

St Helena School

Inspection report

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|--------------------------------|--------------------|
| Unique Reference Number | 115364 |
| Local Authority | Essex |
| Inspection number | 338576 |
| Inspection dates | 26–27 May 2010 |
| Reporting inspector | Stephen Abbott HMI |

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

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|--|-------------------------------------|
| Type of school | Secondary |
| School category | Foundation |
| Age range of pupils | 11–16 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 991 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Mrs Kay Phillips |
| Headteacher | Mr Kevin Prince |
| Date of previous school inspection | 14 September 2006 |
| School address | Sheepen Road Colchester Essex |
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors. Inspectors observed 32 lessons led by 31 different teachers. It was not possible to observe Year 11 lessons, as the inspection coincided with the examination season. However, the school's assessments of current Year 11 students were examined. Meetings were held with senior leaders, governors, subject and pastoral leaders and other members of staff. Inspectors also met various groups of pupils and held telephone discussions with two parents. They observed the school's work, and looked at various documents, including improvement plans, attendance data, internal assessment information and policy documents. They scrutinised incident records, risk assessments, the minutes of school and governor meetings and the school's safeguarding records. All students, staff and registered parents were invited to contribute their views by completing an online questionnaire. In addition, parents were provided with a paper based questionnaire. Inspectors received the views of 78 parents, 30 members of staff and 14 students. Inspectors also took into account the findings of the school's own questionnaires, which were completed by much larger numbers of parents and students.

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

- how well the school has addressed previous weaknesses in attainment and progress
- the impact of the school's specialist status and the wider curriculum on students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and their other personal development outcomes
- the extent to which leaders and managers have secured improvements in outcomes through better provision, for example in teaching, assessment, curriculum, pastoral care, governance and partnership with parents.

Information about the school

St Helena is an average sized school with arts and media specialist status. Students are drawn from a wide range of ethnic groups, with a very few being at an early stage of learning English, but the very large majority are White British. The proportion of students known to be entitled to free school meals has increased in recent years and is now average. The proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is average and increasing. The number of students joining or leaving the school other than at the usual time is much higher than average. The school is due to expand from 2011 as part of a significant reorganisation of education in Colchester.

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

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

3

Main findings

St Helena is a satisfactory school with an inclusive ethos that provides a good curriculum and good care, guidance and support for all students, and particularly for those who are vulnerable. The school is having some success in addressing previous weaknesses in attainment and progress. Students make satisfactory progress, standards are close to the national average and attendance is well above average. Support from the local authority has played an important part in improving teaching and learning in English.

When the present headteacher was appointed shortly after the last inspection, the school was at a low ebb. Since then, the senior leadership team has been strengthened and the governing body has been revitalised, so that it now fulfils its duties well. The school's realistic self-evaluation involves the school's increasingly effective subject and pastoral leaders, as well as taking into account students' views. As a result, the school is well aware of the improvements it needs to make and has set these out in a clear improvement plan, which fully reflects the school's arts and media specialism. The plan is supported by the great majority of staff. Significant changes have already been made and the benefits are beginning to emerge. Senior leaders have established some useful quality assurance procedures to help drive and embed improvement. For example, they regularly observe lessons and analyse assessment data to hold subject leaders to account. However, quality assurance is less effective when it is delegated to middle managers, where the lack of a whole-school overview makes it harder to secure consistency. For example, there are considerable variations in the quality of marking, the use of homework and the quality of the learning environment. Although improvement is uneven, it is clear that the school has the capacity for further improvement.

The school has successfully restructured the curriculum and strengthened the pastoral system. Partnership with other education providers has enabled the school to provide a range of learning pathways to meet students' needs, including alternative programmes for those at risk of disaffection. In addition, the pastoral team has liaised with social services, medical and other care agencies to strengthen support for students with challenging personal circumstances. Support from the local authority has been critical in improving attendance rates and reducing persistent absence. Students understand and accept the school's behaviour code, but are rightly concerned that it is not applied in a consistent way by all staff.

A substantial programme of professional development has been introduced, which includes arrangements for the strongest teachers to support their colleagues.

In the best lessons, teachers identify clear learning objectives and plan enjoyable

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activities that challenge and actively involve all students. They assess students' progress during the course of lessons and adapt their teaching accordingly. However, most lessons are not like this. In satisfactory lessons, teachers allocate more time to giving instructions and less to developing students' understanding or checking their progress. Their feedback does not give students enough specific guidance on how to improve their work. Consequently, students usually know what to do but not always what they are supposed to be learning. This explains why their progress in the majority of lessons is satisfactory. Achievement is rising steadily, notably in the previously weak subject of English.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Accelerate students' progress and increase their enjoyment in learning by ensuring that all teachers:
 - identify clear learning objectives for each lesson
 - plan lesson activities that challenge and actively involve all students, making it clear how these activities are intended to facilitate their learning
 - assess students' progress during the course of lessons and adapt their teaching accordingly for students who need more support or challenge
 - provide regular feedback to students that includes specific guidance on how to improve their work.
- Embed improvement by making regular quality assurance checks to ensure that the school's policies and procedures are implemented consistently, particularly in relation to:
 - the promotion of good behaviour
 - the use of homework to consolidate and extend learning
 - the marking of students' work
 - the quality of the learning environment.
- About 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**3**

Students' progress was satisfactory or better in nearly all of the lessons observed during the inspection. In the better lessons, students' learning is good because they discuss ideas with each other and develop their own solutions to problems. In one lesson about mouldings, students learned a lot through their mistakes. More often, students are passive learners who complete the tasks set for them without being sure what they are supposed to learn. In these cases, they sometimes lose focus and work slowly.

Since the last inspection, the proportion of students attaining five or more good GCSE passes has increased steadily, and the school has nearly closed the gap with the

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national average. Even so, data for the years 2007 to 2009 shows that St Helena students had made less progress than similar students elsewhere. There were three main reasons for this: absence rates were too high; performance in English was weak; and too many students failed to complete a full range of qualifications, particularly in 2009. The good news is that these issues have been addressed and achievement is now satisfactory for all groups of students. Attendance has improved dramatically and is now above average. Better teaching in English means that students' learning and progress is now satisfactory. In addition, more students are completing their studies following improvements to the curriculum and pastoral care. In recent years, progress has been slower for students who had average attainment in Key Stage 2. However, the school's tracking data shows that this is no longer the case. Data provided by the school shows that attainment and progress for the current Year 11 students is close to the national average. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities achieve satisfactorily because their progress is checked regularly, allowing them to learn in small steps. The school is meeting its targets for participation and attainment in its specialist subjects. Taking all these aspects into consideration, students' achievement is satisfactory.

Students get along with each other well. A very high proportion report that they feel safe at school. They are confident that the school deals effectively with bullying, with most saying they have never been bullied, or on only one or two occasions. During the inspection, students behaved sensibly and safely around the school and inspectors saw little misbehaviour in lessons. Nevertheless, evidence from students, staff and parents and the school's slightly above average rate of exclusions shows that disruptive behaviour and more serious incidents are not unknown.

The school's specialist status is playing an important role in students' personal development by providing them with opportunities to engage in cultural activities and to contribute to the local community, including arts and media work in local primary schools and links with a school in Uganda. All students now study for qualifications in information and communication technology (ICT), thereby increasing their work readiness. Arts and media play an increasing role in the school's personal, social and moral education programme. Students' moral, social and cultural development is therefore being enhanced, though the spiritual dimension is not stressed sufficiently.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

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

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| | |
|---|----------|
| Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning | 3 |
| Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹ | 3 |
| The quality of pupils' learning and their progress | 3 |
| The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress | 3 |
| The extent to which pupils feel safe | 2 |
| Pupils' behaviour | 3 |
| The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles | 3 |
| The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community | 3 |
| The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being | 3 |
| Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹ | 2 |
| The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development | 3 |

How effective is the provision?

One successful aspect of teaching is the consistent approach to lesson planning, which encourages teachers to think about their learning objectives and to consider the needs of different groups. However, too often the lesson plan focuses on what students should do rather on what they need to know and understand. As a result, students' interest and enjoyment can wane. Teachers make regular use of interactive whiteboards, both to add interest and to support understanding. Some lessons provide good guidance to help students understand assessment criteria. Most students know their targets and are broadly aware of what they need to improve. However, they are less clear about specific improvements that will take them to the next level. Teachers recognise that students are at different stages of learning, but too often their planning does not indicate how they will close these gaps in attainment. For example, support assistants often operate in a general support role because there is insufficient time for teachers to brief them on specific tasks. Marking is variable in both frequency and quality. For example, teachers do not always follow up requests they have made for students to improve their work.

The school has introduced several new curriculum initiatives, working effectively in partnership with other schools and the neighbouring further education college. In Key Stage 4, the five curriculum pathways cater well for students' differing needs. Students who join the school with under-developed literacy and numeracy skills are helped to catch up through special curriculum arrangements in Key Stage 3. From September onwards, students will begin the Key Stage 4 programme in Year 9, to provide greater flexibility. There is a thriving sports programme, and the specialist arts and media status provides good opportunities for extra-curricular enrichment through music, drama,

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photography, film and animation. An innovative feature of the curriculum is the 'ICT professional' course, where students learn technical skills by 'looking inside the box' at computer hardware.

The school's care, guidance and support have some further strengths. Good liaison with primary partners helps students to settle quickly. The mixed-age tutor groups allow students to take responsibility for supporting younger classmates. As students move through and beyond the school, they are guided well on their next steps. Senior leaders and directors of learning monitor students' progress carefully to identify those needing additional support to meet their targets. The recently introduced improvements to the pastoral care of students are still being embedded, and work continues to improve the behaviour of a few students.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

| | |
|--|----------|
| The quality of teaching | 3 |
| Taking into account: 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 senior leaders and the governing body share a commitment to the comprehensive ideal, promoting a clear vision of the school as an inclusive community. Their clear focus on raising standards has delivered improvements in attainment and progress. The school's effective partnership with parents and carers is evident from the improvements in attendance and the positive responses to its own surveys of their views. The school offers a variety of forms of communication with parents and carers, and a high proportion of them attend information events.

Self-evaluation is rigorous in many respects, but better quality assurance is needed in some areas to embed improvements. The leadership of teaching and learning is satisfactory: there is a clear programme of professional development, but this has not yet delivered consistently good teaching. The school is promoting community cohesion well. It has a good understanding of its context, and works well with the local community, including in partnership with parents. The plans to forge links with schools nationally and globally are designed to improve students' understanding of a range of cultures. The school has sound financial procedures and provides satisfactory value for money.

Governors have had training to raise their expertise in data analysis, safeguarding and child protection. The governing body is well led and has effective working structures. As a result, it fulfils its statutory duties and provides a good balance of challenge and support to influence the direction of the school.

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The school follows current requirements in safeguarding and has appropriate child protection arrangements. It meets statutory requirements in promoting equality in the areas of gender, race and disability. The progress of different groups of students is monitored and support for particular groups, such as looked after children, young carers and those at an early stage of learning English is effective. However, the reporting of progress in relation to equality schemes and targets is not detailed enough.

These are the grades for leadership and management

| | |
|--|----------|
| The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement | 3 |
| Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning | 3 |
| The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met | 2 |
| The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers | 2 |
| The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being | 2 |
| The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination | 3 |
| The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures | 3 |
| The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion | 2 |
| The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money | 3 |

Views of parents and carers

For most of the statements in the questionnaire, a very small minority of parents disagreed. The biggest concern for parents is that the school's management of behaviour is inconsistent, a point accepted by the school and confirmed by the inspection. Most of the comments referred to instances of poor behaviour disrupting lessons. For example, 'There is a lack of discipline throughout the school and behaviour policy is not strong or effective enough.' However, another wrote, 'Considering what we hear and see of other schools, St Helena pupils are fairly well behaved and turned out.' Some parents feel that the school could do more to provide them with information to support their children's learning. While several parents did not agree that the school helps students' to have a healthy lifestyle, few commented specifically on this aspect.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at St Helena School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school. The inspection team received 78 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 991 pupils registered at the school.

| Statements | Strongly Agree | | Agree | | Disagree | | Strongly disagree | |
|---|----------------|----|-------|----|----------|----|-------------------|----|
| | Total | % | Total | % | Total | % | Total | % |
| My child enjoys school | 25 | 32 | 42 | 54 | 9 | 12 | 1 | 1 |
| The school keeps my child safe | 22 | 29 | 43 | 56 | 10 | 13 | 1 | 1 |
| The school informs me about my child's progress | 27 | 35 | 42 | 54 | 6 | 8 | 1 | 1 |
| My child is making enough progress at this school | 25 | 32 | 39 | 51 | 11 | 14 | 1 | 1 |
| The teaching is good at this school | 14 | 19 | 47 | 63 | 7 | 9 | 2 | 3 |
| The school helps me to support my child's learning | 13 | 17 | 40 | 51 | 18 | 23 | 3 | 4 |
| The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle | 15 | 19 | 41 | 53 | 13 | 17 | 3 | 4 |
| The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment) | 17 | 23 | 43 | 59 | 6 | 8 | 1 | 1 |
| The school meets my child's particular needs | 19 | 25 | 42 | 55 | 9 | 12 | 4 | 5 |
| The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour | 15 | 19 | 36 | 46 | 11 | 14 | 13 | 17 |
| The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns | 12 | 16 | 40 | 53 | 12 | 16 | 2 | 3 |
| The school is led and managed effectively | 12 | 16 | 50 | 66 | 7 | 9 | 2 | 3 |
| Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school | 23 | 29 | 42 | 54 | 6 | 8 | 5 | 6 |

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

| Grade | Judgement | Description |
|---------|--------------|--|
| Grade 1 | Outstanding | These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its pupils' needs. |
| Grade 2 | Good | These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well. |
| Grade 3 | Satisfactory | These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils. |
| 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. |

Overall effectiveness of schools

| Type of school | Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools) | | | |
|----------------------|---|------|--------------|------------|
| | Outstanding | Good | Satisfactory | Inadequate |
| Nursery schools | 51 | 45 | 0 | 4 |
| Primary schools | 6 | 41 | 42 | 10 |
| Secondary schools | 8 | 34 | 44 | 14 |
| Sixth forms | 10 | 37 | 50 | 3 |
| Special schools | 32 | 38 | 25 | 5 |
| Pupil referral units | 12 | 43 | 31 | 14 |
| All schools | 9 | 40 | 40 | 10 |

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above is for the period 1 September to 31 December 2009 and is the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn term 2009 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

| | |
|----------------------------|--|
| Achievement: | the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training. |
| Attainment: | the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons. |
| 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. |
| Learning: | how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners. |
| Overall effectiveness: | <p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support. |
| 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. |

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



28 May 2010

Dear Students

Inspection of St Helena School, Colchester, Essex, CO3 3LE

I am writing to you to tell you about your school's recent inspection. I would like to thank you on behalf of the team for the help you gave us during the inspection. We talked to several groups of you and analysed the school's survey of over 500 students. You told us that you enjoy school and feel safe, that the school deals well with any bullying and that you understand and support the school's behaviour code. However, you say it is not applied equally by all teachers. We agree with this view.

St Helena is a satisfactory school, with some good features. The curriculum has been improved and now meets the needs of all students well. The pastoral system is effective and helps keep you safe. The school provides particularly good support for students who have personal issues. You are well supported when you join the school and receive good guidance when you have to choose options or leave the school.

Examination results are improving and standards are now close to the national average. The teaching you receive is satisfactory and, as a result, you make the same progress as similar students in other schools. This was not always the case. There have been two important factors in the school's improvement. One is determination of the school leaders and the governing body that the school should improve. The other is down to you! Your attendance has improved considerably and is now well above average. With few absences, you have more opportunities for learning.

The school leaders are keen for you to think for yourselves more and become independent learners. We have asked the school to:

- ensure that all teachers make it clear what you are expected to learn, promote active learning and explain to you how to improve your work
- check that everyone follows the school's policies consistently, for example on the behaviour code, setting homework and marking your work.

I wish you all well for the future.

Yours sincerely

Stephen Abbott

Her Majesty's Inspector

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