

De La Salle School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	104834
Local Authority	St Helens
Inspection number	324113
Inspection dates	3–4 December 2008
Reporting inspector	Patrick Geraghty HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	1201
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Brother Alban
Headteacher	Mr W Daunt
Date of previous school inspection	21 September 2005
School address	Mill Brow Eccleston St Helens Merseyside WA10 4QH
Telephone number	01744 20511
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Age group	11–16
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Introduction

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

Description of the school

De la Salle School is a popular, voluntary-aided, Roman Catholic comprehensive school for pupils aged 11 to 16 years. The school was awarded Arts College status in 2003. The school draws from a wide catchment, with children attending from a broad sweep of north, west and south St. Helens; additionally, about 10% of pupils are from Knowsley. The school has a comprehensive intake, drawing pupils from relatively affluent wards as well as more deprived areas. Gifted and talented pupils are 10% of the average cohort; 8% of pupils are entitled to free school meals. Few pupils are of minority ethnic heritage and none have home languages other than English. The proportion of students with special educational need is below average.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school with a number of outstanding features. Achievement is good. Examination and test results at both key stages are well above national averages and demonstrate good year-on-year improvement. Evidence of recent examination results together with inspection evidence indicates that students are making good progress. Personal development and well-being are outstanding. The school provides an environment where pupils are safe and in which their self-confidence and motivation develops. Students' behaviour is outstanding and they enjoy school greatly. The Catholic ethos is thoughtfully integrated into all aspects of school life. Relationships across the school are excellent. Healthy lifestyles and participation in abundant extra-curricular activities are encouraged and enthusiastically embraced by students. Respect for the individual and appreciation of artistic endeavour has a high priority within the school. The school makes an excellent contribution to its local communities. Parents are supportive of the school and its ethos.

Teaching and learning are good. Improvements to the monitoring of teaching and learning have helped teachers to develop their skills. A greater emphasis is now placed on active learning. In the majority of lessons, that are at least good and sometimes outstanding, challenge and independent learning are promoted with enthusiasm and students respond well. In a minority of overtly teacher-led lessons pace is slow and students are insufficiently challenged. There is good use of information and communication technology (ICT) to promote learning. Data are now used effectively to monitor students' progress. Students are benefiting from the closer monitoring that ensures they make good progress. However, subject specific targets, while recently introduced, are not fully embedded at both key stages. Subject choice has been extended at Key Stage 4. Vocational pathways have been expanded. Effective partnerships have been developed with further education colleges. The Every Child Matters themes have been fully integrated into school systems to augment outstanding care, guidance, and support. Transition and induction arrangements are excellent and students settle into school life quickly.

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher has established a strong improvement culture. Senior leaders fully understand the school's strengths and areas for improvement, including the need to ensure greater consistency of good practice across middle management. The school's self-evaluation is thorough and accurate. Governance is good and committed to maintaining and developing improvement in standards. The school has used Arts College Specialist status outstandingly well and this has had a significant impact across the school in improving provision. During the inspection dress rehearsals for the school production of 'West Side Story' were observed by inspectors. These rehearsals, involving over 120 students, encapsulated the dynamic and cooperative nature of the creative arts area; the schools' commitment to the nurturing of creative skills; this community's promotion of mutual respect and independent learning; and the building of aspirational and confidence skills. The school has a good capacity to make further improvement.

What the school should do to improve further

- Embed subject specific targets at both Key Stage 3 and 4.
- Improve the pace and level of challenge in a minority of lessons in order to enhance learning.
- Ensure consistency of good practice across middle management.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Achievement and standards are good. Students enter the school with standards that are just above the national averages. At the end Year 9, the standards reached in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science have consistently been above national averages. When compared with similar students in other schools, progress over this key stage is satisfactory and in line with expectations. In 2007, students left school having attained GCSE results that were above national averages and that were broadly in line with expectations based on their previous attainment. There was some underachievement in the case of lower ability boys. Strong leadership plus an emphasis on raising the quality of teaching and learning led to considerable improvements in 2008 unvalidated GCSE results with no areas of underachievement. In 2008, the percentage of students achieving five or more GCSE passes at grades A* to C was 79%, the highest recorded by the school; 59% of students obtained five GCSE passes A* to C that included English and mathematics. There was a significant increase in the proportion of very high grades with 33% of the cohort gaining three or more grades at A or A*. All specialist college targets were met. Students identified with learning difficulties and/or disabilities made similarly good progress. Strong evidence from the school's own data and from observations during the inspection indicates that standards continue to rise and that students are now making at least good progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Personal development and well-being are outstanding. Through informative citizenship lessons students acquire an objective outlook on society, which is further strengthened by the strong Catholic beliefs and values that the school promotes. Through the 'Education for Personal Relationships' lessons students gain a balanced insight into healthy and responsible lifestyles and demonstrate high levels of maturity in communication and social skills. The school canteen provides a variety of healthy food options, which are popular with students, although the dining room is often overcrowded. Attendance is consistently above the national average. Behaviour is outstanding. Throughout the school, students demonstrate mutual respect towards each other and all adults. They feel very safe at school and say that any problems such as 'bullying' are dealt with quickly and effectively. Students have a wide range of responsibilities. They are ambitious and eager to participate in the stringent procedures associated with the selection processes for prefects, the school council, listeners and many other leadership openings offered to them. They say that they are 'treated like adults'. The school council actively promotes the student voice. The outstandingly wide range of extra-curricular activities such as girls' rugby and boccia provides students with ample chances to be involved in the school and local community. Enterprise days for Year 10 and 11 students provide many opportunities to enhance team building and decision-making skills. Students are aware of the needs of others and give their time readily to fund-raising activities. A wide range of retreat opportunities enables them to develop the skills of reflection. The national and worldwide network of the De La Salle Brothers is used well to develop a wider understanding of national and international perspectives.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The overall quality of teaching and learning is good and has significantly improved since the last inspection. The school has invested energy, resources and time to extending the teachers' repertoire of teaching styles. A greater emphasis is now placed on the different ways students learn. This is having a positive impact on the quality of lessons; however, improvements are not yet uniformly spread. In good lessons the teachers deploy a variety of activities that stimulate interest and sustain concentration. Teachers skilfully formulate questions that require students to think for themselves and contribute to the development of ideas. Continuous assessment of progress informs the development of the lesson and students are aware of how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve. In outstanding lessons, particularly in the creative arts, these features are enhanced by the teachers' infectious enthusiasm for their subject which elicits challenging, mature and enthusiastic responses from students. Relationships are characterised by mutual respect and lessons are conducted in a purposeful and harmonious atmosphere. In a minority of less successful lessons, teachers do too much talking and employ a limited range of strategies. Consequently, there is insufficient challenge, little opportunity to develop independent learning and students' learning becomes passive.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Curriculum provision is good and increasingly well matched to the wide range of different student needs. Excellent links have been established with primary schools to support transition, particularly through some outstanding work undertaken in the creative arts. The Key Stage 3 curriculum whilst meeting statutory needs is less well developed with fewer pathways or innovative choices. The Key Stage 4 curriculum has improved significantly since the last inspection. Vocational courses have been expanded to provide a curriculum that meets the needs of all students. The provision of ICT in support of teaching and learning is very good. Good and improving collaborative arrangements with other institutions enable the curriculum to be more closely tailored to individual requirements. There are excellent progression rates to further education. Skills for future economic well-being are well developed. There is good provision for the minority of students at risk of disaffection. There is an outstanding range of extra-curricular activities, particularly in sport and the creative arts.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Overall care, guidance and support are outstanding. Pastoral care and guidance is outstanding and academic support is good. Teachers work very closely with an extensive number of outside agencies to ensure that the care, guidance and well-being of all students are of the highest standard and meet their specific needs. Students are appreciative of the support they gain not only from adults in the Enrichment Centre but also from their peers through the highly effective Student Listening Services. Academic monitoring is used well to identify those students who need additional support in order to meet their challenging targets. Students know their general targets in terms of levels and grades. Marking is informative and students know what they must do in order to improve. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are equally well supported. Students make informed choices about their future as a result of their work

placements and excellent careers education and guidance. Parents value the extra guidance and support that is given to students and the commitment shown by all staff. One reflected that at 'De La Salle School every child is valued'. All statutory requirements for the safeguarding of students are met.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The overall quality of leadership and management is good. Outstanding leadership by the headteacher promotes a strong culture of improvement. He has a clear vision for the future of the school and is ably supported by a senior team that have a self-critical approach to their work. There are effective lines of communication and accountability. Governors give good support, know the school well and demonstrate a challenging approach to monitoring the effectiveness of school management at all levels. Since the last inspection a strong focus has been placed on developing robust quality assurance systems. Data are used effectively to check progress. Self- evaluation is comprehensive, accurate and self-critical. Heads of department and middle managers have increased involvement in self-evaluation and are more accountable; however, there remain some inconsistencies at this level of management in the quality of monitoring and action planning for improvement. Whilst target-setting has improved, subject specific targets at both Key Stage 3 and 4 require further embedding into the school improvement plan. Specialist arts status is used highly effectively to improve and enhance provision. The management of creative arts is outstanding. There is a strong commitment to inclusion and involvement with the wider community. Overall, structures are in place to ensure a good capacity to bring about further improvements. The school gives good value for money.

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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
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

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

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	1
The behaviour of learners	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of 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?	1

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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	1
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

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

Thank you for welcoming the inspection team into your school recently. The whole team thoroughly enjoyed our two days at your school. Thank you for your cooperation, for the discussions we had and for your willingness to talk about your work, interests and how much you enjoy and give to the school. We would also like to congratulate you on your outstanding behaviour and on your contribution to the inclusive and harmonious culture of your school. We were all impressed by the talent demonstrated in the rehearsals of 'West Side Story' and by the infectious enthusiasm you bring to the creative arts and many aspects of your learning.

Yours is a good school and it is well led. The headteacher, senior staff, staff and governors are working hard because they want you to do the very best you can. Most importantly, your progress and examination results continue to improve. There is much good and some outstanding teaching in the school and in these lessons you respond well to teachers' high expectations. In some lessons you are not being given work which really challenges you or encourages you to enjoy learning, achieve well and progress. Your curriculum options are now good at Key Stage 4. You enjoy an outstanding range of extra-curricular activities. Importantly, you also appreciate the excellent care, guidance and support the school gives you.

We have asked your school to:

- improve the use of subject targets at both Key Stage 3 and 4 in order to help you to reach and surpass all your targets
- ensure that the quality of learning is enhanced by greater pace and challenge in those lessons where learning is not yet as strong as it should be
- ensure consistency of good practice in monitoring your progress and planning for you to make even better progress.

We are sure that you will keep up your strong enthusiasm for learning and will make even better progress in the future.

All the inspection team wish you well for your future education and careers.