

The Clere School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	116430
Local Authority	Hampshire
Inspection number	326392
Inspection dates	3–4 June 2009
Reporting inspector	Joanna Beckford-Hall HMI

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 under pilot arrangements; it was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	720
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Pam Burke
Headteacher	Ms Sarah Rogers
Date of previous school inspection	24–25 May 2006
School address	Earlstone Common Burghclere Newbury, RG20 9HP
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Introduction

This pilot inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 31 lessons, and held meetings with the Chair of Governors, staff and groups of students. They observed the school's work, and looked at the school's self-evaluation, planning and development documents, students' work, governing body minutes and 108 parental questionnaires.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- the progress made by students, particularly in mathematics
- the extent to which target-setting provides sufficient challenge for all students, notably middle-attainers and gifted and talented students
- the effectiveness of senior and middle leaders in pursuing strategic school improvement and the rigour with which they are held to account by the governing body.

Information about the school

The Clere School is a smaller-than-average 11–16 school serving a large rural community in Hampshire. The student population is drawn from a wide catchment area and many students travel long distances to attend this school. Most students are of White British heritage with the proportion of students from minority ethnic groups well below the national average. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is low, and the majority of these students have particular behavioural, social and emotional needs. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is well below the national, as is the proportion for whom English is an additional language.

The school gained specialist technology status in 2003 and has successfully achieved other accreditations including the Healthy School Award, Investors in People and Sportsmark. The school has just been awarded Artsmark Gold.

Inspection judgements

Grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Overall effectiveness

3

Capacity for sustained improvement

3

Main findings

The Clere School provides a satisfactory education, with some good strengths in the curriculum and care and welfare of its students.

- The school is led by a headteacher whose clear vision shapes improvements across the school. The school has improved its system for tracking and levelling student progress. This is more robust than at the time of the last inspection.
- A strong community ethos exists in the school environment. Students are polite and courteous to one another, staff and visitors. Behaviour in lessons and around the school is good.
- Teaching is generally satisfactory with some good teaching in German, technology, English, drama and increasingly mathematics. Assessment information is not consistently used when planning lessons, thus some lessons are not appropriately pitched to meet the needs of students.
- Progress of students who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities is good while gifted and talented and more-able students make satisfactory progress similar to that of their peers.
- The curriculum is good, especially at Key Stage 4, and the impact of the technology specialism is steadily raising attainment at both Key Stage 3 and 4.
- Pastoral guidance and welfare of all students is good.
- Students relish the good range of extra-curricular activities including drama, music, language and enterprise clubs, as well as over thirty sporting activities.
- The capacity for improvement is satisfactory. Self-evaluation has pinpointed areas requiring more development as well as strengths of the school, but has been generous in grading some areas as good where practice remains satisfactory. Pockets of best practice have yet to materialise into a whole-school leap forward which will fulfil the school's high ambitions.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged to be satisfactory, but which have areas of underperformance, will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Build on the strengths in teaching and learning by establishing greater

consistency in the following areas as a way of continuously raising achievement:

- Ensure that assessment information is used more proficiently when planning lessons to match learning to the needs and capabilities of all students
 - Provide students with detailed and precise feedback when marking so that they know how to make progress against the targets they have been set.
- Ensure that systems developed for improvement by leaders and managers at all levels are evaluated regularly to increase the pace and consistency of improvement both at departmental and whole-school level.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3

Overall students make satisfactory progress given their average starting points and attain standards broadly in line with national averages by the time they leave school. Attainment and progress in English at Key Stage 4 shows a positive trend, remaining above average for three years. The downward trend in progress in mathematics has polarised attainment and progress in these two core subjects. However, evidence gathered during inspection from lesson observations, analysis of module exam results and school tracking data indicates recent improvements in mathematics. Progress is now better and attainment is rising. For the last three years the percentage of students attaining five GCSE A* to C passes including English and mathematics has been a rising trend, just tipping above the national average in 2008.

In the majority of lessons observed, students made satisfactory progress. In a few lessons, such as German, drama and some mathematics teaching, progress was good because teaching provided students with learning challenges which engaged them in critical thinking. Good pace and quickfire debate using open-ended questioning kept students working quickly, preventing them from being complacent in lessons.

Progress of students who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities is good. Effective support helps them to understand their lessons. The work of the special educational needs coordinator and teaching assistants was mentioned positively in some of the parental questionnaires. Higher-ability and gifted and talented students do not make better than satisfactory progress because lessons are not always planned to provide them with learning that raises expectations or stretches their capabilities.

Good relationships between students and staff are conducive to learning. The great majority of students enjoy school and are very positive about the community in which they learn. They say bullying is rare and if incidents occur, they are dealt with firmly.

Students feel safe at school and behave sensibly when using equipment in practical lessons for technology and science. Students are particularly astute in their

understanding of health and well-being. Participation rates in sporting activities are high, effectively contributing to students' fitness as well as enhancing team skills in sports competitions.

Attendance levels are rising and this, coupled with good behaviour and smart attitudes to learning, helps students to develop skills necessary for the next stage of their lives in education or work.

Many students make a good contribution to school life as prefects, peer mentors and volunteers in the wider community. Students told inspectors of their commitment to charity work, noting that working with children less fortunate than themselves and in local primary schools is really enjoyable.

The development of student's social, moral, spiritual and cultural understanding is satisfactory. The school promotes a strong social and moral code, positively influencing behaviour and good group work in lessons. Opportunities for developing spiritual and cultural understanding need to be extended and students say they would appreciate more extensive first-hand opportunities to work with and learn about people of different ethnic groups, faiths and religious backgrounds.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and their progress	2
How well do pupils achieve and enjoy their learning?	3
To what extent do pupils feel safe?	2
How well do pupils behave?	2
To what extent do pupils adopt healthy lifestyles?	2
To what extent do pupils contribute to the school and wider community?	2
Pupils' attendance ¹	2
How well do pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being?	2
What is the extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development?	3

How effective is the provision?

Inspectors observed some good and a couple of outstanding lessons. In these lessons the pace of learning was brisk with an energetic buzz in the classrooms. A clear structure of different learning activities matched the needs of students resulting in good progress. Teaching rooted in good subject knowledge maximised the use of information and communication technology (ICT), task sheets and resource cards. Students told inspectors they really enjoy such lessons because 'learning is fun, we

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

get pushed and we get feedback which helps us know how to improve our work'.

These features of good teaching and learning were not evident across the whole school. Such inconsistency means that overall the quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. Two inconsistencies emerged repeatedly which affect the quality of teaching, learning and progress:

- The use of assessment data to plan lessons with different levels of tasks to meet the needs of students, especially those students needing more challenging work.
- The quality and regularity of marking

The depth of commentary in marking is very variable from a few examples of detailed guidance mapping out improvement steps against criteria, to cursory ticks with little commentary. Students told inspectors they wanted more regular and thorough advice about how to improve their work. Inspectors agree that the marking of students' work requires urgent improvement.

Lesson-planning is mostly satisfactory. In some lessons it is too brief and the effective use of assessment and tracking data, which is now provided to all staff electronically, into meticulously planned learning outcomes and lesson sequencing is erratic.

The good curriculum is characterised, particularly at Key Stage 4, by appropriate provision for students who wish to follow a pathway other than the traditional GCSE qualifications. Students on apprenticeship programmes and college courses with work placements were positive about how the school has supported them by providing vocationally based provision. Students expressed a wish for a little more variation in GCSE courses but were aware of the difficulties of expanding GCSE provision in a small school where take-up numbers may be quite low. Year 10 and 11 students were very pleased with the opportunities to develop a portfolio of workplace skills through two weeks' work experience, enterprise activities and good careers guidance.

The school recognises that at Key Stage 3 it needs to develop learning and thinking skills across the curriculum and continue the good work in expanding the impact of the technology status. New courses such as product design are successful and a student in the young enterprise group described how students developed business acumen through designing and selling products as part of running a small business. The expansion of the technology provision at Key Stage 3 is giving students an understanding of the relationship between technology and many industries. Good teaching was seen in technology lessons. Year 9 students devising 3D models talked confidently about the design and crafting skills they were developing.

Staff know students well and have a good awareness of personal circumstances which may affect learning. Good inter-agency links support vulnerable students. While these links mean information is shared between the school and support services, the recording of discussions and outcomes from sharing information needs to be more rigorous in its detail.

Care, guidance and support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is well targeted. The effective deployment and work of teaching assistants coupled with well-coordinated guidance helps students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities tackle issues they face and they make good progress.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	3
The use of assessment to support learning	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

The communication and driving of ambitious changes in the school is having impact in areas such as setting more challenging targets for students, improving work in mathematics and raising the profile of the technology status. School development planning is mapped to departmental action plans with measurable targets and middle leaders show increasing capacity to monitor and respond to targets. However, leaders at all levels do not systematically evaluate interventions and innovations with a view to measuring their impact upon outcomes for students. Agreed whole-school practices are not endorsed and pursued by leaders with sufficient energy to ensure that all staff 'buy into' the need for consistency.

The governing body is very supportive of the school, but its work in holding the school to account for the outcomes achieved by specific groups and individuals, and in systematically evaluating school practice to generate change, requires more vigorous pace.

Safeguarding procedures are satisfactory. The school operates secure procedures for safeguarding students on trips and visits. Students confirm they understand the guidance they receive in order to stay safe. The school recognises that meticulous monitoring of all regulatory requirements is vital and the senior leaders need to constantly keep abreast of time-frames for rolling out staff training.

The school fulfils its statutory duty in terms of equalities both in policy and in practice. In developing students' cultural awareness the school has rightly acknowledged that it needs to expand work with different minority ethnic groups and take a more strategic focus upon building UK and global links. There are many activities that show how the school has made inroads into the local community, especially through the extended schools programme, but the school has yet to systematically evaluate community cohesion.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in communicating ambition and driving improvement	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and	3

tackles discrimination	
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	3
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	3
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	3
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Views of parents and carers

Most of the parents who completed questionnaires expressed generally positive views of the school. The good transition process for students from Year 6 to Year 7 was commented on very favourably by many, as was the good pastoral care the school provides. A number of parents stated their concerns about communication with parents and a few were concerned that the ambitions for the school were not being clearly communicated to parents.

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at The Clere School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school. If a parent has more than one child at the school, we ask them to record an answer against all the questions, for each of their children.

The inspection team received 108 completed questionnaires. In total, there are 726 parents and carers registered at the school.

	Always	Most of the time	Occasionally	Never
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	70	36	8	3

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. In 2007-8, 15% of schools were judged to be outstanding.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well. In 2007-8, 49% of schools were judged good.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils. In 2007-8, 32% of schools were judged satisfactory.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves. In 2007-8, 5% of schools were judged inadequate.

Common terminology used by inspectors

- Attainment:** the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
- Progress:** the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.
- Achievement:** the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, training or development. This may refer to the acquisition of skills, knowledge, understanding or desired attributes. Attributes include qualities or personal competencies which are important to the development of the pupil; for example personal, social, cultural, emotional or health.
- Capacity to improve:** the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
- Leadership and management:** the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.



17 June 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of The Clere School, Newbury, RG20 9HP

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave to us when we visited your school recently. We enjoyed meeting with and talking to you in lessons. You gave us your views of your school and we were able to use our discussions with you to help inform the judgements we made.

We judged your school to be providing you with a satisfactory standard of education. We found that the care and guidance you receive is good and this helps you to feel you are safe and well looked after by the staff, who know you very well. The curriculum is good and we were pleased that so many of you take part in sports activities. This is clearly helping you to stay fit and be aware of why you need to be healthy.

Most of you make satisfactory progress and some students make good progress. Inspectors judged that you have mature attitudes to learning and good behaviour that could help you all to make good or outstanding progress and reach high levels of attainment by the time you leave school. You told us that you need more challenge to reach demanding targets and that you need better guidance in the marking of your work. We agree with this and have asked your school to:

- provide you with more detailed and regular feedback about your work, especially in the written comments in your books
- make sure that teaching caters for everyone's needs in lessons so that students who need more help continue to make good progress and those of you who could exceed current target levels can be challenged even more.

You are good ambassadors for your school and we hope you continue to enjoy your time at The Clere School. On behalf of all the inspectors I wish you every success in the future.

Yours faithfully

Joanna Beckford-Hall
Her Majesty's Inspector

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