ISI Independent Schools Inspectorate

# School inspection report

14 to 16 April 2026

# St Clare's, Oxford

139 Banbury Road

Oxford

OX2 7AL

The Independent Schools Inspectorate is appointed by the Department for Education to inspect association independent schools in England. Our inspections report on the extent to which the statutory Independent School Standards and other applicable regulatory requirements are met, collectively referred to in this report as 'the Standards'.

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## Summary of inspection findings

1. Governors ensure that leaders understand and fulfil their responsibilities. Governors make sure that leaders have suitable knowledge and skills so that pupils' wellbeing is at the centre of the decisions they make. Pupils receive a wide-ranging education that successfully promotes the school's aim to instil the benefits of a global perspective. As a result, the school consistently meets all of the Standards.

2. Leaders provide pupils with a well-planned, suitably broad curriculum which covers all required academic areas stipulated in the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme (IBDP). Pupils are highly motivated in all areas of learning and make consistently good progress.

3. Leaders ensure that teachers understand the needs of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) through careful screening and individual learning plans (ILPs) to support their learning. However, not all teaching implements these plans to best effect.

4. Leaders provide a suitably wide-ranging activities programme which allows pupils to participate in creative, sporting and service activities. Through these opportunities, pupils develop a firm understanding about the importance of contributing positively to the school community and society at large, both locally and internationally. Leaders encourage pupils to take on roles of responsibility within the co-curriculum so that they may develop leadership skills and grow in confidence.

5. Throughout the school, pupils demonstrate a high regard for the importance of considerate and helpful behaviour towards everyone. They understand and champion the school ethos of respect for all. This is emphasised through staff leading by example and supported by effective behaviour and anti-bullying policies and strategies.

6. Boarding leaders' decisions contribute positively to pupils' welfare and progress in all areas of school life. They provide boarders with a helpful orientation programme that they undertake when they arrive at St Clare's. Boarders develop a sense of community in and across the houses and take advantage of opportunities to become friends with peers from around the world. Boarders' views to further enhance the boarding experience are welcomed and acted upon suitably.

7. Leaders teach pupils to uphold the importance of equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI). Leaders shape the curriculum and a wide range of co-curricular opportunities so that pupils learn deeply about issues relating to these areas and acquire a highly developed understanding of different lifestyles, faiths and political beliefs. Pupils become extremely respectful of diversity. Leaders ensure that boarding house arrangements encourage pupils to learn about and show respect for people representing cultures from around the world. As a result, pupils research, discuss and debate issues and ideas maturely and with confidence with each other, staff and the wider community. This results in an outward-looking, tolerant and harmonious pupil body and has a highly beneficial impact on their overall wellbeing. This is a significant strength of the school.

8. Leaders promote a culture in which safeguarding is prioritised. This includes effective, regular training for all staff. Leaders act swiftly on any concerns and take steps to enable pupils to feel safe. Leaders make referrals to external agencies, as appropriate, so that pupils can be supported effectively.

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# The extent to which the school meets the Standards

- Standards relating to leadership and management, and governance are met.
- Standards relating to the quality of education, training and recreation are met.
- Standards relating to pupils' physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing are met.
- Standards relating to pupils' social and economic education and contribution to society are met.
- Standards relating to safeguarding are met.

## Recommended next steps

Leaders should:

- ensure consistently effective classroom provision for all pupils who have SEND, to support their learning as well as possible.

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## Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

9. In line with the school's ethos, leaders prioritise and promote pupils' wellbeing, advocating an inclusive, considerate and mutually supportive community where all are valued. Leaders encourage pupils to approach challenges with enthusiasm and confidence, determined to give of their best both in and out of the classroom.

10. Leaders undertake rigorous self-evaluation of all aspects of the school's provision. They use this evaluation to inform their plans for strategic development effectively. For example, after consultation with pupils and staff, leaders recognise the need to further strengthen academic support in the boarding houses and have taken effective action to address this through revising staffing arrangements.

11. Leaders attend regular training events to ensure that the understanding, skills and knowledge required to undertake their responsibilities effectively is suitably current. Governors offer leaders pertinent challenge and support to ensure that leaders have the appropriate knowledge and skills to fulfil their responsibilities effectively. Through regular meetings and school visits, governors engage with school leaders and scrutinise policies and practice to ensure they reflect the latest statutory guidance and are effectively implemented so that Standards are met.

12. Boarding is well led. Leaders ensure that the boarding experience is regularly reviewed and evaluated so that boarders can be happy and flourish. Boarders are enabled to feel safe, supported and well known. They learn to live together harmoniously. Boarding records, policies and documentation are clear and suitably detailed so that boarders' welfare is promoted.

13. The school's comprehensive accessibility plan is thorough and effectively implemented. The plan is reviewed regularly to make sure it remains relevant and enables pupils to access the curriculum and the school premises. Leaders make sure that the school fulfils its responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010. Leaders' promotion of EDI is highly successful. They ensure that members of the school community do not suffer from discrimination. Leaders make reasonable adjustments for pupils who have SEND.

14. Suitable provision is organised for pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL) so that they improve their knowledge and use of English language rapidly. Pupils learn to understand and accept individual differences through the informative 'global futures' programme, pre-IB personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) lessons, and boarding house and year group meetings.

15. Governors and leaders have a strategic approach to risk management. Leaders promote a robust and effective approach to managing and mitigating risk across all areas of school life. Staff receive useful guidance so that risk assessments are helpfully detailed and regularly reviewed. Leaders write individual welfare plans for vulnerable pupils with suitable consideration for their needs. Leaders maintain a comprehensive audit of risk assessments that cover the school's premises and accommodation, including all boarding houses. They ensure risk assessments for educational visits are thorough and reviewed appropriately. Such measures actively promote pupils' safety and wellbeing, both on and off the school site.

16. Leaders provide the necessary information to parents, pupils, staff and to relevant external agencies in line with their statutory obligations. This is available directly from the school and through the school website. The school provides parents with regular and detailed reports on their child's

achievements and progress, alongside the opportunity to discuss these with staff during online parents' evenings.

17. The school has a suitable complaints policy. When complaints arise, leaders respond within appropriate timeframes and record these systematically and in detail. Leaders and governors review complaints regularly to identify trends and address areas of concern effectively.

18. Leaders maintain suitable links with external agencies to promote the wellbeing of pupils. In particular, there is an effective working relationship with local safeguarding partners. The school informs the local authority about any pupils who leave or join the school at non-standard transition times during the year.

## The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to leadership and management, and governance

**19. All the relevant Standards are met.**

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## Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

20. Leaders ensure that all pupils study a suitably broad range of subjects required, including through the IBDP. Alongside academic lessons, through the well-organised theory of knowledge, extended essay and the co-curricular creativity, activity and service (CAS) programmes, pupils develop knowledge and skills which complement and extend their academic studies. Those in Year 11 take non-examined pre-IB courses, ranging from one term to one year, to strengthen academic foundations in preparation for the IB Diploma Programme offered in Years 12 and 13.

21. The school's central aim to advance international education and understanding is embedded in the IB programme in which all pupils participate. Pupils receive educational provision which promotes global awareness alongside personal responsibility and builds intercultural understanding and respect. Leaders encourage pupils to treat everyone with respect and contribute positively to the local community, including through CAS opportunities.

22. Teaching enables pupils to attain well consistently. They make good progress over time in relation to their starting points, including pupils who have SEND. They achieve good levels of success in the IB Diploma, typically attaining scores above the global average. As a result, almost all pupils gain places to study at their preferred universities across the world.

23. Highly knowledgeable teaching fosters pupils' independent thinking through lessons which, when appropriate, call for individual contributions in the classroom. Pupils respond positively to this challenge and demonstrate high levels of self-motivation. They collaborate readily through the many opportunities to do so in all subjects, from planning a debate on the desirability of the development of artificial intelligence (AI) to completing practical biological work on the observation of onion cells. In pre-IB, pupils with varying levels of musical proficiency work together in a highly creative manner, teaching each other new instruments in preparation for a summer concert.

24. Teaching encourages pupils to develop their English literacy skills through skilfully managed, frequent opportunities for discussion and written response in lessons. For example, pupils scrutinise the ways in which gross domestic product (GDP) is spent in different countries and the effects of this, confidently citing specific examples. Pupils develop written analytical and evaluative skills through the study of literary and non-literary texts, supported by written tasks which promote critical thinking and textual analysis.

25. The learning support co-ordinator provides suitable individualised teaching strategies to support pupils who have SEND so that they may make good progress. For example, teaching draws attention to key subject-specific vocabulary, important command words in questions and allows time for pupils to process new information. However, there is inconsistency in the way in which teachers implement the recommended strategies in the classroom, with the result that the learning of pupils who have SEND is sometimes less well supported as a result.

26. A very large number of pupils speak EAL. Leaders identify the individual language needs of pupils at interview and again when they arrive in school. This ensures that they are placed in English classes appropriate to their levels of proficiency so that their vocabulary and oral and written fluency can develop swiftly. Because of this, they made good, and often rapid, progress in their learning.

27. An assessment framework is in place which features regular monitoring and tracking of pupils' progress and informs reporting on pupils' performance. This feeds into teachers' lesson planning so

that most lessons have suitably ambitious objectives and a clear structure that develops learning points systematically. Teachers use questioning, discussion and practical tasks effectively, alongside appropriate resources. Consequently, pupils are engaged learners and develop their knowledge and skills successfully.

28. Leaders provide a suitably broad, well-resourced co-curricular programme in which all pupils take part. Pupils develop their interpersonal skills alongside learning new skills and developing their knowledge in areas as varied as art club, padel, animal rights action group, chess club and contributing to the school magazine.

29. Leaders ensure that boarders are supported academically out of the classroom. Staff respond positively to any requests for extra help. Boarding leaders provide boarders with suitable opportunities to participate in recreational activities. These include visiting the local sports club, trips to London and socialising across the boarding houses in the evenings and at weekends. Boarders also have the opportunity to explore Oxford after an orientation programme which ensures that they feel comfortable in the locality and know what to do should any issues arise.

## The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to the quality of education, training and recreation

**30. All the relevant Standards are met.**

## Section 3: Pupils' physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing

31. The 'global futures' curriculum for pupils in Years 12 and 13 covers a variety of age-appropriate PSHE themes, following on from a one-year course for pre-IB pupils. Topics include how to lead a healthy lifestyle, a focus on Hofstede's 'cultural dimensions' theory, which is an academic model for comparing national cultures, and a focus on democracies, including the British parliamentary system. As part of this curriculum, the relationships and sex education (RSE) programme includes delivery by visiting experts on a variety of age-appropriate and suitable topics, such as consent, different types of families, masculinity, and contraception. Leaders act on feedback from pupils to ensure that subject matter is helpful and informative.

32. Leaders provide pupils with many opportunities to develop self-knowledge, self-esteem and self-belief. Teaching encourages debate and discussion as a matter of course, so that pupils learn to present their ideas effectively and grow in confidence by doing so. The three-weekly subject reports that pupils receive help them to grow in self-esteem and self-belief through the charting of their academic growth. Pupils train for mentoring roles in the boarding houses and opportunities to lead orientation days. Leaders encourage them to draw on their own experiences in boarding to carry out these roles appropriately.

33. Leaders provide a wide range of physical education (PE) opportunities, including football, badminton, tennis and swimming, so that pupils may develop their sporting knowledge and skills alongside teamwork, resilience and perseverance. Leaders induct sports staff effectively so that provision is inclusive, engaging and meets the needs of all pupils. Leaders celebrate sports achievement through an annual awards ceremony, recognising a range of attributes such as effort, excellence, teamwork and courage.

34. Leaders and staff set clear behavioural expectations through modelling courteous behaviour towards all, alongside anti-bullying and behaviour policies which pupils understand and support. Expectations regarding mobile phone usage are clear and respected. Relationships between pupils and staff are warm and positive and characterised by mutual respect. Staff encourage pupils to reflect on their behaviour and to resolve issues constructively, including through repairing relationships through discussion where appropriate. On the very rare occasion when bullying incidents occur, leaders deal with them swiftly and appropriately.

35. Leaders actively promote pupils' spiritual and moral development in an inclusive manner. For example, they provide a multi-faith room for reflection or prayer and support pupils to join congregations at local places of worship if they so wish. Leaders invite leaders of different faiths to talk to pupils about their religious roles and beliefs. This multi-denominational approach encourages pupils to be respectful, curious and understanding of people who hold religious or spiritual beliefs different to their own. Pupils develop their sense of morality, in part through the school ethos of global citizenship which permeates all aspects of school life. They learn to listen to each other's experiences and ideas thoughtfully and debate ethical issues carefully.

36. Well-trained boarding staff know boarders well and monitor their welfare closely. The comprehensive induction boarders receive on joining the community allows them to understand British culture and customs so that they quickly feel at home in the locality. There are effective arrangements for boarders to communicate with their families and friends. Boarding

accommodation is comfortable, well maintained, and well equipped and boarders describe their houses as friendly and inclusive. Boarders' privacy is respected and they can always contact a member of staff, including at night.

37. A robust health and safety culture is embedded throughout the school. Leaders, supported by governors, make sure that health and safety procedures, including those related to fire safety systems, are suitably implemented. Leaders ensure that fire prevention measures for all buildings are rigorously implemented. These include regular fire drills, including during boarding time. Leaders' monitoring of health and safety is rigorous. They arrange for regular maintenance checks in school buildings, outdoor areas and the boarding houses and there are systems in place to ensure maintenance issues are meticulously recorded and effectively addressed. This results in premises and accommodation that are well maintained and free from obvious hazards, creating a suitable environment for pupils to work and relax in.

38. Provision for pupils' first aid and medical needs is suitable. The medical centre is staffed by a qualified school nurse and a counsellor, supported by additional medical provision and access to local healthcare services. Leaders meet regularly to review welfare concerns, enabling early identification and appropriate support to be provided when required. An appropriate number of staff are trained in first aid and systems for responding to medical needs, both routine and urgent, are effective. Arrangements for managing medication are secure, including storage, recording and oversight. Pupils are able to seek prompt support at any time.

39. Pupils are well supervised with an appropriate staff presence, including during social times. The consistent use of electronic access to buildings adds to pupils' safety. Boarding houses have effective arrangements so that staff know the whereabouts of boarders outside lesson times, in the evenings and during weekends.

40. Admission and attendance registers are suitably maintained. Attendance procedures follow statutory guidance, and leaders understand the link between attendance and pupils' wellbeing. There are clear processes in place for the swift follow-up of any concerns about absenteeism, alongside effective support for pupils to attend school when facing particular challenges or difficulties.

## The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to pupils' physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing

**41. All the relevant Standards are met.**

## Section 4: Pupils' social and economic education and contribution to society

42. In line with the school's ethos, teaching promotes tolerance and harmony and develops pupils' understanding and capacity to act as responsible global citizens extremely well. Both in and out of the classroom, pupils learn about the importance of British values of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect. Teaching encourages pupils to compare and contrast cultures and political ideologies, ensuring that all discussions on such matters are balanced and conducted without bias. Pupils learn how to voice disagreements with each other respectfully. As a result, pupils have an extremely high regard for the importance of valuing people who represent diverse societies, lifestyles, beliefs and faiths. They demonstrate this as a matter of course. As part of new pupils' orientation, leaders educate them to respect people from cultures and customs different to their own. Through this provision, pupils learn about and understand the importance of respect for all and the benefits of living in harmony with others collegiately and globally.

43. Through the 'global futures' curriculum, pupils learn about themes such as cultural identity, discrimination and use of language, the Equality Act 2010 and people who are protected under it. This education supports pupils to respect everyone and be curious about others' beliefs and values. During Black History month, visiting speakers educate pupils on topics such as Oxford's Black history and the peace and reconciliation commission in South Africa. Leaders augment this learning with many opportunities for further understanding of diverse people's lives. For example, they ensure that all pupils take part in the annual Model United Nations (MUN) conference, allocating them the responsibility of representing countries other than their own so that they grow in their understanding of global issues.

44. Leaders encourage the school's pupil-led 'diversity, equity, inclusion and justice' group to actively consider areas for development. Through focused surveys and discussion, the group ensures that pupils' views are addressed and that helpful adjustments to the provision are made whenever possible. For example, Muslim pupils have created opportunities in which to educate their peers about their religion, and neurodivergent pupils have spoken to their peers about effective inclusive practice.

45. Through their engagement with ethical topics and themes of inclusion and fairness, pupils develop a clear sense of what is right and what is wrong. Pupils are respectful of the school rules and understand they are in place for their safety. Boarding staff support boarders to develop suitable independence and respect for others. They communicate consistently applied expectations clearly, enabling pupils to understand the impact of their behavioural choices.

46. The boarding environment fosters a deep sense of community and belonging. Pupils benefit from measures such as rooming with those who do not speak their language when they first arrive, which helps support the improvement of their spoken English. Opportunities to contribute views, including through the boarding council, allow pupils to become confident and engaged. Leaders enable them to make a positive difference to school life. For example, leaders have provided water filters in boarding houses as a result of requests.

47. Leaders have developed well-planned careers provision, supported by a clear careers roadmap that sets milestones for research, applications and decision-making. The curriculum explicitly develops employability skills such as writing a CV, making applications, interviewing and self-reflection.

Careers education is delivered through a structured programme of taught lessons and personalised support. Leaders organise speakers, higher education fairs, alumni engagement and pathway seminars so that pupils may understand the wide variety of options open to them. Leaders encourage pupils to experience work-related learning through self-organised placements, virtual work experience platforms and co-curricular opportunities. Through this, leaders encourage pupils to think about long-term career options beyond academic study. Careers guidance is sensitive to individual needs, including of pupils who have SEND, and is informed by close liaison with specialist staff where required.

48. Teachers deliver economic education through PSHE and 'global futures' lessons and the wider curriculum. Leaders consult pupils on areas of useful focus. These include credit and debt, savings and investment so that pupils are educated to be economically aware and confident in their management of their own finances. Leaders provide a range of opportunities for pupils to take financial responsibility, such as through charitable fundraising and conference organisation.

49. Leaders encourage pupils to contribute positively to the local and international community. Pupils take on a wide variety of service projects, such as planning and organising an Eid party for refugees in Oxford and helping to provide art clubs in local primary schools. Supported by leaders, pupils regularly plan and host events for local schools, including a TEDx occasion on the theme of internationalism, and a whole-day global citizenship conference. Such opportunities allow pupils to educate others on the benefits of being globally aware. Additionally, pupils organise fundraising events for overseas and local charities. Through these ventures, pupils improve their communication, organisation, budgeting and management skills.

## The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to pupils' social and economic education and contribution to society

**50. All the relevant Standards are met.**

# Safeguarding

51. Leaders have established a robust safeguarding culture which is embedded throughout the school. Led by a suitably trained, approachable safeguarding team, the school implements well-considered, thorough policies for safeguarding which reflect current statutory guidance. Consequently, safeguarding procedures successfully promote the safety and wellbeing of pupils.

52. The induction process for staff joining the school includes comprehensive safeguarding training. Staff leading safeguarding provide regular updates for all staff, including weekly quizzes. These measures ensure that staff are able to act swiftly and appropriately if they are concerned about a pupil's wellbeing. Staff understand how to support pupils' safety, including when online, and the risks posed by radicalisation and extremism, including in the context of the school's community.

53. All governors undertake safeguarding training, and the designated governor meets regularly with the leaders with responsibility for safeguarding to provide support and maintain oversight. Leaders provide termly updates to governors as well as a formal annual safeguarding report. This allows governors to have a clear understanding of trends or patterns and the school's management of any safeguarding concerns that have arisen.

54. Pupils know who to turn to if concerned for their own or others' safety. They can also report concerns anonymously. Leaders take concerns seriously. They record them in appropriate detail including the rationale behind decisions taken in response to safeguarding concerns that have arisen. Leaders with designated safeguarding responsibilities maintain helpful working relationships with external agencies. When required, they refer safeguarding concerns to relevant safeguarding partners so that pupils may be effectively protected.

55. Pupils learn how to keep themselves safe, including when online, through orientation activities, 'global futures' and PSHE lessons, and year group and boarding house meetings. A suitable internet filtering and monitoring system is in place and tested regularly. Governors have a clear understanding of these arrangements and maintain suitable oversight of them. Leaders take appropriate action should any alert occur. They evaluate these and educate pupils as necessary and review records regularly. This informs processes to keep pupils safe from harmful content.

56. The school's thorough safer recruitment procedures ensure that all required checks are made before adults commence working at the school. These checks are recorded in a detailed single central record of appointments (SCR).

## The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

**57. All the relevant Standards are met.**

## School details

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|---|---|
| **School** | St Clare's, Oxford |
| **Department for Education number** | 931/6120 |
| **Registered charity number** | 294085 |
| **Address** | St Clare's, Oxford<br>139 Banbury Road<br>Oxford<br>Oxfordshire<br>OX2 7AL |
| **Phone number** | 01865 552031 |
| **Email address** | admissions@stclares.ac.uk |
| **Website** | stclares.ac.uk |
| **Proprietor** | St Clare's, Oxford |
| **Chair** | Mr Jens Tholstrup |
| **Headteacher** | Mr Duncan Reith |
| **Age range** | 15 to 19 |
| **Number of pupils** | 261 |
| **Number of boarding pupils** | 207 |
| **Date of previous inspection** | 14 to 15 June 2023 |

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## Information about the school

58. St Clare's, Oxford is an independent co-educational school for boarding and day pupils in Oxford. It is a registered charity overseen by a board of governors. The school was founded in 1953 with the purpose of fostering international education and understanding between pupils of different nationalities. It provides a one-year course for pupils who enter Year 11, designed to prepare them for embarking on the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme offered by the school for those in Years 12 and 13.

59. Boarders are accommodated in one of the 12 single-sex boarding houses situated close to the school, each overseen by a house parent.

60. The school has identified 54 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities. No pupils in the school have an education, health and care plan.

61. The school has identified 250 pupils who are bilingual or who have English as an additional language.

62. The school states its aims are to provide an environment where pupils can develop their intellect, imagination and independence of mind; learn from and contribute to their local community; develop a sense of environmental awareness and responsibility to the international community; learn to value honesty, compassion and inter-cultural understanding and take personal responsibility for their work and conduct.

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## Inspection details

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| **Inspection dates** | 14 to 16 April 2026 |

63. A team of five inspectors visited the school for two and a half days.

64. Inspection activities included:

- observation of lessons, some in conjunction with school leaders
- observation of year group meetings
- observation of a sample of extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection
- discussions with the chair and other governors
- discussions with the headteacher, school leaders, managers and other members of staff
- discussions with pupils
- visits to the learning support area and facilities for physical education
- visits to boarding houses accompanied by pupils and staff
- scrutiny of samples of pupils' work
- scrutiny of a range of policies, documentation and records provided by the school.

65. The inspection team considered the views of pupils, members of staff and parents who responded to ISI's pre-inspection surveys.

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**How are association independent schools in England inspected?**

- The Department for Education is the regulator for independent schools in England.
- ISI is approved by the Secretary of State for Education to inspect independent schools in England, which are members of associations in membership of the Independent Schools Council.
- ISI inspections report to the Department for Education on the extent to which the statutory Independent School Standards, the EYFS statutory framework requirements, the National Minimum Standards for boarding schools and any other relevant standards are met.
- For more information, please visit **www.isi.net**.

**Independent Schools Inspectorate**

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