

The De La Salle Academy

Carr Lane East, Croxteth, Liverpool, Merseyside L11 4SG

Inspection dates

4–5 October 2017

Overall effectiveness	Inadequate
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Requires improvement
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Requires improvement
Outcomes for pupils	Inadequate
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an inadequate school

- The school's performance has declined over the last four years. Many reasons have contributed to this, not least a lack of systems to check the effectiveness of all areas of the school's work.
- Outcomes for pupils are inadequate. Over time, GCSE results, in a range of subjects, have been far too low when compared to the national average. Consequently, pupils are not well equipped for the next stage of their education.
- Currently, too many pupils in key stage 3 are not making the progress that they should.
- Subject leaders vary in how well they pinpoint and overcome weaknesses in teaching, learning and the curriculum.
- Although improving, not enough of the teaching is good. Consequently, pupils who have fallen behind in their achievement are not catching up quickly.
- Pupils' attendance is low. Too many pupils miss at least half a day a week on average, especially disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities.
- The vast majority of pupils behave well, but not all are keen to work as hard as they could in lessons. This hampers their progress. They do not expect enough of themselves.

The school has the following strengths

- The principal has taken decisive action to create the leadership structure and to develop the management practices necessary to underpin the school's future.
- The principal, ably assisted by the head of school, has won the support and commitment of staff, governors and pupils in his work to turn the school around.
- A renewed governing body is starting to ask the challenging questions necessary to hold leaders to account.
- Recent improvements are leading to stronger teaching in some parts of the school, especially in key stage 4.
- The school's proactive engagement with the local community is improving its reputation. Pupils get involved in activities such as the community choir and fundraising for charities. Numbers of pupils joining in Year 7 have risen, with many more making it their first choice.

Full report

In accordance with section 44(2) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement, because it is performing significantly less well than it might in all the circumstances reasonably be expected to perform.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve pupils' outcomes at key stage 4 so that a greater proportion gain the qualifications that they need to make a successful start in the next stage of their education, training or employment.
- Improve teaching and the progress that pupils make, particularly in key stage 3, by:
 - ensuring that staff have high expectations of what pupils can achieve
 - taking account of pupils' starting points and any special educational needs
 - improving how teaching is sequenced within lessons, and from lesson to lesson, to develop and deepen pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding
 - selecting teaching approaches that hold pupils' attention and checking throughout the lesson that pupils are 'on task' and understanding
 - encouraging pupils to take more responsibility for their learning, including how fully they participate in lessons and present their written work
 - strengthening the quality of catch-up provision in Year 7.
- Develop subject leaders' skills further in leading teaching and the curriculum, and ensure that their monitoring pinpoints and tackles weaknesses.
- Raise attendance and reduce persistent absence, particularly of disadvantaged pupils and those pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities.

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Over time, the quality of education at this school has declined. It is inadequate. Pupils' outcomes are weak and the quality of teaching, although improving, is not strong enough to make up for a stark legacy of underachievement in the past.
- Instability in staffing, falling pupil rolls, endemic failings in management systems plus weaknesses in teaching have all contributed to the school's deterioration since the previous inspection.
- The journey back to a good-quality education will take time. However, due to the effective and determined leadership of the principal, supported by the head of school, De La Salle is beginning to recover. Improvements in teaching, a reduction in pupils' absence and increased rates of progress by pupils in key stage 4 indicate that recent actions are making a difference. Consequently, the school has the capacity to bring about the required improvements.
- In his first few weeks in post, the principal got to the bottom of many weaknesses. He quickly took robust action to halt the decline in standards and build for sustainable improvement over time. He was determined not to use quick fixes. Staff and governors are fully on board with his vision and the actions taken. This was reflected in discussions during the inspection and in the high proportion of positive responses to the online staff questionnaire. Morale is high.
- The constant churn in staffing, which included a large number of temporary teachers, has stabilised. The school is now fully staffed with permanent appointments. The principal has rationalised the staffing structure so that clear lines of accountability are in place. Leadership is now more widely shared, and this is helping to build capacity. A new performance management structure has been established which is linked to the school's professional development programme.
- A faculty structure has been introduced, grouping related subjects together. Middle leaders have regular opportunities to meet with their faculty and subject teams as well as meeting as groups of middle leaders. They attend subject leader meetings organised by the local authority and the archdiocese. Consequently they are better placed to lead their subject than previously.
- The role of heads of year now focuses strongly on pupils' academic progress and attendance rather than, as in the past, solely their pastoral care. This includes analysing progress data from each assessment point and liaising with subject teachers where a pupil's progress is a concern.
- The school had become isolated from the many changes in education that have taken place over the last few years. It now receives support from the local authority and works with a number of partnerships, such as the St John Bosco teaching school alliance. Staff are engaging wholeheartedly in opportunities within and beyond the school to develop their teaching expertise.
- The school's self-evaluation is accurate and informs improvement planning. Leaders at all levels were strikingly honest about the quality of provision in their discussions with inspectors.

- Systems for faculty review and monitoring of teaching and learning by senior and subject leaders have been introduced. Subject leaders carry out the monitoring activities expected of them but do not always spot underlying weaknesses. For instance, when scrutinising pupils' work, they check if their colleagues are following the school's marking policy. However, they may not identify other aspects such as the scheme of work not being followed to the correct depth, work that is insufficiently demanding, or weaknesses in the teaching approach. This is limiting some leaders from having a greater impact on improving the quality of teaching, learning and the curriculum.
- Improvements have been made to the curriculum. Schemes of work have been rewritten to provide a five-year learning journey from Year 7 to the new GCSEs and equivalent qualifications. This is providing a basis for improved pupil progress. At present, opportunities for developing pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and their understanding of British values are not promoted well enough across the curriculum. Art and geography are not currently included in the curriculum, but the school hopes to reintroduce them before long. Current Year 11 pupils had little or no choice of GCSE options when choosing them in Year 8, which has led to some dissatisfaction. The school now runs a two-year key stage 4 and gives pupils a greater choice of subjects.
- A review of provision for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities has led to improved identification of pupils' needs and more effective use of this funding. Approximately twice as many pupils now have their needs specified and staffing for this area has been increased appropriately. The SEN coordinator, who has been in post for a year, has updated the register in line with the code of practice and has a clear understanding of the range of support provided for these pupils. The coordinator evaluated the progress pupils made in Year 7 who were supported by catch-up funding provision last year. However she was less well informed about the progress across the curriculum made by pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities.
- The school's pupil premium funding this year is now being used more appropriately to support disadvantaged pupils. Evaluation of last year's funding showed some positive impact on attendance and examination results. Nonetheless, this group of pupils do not achieve as well as they should when compared to other pupils nationally.
- The sixth form has not been in operation since the end of the last academic year as its projected numbers were too small to be viable and outcomes were poor. The few students who were due to enter Year 13 were guided into further education or apprenticeships elsewhere. The school intends to relaunch the sixth form in a couple of years but with an improved, relevant set of courses.
- The school has strengthened its reputation in the local community and with parents. Numbers joining in Year 7 have risen in the last two years with many more in 2017 choosing the school as their first choice. The school's 'community engagement project' has been successful in reaching out to the community in a diverse range of ways. Funding has been acquired for several of its activities, including creating a community room at the school which is used by various local groups. The activities include community champions, which is an inter-generational project, the community choir, and a government-funded cultural citizens programme. This work is also strengthening pupils' understanding of British values.

Governance of the school

- The board of governors did not hold senior leaders to account over the period of the school's decline. In part, this was because they did not receive sufficiently robust information about the school's work. The board of governors was disbanded by the De La Salle Order in May 2016 and relaunched with a new chair of governors. Since then, the Archdiocese of Liverpool's allocation of four governors has remained unfilled.
- Almost all the current governors were newly appointed in May 2016, including two parent governors. Together, they bring a range of expertise to the work of the board of governors. The chair of governors provides effective leadership. He has a good grasp of the challenges faced by the school. Minutes of meetings show an openness of approach, with governors asking questions that help to challenge leaders. However, not enough questions are asked about leaders' work to improve teaching and pupils' progress.
- The school received a financial notice to improve in the summer term 2017. Its subsequent recovery plan was accepted.
- The board of governors has not ensured that the school is fully compliant in the information it is required to publish on its website.
- Governors have been proactive in seeking an external review of governance, in order to improve their own effectiveness. This review is planned for later this term.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Safeguarding has a prominent place in the work of the school. Safeguarding procedures are robust and leaders fulfil their statutory duties effectively. The school's safeguarding and child protection policies comply with the latest government requirements and are available on the school's website. Systems to ensure that only suitable people are recruited to work with children in the school are secure. Staff training is up to date, including specific training on 'Prevent', which is a government strategy designed to stop people becoming involved in terrorism or supporting extremist causes. A review by the local authority in February 2017 evaluated the school's safeguarding practice as strong, a view shared by inspectors.
- The school has a culture of working closely with external agencies for the safety and benefit of pupils, with constant awareness of the social, economic and health challenges faced within the community. It strives to work closely with parents, providing a good range of helpful information, including mobile phone apps, to help parents and carers keep their children safe. The school works proactively to help pupils to keep themselves safe outside school, helping them to be aware of potential risks and how to manage them.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- Over the past few years, teaching has failed to provide pupils with an adequate standard of education. This accounts for the considerable weaknesses in pupils' progress and achievement.

- Current teaching is improving, especially in key stage 4. This is beginning to help pupils to catch up from a legacy of underachievement. However, teaching in key stage 3 is not consistently strong enough to ensure that pupils make the progress that they should.
- While relationships between teachers and pupils are generally positive, teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve are not consistently high. Poor presentation and undemanding work was evident in many pupils' books, particularly in Year 8.
- Teachers' use of questioning is of varying quality. In some cases, teachers allowed pupils to shout out answers so that a minority of pupils dominated the lesson. A few teachers selected pupils at random to answer a question, which contrasts with those teachers who pitched questions skilfully to individual pupils to probe particular aspects of their learning.
- Some teaching lacks depth, with tasks or exercises showing no increase in difficulty and lacking challenge for those who grasp ideas easily. Sometimes, learning becomes a set of disparate topics because teaching is not sequenced well to ensure that progression in knowledge, skills and understanding. What is taught is not always linked carefully to prior and future learning. Teaching does not always take sufficiently into account pupils' starting points or the needs of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities.
- Teachers are applying the school's new marking and assessment policy with varying effectiveness. They are developing their expertise in assessing pupils' work and then using the information from these assessments to 'reteach' weaker aspects.
- The quality of teaching varies widely at present but there is a core that is good. Such teaching is characterised by high expectations of the standards that pupils can reach and how hard pupils should work each and every lesson. Teachers have an enthusiasm for the subject they teach. Good subject knowledge enables these teachers to explain clearly, to frame questions that test out pupils' understanding, and to recognise what pupils' stumbling blocks are. Tasks are well sequenced to move pupils' learning on in a coherent way.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Requires improvement

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare requires improvement.
- Pupils' social and moral development is stronger than their spiritual and cultural development. The school is reinvigorating its Catholic ethos to extend the promotion of pupils' spiritual development. Pupils do not have many opportunities for creativity: awe and wonder are in short supply. Within the curriculum, pupils' social, moral, spiritual and cultural development is currently 'ad hoc' rather than deliberately exploited across the curriculum.
- Pupils participate in various extra-curricular clubs and activities such as fundraising for specific charities, for example Year 7 supports overcoming child poverty, Year 8 pupils raise funds for the 'Whitechapel Centre for the Homeless' and Year 9 help 'Autism in Motion'. The sense of pupils working together to help others is strong. A number of

pupils are also involved with community engagement activities: they enjoy contributing to their local community.

- The school draws effectively on a number of external providers to supplement its programme of personal, social and health education (PSHE). Year 9 pupils have had workshops focused on domestic violence and the risks of alcohol abuse. British values are promoted through form time, assemblies and PSHE. During the inspection, the assembly theme of Black History Month linked into the British values of respect and tolerance, as well as Lasallian core principles (concern for the poor and social justice; faith in the presence of god; quality education; respect for all persons; inclusive community). Pupils are encouraged to 'do what's right even when people are not looking'.
- Pupils spoken to, and almost all who responded to the online questionnaire, say that they feel safe in the school, know how to keep themselves safe including e-safety, and have someone to talk to if they are worried or have a problem. Pupils can report bullying online to designated staff but say that bullying happens only occasionally and is dealt with effectively.
- While observing teaching and learning, inspectors noticed some pupils who were engrossed in one lesson but less engaged in other lessons. This shows that pupils' attitudes to learning are not consistently positive. Pupils can learn very well but sometimes choose not to. At other times, inspectors observed pupils interested in and contributing to a particular activity or discussion, but then 'turning off' when asked to write down their answers or their thinking. Work in pupils' books varies in its quality, and presentation is often poor. Too many pupils do not take pride in their written work.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement.
- Although the promotion of good attendance has a high profile within the school, attendance is well below the national average and persistent absence is high, most markedly for disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities. Both show a small but hard-won improvement in all year groups this year compared with the figures for the same period last year. Inaccuracies in how attendance was recorded in the past make direct comparisons difficult, but the trend was downwards from 2013. This trend is slowly being reversed by a new system introduced in the summer term 2017 with support from the local authority's education welfare officer service. Pupil premium funding is used to good effect in this respect.
- The school has sharpened its focus on punctuality to school by starting each morning with a line-up outside, uniform and equipment checks, and reciting the school's motto, *Semper Fidelis – Always Faithful*. Then straight into the first lesson. Most pupils move purposefully around the school but there remain a few latecomers to lessons.
- Generally, pupils can behave well in lessons, demonstrating positive relationships with each other and staff. Productive routines are more firmly established in some classes than others. Sometimes, on arrival to a lesson, inspectors were greeted courteously by a pupil who would explain what pupils had learned so far. Older pupils said that their learning is disrupted by other pupils' bad behaviour far less than in the past and that teachers deal with it.

- Permanent and fixed-term exclusions are high but reflect raised expectations of pupils' conduct and accurate recording. In January 2017, leaders set up an on-site unit called 'SPACE' to support the pupils who are at risk of exclusion. Staff in the unit provide an environment that encourages pupils to take responsibility for and to change their behaviour. The unit draws on support from external agencies for aspects such as anger management. In 'SPACE', work is set and feedback provided by subject teachers and online software is used to improve reading skills. Several pupils have been reintegrated successfully into the mainstream school.
- Pupils attending alternative provision study various subjects, appropriate to the setting and to the pupils' needs. The curriculum for those attending the secondary pupil referral unit is similar to that of the school. At another provider, for example, a pupil is working towards a diploma in construction and mechanics. The school communicates well with the providers, for instance in checking attendance, but information about pupils' progress is not gathered routinely from each provider.

Outcomes for pupils

Inadequate

- The extent of the school's decline is most noticeable in pupils' examination results at the end of key stage 4. Standards have fallen over the last four years. Outcomes have been consistently below the government's current floor standard and meet the Department for Education's definition of a coasting school. Weaknesses in teaching over the last few years mean that pupils have fallen far behind from their well-below-average starting points in Year 7. Stable staffing and improvements to teaching are starting to overcome the legacy of underachievement.
- In 2016, headline figures showed that pupils made too little progress in most of their subjects, with only results in English meeting national averages. Results in mathematics were poor. Overall, only 20% of the pupils gained grade C or better in both English and mathematics. Outcomes in science and most of pupils' chosen options were also weak, but close to average in history.
- In 2017, pupils sat the new GCSEs in English and mathematics. Of the cohort, 26% gained the new standard pass of grade 4 in both subjects. The provisional data points to even weaker progress overall than in 2016, but this masks some underlying improvement.
- The story in mathematics is one of improvement in 2017 from a very low base. Shortly after joining the school, the head of mathematics set the pupils a mock examination halfway through their GCSE course. No pupil scored enough marks to be awarded a grade of any kind. Months later, the same cohort achieved a 38% pass rate at grade 4 or higher (unvalidated data). This reflects a significant improvement although, with much further still to go.
- Pupils' performance in other subjects in 2017 varied, but none represented good progress for the pupils. No group, such as the most able, disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities, made significantly better progress than others: all did not do well enough. Work in key stage 4 pupils' books and the school's data point to stronger outcomes for 2018.
- The progress of pupils currently in key stage 4 is stronger than in key stage 3. In part,

this is because the school has focused on key stage 4. Evidence gathered about teaching, learning and progress in key stage 3 shows that too many pupils are making inadequate progress.

- The school's assessment information shows that differences in attainment for disadvantaged pupils compared with their peers are starting to reduce in some subjects and year groups. Nonetheless, this group of pupils do not achieve as well as they should.
- The school's information shows that the impact of catch-up funding for pupils in Year 7 in 2016/17 was positive in developing pupils' reading skills but limited in mathematics. The pupils heard reading read fluently and, mostly, with enjoyment and confidence. When talking about unfamiliar words, however, they referred to strategies learned at primary school rather than any strategies advocated at secondary school.

School details

Unique reference number	136409
Local authority	Liverpool
Inspection number	10024342

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Boys
Number of pupils on the school roll	332
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	Gerry Proctor, MBE
Principal	David Hayes
Telephone number	0151 546 3134
Website	www.de-la-salle.co.uk
Email address	hello@de-la-salle.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	5–6 June 2013

Information about this school

- The school does not meet requirements on the publication of information on its website about the objectives it sets for itself under the 2010 Equalities Act.
- The school does not comply with the Department for Education’s guidance on what academies should publish on its website about details of its governance arrangements.
- The academy is a much smaller than average-sized secondary school for boys aged 11 to 16. (There is no sixth-form provision at present.) It is sponsored by the De La Salle Brothers, with co-sponsors the Archdiocese of Liverpool. At the time of the last inspection, Hope University was also a co-sponsor. The academy is not part of a multi-academy trust.
- The principal has been in post since January 2016 and the head of school since September 2016. The former principal retired in December 2014 but continued in the role of executive principal for a year while his vice-principal acted as principal. Since January 2016, 12 teachers have left the school and eight have joined.

- The proportion of pupils supported through the pupil premium, at around 65%, is very high.
- An average proportion of pupils have SEN and/or disabilities but none has a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan.
- The school has recently secured the Reading Quality Mark silver award.
- Eight pupils attend alternative provision with various providers: New Heights secondary pupil referral unit (three pupils), Alder Centre for Education (Hospital School; two pupils), JMH Training Sport and Development Programme (one pupil), Alt Valley Community Trust (one pupil) and CST Northwest (one pupil).
- The school does not meet the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum standards expected for attainment and progress. It meets the Department for Education's definition of a coasting school based on key stage 4 academic performance results in 2014, 2015 and 2016.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed parts of lessons taught by all of the school’s teachers except one whose lesson was being taught by a trainee teacher. A few of the observations were conducted jointly with the principal or the mathematics subject leader.
- Inspectors held meetings with the chair of the governing board, two teacher governors (one of whom leads the community engagement project and the ‘SPACE’ provision), the principal’s PA, who is also the clerk to the governing board, senior and middle leaders, newly and recently qualified teachers, and the school’s improvement partner.
- Inspectors scrutinised samples of work in English, mathematics, history, science and physical education belonging to pupils of differing abilities in Years 8 and 11. This activity was carried out jointly with subject leaders/teachers and considered the curriculum plans alongside the pupils’ work.
- Discussions were held with groups of pupils in key stages 3 and 4. Inspectors spoke to pupils during lessons and around the school.
- An inspector heard three pupils read from Years 7 and 8.
- Telephone discussions were held with representatives of both sponsors and two of the alternative providers.
- Responses to the online questionnaires for parents (Parent View), pupils and staff were taken into account: 21 for Parent View, 41 for the pupil survey and 30 for the staff survey.
- Inspectors observed the school’s work and looked at various documents, including the school’s self-evaluation and improvement plan, minutes of recent governing body meetings, the school’s data on current pupils’ progress and provisional data for the 2017 key stage 4 outcomes, information about attendance and exclusions, and safeguarding arrangements.

Inspection team

Jane Jones, lead inspector	Her Majesty’s Inspector
Sheldon Logue	Ofsted Inspector
Alison Stott	Ofsted Inspector

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