in all subjects has been introduced but this is very new and needs more time to fully embed before it impacts on standards. Pupil-planners are not consistently used to record homework and are not routinely signed by tutors or parents. The quality of marking is variable. Although most pupils can explain what level they are working at many do not know exactly what they need to do to achieve higher standards because not all teachers provide them with this information.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum meets all statutory requirements. German and Spanish are growing in popularity and the school has recently introduced Mandarin. All pupils in Years 10 and 11 study a GCSE ICT course and the school is expanding its range of work-related learning to meet the needs of all pupils. Management of vocational courses is satisfactory and ensures that pupils following specific courses are suitably matched to work placements. Opportunities to enter examinations in Year 10 and progress to advanced level courses are proving to be successful; other subject leaders are currently planning similar arrangements. Enrichment activities outside of the curriculum are extensive and well attended and many pupils enjoy cultural and sporting visits abroad.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The care, guidance and support provided for students are good. Systems for checking staff suitability and safeguarding pupils meet government guidelines. The school is highly inclusive and ensures those pupils who have learning difficulties and disabilities make good progress as a result of good support from teachers and classroom assistants. Some pupils are not provided with informed guidance in lessons about how to meet the challenging targets set for them. Robust systems ensure pupils' smooth transition to Year 7 and some pupils are given additional support to improve their reading and writing. Effective partnership working with outside agencies provides targeted mentoring for the most challenging students. Guidance on courses and future careers is good. Aspects of personal, social and health education makes appropriate links with the Connexions service and post-16 providers.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The headteacher leads and manages the school effectively and understands most of the school's strengths and weaknesses, but the school improvement plan does not include specific, measurable targets for raising achievement in all subjects. The senior leadership team work in partnership with other schools, colleges and the local authority to ensure pupils benefit from specialist language college and training school status, specialist provision for hearing and visual impaired children and the new community sports facilities. Governors ensure that the school has the support and resources it needs and that the school uses them effectively. The positive action taken by the school leadership team to recruit key staff has stabilised the school and put it in a much stronger position to focus on raising achievement. The school is building on its strengths, it provides good value for money and its capacity to improve is good.

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?	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

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	2

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The behaviour of learners	2
The attendance of learners	1
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
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	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.

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	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
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

1 December 2006

Dear Pupils

St Clare's School, Butts Lane, Stanford-le-Hope, Essex, SS17 0NW

Recently I visited St Clare's and found it to be a satisfactory school. Your input was vital in helping me make this judgement, so thank you for allowing me to join you in lessons, talk with you and look at some of your work. I also spent time with some of your teachers, met with the chair of governors and read many letters from parents.

I was particularly impressed with how the language college has extended the range of languages available to you and the links it has made with other schools and countries. Many of you achieve very well in your chosen modern foreign language and I'm sure this will prove beneficial in your future studies and in the work-place. The school takes good care of you and provides a good range of enrichment activities so you can lead healthy lifestyles and develop your musical and cultural interests. Prefects do a great job in supervising others and ensuring the school is a safe place to be.

I found that results in both key stages are, in general, similar to those achieved nationally, but many of you could be challenged further to achieve higher grades in several subjects. Therefore I have asked your senior teachers to make four improvements:

- Continue to support subject leaders and heads of Year so they can make a better contribution to raising the achievement of all of you, especially those of you in Key Stage 3.
- Ask teachers to make regular assessments of how well you are doing so they know how well you are doing and can give you the advice you need to achieve your very best.
- Tell you how good or bad your work is in lessons and explain exactly what you have to do to improve it so you can achieve a higher standard of work.
- Set regular homework and mark it promptly.

You can play your part by ensuring that in all lessons you and your friends adhere to the pupils' code of conduct that you helped to design, and by continuing to share your views on how to make further improvements to the school with the school council. Once again, thanks for your help and I wish you all well.

John Mitcheson

Her Majesty's Inspector