

St Christopher's The Hall School

Independent school standard inspection report

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Reporting inspector	Wendy Forbes

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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 The Hall School is a co-educational independent day school located in the residential area of Beckenham in Kent. Currently there are 293 pupils on roll, aged from two-and-a-half to eleven years: 242 full-time pupils, and 51 part-time children in the Kindergarten classes, including eight under the age of three. There are 61 children in receipt of nursery funding. There are no pupils with a statement of special educational needs. The school was established in 1893 as The Hall School for Girls and amalgamated with St Christopher's in 1926. It occupies a large Georgian building extended over time. New Early Years Foundation Stage classes are due to open in the summer term of 2011. There is a before- and after-school play scheme for children who attend the school. The school prepares pupils for entry into both maintained and independent schools. It seeks to encourage children 'to maximise their potential and to work and play to the best of their ability...in a happy, caring and secure environment, where good manners and respect for others are highly regarded and learning is structured and fun.' The school was first inspected by Ofsted in February 2008.

Evaluation of the school

St Christopher's The Hall School meets its aims and provides a good quality of education, including in the overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage. Pupils benefit from a strengthened curriculum, improved teaching and assessment and good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development which ensure that they are well prepared for their next stage of learning. The provision of pastoral care is good and safeguarding arrangements are secure; as a result, pupils' confidence and self-esteem develop well, their behaviour is outstanding and they make good progress. The school has improved since the last inspection and now meets all but two of the regulations for the registration of independent schools so that pupils' welfare, health and safety remains satisfactory, as at the last inspection.

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

Quality of education

The curriculum, including that in the Early Years Foundation Stage, is good. The broad and balanced curriculum is enhanced by specialist facilities and teaching in music, drama, sport and French. Opportunities to sing in the choir or learn an instrument are appreciated by pupils, who spoke enthusiastically about performing at the Royal Albert Hall. School trips to places such as the Royal Observatory or a local synagogue and opportunities to learn about the work of a hospice further enrich pupils' personal development. There is good provision for the development of basic skills in literacy and numeracy. Information and communication technology (ICT) has improved since the last inspection with the addition of an ICT suite and interactive whiteboards. The curriculum is matched appropriately to most pupils' needs, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

The quality of teaching and assessment is good, an improvement since the last inspection. In the best lessons teachers have good subject knowledge, high expectations, and provide challenging tasks. Teachers explain new skills well and provide helpful feedback about what pupils need to do to improve their work. Those who need help are provided with good support. Pupils are particularly enthusiastic about their writing opportunities. As one pupil said, 'You are given a topic and allowed to fly...'. However, in a few lessons teachers do not recognise that some pupils may have higher starting points, they talk for too long and rely too much on worksheets; as a result, their pupils' learning activities are restricted. Regular assessments and annual national tests of pupils' learning enable most teachers to have a good view of how well pupils are doing. However, this information is not used consistently. A few teachers are not always fully aware of pupils' needs or what activities to plan to ensure that they achieve their potential. Nonetheless, pupils' progress is good overall and their work shows that most make at least good progress in English and mathematics, with exceptional progress in reading. By Year 6 many pupils gain places at schools of their first choice and almost half of the pupils gain scholarships.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

As at the last inspection, the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils is good, including in the Early Years Foundation Stage. The majority of parents comment that their children enjoy school and they are delighted with the support they receive. As one parent said, '...my child asked all through the holidays, am I going to school today; it just shows how much our children enjoy school.' Outstanding attendance reflects pupils' desire to be at school.

Pupils are articulate and confident. Excellent social skills within the family atmosphere show that they genuinely care for each other. The behaviour of almost all pupils is outstanding. Pupils make a strong contribution to school life through such

roles as house captains, re-cycling monitors, junior road safety officers and school council members. Pupils take part in a wide range of clubs and local community activities and in school teams with much success. They raised an impressive £15,000 in a year's effort for the Eyeless charity.

Pupils' spiritual development is promoted well through opportunities to learn about different cultures and religious festivals in religious education and assemblies. Pupils have a good knowledge of public institutions and national organisations and younger pupils understand the roles of the local police officer and fire service.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

Provision for the welfare, health and safety of pupils is satisfactory. A high ratio of adults to pupils enables pupils to feel safe and cared for well. Pupils understand how to stay healthy but the school does not provide a high profile to promoting healthy eating. Pupils recognise that biscuits provided at break time are not a healthy option. A few parents expressed dissatisfaction with the school lunches. Inspectors found that satisfactory school lunches cooked on site offer different hot menu choices each day and include a salad bar, although pupils do not always make healthy choices.

Pupils say that bullying is rare. Safeguarding procedures are secure. All members of staff have undertaken child protection and first aid training. Fire checks and fire evacuation procedures are tested regularly. Admission and attendance registers are maintained carefully and accurately. Health and safety policy and procedures are mainly secure. However, procedures for the recording of the administration of medicines are out of date and are being updated in order to reflect current guidance and best practice. Accidents and incidents are investigated where appropriate and suitably recorded. The school has begun to address the issue, raised at the last inspection, of banister height on the main stairs. It is working with the local authority on how to deal with the problem in what is a listed building. However, the works have not yet been completed. The school provides good access for adults and pupils with disabilities and fulfils its duties under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, as amended, being aware of the importance of regular review and updating of the access plan.

Suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors

Arrangements to ensure that, prior to taking up their responsibilities, all teaching and non-teaching staff and the governing body are checked for their suitability to work with children have improved since the last inspection. The school now maintains an up-to-date single central register of such checks as required and all regulations are now met.

Premises and accommodation at the school

The attractive accommodation ensures that effective learning can take place in a safe environment. Since the last inspection the school has improved safety by fitting appropriate bars and locks on all the upper ground floor windows. Adaptations to the banisters on the main stairs so as not to compromise the safety of pupils remain outstanding.

A good range of classrooms and specialist facilities includes dedicated, appropriately resourced rooms for the youngest children in the Early Years Foundation Stage classes. The outside learning environment for the Early Years Foundation Stage is currently under construction as part of the school's new extension.

A small garden with raised beds supports the environmental curriculum. The large outside area includes hard-surfaced play areas and a school field. There is a small, recently adapted medical room for those who become ill.

Provision of information

All regulations are now met regarding information provided for parents, carers and others, which includes full reports completed at the end of each term. Parents and carers have daily ad hoc opportunities to talk to teachers and are provided with more formal meetings with staff throughout the year. The school's website ensures that readers are kept informed of daily events, policies available upon request and updated information on the school's work.

Manner in which complaints are to be handled

Procedures for handling complaints have improved since the last inspection. An appropriate policy and procedures for handling complaints are made available on request and on the school's website.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

The effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage is good and improved since the last inspection; it meets the requirements of the Early Years Register. Good leadership and management have brought about recent improvements in both the curriculum and provision, which is good overall. On entry, most pupils have skills and knowledge above national expectations. A welcoming environment enables children to settle quickly, develop confidence, feel safe and enjoy their first experiences of school.

Small class numbers help staff meet most children's needs well. Appropriate planning provides a balance of teacher-led and child-initiated activities. The good curriculum is enriched by specialist teaching and enhanced by a good range of visits and visitors.

Planning for outdoor play does not yet provide a free flow environment and awaits completion of building works. Most teaching is good, particularly the teaching of letters and sounds, and ensures that children make good progress towards the early learning goals and that outcomes are good. Children's speaking, listening and reasoning skills, including the youngest children in the Kindergarten groups, are well developed. Appropriate systems assess children's work and track their progress, although not all staff systematically record children's achievements or analyse progress made. As a result, activities do not always take account of the needs of the most able, whose progress is sometimes slower than it could be. Staff provide high quality day-to-day care, ensuring effective welfare and safeguarding and helpful links with parents and carers.

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

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of provision for welfare, health and safety of pupils (standards in part 3) and must:

- ensure that there are effective measures to ensure pupils' health and safety by updating the school's health and safety policy and procedures, particularly procedures relating to the administration of medicines, to reflect current guidance and practice (paragraph 11).

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the premises of and accommodation at schools (standards in part 5) and must:

- ensure that all areas of the school do not compromise safety by adding height to the banisters on the main stairs to provide adequate protection for children (paragraph 23(i)).

What the school could do to improve further

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

- improve the quality of teaching and assessment so that a higher proportion is consistently good or better by making more effective use of information about pupils to ensure a sharper match between the work set and the

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

different abilities of pupils, especially the most able

- improve pupils' understanding of healthy eating by raising their awareness of the benefits of a healthy lifestyle
- ensure that all Early Years Foundation Stage staff routinely record the outcomes of adult-directed and child-initiated activities to ensure that planning meets the needs of all children, especially the most able, particularly in the Reception classes.

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	Co-educational nursery and primary school		
Date school opened	1893		
Age range of pupils	2½–11		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 132	Girls: 121	Total: 253
Number on roll (part-time pupils)	Boys: 25	Girls: 25	Total: 50
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational needs	Boys: 0	Girls: 0	Total: 0
Annual fees (day pupils)	£2,325–£6,870		
Address of school	49 Bromley Road Beckenham Kent BR3 5PA		
Telephone number	020 8650 2200		
Email address	secretary@stchristophersthehall.co.uk		
Headteacher	Mr Andrew Velasco		
Proprietor	St Christopher's The Hall School Ltd		