



St. Clare's, Oxford
— An International Education —



Private Further Education Inspection Report

“exceeds expectations”

**EDUCATIONAL OVERSIGHT INSPECTION OF
PRIVATE FURTHER EDUCATION AND ENGLISH LANGUAGE COLLEGES**

ST. CLARE'S, OXFORD

**Private
Further
Education**

St. Clare's, Oxford
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PREFACE

This inspection report follows the framework for Educational Oversight of private further education colleges and English language colleges. The inspection consists of a three-day team inspection of the college's educational provision.

The ISI is an approved educational oversight body authorised by the UK Border Agency to inspect privately funded further education colleges in England and Wales offering courses on the Qualifications and Credit Framework, and English language colleges.

ISI inspections are required to:

- Report on the extent to which colleges comply with the published Standards for private colleges;
- Assess and report on the quality of educational outcomes and provision;
- Where applicable, make recommendations to colleges outside the scope of the Standards to support continued improvement of quality.

Inspection provides objective and reliable reports on the quality of colleges, and by placing reports in the public domain, makes this information available to students, Government and the wider community. Inspection takes account of the context of each individual college, and of how it evaluates its own performance and demonstrates its success.

The inspection of the college is from an educational perspective and provides limited inspection of other aspects, though inspectors will comment on any significant hazards or problems they encounter which have an adverse impact on students. The inspection does not include:

- (i) an exhaustive health and safety audit
- (ii) an in-depth examination of the structural condition of the college, its services or other physical features
- (iii) an investigation of the financial viability of the college or its accounting procedures
- (iv) an in-depth investigation of the college's compliance with employment law.

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1. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE COLLEGE

- 1.1 St. Clare's, Oxford was founded in 1953 with a mission to advance international education and understanding. The college is registered as an educational charity and is overseen by the principal who reports to the governing body. Two distinctive programmes are offered under the St. Clare's banner: International Baccalaureate Diploma courses (separately inspected by ISI and previously by OFSTED) and the International Further Education courses (previously inspected by BAC and Accreditation UK) which are the focus of this inspection report. The further education college is based at 18 Bardwell Road, with three additional buildings dedicated to accommodation, activities, welfare and teaching, although the wider facilities of the college are also available as appropriate. It employs a total of 14 managers and support staff and runs examined courses, short courses and individual English language tuition.
- 1.2 The college aims to provide an educational structure that is challenging, rigorous and stimulating and is supported by student-staff relations based on mutual respect and high expectations. It seeks to nurture a lifelong passion for learning and an enduring commitment to global citizenship.
- 1.3 The college is approved by Accreditation UK (AUK), the British Accreditation Council (BAC) and holds a Highly Trusted Sponsor (HTS) rating from the United Kingdom Border Agency (UKBA). The college offers four programmes designed as pathways towards higher education. These are liberal arts, English plus academic subjects, university foundation courses and English language.
- 1.4 At the time of inspection there were 104 students attending the college. The current student population are aged over 18 with the exception of 10 who are 17 and atypically 2 who are 16 and accompanied by their guardian. There are slightly more males than females. A wide range of nationalities and languages is represented including Argentinian, Chinese, Dutch, Italian, Iranian and Venezuelan. Just over a third of students are from EU/EEA countries. The majority of the remaining students are on student visitor visas and a small number are on a general student visa. English is an additional language for nearly all students (EAL). The college has identified no students as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).
- 1.5 When individuals apply to join a course, the college checks that they are suitable for the course they have chosen through pre-arrival questionnaires, placement testing and interviews carried out on arrival.
- 1.6 The college caters for students aged 17 years and over. The majority of students are over the age of 19. The college provides residential accommodation for approximately 80 students in three separate residences, each with a resident house manager. Only students who are over 18 are permitted to reside in college accommodation. Special provision is made for the small number of under 18 year-olds: all stay in approved home-stay until they are 18 and are subject to a Child Protection Plan.

2. THE SUCCESS OF THE COLLEGE

2.(a) Executive Summary

Section of the Standards	Grade awarded 1-4
3. The quality of the curriculum, teaching and learners' achievement	1 Exceeds expectations
4. Students' welfare, including health and safety	1 Exceeds expectations
5. The effectiveness of governance, leadership and management	1 Exceeds expectations

- 2.1 St. Clare's delivers an outstanding level of provision to its students. Students make excellent progress in their learning through effective teaching and an exemplary attitude to their studies. They benefit from a very well designed curriculum and a wide-ranging and high quality extra-curricular programme. Individually tailored support is provided for those for whom English is an additional language, which ensures that they achieve in line with their peers. Students' behaviour is exemplary and the relationships amongst students and between students and teachers are excellent. Curriculum planning is highly effective and its flexible and innovative nature ensures that students are inspired to complete their courses successfully. The quality of teaching and learning at the college exceeds expectations. Lessons are well planned and excellent use is made of resources to support and promote learning. Students are highly motivated. As a result attendance rates are high and success rates across the range of courses are exceptional.
- 2.2 Arrangements for welfare, health and safety are excellent. The college succeeds extremely well in its aim to foster a sense of belonging and of community. Staff understand the needs of the students well, and the strong pastoral structure provides highly effective support and guidance for the students in accordance with the college's aims. Attendance is rigorously monitored and attendance and enrolment data are systematically recorded on the college's database. The multi-cultural environment influences the work and attitudes of the students and their appreciation of cultural diversity. Students' responses to pre-inspection questionnaires were very positive, showing particular appreciation of learning in a friendly, safe and supportive environment. In interviews, students spoke highly

of the support provided by their teachers and that of the college as a whole. They appreciated the dynamic and stimulating atmosphere within the college, as well as the many challenges and opportunities open to them. Highly effective procedures and policies are in place to safeguard and promote the welfare of students and health and safety measures are carefully adhered to.

- 2.3 Governance of the college exceeds expectations. Governors have a clear oversight of the college and successfully promote a vision for the future of the college, providing effective guidance and support to help the college meet its aims. Leadership and management are outstanding, with a highly effective management structure and well-defined policies and procedures which support students in their learning and personal development. Exceptionally strong leadership and management at all levels have ensured that the college is highly successful in achieving its aims. The principal has a clear vision for the college which ensures that students achieve successfully and are thoroughly prepared for the next stage of their education. This vision is shared by senior leaders and teachers, who work together for the good of the students. This ensures that staff at all levels have clear roles and responsibilities and are inspired to aim for the highest standards. Management is strengthened by the college data system which integrates academic and pastoral information, enabling staff to support students effectively. Comprehensive systems for review and planning are used successfully, resulting in improvement in many areas of the college. Appraisal systems are effective. Arrangements for the training of staff in safeguarding, welfare and health and safety issues are excellent and well established. Rigorous checks to ensure individuals' suitability to work with children are undertaken. The required checks are fully recorded in the central register of employment.

2.(b) Action points

(i) Compliance with standards for Private Colleges

- 2.4 At the time of the inspection, the college met all the key standards for private further education colleges and quality is high. **The college exceeds expectations for the quality of education.**

(ii) Recommendation for further improvement

- 2.5 The college is advised to make the following improvement.
1. Identify best practice in teaching and share this extensively across all curriculum areas.

3. THE QUALITY OF CURRICULUM, TEACHING AND LEARNERS' ACHIEVEMENTS

3.(a) Assessment of students prior to or on arrival

- 3.1 The assessment of students prior to, or on, arrival exceeds expectations. Detailed entry criteria are set and used effectively by the college to accurately assess the suitability of each student prior to an offer being made.
- 3.2 Students receive appropriate advice and guidance prior to arrival in the UK. The use of initial assessment, via a pre-course questionnaire and telephone interview, ensure that they are placed on the most appropriate programme. On arrival, students take further tests to ensure course placement is accurate. The use of assessment information by tutors is effective. The college is responsive to instances when students feel that they need to change to another course or level. The number of withdrawals or transfers between programmes is low.
- 3.3 Replies to the pre-inspection questionnaire and meetings with students indicate a very high level of satisfaction with the information and advice that they receive, and inspection supports this view.

3.(b) Suitability of course provision and curriculum

- 3.4 The course provision and curriculum is excellent. The college offers a well-defined curriculum which is of a very high standard and consistent with the college's aim to enable all students to access higher education in the UK or abroad. Qualifications meet the requirements of the UKBA and offer suitable progression routes into further study or employment.
- 3.5 Programmes are effectively matched to the students' needs. The curriculum is well planned and high quality course handbooks and schemes of work provide effective guidance. A secure course review is undertaken annually with the involvement of students. Students' feedback is sought on a continual basis and is used to guide future course development.
- 3.6 Students are highly satisfied with the provision offered and are able to link their current studies to their future aspirations. Most students successfully complete their programme and the number of withdrawals is very low. The needs of those with EAL are effectively assessed and met. An excellent range of extra-curricular activities is available which are highly effective in developing the students' cultural and social skills.

- 3.7 Courses are accurately detailed in the prospectus and advertised on the college website.

3.(c) The quality of teaching and its impact on learning

- 3.8 The quality of teaching and its impact on learning exceeds expectations. Overall, teaching is good and often outstanding. This successfully supports the aims of the college to provide meaningful learning experiences in a diverse educational environment that enables students to acquire new knowledge and make progress according to their ability and starting points. Students spoke very highly of the teaching, responding very positively in interviews and pre-inspection questionnaires. Attendance and punctuality are excellent. No unsatisfactory teaching was observed.
- 3.9 The significant amount of excellent and good teaching demonstrated good pace, variety and energy. It stretches and challenges the students through skilful questioning. Effective use of interactive teaching methods promotes engagement and enthusiastic learning. Teachers' subject knowledge throughout the college is excellent, and this fosters a real enjoyment and understanding among the students.
- 3.10 Most teaching encourages students to work independently and in co-operation with others; students are challenged to produce work of a high standard and to extend themselves by applying their knowledge in unfamiliar or more demanding contexts. Teachers know the characteristics and needs of their students well and the detailed, individual support for students with EAL is excellent. Teachers are motivated and the planning and implementation of programmes of study are rigorous. Where teaching is only satisfactory, the pace is often too fast or the teacher talks too much, and consequently students lose concentration and interest.
- 3.11 The college has created a feeling of mutual support; the atmosphere in lessons is both positive and friendly. Students are comfortable in their surroundings and this enables them to work hard and make progress. They form close bonds with others from different countries and backgrounds, encouraged by the staff. The concept of multi-cultural internationalism is valued by the students and is a feature of the college.
- 3.12 The work of students is effectively assessed by a variety of methods. Marking of written work by teachers is thorough and contains helpful comments on how to

improve. The quality of oral feedback to students is excellent and is a key factor in enabling students to understand what they need to do to improve. Data is used effectively to track and monitor students' achievements, and ensure that all students are making sufficient progress.

3.(d) Progress and attainment

- 3.13 Progress and attainment are excellent. Students are very well educated and make exceptional progress over time in relation to their ability profile. The college is highly successful in meeting its aim of inspiring students to achieve more than they believe they can, and in developing their intellects, their imagination and independence of mind.
- 3.14 Success rates, including external examinations, are high and well above the national average. Students demonstrate excellent and sometime outstanding

levels of knowledge and understanding. They are articulate and engage in lively exchange and discussion amongst themselves and with their teachers. Students with EAL make good progress and match that of all other students in the college because of the high level of support provided by student support and the teachers. The students themselves affirm that they are pleased with their academic progress. The college is successful in its aim of placing students in an impressive range of higher education courses and institutions.

- 3.15 Students have highly positive attitudes and an enthusiasm for learning, which motivates them to do their best at all times. They are also very ambitious and focused on obtaining good examination results, but also enjoy learning for its own sake. They take responsibility for their progress and attainment.

4. STUDENTS' WELFARE, INCLUDING HEALTH AND SAFETY

4.(a) Health, safety and security of the premises (in line with expectations of educational institutions)

- 4.1 Arrangements for health, safety and security of the premises are excellent. The college has invested well in the premises and the general condition of the building is good. Accommodation for students and staff is of a high standard and fit for purpose. Toilet facilities are adequate in number and are clean and well maintained. College identity cards are issued to each student and staff member to allow timed, 'swipe-card' entry to all buildings. Closed-circuit cameras monitor buildings and relay images to a central point. This results in a safe and secure learning environment.
- 4.2 Arrangements for health, safety and security of the students exceed expectations. Students receive excellent support and guidance from the college which results in a caring and friendly community where students feel highly valued. Pastoral arrangements are clearly understood by the students. The combination of support provided through the welfare office, tutors and subject teachers works exceptionally well, and results in concerns being identified and handled quickly. Students feel comfortable to talk to any member of staff if they have a concern or problem and are confident that it will be resolved. Teachers know their students well and communication amongst staff is very effective and fully co-ordinated.
- 4.3 Arrangements to ensure health and safety are well managed by a dedicated health and safety team. Detailed risk assessments are reviewed regularly. All necessary measures to reduce risk from fire and other hazards have been taken and staff are trained in the required fire prevention procedures. Fire drills are carried out regularly. There are adequate numbers of fire marshals and first aiders, as well as first-aid kits and accident books. There are fire action notices on display throughout both premises and the fire exits are well signed and free of obstructions.
- 4.4 Students benefit from on-site access to a health care professional. In addition, a number of staff are trained in first aid. A secure plan is in place for disability access and is in line with the Special Education Needs and Disability Act. The admission and attendance records are accurately maintained, and students are registered at the start of every lesson, with their attendance closely monitored and evaluated.

- 4.5 There are clear and effective policies and procedures for child protection and due care is given to the implementation of these policies. Staff undertake safeguarding training, and safe recruitment procedures are strictly adhered to.

4.(b) Student registration and attendance records

- 4.6 Arrangements for student registration and attendance recording are extremely effective. Admission procedures are clear, and a comprehensive central register is maintained. Accurate attendance records are kept and data is systematically analysed and used to monitor students. There is a comprehensive attendance policy and students are contacted immediately if they are absent without authorisation. There is a rigorous approach to monitoring punctuality and appropriate action is taken swiftly. As a result attendance rates are high and non-completion of courses is rare.
- 4.7 Clear policies and procedures are in place for the collection and refund of student fees and deposits. The policy is fair and applied consistently and accurate records are kept.
- 4.8 Staff have good knowledge of UKBA requirements in regard to attendance. A secure system is in place and effectively used to inform UKBA of students who do not comply with attendance requirements.

4.(c) Pastoral support for students

- 4.9 Pastoral support for students is excellent. Student welfare is a key priority and the college has invested heavily in ensuring that it meets its promise of providing a personalised service. Oversight and co-ordination of the welfare and pastoral support for students is provided by a full-time student welfare manager. Initial advice and guidance is supportive and helpful which means students are placed on a course which is appropriate to their needs. An effective system of tutorials, progress reviews and attendance reports ensures that individual students' personal and academic development is reviewed regularly. Comprehensive records are kept.
- 4.10 Relationships between students and staff, and amongst students themselves, are outstanding. The college has clear anti-bullying and behaviour policies which ensure that any issues are dealt with swiftly and effectively. Replies to the pre-inspection questionnaire and meetings with students show overwhelmingly that students are happy in the college. Students feel that the college is providing

them with a safe and comfortable environment which effectively meets their learning needs. A wide range of college trips are provided to widen the students' experiences

- 4.11 Exceptionally high quality careers advice and guidance ensures that students are well prepared for further study choices and life beyond college.

4.(d) Child protection

- 4.12 The safeguarding arrangements for students under the age of 18 are excellent and conform to official guidance. There is a designated child protection officer who is appropriately trained. All staff, home-stay providers and governors are subject to criminal records bureau (CRB) enhanced disclosures, and records are maintained centrally by the human resources manager.
- 4.13 A range of suitable policies are in place and these are effectively implemented. All staff have an awareness of safeguarding issues because the general culture of the college supports a strong focus on care for all students, particularly for those under 18.

4.(e) Residential accommodation

- 4.14 The quality of residential accommodation is excellent and forms a valuable part of the students' education and personal development. Facilities are of a high standard and there is an ongoing programme of refurbishment. Students are accommodated in comfortable and well-decorated single or shared rooms, most with en-suite facilities. Lounge, study and information and communication technology (ICT) facilities are good, and there are well-equipped kitchens and laundry facilities. Students indicated a particularly high level of satisfaction with the facilities.
- 4.15 The arrangements for home-stay accommodation are excellent. A rigorous and stringent approach to host family placements is taken, with care and attention being given to ensure the best possible experience for students. Students are well matched to home-stay families according to their needs and requirements. As a result students report that they are extremely satisfied with their host families. Students provide early feedback on any issues so that these can be immediately rectified. Regular spot checks are carried out.

5. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GOVERNANCE, LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

5.(a) Ownership and oversight

- 5.1 Ownership and oversight exceed expectations. The governors bring much educational expertise to the college, and provide secure oversight. Their work is firmly directed towards ensuring that the college meets its aims, particularly its inclusive ethos and emphasis on supporting students. They receive regular and formal briefings from the principal and senior management team. Governors are closely involved in the college's development plan, and work actively to ensure appropriate provision of resources and accommodation. They have a named governor for child protection, and discharge their responsibility for child protection by effective oversight of the college's management of these matters. They annually review the college's policies for health and safety and child protection.
- 5.2 Appropriate legal permissions from the appropriate bodies are in place, including an operational lease, full planning permissions and copyright licences. The proprietors fulfil their statutory duties in meeting the needs of all students under the age of 18.
- 5.3 The college's work is supported financially by good structures. The college buildings are well maintained.

5.(b) Management structures and responsibilities

- 5.4 The quality of leadership and management in the college is excellent. Consultation, mutual support and shared purpose are evident. The leaders have a clear vision for the college and a commitment to make that vision realised in high academic achievement and strong pastoral care, by excellent relationships between staff and students and among the students themselves, and by clear and effective links with the local community and those abroad. Self-evaluation is effective and provides an accurate account of the college's key strengths and areas for development.
- 5.5 The management structure promotes effective systems to initiate and implement policies to meet the college's needs, and to monitor their operation. The structure operates smoothly and successfully, with defined roles and responsibilities and excellent lines of communication. The style of management has ensured that relationships between the leadership team and the teaching

staff are good. Replies to the pre-inspection questionnaire and meetings with staff show that they are happy and very supportive of the college.

- 5.6 Pastoral management is excellent, contributing much to students' personal development and to meeting the college's aim to create a supportive environment. Academic management is excellent, ensuring consistency in assessment and curriculum planning.
- 5.7 The college is very successful in securing and retaining well-qualified staff. An effective system of staff review is in place and this is used to ensure staff are well qualified for the work they do, and appropriately supported by the management team. Staff have received appropriate child protection training, and are aware of health and safety requirements. An excellent programme of staff development is in place to ensure that staff are appropriately trained for their roles.

5.(c) Quality assurance including student feedback

- 5.8 Quality assurance within the college is strong and effective. Arrangements for quality assurance are fully embedded in the operational structure of the college and monitored effectively by managers. Data on performance and progress is used to monitor and evaluate performance; with appropriate actions initiated in a timely manner to bring about effective change. The college makes improvements as a result of student feedback and course reviews.
- 5.9 Responses to pre-inspection questionnaires indicate a high level of satisfaction with the quality of education provided by the college.
- 5.10 There is a suitable complaints policy in place which is operated effectively. All students confirmed that they were aware of the complaints policy.

5.(d) Staff recruitment, qualifications and suitability checks

- 5.11 Staff recruitment, qualifications and suitability checks exceeds expectations. The college secures well-qualified staff who contribute significantly to the success of the college's aim of providing education in a friendly, inclusive and supportive environment. Checking procedures to ensure the suitability of staff are robust, and the central register is maintained effectively. The college's aim to create a friendly environment is enhanced by the effective work of non-teaching staff in a variety of administrative and supportive roles.

5.(e) Provision of information

- 5.16 The quality of information available on the college website is good. Accurate details of the courses offered by the college are provided. Policies and arrangement for admissions, discipline, exclusions, health and safety as well as its welfare provision are clearly detailed.
- 5.17 Contact details for the principal, together with the college's complaints procedure, are provided. The college was extremely responsive in providing information for the inspection in a timely manner.

INSPECTION EVIDENCE

The inspectors observed lessons, conducted formal interviews with students and examined samples of students' work. They held discussions with senior members of staff and with the proprietors and attended registration sessions. The responses of staff and students to pre-inspection questionnaires were analysed, and the inspectors examined regulatory documentation made available by the college.

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