

St Christopher's School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	132307
Local Authority	Service Children's Education
Inspection number	365540
Inspection dates	29–30 March 2011
Reporting inspector	Jane Wotherspoon HMI

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Middle deemed primary
School category	Ministry of Defence
Age range of pupils	3–12
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	123
Appropriate authority	Service Children's Education
Chair	Lt. Cdr. Fiona Cameron
Headteacher	Stephen Coventry
Date of previous school inspection	8–9 July 2008
School address	Europa Rd Gibraltar BFPO 52
Telephone number	00350 20055550
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors. Inspectors observed 10 teachers during the course of 12 observations which included short drop-ins to lessons as well as longer observations. They held meetings with the headteacher and key staff, the Chair and other members of the School Governance Committee and groups of pupils. They observed the school's work, and looked at a range of documentation including: safeguarding documents and policies; school improvement plans; minutes of meetings held by the school governance committee; teachers' lesson plans; and data on the pupils' attainment and progress over time. They analysed questionnaires from pupils, from staff and 56 from parents and carers.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- The impact of improvements in outdoor provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage and of greater opportunities for free movement between indoor and outdoor learning on children's outcomes.
- What the school's tracking information shows about the pupils' progress from term to term and year to year.
- The extent to which lack of consistency in the quality of teaching hampers pupils from making better progress and how effectively assessment information is used in lessons to meet pupils' individual needs and provide a high level of challenge.
- How well the senior leadership team is setting clear direction so that the whole staff team is working together to sustain the quality of education as the school moves towards closure in 2012.

Information about the school

St Christopher's School serves the children of Royal Navy, Royal Air Force and Army personnel as well as some from civilian families. Almost all pupils are from White British backgrounds and very few speak English as an additional language. A smaller than average proportion of pupils has been identified as having special educational needs. The children in the nursery (FS1) attend mornings only. In common with all schools in Service Children's Education pupils join and leave the school at various times of the year as their parents are posted. Historically, most pupils have stayed at St Christopher's for about two and a half years but an increasing number is leaving before two years have elapsed. Following the defence spending review the number of personnel in Gibraltar is being reduced. The number on roll is falling rapidly and class sizes are small. Few new families are arriving. The school is due to close in July 2012 and any remaining pupils will attend local schools in Gibraltar.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

3

Main findings

Parents are positive about the provision at St Christopher's School and many expressed sadness at its impending closure. They are confident that their children are looked after well and appreciate the wide range of activities that staff provide for pupils. Pupils are also positive about these aspects of the school's provision and feel safe in school. Several pupils spoke enthusiastically about some of the interesting and memorable experiences they have enjoyed and which make a good contribution to their personal development.

The school has moved forward steadily since the last inspection and all the issues identified then have been tackled systematically. Support and coaching to help staff improve their teaching has had some impact. Inadequacies in teaching have been tackled effectively to ensure that pupils leave St Christopher's having generally achieved satisfactorily. Attainment among the oldest pupils, Year 7, is above average and there are signs that it is rising in other year groups.

A comprehensive system for tracking the progress of pupils, overseen by the deputy headteacher, gives the school a clear picture of each individual's strengths and weaknesses. Previous underachievement has been tackled head-on and intervention programmes are helping to bring pupils back on track. Although satisfactory overall, there are pockets of good teaching where pupils make correspondingly good progress. However, there is more to do to raise more teaching to the level of the best.

Provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage is satisfactory. An over emphasis on adult-led activities restricts children's opportunities to develop independence in choosing and initiating learning for themselves. Relationships among staff have been strained in this part of the school and the leader has been working closely with all staff to rectify the situation.

Although satisfactory at present, there is a risk of fragility about the school's capacity to improve which stems from staff's concerns about the school's closure and uncertainties for the future. A lack of clear communication within and beyond the school exacerbates this situation. Agreed policies, such as the school's values, are not always followed consistently and there is a perception from staff that they are not consulted about changes to agreed procedures. A minority of staff have lost confidence in the leadership of the school, particularly in the leadership of the headteacher and the school governance committee. Nonetheless, staff are

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committed to meeting the needs of the remaining pupils and to sustaining provision in the period leading up to closure. Self-evaluation is largely accurate and appropriate action plans are in place to continue moving forward with efforts to raise standards and increase pupils' rates of progress, particularly in writing.

Up to 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve consistency in the quality of teaching and raise more to a good level by:
 - using assessment information better to set different tasks that more closely match pupils' needs
 - ensuring that good practice is shared
 - providing practical tasks that engage pupils in independent learning.
- Improve the quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage by:
 - planning activities that stem from children's interests and giving them opportunities to initiate learning for themselves
 - improving systems for assessing what children already know and can do so that plans build on their learning
 - continuing to build relationships between staff.
- Improve channels of communication between leaders and staff at all levels to ensure that all staff work together to adhere to the school's agreed procedures and values, and to follow policies consistently.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**3**

The school's data confirm the good level of attainment towards the top of the school, especially in mathematics. For example, pupils in Years 5 and 6 were dealing with some complex mathematical concepts to present information as pie charts. Raising standards in writing has been a focus of the school's efforts, with some success, and continues to be so. The big picture of is one of satisfactory achievement over time with no group doing much better or much worse than any other. Any variations in pupils' progress reflect differences in the quality of teaching rather than any differences in gender, background or ability. At present, some classes are very small enabling teachers to provide more individual help. Additional support through intervention programmes and one-to-one support are successful in helping pupils with special educational needs to make progress. The learning logs completed by these pupils show the small steps of progress they make in lessons and, importantly, what they need to learn next. Some individuals make good progress as a result of

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the close support they are given.

Observations of lessons showed pupils to be settled and engaged. The good behaviour of the vast majority of pupils contributes much to their learning. Pupils' attitudes to learning are positive. They respond well to opportunities for practical activities and collaborate effectively. For example, pupils in Year 3 worked together well in groups to make an instructional video of how to build a model volcano. This activity used a number of skills beyond the actual intention of helping pupils devise a set of verbal instructions. Pupils are less engaged when the style of teaching tips the balance of time towards listening to the teacher rather than actively participating in learning.

Pupils show a good awareness of how to keep themselves healthy and safe and of the factors beyond the school's gates that might jeopardise their safety. They take part enthusiastically in health promoting activities, such as 'Wake up shake up'. Pupils recognise that some of their peers find it difficult to follow the school's expectations of behaviour. Nonetheless pupils are confident that bullying is not an issue and that 'although friends sometimes fall out they usually make up again pretty quickly'.

Pupils are polite and friendly to visitors. They get on well together at playtimes with older ones looking after younger ones, and take the messages of assemblies seriously in trying to care for each other. Pupils are respectful of the wider cultures and faiths represented in the local area and sensitive to world issues such as the events across The Mediterranean. School council members undertake their roles conscientiously but have more limited opportunities to contribute to decisions at a higher level. Pupils raise funds for charities such as 'Help for heroes'.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	2
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	3
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	3
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will	3

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

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contribute to their future economic well-being	
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹ .	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

Teachers are clear what they want pupils to learn by the end of a lesson. The best lesson planning takes good account of information from assessment of what pupils know and can do to ensure that activities are pitched at different levels to match the different abilities in the class. This ensures that more-able pupils have an appropriate level of challenge. For example in Year 2, a group of boys, working at levels above expected for their age, mapped out the route that Little Red Riding Hood took on her journey to visit grandmother and plotted the time at which she met certain characters. They then calculated the time taken for each part of the journey. The management of teaching assistants is inconsistent. Where their support role is clear, teaching assistants have copies of planning and guidance on the level of support required. Good examples were seen of assistants writing up assessment notes for the class teacher to use in planning for the next day. At best, teachers foster good learning habits among the pupils with opportunities for them to be actively engaged in independent work. At times lack of open-ended questions reduces opportunities to challenge pupils' thinking or to help them make links between aspects of their learning.

The marking of pupils' written work is regular and helpful. Pupils say it tells them what they are doing well and what could be improved. Pupils often assess their own learning and, in the case of written work, to evaluate whether they have included all the required features in their work. Pupils know their targets and older pupils can talk about the levels at which they are working. All these strategies are raising pupils' understanding of their own learning and giving them a sense of achievement.

Teachers plan a broad range of curricular activities that enable skills to be taught across subjects. Much work on improving the curriculum since the last inspection is beginning to bear fruit. Its impact can be seen in the rising standards in basic skills and in the all-round development of pupils as learners. Technological equipment, including computers, has a prominent place as a means of presenting information to pupils and as a means for pupils to present their learning. Curriculum enrichment is strong. Pupils appreciate the wide range of visits and visitors which add breadth to their learning as well as being a source of enjoyment. A good number of pupils take part in the wide range of clubs on offer. The support for pupils with special educational needs is well managed. Staff are alert to the social and emotional needs of pupils whose circumstances may make them vulnerable to underachievement. The school can cite examples of how staff have worked together with a number of external agencies to provide targeted support to meet the needs of an individual pupil and their family. Absence is followed up promptly and the success of strategies to promote good attendance can be seen in above average attendance figures.

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These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	3
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

Through monitoring the school's provision, leaders and managers at all levels know what is working well and what needs to improve further. They are aware of the remaining inconsistencies in the quality of teaching and the effect on the progress pupils make. Nonetheless, coaching and support for teachers' planning are having a beneficial impact on teachers' practice. Despite these signs of improvement since the previous inspection, staff do not always feel supported or appreciated in their efforts. Staff morale is affected at present by uncertainties around the impending closure.

Increasingly, data on pupils' progress is used to set challenging targets for individuals and to ensure that all pupils have the chance to do well. Any underachievement is identified and rectified quickly. Analysis of outcomes by gender and ability is used to check any inconsistencies between groups. Close tracking ensures that specific needs can be met. Regular meetings to discuss pupils' progress are used to hold staff accountable for pupils' achievement and to identify strategies for increasing their progress.

Many members of the school governance committee are relatively new to the role but are quickly getting to know the school's strengths and areas for development through visiting and talking to staff and pupils. Members are patently aware of the challenges facing the school in the next four terms and of parental concerns about the absence of clear communication over the school's closure. The chair acknowledges the need for greater clarity for staff and parents alike and for governors to take a more prominent role in the community in the run up to closure.

Provision is not planned in any systematic way to develop community cohesion although in practice there is much in place through the curriculum that fosters pupils' awareness of communities at a local and global level. Links with faith communities in Gibraltar are established through visits to places of interest and the impact of the school's work can be seen in the positive relationships between pupils in the school. The impact of good procedures to safeguard pupils can be seen in the confidence of parents and pupils alike that pupils are safe and well looked after. This is a well-managed area of the school's work with all policies and procedures kept under regular review. Systems for assessing risk and checking the suitability of staff are very thorough.

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These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	3
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	3
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	3
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	3
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	N/A

Early Years Foundation Stage

Children start the Early Years Foundation Stage with levels of skills, knowledge and understanding that are typical of those expected for three- and four-year-olds. They settle well, learning the daily routines quickly and follow instructions from staff happily. Most make satisfactory progress.

Children are confident using equipment in both the indoor and outdoor areas. They help staff tidy up at the end of sessions and support each other to carry large objects, such as the wooden building blocks. However, children are not given continuous access to the well-equipped outdoor area. This means opportunities for them to make choices and take responsibility for their own actions are more limited. Staff plan interesting activities across the six areas of learning. However, frequently staff direct children in their choice of activity and there are too few occasions when children work without close adult support, limiting their ability to learn independently. In some activities observed, children sat for too long listening to the teacher and there was over-reliance on worksheets.

Staff are attentive to children's welfare needs and consequently children are learning to keep safe. Relationships between children and their key staff are good. The phase leader knows the strengths and weaknesses of the setting and improvement plans are of good quality. She recognises that although assessment information is broadly accurate, staff do not use the information routinely to plan the next steps in children's learning. Some resistance to change and strained relationships between staff has the potential to undermine the capacity of the team to improve the provision. Although the phase leader is tackling this situation, the underlying tensions

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are not conducive to sharing information or building on existing good practice.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	3

Views of parents and carers

The proportion of questionnaires returned was higher than average. The very large majority of parents are positive about most aspects of the school's work. Many wrote in praise of staff. Additional comments relating to concerns over lack of information from the school governance committee and the local command about the school's closure and the provision of schooling in the future are beyond the scope of this inspection. Parents were not so positive about the quality of teaching, the progress their children make, and the way the school deals with unacceptable behaviour. Inspectors' judgements on these aspects of the school's work have been dealt with in the report. Inspectors saw no unacceptable behaviour during the inspection. Indeed, behaviour was good.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted’s questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at St Christopher’s School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 56 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 123 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	25	45	31	55	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	31	55	21	38	1	2	0	0
The school informs me about my child’s progress	23	41	29	52	4	7	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	22	39	25	45	8	14	1	2
The teaching is good at this school	25	45	20	36	9	16	0	0
The school helps me to support my child’s learning	23	41	22	39	7	13	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	14	25	37	66	5	9	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	22	39	22	39	2	4	1	2
The school meets my child’s particular needs	22	39	30	54	1	2	3	5
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	15	27	23	41	10	18	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	13	23	31	55	9	16	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	18	32	29	52	5	9	3	5
Overall, I am happy with my child’s experience at this school	32	57	18	32	3	5	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	59	35	3	3
Primary schools	9	44	39	7
Secondary schools	13	36	41	11
Sixth forms	15	39	43	3
Special schools	35	43	17	5
Pupil referral units	21	42	29	9
All schools	13	43	37	8

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 August 2010 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2009/10 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



1 April 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Christopher's School, Gibraltar, BFPO 52

Thank you for making us so welcome when we inspected your school. We were pleased to meet with some of you at lunchtime and we listened carefully to what you had to say. We have judged that St Christopher's is a satisfactory school.

You told us that you feel safe in school and we think staff look after you well. Several of you talked about the interesting and memorable experiences that you have enjoyed: the visits to different places; the visitors who come to school; the clubs and activities; learning Spanish; and wake up and shake up that helps to keep you healthy. These experiences help you to make satisfactory progress and some of you reach standards that are higher than most children of your age. We saw you all getting on well together and we thought you behaved well. You said that bullying is not an issue and that when friends fall out they make up pretty quickly. Those of you we met were polite and friendly. We were impressed that you try to carry out the messages of assembly such as taking care of your friends. We know that you think about others when you raise funds for charities such as 'Help for heroes'.

We know that you will be sad to leave St Christopher's. We understand your worries about not knowing where you are going next. The staff are worried too, and so are your parents. We know that the staff and your parents have not always had the information they need about the future of the school. We want to make sure that everyone continues working together to keep things going for the next four terms for those of you who will still be there. It is important that staff pull together and continue giving you interesting things to do to help you achieve well and reach the standards you are capable of reaching. We have asked that they give you more practical tasks to do that will meet your needs. Some of the youngest children in FS1 and FS2 do not have enough chances to choose activities for themselves so we have asked staff to take account of this when they plan the activities. We want them to check what the children are learning and use this information when they plan.

We wish you all the best in the future.

Yours sincerely

Jane Wotherspoon
Her Majesty's Inspector

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