

St Clare's School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	113046
Local Authority	City of Derby
Inspection number	301317
Inspection dates	14–15 May 2007
Reporting inspector	Susan Aldridge

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	94
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Tony Giacobbe
Headteacher	Mrs Carmel McKenna
Date of previous school inspection	9 June 2003
School address	Rough Heanor Road Mickleover Derby DE3 9AZ
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Age group	11–16
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The school provides for students with mainly moderate learning difficulties, all of whom have statements of special educational need. A significant minority have behavioural, emotional and social difficulties (BESD); these students may have been previously excluded from schools or have a history of non-attendance. A third of students are eligible for free school meals, and seven are in the care of the local authority. Most students are of White British heritage. On entry to the school, students' knowledge and skills are well below those expected. In 2005–2006, the school went through a period of considerable turbulence which included long-term absence through illness of the headteacher and a deputy headteacher, and the retirement of a second deputy headteacher and a senior leader. The school's work has been recognised by Investors in People, Arts Mark, the Football Association Charter Mark and St Clare's has Healthy Schools Status.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

St Clare's is a good school, and this is how it sees itself. It provides good value for money. Despite a period of considerable difficulties it has improved well since the last inspection, because the school is well led and managed. Staff support one another, working well together as a team. Parents are strongly supportive and appreciative of the school. They find the staff dedicated, caring and professional.

Students enter the school with lower standards than those expected and this remains the case whilst they are at the school, but they make good progress because they are well taught, effectively supported and given a good range of learning experiences. By the time they leave school, students have successfully obtained Entry Level accreditation in several subjects including English, mathematics and science. Most are successful in GCSE art. Overall, achievement is good.

School self-evaluation is good and accurate, taking account of all stakeholders' views. Outcomes successfully inform improvement planning. Over the years, the school has collected assessment information in all subjects so it knows how well students are doing academically, but the information has not been analysed to measure the rate of progress made by students, other than in reading and spelling. Recently, staff have started to measure gains in mathematics and science. The school has no means of comparing its results with similar schools nationally. This limits the school in its ability to ensure it is doing as well as it might. This has been identified as an area for improvement, and there is a firm foundation on which to build as the school now has a software package that will enable it to compare its performance with that of other schools.

Students' personal development is good; fostered well by the encouraging ethos, atmosphere and life of the school. The headteacher sets the tone for the school, in particular emphasising the importance of values such as tolerance, and staff follow her lead well. They all provide good role models for the students. Behaviour is good; students who find it difficult to behave well all the time are well supported in improving their behaviour and fixed period exclusions are being reduced. The curriculum is well constructed. Students thoroughly enjoy all the experiences on offer, and feel that they are treated with respect. They are taught well how to keep safe and lead healthy lives and make a good contribution to school life and the wider community. Their preparation for future working life is good; they get on well with other people, work well in teams, and learn how to run small businesses. Their skills and attributes prepare them well for adult life, including the world of work.

Teaching and learning are good, and some lessons are outstanding. All staff are well supported in improving their practice through the school's good arrangements for professional development. At present, teachers are limited in the extent to which they can use information and communication technology (ICT) in lessons because there are few interactive whiteboards. The school is hampered in its efforts to rectify this by current purchasing agreements. Staff agree that the appointment of a number of new staff has injected new ideas and enthusiasm. The leadership team has been reconstituted and is soon to be completed when a new deputy headteacher takes up the appointment. Governance has improved since the last inspection and is now good. The school is now well placed to continue its improvement.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that information on how well students are doing is analysed and used to compare the school's performance with that of similar schools nationally.
- Increase the opportunities for teachers to use ICT in all subjects.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Although standards rise whilst students are at the school, they still remain well below those expected because of the nature and extent of students' learning difficulties. Nonetheless, students make good progress and achieve well, mainly because they are taught skilfully and have positive attitudes to learning. However, the school does not analyse progress made by different groups, or compare results with those of other schools so cannot be sure that all make as much progress as possible.

Students achieve most of the targets set in their individual education plans within the timescale set. Targets are challenging but realistic. Where progress made by individual students is less than expected, staff intervene, giving students additional support. Inspection findings confirm that this is effective in accelerating progress made by individuals. For instance, certain students have made remarkable gains in spelling and reading. By using its good knowledge of students and their abilities, the school sets challenging targets for raising achievement and these are met or exceeded by Year 11. In the summer of 2006, most Year 11 students were successful in passing GCSE art, with a few gaining the higher grades. Students also achieved Entry Level passes in English, mathematics, science, religious education and physical education.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Students' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is good. One summed it up thus: 'This school has changed me massively. I now have the confidence to go out and enjoy life.' Students' self-confidence and maturity is impressive. Most thoroughly enjoy school, although attendance is satisfactory rather than good because, despite the school's good efforts, there is a small number of persistent poor attenders. The strength of support for the school's anti-bullying pledge has virtually eliminated bullying as a concern. There are no permanent exclusions and the number of fixed period exclusions has dramatically reduced over the current year. Behaviour is good.

Students take part enthusiastically in a wide range of sporting and physical activities such as dancing, football and swimming. They know about the best kind of food to eat to stay healthy. They take seriously the many responsibilities that they are given, such as prefects, peer mentors or sports leaders.

There is a vibrant school community and this extends to students helping those less fortunate through fund raising for causes such as the Unicef Kenyan appeal and Red Nose Day. Students are well prepared for adult life and work; they work extremely well together in teams because there are many opportunities to do this, and they successfully learn about the world of work and enterprise.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching, learning and assessment are good. There is some outstanding teaching, but most of it is good. There is a clear strategy for further improving the teaching through peer observations and coaching. Good relationships between staff and students and students' positive attitudes to learning contribute much to the success of lessons. Teachers prepare their lessons well; they use a good range of strategies for ensuring that work is pitched at the right level for all students, and they take into account the need to allow students to learn in different ways. Teaching assistants work well in partnership with teachers; they provide good support, so students approach tasks with confidence. Students are well behaved and cooperative in lessons; they concentrate well and work effectively together and independently. There are clear lesson objectives, which are shared with students and mostly reviewed with them at the end of each lesson. In the best practice, teachers identify different outcomes for students of different abilities. Teachers are limited in the extent to which they can use ICT in lessons, as there are only three interactive whiteboards at present, though these are used to good effect and students enjoy using them to learn. Since the last inspection, the school has recruited more subject specialists and this has extended the approach to teaching, notably in art and physical education.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The good quality curriculum promotes academic and personal development well. There is a suitable range of accredited courses for older students and the school has plans to extend the range of vocational courses it offers. Students benefit from a comprehensive programme of personal, social and health education, which encourages well awareness of healthy lifestyles and personal safety. Learning French and Spanish and studying the music and foods of different lands and faiths successfully encourages appreciation and respect for other cultures and beliefs. A variety of educational visits, which are both popular and successful, enriches the students' experiences further, as have successful links to the business community to promote enterprise and work experience activities. For instance, Year 10 and 11 students have worked alongside local medical students to gain a Heart Start qualification in first aid as part of the Youth Award Scheme. Additional programmes such as Learn to Read have proved successful in raising students' attainment in literacy. The school has a good range of lunchtime clubs and works hard to provide activities that interest students, such as a break dancing club for boys.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The quality of care, guidance and support for students is good, and parents appreciate this. Students particularly value the school's pastoral and tutorial system. One remarked, 'If you have a problem and it is confidential you can always talk to staff, especially your tutor.' Good links to external agencies support the hard work of the school to care for students who have been at risk of exclusion or have problems with attendance.

Safeguarding procedures are in place. Well defined risk assessments for education visits and work experience placements are in place. However, there are no risk assessments for students working in specialist rooms.

An effective system of induction, supported by peer mentors, gives students a good start to school life in Year 7. Systems for transition beyond school, including careers guidance, are equally well arranged and a mobility officer works with all leavers to improve their skills in using public transport, and this is an aspect parents are particularly happy about.

Students are involved in setting their own learning and social targets. They are positive about the challenge this offers them. 'We do not feel stressed but enjoy being stretched', one commented. Home school diaries include targets so parents can help students to work towards them. Monitoring of students' progress is thorough and intervention is timely and effective.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Good leadership and management have enabled the school to emerge from a period of turbulence with little interruption to the life and work of the school. This is because staff work well as a team and towards shared goals. The headteacher provides strong leadership and vision, and staff share her passion and enthusiasm to do the best for the students. Parents recognise this and are most appreciative.

Leadership roles are widely shared, and all take responsibility for monitoring and evaluating their own areas of provision. The ideas and enthusiasm of staff are welcomed and innovation is encouraged and well supported, particularly through the robust arrangements for staff development and review. Good practice has been shared both locally and nationally.

Governance is good. Among them, governors have a good range of relevant expertise; they are supportive, and keep the school's work under review through their committees and by visiting the school to check on provision first-hand. They are involved well in self-evaluation, so they recognise that the school needs to strengthen self-evaluation by comparing itself with similar schools nationally.

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Annex A

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?	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	2
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?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4
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

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	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?	2
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.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	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	2
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	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

16 May 2007

Dear Students

Inspection of St Clare's School, Mickleover, Derby, DE3 9AZ

Thank you for making us welcome in your school, and a special thanks to those who talked to us about school life. We enjoyed our visit. We came to see how well you are all getting on and find out whether there are any things that could be improved.

We agree with you that St Clare's is a good school and were pleased to see and hear how much you all enjoy yourselves in school and out. You are making good progress in school because teachers teach you well and you concentrate in lessons and work hard. You are also developing well as young citizens who know how to lead healthy lives and keep safe. We were impressed with the number of different responsibilities that you take seriously, and with the enterprise projects that help you understand how to run a small business and work in teams. We saw how well behaved you are and found that a few of you have been able to improve your behaviour with the help of the staff. Coming into your school, we could see that you care for one another and for those less fortunate than you are. Your fund raising efforts help those who are not as lucky as you are.

The main reason your school is so successful is that the headteacher and staff are doing a really good job. They make sure that you learn the importance of values and set a good example for you to follow. They are good at working together to make sure that the school is good. Like you, they learn new skills and try different ways of making things better for you. The governors are also doing a good job.

The staff and governors recognise that to make the school even better they need to be able to compare the progress that you make with that of students in schools like yours, so that they can be sure that you are doing really well. They are also doing all that they can to get more interactive whiteboards in school. We saw how well the teachers use the few that you have already and how much you enjoyed using them too. You can play your part in improving the school by making sure that you attend as often as you possibly can.

We hope that you will keep up the good work and wish you well for the future.

Mrs S Aldridge (Lead inspector)