

St Christopher's School

Independent school standard inspection report

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Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out by Ofsted under Section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.^{1, 2}

Information about the school

St Christopher's School was founded in 1923 and provides non-selective education for up to 125 pupils aged 3–11 years. The school is located close to the centre of Canterbury in a large Victorian semi-detached house. The school's aims are 'to give the pupils a broad, balanced and liberal education in order that they develop enquiring minds and confidence in themselves, so that they appreciate the importance of language, number, the aesthetic and physical areas of learning and develop competence in them'. In their final year, most pupils take examinations which would enable them to transfer to the local grammar schools. The school was last inspected in 2007. There are no pupils with a statement of special educational needs. The school does not intend to make provision for Nursery children beyond the end of the current school year. There are seven children in the Early Years Foundation Stage at present.

Evaluation of the school

St Christopher's School is successful in meeting its aims. The school provides a good quality of education. The overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage is satisfactory. Overall, pupils make good progress through the school because the curriculum, teaching and pastoral care are good. Pupils' behaviour is outstanding. The school has made significant progress since the last inspection. Virtually all of the regulations are now met and there is more rigorous and systematic monitoring of the quality of provision at all levels to ensure that current good practice and outcomes are sustained.

Quality of education

The curriculum is good. It is broad and balanced and follows the Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum and, for pupils in Years 1 to 6, the National Curriculum. Since the last inspection, the school has implemented long- and medium-term planning and now has identified staff members with responsibility for leading and developing each subject. Although the school site has limitations, sporting activities are effectively supported through weekly visits to a leisure centre and sports ground; the introduction of swimming is planned. There is a well-developed programme for personal, social and health education. A key strength of the curriculum is the

¹ www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2002/ukpga_20020032_en_14#pt10-ch1-pb4-l1g162

² www.opsi.gov.uk/ACTS/acts2005/ukpga_20050018_en_15#sch8

growing emphasis on modern foreign languages. The established provision for French, with regular visits to the Pas-de-Calais, has been supplemented by a carefully structured programme of work in Spanish. Some pupils, and their parents, are now studying Mandarin Chinese as an after-school activity. The curriculum is also enhanced by a good range of extra-curricular activities, including several sporting competitions organised by the Sandwich maintained schools' cluster, of which St Christopher's (unusually for an independent school) is a member. The before- and after-school ('Waiters') care provision gives pupils the opportunity to socialise, play games or to complete their homework.

Within the curriculum there is a strong focus on teaching literacy and numeracy. Reading is seen as a crucial skill and all pupils are heard to read every day. There is flexibility to enable the many pupils who enter the school at Year 3, or subsequently, to catch up. Pupils also learn to write in a range of styles and there are reasonable opportunities for them to practise their writing skills in other subjects, although there is occasional excessive recourse to worksheets in some areas. Science does not have as much prominence in some years as in others. There is no evidence that the few pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities do any less well, relatively, than their fellows. However, the identification of these pupils is not fully consistent with the Code of Practice and there is variable practice in the monitoring of the progress which they make and of the impact of any interventions used. There is not enough oversight of the targets set for these pupils, to ensure that they are appropriate, or, ultimately, that they are met. Overall, however, given their varied starting points, pupils make good progress and a very high proportion achieve entry to grammar school.

Teaching and assessment are good overall, although there are some weaknesses in the assessment process. The upper school is organised so that staff work to their specialist skills and this produces a high level of commitment and lively teaching, which engages pupils well. Lessons have a good pace. Resources are plentiful and are used well to promote learning and understanding. Relevant internet material is used well in conjunction with the interactive whiteboards. Teachers question pupils effectively to ascertain their understanding and pupils respond readily. Although written lesson planning does not always identify or provide for the full range of needs within each class, teachers know their pupils really well, have a very good awareness of their needs and respond to these effectively. Pupils' work is marked regularly although teachers do not in every case explicitly indicate what pupils could do next to extend their learning further and faster. Individual targets are provided in writing and mathematics. However, these are not always used effectively to promote better progress, nor are they evaluated sufficiently. Assessment information derives from teachers' close knowledge of individuals, but also from a range of commercial, standardised assessment tests. Staff feel that they get good information from these tests. However, it is difficult by the nature of the data to demonstrate, analyse or evaluate the extent of the progress which pupils are making over time, other than in terms of the test outcomes during Year 6.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

The pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. While spiritual development is less overtly promoted, moral and social development are particularly strong. Throughout the school there is a positive family ethos wherein pupils are both courteous and caring. Newcomers are quickly absorbed into this close and cohesive community. As a result, pupils enjoy school and have good attitudes to their learning. Their relationships with teachers are productive because teachers make their lessons enjoyable. Pupils are able to make decisions on the running of the school through the very active school council. This is an important feature of the school which gives pupils engagement with democratic processes and which has been successful in promoting important changes such as new lunch-time rules, for example, the use of bicycles on the playground. A 'Worry Box' system enables individual pupil concerns and views to be dealt with fairly. There is a well-established 'buddy' system which ensures that no one is alone in the playground.

Expectations of behaviour are high and pupils are responsive to this. In consequence, they develop a strong sense of right and wrong. Behaviour throughout the school is outstanding. Pupils develop outstanding social skills; they are given plenty of opportunities to become confident speakers. Very good relationships between pupils are evident throughout the school. Given pupils' good progress academically, they are well prepared for their future economic well-being. Different year groups play well together and the well-supported extra-curricular activities and outside visits provide further opportunities for the development of pupils' social skills. This, in turn, helps to boost pupils' confidence and self-esteem. Older pupils learn about institutions in the United Kingdom through the curriculum, assemblies and through visits such as to the O² Arena, local museums and concerts. There are good opportunities to develop cultural awareness through religious studies, frequent residential visits to France, new links recently established in Spain and the emerging engagement with Chinese culture through the introduction of classes in conversational Mandarin. Other than through charitable collections, there is less active engagement with diverse ethnic and social groups in other parts of the United Kingdom.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

Provision for the welfare, health and safety of pupils is good; many aspects are outstanding. The school has made considerable progress since the last inspection. All policies have been updated, are extremely thorough, regularly reviewed and have regard to current best practice. An effective training programme is in place to ensure that staff have the latest information about safeguarding, food safety, fire prevention and most aspects of first aid. Staff training in the safeguarding of pupils is up to date. Fire certification, regular fire and safety audits and equipment testing are all in place and are meticulously monitored. However, no member of staff currently holds a valid certificate in paediatric first aid. The closely-knit nature of the community contributes to the effectiveness with which pupils are supervised throughout the day and in the before-school and 'Waiters' clubs. Pastoral care is of very high quality and

parents and carers value the supportive family atmosphere. There are highly-effective policies to promote good behaviour, so that incidents of poor behaviour are uncommon and bullying is rare. Lunches are cooked on the premises and are of good quality. Lunchtime itself is a very civilised social occasion when pupils talk enthusiastically among themselves and to visitors. There are regular opportunities for exercise and sport on Friday afternoons to enable pupils to keep fit. The school has a three year accessibility plan, which meets the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 2002. The school plans to undertake work to provide access to part of the ground floor, together with an accessible lavatory.

Suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors

The school has implemented appropriately thorough checks for the appointment of staff to ensure that they are suitable to work with children and this information is recorded in a single central register as required.

Premises of and accommodation at the school

The school's accommodation provides a suitable environment for learning. Despite the inherent constraints of the building, the school has creatively adapted the space available. Classrooms are adequate for the number of pupils. Since the last inspection, various changes have enhanced the provision. The phasing out of the dedicated nursery class and reorganisation of office space has allowed the school to provide a dedicated information and communication technology suite, a modern languages room and a well-equipped medical room. The number of washrooms is appropriate to the number of pupils on roll. All accommodation is well-decorated, bright and warm and a high standard of cleanliness is maintained. Most classrooms are equipped with well-used interactive whiteboards.

The outdoor play area has an all-weather surface. The available space is just adequate when all pupils are out, although, with staggered lunch-sittings, this is not a significant issue. The school has made available an additional play area to the side of the hall and this is accessible in fine weather. While outdoor space on site is at a premium, the school has access to excellent facilities at the nearby cricket ground and leisure centre and is about to introduce swimming there.

Provision of information

All regulations are met in respect of the information provided for parents, carers and others and all school policies are readily available on request. The school's new website provides ready access to a number of documents and information about the school's work, while the annual handbook for parents is a particularly thorough and well-produced source of information on current practice.

Manner in which complaints are to be handled

The school's procedures for handling complaints meet all the regulations.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

The overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage is satisfactory. Although there are no formal entry assessments, most children enter the Nursery with skills and capabilities beyond those expected for their age, particularly in their well-developed personal, social and language skills. Outcomes are satisfactory. By the end of the Reception year, despite some limitations in the provision, children have made at least satisfactory progress, though outcomes are good in some respects, particularly in language and personal development. Very low numbers mean that children are well known to staff and relationships are excellent. Children have many opportunities to talk and to engage with adults and this effectively promotes good personal development. The children enjoy learning and are well behaved, considerate, and happy in the setting. Staff show great care in ensuring the children's safety. Snack time is a very positive social occasion and helps children to begin to understand the importance of healthy eating.

Provision is satisfactory. However, there is some imbalance between activities initiated by adults and those initiated by the children. The mornings are dominated by rather formal sessions of literacy and numeracy, with the rest of the curriculum in the afternoons. The range of opportunities available indoors is restricted at times, with limited access to water play and painting. The home corner is underdeveloped so that imaginative play tends to lack a thematic focus. Opportunities for children to make choices could be further developed. At present, the lack of outdoor cover and limited resources mean that children have limited opportunities to experience the expected breadth of the curriculum outdoors as well as indoors. This particularly restricts the development of the full range of physical skills, although the hall is sometimes available.

Planning mostly takes account of children's needs, but there is not a sharp enough awareness of the distinctive needs of Reception children as against those in Nursery. Assessment and record-keeping is satisfactory, although there is not enough evaluation of the progress children make.

Leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage are satisfactory. All required policies are in place, although no staff member has current valid training in paediatric first aid. The school has limited access to external guidance or support, from its local authority or elsewhere. However, the recently-appointed Early Years Foundation Stage leader recognises the importance of developing various aspects of provision, both indoor and outdoor. Very good links are sustained with the children's families.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The proprietor has ensured that the school meets The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010, schedule 1 ('the Regulations'), with the exception of those listed below.³

In order to comply with the welfare requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage, the school must:

- ensure that at least one member of staff holds a current qualification in paediatric first aid.

What the school could do to improve further

While not required by regulations, the school might wish to consider the following points for development:

- implement a more systematic approach to the identification of pupils with special educational needs
- further develop teachers' planning to ensure a sharper focus on the full range of pupils within each class.
- develop a consistent whole school approach to marking and feedback
- increase the range of resources available to Early Years Foundation Stage children in the classroom, extend their learning opportunities in the outdoor environment and aim for a balance between activities initiated by adults and by the children themselves.

³ www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2010/1997/contents/made

Inspection judgements

outstanding	good	satisfactory	inadequate
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The quality of education

Overall quality of education		√		
How well the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of pupils		√		
How effective teaching and assessment are in meeting the full range of pupils' needs		√		
How well pupils make progress in their learning		√		

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

Quality of provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development		√		
The behaviour of pupils	√			

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

The overall welfare, health and safety of pupils		√		
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The quality of the Early Years Foundation Stage provision

Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage			√	
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage			√	
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage			√	
Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage			√	

School details

School status	Independent		
Type of school	Primary		
Date school opened	1923		
Age range of pupils	3 -11 years		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 54	Girls: 55	Total: 109
Number on roll (part-time pupils)	Boys: 1	Girls: 1	Total: 2
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational needs	Boys: 0	Girls: 0	Total: 0
Annual fees (day pupils)	£7,350		
Address of school	New Dover Road Canterbury Kent, CT1 3DT		
Telephone number	01227 462 960		
Email address	enquiries@stchristopherscanterbury.org.uk		
Headteacher	Mr David Evans		
Proprietor	Mr David Evans		