

St Christopher's School

Independent school standard inspection report

DfE registration number	801/6008
Unique Reference Number (URN)	109342
Inspection number	397750
URN for social care	SC026644
Inspection dates	4–5 December 2012
Reporting inspector	Jonathan Palk HMI

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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 in Bristol is a residential special school that provides education for pupils with severe and complex learning difficulties between five and 19 years of age. The most predominate conditions are autistic spectrum disorders and epilepsy. All pupils have language and communication disorders, some have physical disabilities and other display challenging behaviour. The school is dually registered as a children's home and care provision is available all year round.

The school was founded in 1945 based on the principles of Dr Rudolf Steiner. These approaches remain at the heart of the school's ethos. The school aims 'to improve pupils' self-esteem and independence through creating a stable, caring environment which supports and nurtures the emotional, physical, social and spiritual well-being and development of pupils'. The school sets out to support this aim by providing 'a variety of experiences which stimulate physical, emotional, intellectual and creative awareness'. Currently, there are 40 pupils on roll aged between 10 and 19 years. All have a statement of special educational needs and have their places funded by their local authorities.

The school was last inspected in October 2009 when it met all of the regulations for registration. The children's home was last inspected in March 2012. The care provision was examined at the same time as the education provision.

Evaluation of the school

St Christopher's School provides a good quality of education. A good curriculum, supported by good teaching and assessment, results in pupils making good progress in improving academically. The outstanding quality of welfare, health and safety of pupils, including safeguarding, and the outstanding provision for their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development ensure that pupils make outstanding progress in their personal development. The school continues to meet all of the regulations and has made steady improvement since its last inspection.

¹ www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2002/32/contents.

² www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2005/18/contents.

Quality of education

The school's curriculum is good and is well adjusted to meet the full range of pupils' needs. It is based on the National Curriculum for pupils learning below and within Level 1. The schemes of work are built around the Steiner Waldorf themes, and provide a consistent and effective multi-sensory approach to daily lessons. The Equals-Moving On curriculum for the older pupils allows for nationally recognised accreditation, and is based on three main areas: world studies, life skills and vocational studies. In addition, pupils aged 14+ access the QCF (Qualifications Credit Framework) approved qualification through the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN), which is proving highly effective in providing academic life skills and promoting independence and communication. In addition, it provides pupils with regular and purposeful work in the local community. The introduction of progression plans for all pupils ensures the school introduces vocational and work-related experiences at an early stage. When appropriate, pupils are supported to attend a local college.

The curriculum is underpinned by approaches developed through continuous working with a range of educational and clinical therapists, to reduce the effect of autism and support the development of communication skills. This means that a great deal of attention is given to the environment. It is highly structured and predictable. It is calm and uncluttered. Expectations are clear and pupils who have significant and complex needs perceive the school as a safe place to learn. It enables them to make significant progress in their ability to access learning. Transition times clarify the next activity for pupils. This means that the challenge in dealing with change is successfully managed. Distress is significantly less likely to occur and, over time, pupils become confident. They progress from requiring physical prompting to verbal prompting and the vast majority learn to move around the buildings or to different activities calmly and independently. TEACCH (Treatment and Education of Autistic and related Communication Handicapped children) approaches are used to structure learning activities. The effective use of pictures and symbolic communication systems means that the spoken word is enhanced by a visual prompt. Pupils develop their own sense of order to the day by using a personal or class timetable. Through intensive support, they learn what is expected of them, for example to 'be calm'. Together, all these approaches, supported by an effective multi-disciplinary approach and staff training, are a strong point of the school. Their successful and consistent implementation is a significant factor in the pupils' good progress.

The detailed personal, social and health education (PSHE) policy underpins the main aims of the school. Pupils experience a range of creative opportunities, for example through art, craft, drama, music and eurythmy (rhythmical movement). Pupils participate in a wider curriculum that includes activities, such as rock climbing, horse riding, rambling and cycling, which are led by the care staff who work in very close liaison with the teaching staff. Numerous outdoor play spaces mean that pupils engage energetically and safely in exercise, supplementing the good physical education curriculum that is on offer. Each of these different activities, as well as

significantly enhancing the experience of the pupils, is a new challenge to the pupils, who respond very well and with growing confidence.

Teaching and assessment are good. All lessons are underpinned by strong relationships between staff and pupils. They are carefully structured so that pupils know what to expect. This means that pupils engage and work cooperatively with staff in a variety of different activities. In the best lessons there is clear evidence of progression for each individual in the particular subject; for example, in a science lesson pupils were challenged to recognise the characteristics of rocks and, when excavating for these, to name and group them correctly. The teacher's language was clear and unambiguous. Excellent support from assistants in lessons is focused when necessary on returning the pupil to learning as quickly as possible. Pace is maintained so that challenge remains high without stress or unnecessary pressure on pupils. Where activities are not well sequenced, the teaching does not ensure all pupils are participating at their level. On occasion, in a group activity, whilst encouraging cooperation and appropriate behaviour, teachers do not give enough time or sufficient assistance to help pupils respond to questions or prompts and to acquire new vocabulary. There are times when technological and digital devices are not used as an aid to communication and this reduces engagement.

Pupils make good progress. Systems for assessing and moderating progress have improved significantly in recent years and now ensure that the pupils' development of skills and understanding can be tracked and information fed into the pupil education plans. Regular assessment using performance (P) levels or level descriptors means that the school has a good knowledge of each pupil's current attainment. Tracking indicates that pupils are making good progress across all subject areas. Annual review reports and pupils' work, for example samples of work provided to evidence accreditation by ASDAN, also show good progress. Individual education plans, determined by multi-professional teams and parents, incorporate targets based on the needs associated with autistic spectrum disorders. These education and therapeutic targets are now incorporated into teaching plans and monitored diligently by senior staff. The targets give the teacher or senior management enough information to guide further interventions. The curriculum guidance to support teachers in planning their lessons and to guide the teaching of language and literacy is not sufficiently refined to fit in with these improvements in assessment procedures. It does not yet show the progression in skills to be taught so teachers can consistently plan activities that provide the right level of challenge.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

The school's spiritual ethos is at the heart of pupils' outstanding spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The rhythms and routines of the days and weeks help pupils develop an inner calm that helps them manage their frustrations and anxieties. They learn to tolerate, to participate, to initiate and to lead. Pupils who have significant difficulties in understanding others learn to work together, for example in the school garden or in organising recycling activities. Where they are able, pupils reflect on what they enjoy and make choices.

Pupils' behaviour is good. Whilst individuals may still become upset at times, their distress is appropriately managed and the strategies used to calm pupils are effective. Pupils learn to accept the behaviour of others and do not become distressed themselves. Pupils who display the most challenging behaviour make good progress. Through careful interventions, managed by the therapies team, the number and intensity of incidents significantly decrease. Many pupils learn to manage and regulate their own behaviour.

A particular strength of the school is pupils' awareness of others and their needs. This is borne out in some highly successful partner work and an excellent attitude towards turn taking. Pupils develop their self-esteem extremely well through participating in a wide range of stimulating activities. For example, they perform in celebrating festivals and other events and in contributing to the maintenance of the school grounds and gardens. Work experience enables pupils to be in adult environments and to overcome new challenges in different situations, for example shadowing a librarian or working in a shop. In their residential homes they learn how to take care of themselves, for example by making their beds, attending to their personal hygiene and laundry. They also learn to help each other and have consideration for others, demonstrated in clearing tables at meal times. Pupils learn to shop together, which is evidence of exceptional team working for these individuals.

There are many opportunities for pupils to learn and respect different cultures. A range of festivals is celebrated, international food is served and pupils have participated well in musical events with a cultural theme. Weekend staff help pupils stay in touch with their cultural and religious background by attending religious services. Within school, pupils make their views known through questionnaires. Their contribution is actively sought.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

The strong team of teachers, support assistants and therapists, working in close partnership with social workers, parents, carers and schools, underpins the pupils' outstanding welfare, health and safety. Parents and carers value the support they are given to meet their child's needs. A full range of policies focusing on the different learning difficulties ensures that pupils' needs are met sensitively. Pupils are clearly at ease in the school and respond positively to the respect shown by staff. Attendance is monitored carefully and, when pupils with medical needs require treatment, very good support is given to minimise disruption to their education.

All staff have undertaken the required child protection training at the required level to ensure pupils are safe and are well cared for. There is a high staff-to-pupil ratio in the school and this enables rigorous and close supervision to take place. Close communication means that families receive support and that the approach to pupils is consistent between school, residences and home. This ensures an excellent continuity of care. Supervision of staff and processes adopted by managers both in

school and the residences is excellent, thus ensuring the safety of pupils in school and when undertaking visits off site. Appropriate safer recruitment procedures are in place, as are the policies for fire and first aid, health and safety, behaviour and anti-bullying. Staff are well trained in using non-aversive behaviour management approaches, retaining the respect as well as the safety of individuals. Pupils indicate that they are free from harassment and are well cared for. Parents agree.

The school is inclusive and ensures all pupils are able to achieve. Individually tailored induction and transition programmes are prepared and carried out for pupils. This ensures a smooth transition for each pupil at different points in their education.

Suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors

All the required safeguarding checks on staff are made, including Criminal Records Bureau checks. All are recorded appropriately in a single central register.

Premises and accommodation at the school

The school is spacious and well lit, with a mix of natural and artificial lighting suited to the needs of the pupils. Corridors and classrooms are uncluttered, allowing for easy and safe access for wheelchair users to a range of specialist rooms. The school also benefits from a large hall and a swimming pool which is equipped with a hoist. There is an attractive space for outside play, with a sensory garden and a vegetable plot maintained by the pupils.

Provision of information

Both the education and residential staff maintain excellent links with parents. Parents' and carers' feedback regarding the school is overwhelmingly positive. All are happy with their children's experiences at the school. They comment on the 'huge strides' their children have made. The prospectus provides parents, prospective parents and others with comprehensive information about the school, its ethos and organisation. The school is working to improve its website.

Manner in which complaints are to be handled

The school has a clearly written complaints procedure which meets the requirements of the regulations. Residential and day pupils and their parents know how to raise a concern or make a complaint and say they are confident that the school would do its best to resolve it.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The proprietor has ensured that the school meets The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010, schedule 1 ('the Regulations').

What the school could do to improve further

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

- Update the guidance for teaching language and literacy so that it shows the progression in skills to be taught and so teachers can consistently plan activities that provide the right level of challenge.
- Ensure that there are sufficient technological and digital devices to assist pupils in developing their oral skills in all lessons.

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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School details

School status	Independent		
Type of school	Residential special school		
Date school opened	September 1945		
Age range of pupils	5–19		
Gender of pupils	Boys and girls		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 31	Girls: 9	Total: 40
Number on roll (part-time pupils)	Boys: 0	Girls: 0	Total: 0
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational needs	Boys: 31	Girls: 9	Total: 40
Number of pupils who are looked after	Boys: 31	Girls: 9	Total: 40
Annual fees (day pupils)	N/A		
Annual fees (boarders)	£142,443–£208,325		
Address of school	1–2 Carisbrooke Lodge Westbury Park Bristol BS6 7JE		
Telephone number	0117 9736875		
Email address	st-christophers@st-christophers.bristol.sch.uk		
Headteacher	Ms Orna Matz		
Proprietor	St Christopher’s School (Bristol)		

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.



6 December 2012

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Christopher's School, Bristol BS6 7JE

Thank you for making me so welcome when my colleague and I visited your school. I enjoyed watching all the different things you do. I found out that:

- education is good at your school
- you are making good progress, particularly in the way the school helps you to learn and make sense of things
- the work the staff do to help you understand your autism helps a great deal
- adults care for you exceptionally well and you feel safe
- you enjoy all the different activities the school provides
- your behaviour is good and some of you have made very good progress in this area
- adults help you find the things you are interested in and work hard with other adults to help you reach your goals.

To make your school even better I have asked your headteacher and teachers to make sure the teaching is always good in every lesson and make sure you are engaged and challenged at just the right level.

It was a privilege to meet you all and see your work.

Yours sincerely

Jonathan Palk
Her Majesty's Inspector