



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

**ST CLARE'S OXFORD**

**(Registered Charity 294085)**

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Address	139 Banbury Road, Oxford. OX2 7AL
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Email Address	ic.enquiries@stclares.ac.uk
Website	www.stclares.ac.uk
Principal	Mr Duncan Reith
Proprietor	Mr Jens Tholstrup
Age Range	16+
Total number of students	97
Numbers by age and type of study	Under 18: 20 18+: 77 EFL only: 28 FE only: 54 EFL and FE: 15
Inspection dates	<b>18 - 20 November 2025</b>

## **PREFACE**

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

The ISI is an approved Educational Oversight body authorised by the Home Office to inspect privately funded further education colleges and English language schools in England and Wales offering courses on the Qualifications and Credit Framework. It is designed to improve the quality of education on offer to international students who attend UK colleges through student visas.

ISI inspections are required to:

- Report on the extent to which colleges comply with the published Educational Oversight Standards;
- Assess and report on the quality of educational outcomes and provision;
- Where applicable, make recommendations 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. CHARACTERISTICS AND CONTEXT

- 1.1 St Clare's Oxford is an educational charity, founded in 1953 to advance international education and understanding. This educational statement of purpose is highlighted by the college both in information to students and parents, and the day-to-day running of the college.
- 1.2 St Clare's comprises a number of sections, such as an International Baccalaureate College, an International College, and other activities such as summer schools. Only the International College was in scope for this inspection. The group is overseen by a principal, who reports to a board of 12 governors. Since the last full inspection, the college has reintroduced the role of director of the International College, who has direct responsibility for day-to-day management of the college. She is line managed by the principal.
- 1.3 The International College comprises a main centre for teaching in north Oxford. This building also provides accommodation for students over the age of 18. There are four additional buildings for accommodation, including a designated residence for students under the age of 18. Other services such as a medical centre, library and cafeteria are situated 10 minutes' walk from the main teaching centre.
- 1.4 The college offers a range of programmes, some of which are externally validated by the University of San Diego. These include programmes in English for Life, gap year elective study and University Foundation Programmes (UFP). The college also offers exam preparation including International English Language Testing System (IELTS) and Cambridge Examinations.
- 1.5 The college focuses on higher level learning in particular, including for English language courses. The college enrolment processes ensure that students have sufficient English and academic abilities for their programmes of study and that they meet UKVI requirements. The college has progressively increased the proportion of academic study time on the academic subject teaching hours on University Foundation Programme to provide more academic contact time.
- 1.6 The college has geographical proximity to the University of Oxford, and close links to a number of departments and member colleges of the university via college staff and members of the governing body. The college states this is a key feature in their offer and also influences their delivery.
- 1.7 At the time of inspection there were 97 students on roll, of whom 25 were studying under Student visa arrangements. The latter come primarily from northern Europe and the USA. There are roughly equal numbers of males and females, and 20 students were under the age of 18. There are two students with a declared special educational need and/or disability (SEND).

## 2. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

- 2.1 **The college exceeds expectations for the quality of education.** At the time of the inspection, all Standards for Educational Oversight were met and quality is excellent.
- 2.2 The quality of the curriculum, teaching and learners' achievements is excellent. The college's educational mission to advance internationalism through teaching is evident in all activity and encourages students to develop higher-order critical thinking skills. Courses on offer to students studying under Student visa arrangements meet the definition of an approved qualification according to Home Office guidance and the range and breadth of provision meets the needs of all students extremely well. Initial assessment is excellent and ensures students are placed upon an appropriate course. Teaching, learning and assessment are excellent and promote the core British values of democracy and tolerance. Teachers take a focused approach to the needs of their learners through high quality and bespoke curriculum design. In a minority of lessons technology is not well used. Individual teachers monitor the progress of students extremely well, but there is no objective overview of student progress across all areas of provision at a strategic level. Where students have SEND these needs are met well. Progress by students is excellent both in class and in terms of outcomes, and in most cases above the levels expected for their age and ability. Work set is appropriate for the needs of both students' objectives as well as enabling them to become highly effective and independent learners. This approach means students enjoy their lessons and have strongly positive views of the college and their teachers. The college has responded positively to the previous monitoring visit's recommendation and all lessons seen started and finished punctually.
- 2.3 Students' welfare, including health and safety, is excellent. The standard of the buildings is excellent. They are safe and secure, with compliance to all relevant health and safety legislation. Buildings are all decorated to a high standard, with a range of classroom resources which aid learning. The college has a very good library to support students' learning, as well as high quality catering provision. Measures to reduce the risk of fire are effective, as is provision for first aid. Attendance rates are excellent and the college has excellent measures to ensure attendance, as well as follow up students in the event of absence and meet Home Office reporting requirements. Pastoral care is excellent. College staff care about their students, and leaders have enhanced this with robust and effective systems and investment. For those under 18s who are resident, this includes morning and evening meals, ensuring that welfare standards are met. The college teaching site is accessible to students with SEND, as are residential blocks. Safeguarding for those students under the age of 18 or vulnerable adults is excellent. The management of residential provision, including homestay, is excellent and all appropriate checks on staff are carried out and meet statutory guidance including Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE).
- 2.4 The effectiveness of governance, leadership and management is excellent. Ownership and oversight is excellent. The college governors take their duties seriously and discharge them effectively, using their skills and knowledge to support leaders in the college ensure student needs are met. Governors and leaders have all necessary legal

permissions and fulfil all statutory duties with regard to health and safety and to safeguard students under the age of 18 and vulnerable adults. Proprietors have created a clear educational direction which is reflected in the provision of high-quality education. Management roles and responsibilities are excellent. Through careful and diligent recruitment of highly qualified staff, as well as supportive professional development, leaders have created a culture of learning which directly benefits students. Processes to recruit staff are excellent. Staff feel well supported by the senior leadership team. Quality assurance is excellent and uses student feedback effectively to make improvements to provision. The college has an appropriate range of policies and these are well publicised both internally and on the college's website. Provision of information is excellent.

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

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

- 3.1 Assessment of students prior to arrival is excellent
- 3.2 Students enrolling for English language courses are tested and interviewed to ascertain their language level. These processes are highly effective, and consequently students are placed in the most suitable class to meet their needs.
- 3.3 Students enrolling on university and University Foundation Programmes also undergo assessment and interviews prior to and on arrival which ensure their programmes of study match their needs.
- 3.4 Staff are meticulous in their approach to ensuring students are well matched to their chosen courses and provide excellent guidance throughout the pre-enrolment process. Students are able to move or add courses should they wish to, allowing a high degree of flexibility in programme choice.
- 3.5 Effective procedures are in place to identify and plan support for students with SEND. Staff are trained to recognise additional learning needs.

#### **3.(b) Suitability of course provision and curriculum**

- 3.6 Course provision is excellent. The range and standard of courses offered to learners closely matches their academic standards as well as their future ambitions.
- 3.7 Courses within the college such as the University Foundation Programme that are not subject to an external examination are unique to the college as they are built upon the range of staff expertise and the locality, not an external syllabus. Staff use both resources and the historic city of Oxford to a high degree, including architectural and literary connections. This brings a wider context to students' learning which generates enthusiasm and encourages further development of independent study.
- 3.8 Programmes on offer are clearly outlined in promotional material such as the prospectus and website, and this alongside good advice and guidance before and during study means most students complete their courses.
- 3.9 Courses on offer to students studying under Student visa arrangements meet the definition of an approved qualification according to Home Office guidance. These students study a minimum of 15 hours of daytime, weekday lessons at B2 level or above.



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

- 3.10 Teaching quality is excellent. The college has highly qualified staff who use their depth of knowledge extremely well, and this enables students to learn at a rapid pace and progress well. Students enjoy their lessons and hold their teachers in high regard.
- 3.11 Teaching observed during the inspection was excellent using high level knowledge and skills. Lessons are well planned and use time wisely. All teaching supports the fundamental British values of democracy and does not discriminate against students or contravene Part 3 of the Equality Act 2010
- 3.12 Classroom resources are high quality and available to students regardless of background and generally used well. As most lessons use largely teacher-led discussion, this means in a minority of lessons technology available in classrooms is rarely used. High levels of expectations by teachers ensures learners are encouraged to explore topics more widely. This broadens students' knowledge and prepares them well for further and higher study.
- 3.13 Students with SEND are well supported in classes, and teachers use excellent understanding of individual needs to ensure all students are fully able to access all aspects of the curriculum and progress.
- 3.14 The assessment of students' work is timely, reliable and consistent; information from such assessment is used to plan teaching and inform students about how they can improve their work and make progress. This is largely through homework assignments and preparation for discussion sessions. Students with SEND are well supported in classes, and teachers use excellent understanding of individual needs to ensure all students are fully able to access all aspects of the curriculum and progress.
- 3.15 Students have a personal tutor who monitors academic progress. This is effective, and students feel the supportive approach enables them to progress. This also supports progression and pastoral care effectively. Tracking of student progress by teachers is locally based according to each teacher's programme of study, and individualised as a result. This does not easily feed into a systematic overview across all areas of provision for senior leaders.

### **3.(d) Attainment and progress**

- 3.16 Attainment and progress is excellent. Students undertaking externally examined lessons reach high levels of attainment, and those on non-examined programmes reach high standards of factual knowledge and independent learning. All English programmes follow Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) standards.
- 3.17 Progress in lessons is excellent, with lessons observed all being delivered at pace and to a high level of academic standard. This enables students to progress well after completion at the college, with the large majority of students who apply being offered a university place.

## **4. STUDENTS' WELFARE, INCLUDING HEALTH AND SAFETY**

### **4.(a) Health, safety and security of the premises**

- 4.1 Health, safety and security of premises is excellent. The physical standard and management of premises for both teaching and residence is excellent. Premises are well maintained and fit for purpose. Buildings are decorated to a high standard, well lit, and conducive to a studious atmosphere appropriate to the programmes offered.
- 4.2 There are sufficient washrooms for staff, students and those with SEND. All furniture and fittings in the college are appropriate for the ages and needs of the students. Access to the college allows all students including those with SEND to enter and leave premises safely, including for emergency evacuations.
- 4.3 The security of buildings is excellent, with electronic fob entry and CCTV. Students feel safe travelling to and from their lessons and between sites for meals or to visit the library. Food prepared is of a high quality and prepared in hygienic facilities. Free drinking water is available.
- 4.4 Management of Health and Safety, including measures to reduce the risk of fire, is excellent. Regular fire drills and good record keeping ensures students understand their responsibilities. All aspects of fire safety are overseen at a senior level, and regular checks by external contractors ensures the reduction of other risks, such as that posed by Legionella, are well managed. Use is made of regular feedback from students to ensure a culture of continual improvement.
- 4.5 Arrangements to ensure health and safety are highly effective and include excellent provision for students who are ill, injured or have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Sufficient staff are trained as first aiders. Staff understand contextual risks for this age group and have good links with local health care providers.

### **4.(b) Student registration and attendance records**

- 4.6 Record-keeping of attendance, and processes relating to registration and attendance are excellent. Attendance rates are high.
- 4.7 During each lesson registers are electronically taken, and where students are under the age of 18, additional checks are made, such as twice daily sign-in at reception when at college. Additional checks are also made when students under the age of 18 are off-site on trips, and this ensures a high degree of care is taken to monitor attendance and ensure students are safe. Where students are absent, administrative staff contact welfare staff in residential facilities immediately and welfare checks are undertaken.
- 4.8 The college has appropriate procedures in place to notify the Home Office if required. At the time of inspection, the college had not needed to do so, demonstrating the effective link between diligent enrolment and admissions processes and their high

expectations for students. Attendance of students studying under Student visa arrangements is high, averaging 91%.

- 4.9 Procedures for the collection or refund of fees are clearly outlined in documentation and supported by staff during all aspects of a student's journey with the college.

#### **4.(c) Pastoral support for students**

- 4.10 Pastoral support for students is excellent. Relationships between students and both teaching and support staff are mutually respectful and foster a sense of trust and collaboration following excellent processes during enrolment. This leads to early awareness and action in the event of any pastoral concern. This supports students very well with any personal issues and contributes to the college's high retention and success rate.
- 4.11 Alongside pastoral care, the wider support shown by staff supports the college's aims to foster a tolerant international community. This is effective and also helps students succeed and feel happy in their studies.
- 4.12 An effective induction prepares students for both study and life in the UK.
- 4.13 A wide range of social activities are provided, both for day and residential students. These include a range of trips within Oxford and also the wider UK, enabling students from other countries to gain a wider cultural appreciation of this country during their stay. Students are very positive about these experiences.
- 4.14 Effective careers guidance and preparatory work such as UCAS support and visits to universities in the UK, enables students to be successful in applications, including to USA Ivy League universities, such as Brown, or Russell Group universities in the UK.
- 4.15 For residential students, further effective pastoral care is provided, with live-in welfare staff in every residence. They know their residents well and support a wider range of activities and needs, from art projects to celebrating events such as Eid.

#### **4.(d) Safeguarding for under 18s**

- 4.16 Safeguarding for students under the age of 18 is excellent. Processes to ensure the safety and wellbeing of those under 18 or vulnerable adults are excellent. Students know who to go to in the event of a concern.
- 4.17 Staff have a good understanding of official guidance such as KCSIE. The appropriately trained designated safeguarding lead is the Director of the International College and this ensures they have sufficient seniority to ensure safeguarding is a high priority for the institution. They discharge this role effectively, including all staff receive regular updating on changes to KCSIE and Prevent. Consequently, staff understand their responsibilities extremely well.

- 4.18 Checks prior to employment including Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks are diligently carried out. All aspects of pre-employment procedures meet the requirements of statutory guidance such as KCSIE.
- 4.19 The college has processes to effectively liaise with local partners such as the local authority designated officer should this be required. There have been no disciplinary actions against staff.

#### **4.(e) Residential accommodation**

- 4.20 Residential accommodation is excellent. All residences, including homestay, meet the standards required to ensure students are safe and have a comfortable experience at the college, and the residential experience adds significant value to the wider experience of students at the college.
- 4.21 Residences for students over the age of 18 allow them a range of options including shared or single rooms, alongside high-quality facilities to enable them to self-cater. Comfortable common-room areas allow socialising, and the presence of live-in welfare staff at key times of the day enable both formal and informal support to be offered.
- 4.22 For those students who are under the age of 18, a designated block adjoining the main site allows for a family atmosphere away from home, with further welfare support living on site. These students are provided with three meals a day, and this is of a high quality.
- 4.23 All areas where food might be prepared meet standards of hygiene and safety. For those in under 18 accommodation a reduced range of kitchen appliances ensures reduced risks appropriate to the age range whilst still allowing independent food preparation.
- 4.24 There are good adaptations for learners using wheelchairs in residential accommodation with movable hobs and sinks, and this ensures the college is inclusive for those with SEND.
- 4.25 Homestay providers are carefully vetted by the college, as are their homes, and this ensures students of any age are safe and well cared for in this setting. The college undertakes DBS checks on all adults in the house. Homestay providers spoken to by inspectors clearly outlined their responsibilities and also the high expectations set by the college. Students were extremely positive about their experiences in residential accommodation.

## **5. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GOVERNANCE, LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

### **5.(a) Ownership and oversight**

- 5.1 Ownership and oversight of the college is excellent. Leaders and governors understand their responsibilities well and discharge them with care. Leaders and governors have a very clear mission to ensure the meeting of the college's charitable aims, and they discharge this effectively. The governing body is drawn from a wide range of fields, ensuring an appropriate range of skills and knowledge.
- 5.2 A suitable range of governing committees ensures oversight of all areas of the college's activity, including safeguarding and the maintenance of high academic standards. They are effective in discharging their responsibilities for safeguarding and for welfare, health and safety throughout the college and all legal permissions are met.
- 5.3 Governors visit the college regularly and understand the nature of the curriculum well. They work closely with senior leaders to ensure the effective completion of development plans as well as having sufficient strategic distance to ensure they do not over-reach into operational matters.
- 5.4 Governors demonstrate prudent and effective financial oversight which leads to sufficient investment in staff, accommodation and resources.

### **5.(b) Management structures and responsibilities**

- 5.5 Management structures and responsibilities are excellent. Leadership and management provide clear educational direction, as reflected in the quality of the students' education, their welfare and the standard of their achievements.
- 5.6 Since the last full educational oversight inspection, the college has ensured the role of director of the international college sits on the senior management group of the wider educational group. This ensures that the needs of the international college and its students are given sufficient senior leadership focus, as well as providing effective functional links on a weekly basis to other senior leaders in the organisation.
- 5.7 Senior leaders are well known and have an excellent relationship with both staff and students. The director of the international college is a very visible presence around the college and has an excellent understanding of the needs of learners and staff. They are effective in self-evaluation, setting priorities and ensuring that they are achieved.
- 5.8 Within the college, leadership at all levels works effectively to ensure the development of a suitable curriculum that meets the needs of students, as well as supporting the needs and development of staff and their skills. They regularly review policies to ensure they are fit for purpose. The staffing body works extremely well collaboratively and staff in all areas stated they are very positive about their working environment.

- 5.9 Staff turnover is low, evidencing the strong and effective processes in place to recruit and retain high quality staff and ensuring they are suitably trained for their roles in meeting the needs of all students, safeguarding, welfare, health and safety.
- 5.10 Governors and leaders have ensured that appropriate policies and procedures are in place, and these are reviewed on a regular basis. Where investment is required, they ensure this is prioritised according to their strategic plans.

### **5.(c) Quality assurance including student feedback**

- 5.11 Quality assurance is excellent. Effective arrangements are in place for quality assurance and to enable the college's response to manage and improve the provision for students, including the management of health and safety. Good links with parents prior to enrolment means complaints are rare.
- 5.12 Ongoing feedback is gained from students, both informally through discussions, as well as formally twice a year through quantitative surveys. The results of these are very positive and are reported to the board to ensure sufficient governor oversight. Governors set targets for leaders appropriately and this is monitored over time.
- 5.13 Feedback to inspectors through questionnaires, for both staff and students, was extremely positive.
- 5.14 The college has a clear complaints procedure and where required this includes provision for adjudication by an independent third party where complaints are unresolved. There have been no complaints since the last inspection.
- 5.15 Staff appraisal is effective and enables individual staff to understand their strengths and weaknesses well. A process of lesson observations by senior staff, as well as peer observations, ensures teachers are able to both understand their own strengths and also learn from best practice elsewhere. Summative targets are set annually and this ensures a culture of continuous improvement.

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

- 5.16 All processes related to recruitment, qualifications and suitability checks are excellent. Staff checks prior to employment are robust, including references and appropriate employment history checks and right to work. All staff are subject to an enhanced DBS check prior to the commencement of employment.
- 5.17 A Single Central Record exists as required by statutory guidance and is accurate. As a result, there is an effective centralised mechanism for leaders and governors to ensure all staff have had the appropriate checks prior to commencing employment.

### **5.(e) Provision of information**

- 5.18 The provision of information is excellent. The college has provided all the information required by inspectors as laid out in the Standards

- 5.19 The college has a clear and effective website. All policies and procedures are easily accessible and up to date.
- 5.20 Leaders and other staff worked effectively both before and during the inspection to provide information in a detailed format and timely manner.

## **6. ACTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Recommendations for further improvement**

In order to further improve the excellent quality provided, the college should:

- Implement a centralised academic tracking system to support leaders to help early identification of any academic areas requiring specific focus.
- Encourage all staff to use a wider range of resources in classrooms such as IT facilities to further enhance the experience for students.



## 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 a governors' representative, observed a sample of activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended registration sessions. Inspectors visited residential accommodation. The responses of staff and students to confidential pre-inspection questionnaires were analysed, and the inspectors examined regulatory documentation made available by the college.

### Inspectors

Mr Luke Rake	Lead Inspector
Mrs Elizabeth Greenhalgh	Team Inspector
Mr Mark Marr	Team Inspector

## **7. FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY CHECK**

ISI has shared a summary of financial sustainability data with the Home Office.