

St Christopher's Early Years Foundation Stage Unit

Europa Point, Gibraltar, BFPO 52

Inspection dates 12–13 May 2015

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	
	This inspection:	Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Most children make good progress from their starting points. They are well prepared for the next stage of their education.
- A higher proportion of children than found nationally reaches a good level of development. Those children who have been at St Christopher's the longest often exceed what is expected by the time they transfer to local Gibraltar schools.
- Teaching is of high quality. Staff know their children well and plan activities that meet their learning needs and take account of their interests.
- Strengthening children's speech and language takes top priority. Staff continually reinforce good speaking and listening skills. As a result, children communicate their thoughts, feelings and opinions clearly and confidently.
- Children have a keen sense of fairness. They understand right from wrong, share their toys willingly and play harmoniously alongside friends.
- Children's experiences are enriched by a range of visits to places of interest outside of the school. This supports their spiritual, social and cultural development well.
- The early years leader has a clear vision for what high-quality early education and care should look like. Staff work hard to continually improve and reach these high expectations.
- Leaders regularly check on the quality of teaching. Staff observe each other frequently to improve their practice to that of the very best.
- The early years leader liaises regularly with other pre-school providers, including childminders, to ensure there is a seamless hand-over between the different settings children attend.
- Members of the School Governance Committee are committed to their roles. They understand the school's strengths and are willing to challenge leaders when further improvement is needed.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Some children, especially those who arrive with skills below what is typical for their age, do not make consistently good progress.
- Children's reading, writing and number skills are not developed frequently enough during activities they choose for themselves.
- Outdoor activities do not interest or engage children as much as those provided indoors.
- Observations of teaching do not focus on the quality of learning and the progress being made by different groups of children.
- Members of the School Governance Committee who are new to role require further training to ensure they support and challenge leaders confidently.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed five adult-led sessions, including those relating to letters and the sounds they represent (phonics), and a number of shorter activities that children chose for themselves.
- The inspector evaluated the quality of teaching and learning during these sessions, looked at the achievements children had accomplished over time, as shown through the evidence in their learning journals, and spoke with children informally while they were at play.
- The early years leader observed two adult-led sessions alongside the inspector.
- The inspector observed children during snack and lunchtimes and when arriving and leaving at the beginning and end of each day.
- Meetings were held with the early years leader and lead teachers in Foundation Stage 1 (FS1) and Foundation Stage 2 (FS2). The inspector also spoke to three members of the School Governance Committee (SGC) and held separate discussions, by telephone, with the Senior Education Officer for Service Children's Education (SCE) and a member of the SCE early years consultancy team supporting St Christopher's Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) Unit.
- The inspector considered the ten responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) that were submitted during the inspection. He also spoke with nine parents at the beginning of the second day and took account of the school's own, most recent parental survey. Thirteen staff questionnaires were also considered.
- The inspector observed the EYFS unit's work and examined a range of documentation including the records of children's learning and progress, the checks made on the quality of teaching and performance of staff and those relating to behaviour, attendance, safeguarding and children's welfare.

Inspection team

Lee Owston, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- St Christopher's EYFS Unit provides early education and care for the children of the British forces and attached civilians based in Gibraltar. Three- and four-year-old children attend the Nursery class (FS1) part-time, in the mornings only. Four- and five-year-old children attend the Reception class (FS2) full-time.
- Children transfer to local Gibraltar schools at the end of FS2.
- The vast majority of children attending the EYFS unit are of White British heritage and speak English as their first language.
- Mobility is high. Few children stay at the EYFS unit for the full two years.
- The percentage of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs is below average.
- The EYFS unit was created in September 2012 when St Christopher's Primary School closed. At this time, an early years leader was appointed from within the SCE early years consultancy team to act as the early years leader and teacher-in-charge. The EYFS unit occupies the early years and Key Stage 1 space of the previous primary school.
- A new FS2 teacher joined the setting in November 2014. Up until this point, the early years leader taught full-time in FS2. An experienced adult working in FS1 has recently left the unit.
- The SGC has experienced some turbulence in its leadership over time. There have been four Chairpersons since the EYFS unit's conception in September 2012 and the role of Chair has changed twice in recent months.
- The early years leader works closely with the manager of 'Little Learners', a pre-school setting for under-threes, and delivers training on behalf of SCE to childminders serving the British forces community in Gibraltar. These providers are not inspected by Ofsted.
- St Christopher's holds the national Early Years Quality Mark.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching further so that it moves rapidly towards outstanding, enabling all children to reach their full potential, by:
 - supporting those children who join the school with skills below what is typical for their age, including those with special educational needs, to make equally good progress as their peers
 - increasing the opportunities for children to use and apply their reading, writing and number skills in a greater range of activities that they choose for themselves
 - adapting the range of activities on offer outdoors so they provide a learning experience as interesting and engaging as those offered indoors
 - ensuring observations of the quality of teaching always evaluate the learning and progress being made by different groups of children.
- Ensure that new members of the School Governance Committee establish themselves quickly and receive focused training to enable them to support and challenge leaders to make further improvements.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- The early years leader is highly ambitious for what children can achieve during their time in the EYFS unit. Her knowledge of young children's learning and development needs is excellent and, because of this, parents and staff trust her to make the right decisions for the future direction of the setting.
- Since her appointment, the early years leader has worked systematically to improve the overall quality of teaching. She is a constant presence within the provision, leading by example and capitalising upon every opportunity to provide informal advice and guidance while working alongside staff. Adults are valued for the expertise they bring to the EYFS unit and share a common drive to provide the very best for the children in their care. Staff morale is high.
- As the quality of teaching has become more secure, training has focused on developing the leadership qualities of other staff through focused improvement projects. For example, the FS2 teacher is currently engaged in an initiative to raise boys' achievement in writing, an identified weakness from the previous year's data. In this way, leaders understand that their own effectiveness is judged by their impact on children's learning.
- Leaders have an accurate view of their strengths and weaknesses. Formal and informal observations, together with regular scrutiny of children's learning journeys, contribute to the evaluations of teaching over time. Staff receive detailed feedback about their work but not enough emphasis is given to the difference their teaching has made to the learning and progress of different groups of children. As a result, some groups of children, such as those who arrive with skills below those typical for their age, do not make as consistently good progress as their peers.
- The curriculum ensures children develop into confident, well-rounded individuals with an appreciation of the world around them and the different people and places they will encounter while growing up. Opportunities to visit places beyond the boundaries of the EYFS unit place children's learning in context and make it more relevant and meaningful. For example, children enjoyed visiting the local supermarket to make their own doughnuts, an activity inspired by their interest in the story of 'The Gingerbread Man'.
- The early years leader has forged strong links with other agencies in Gibraltar. Liaison with social workers, speech and language therapists as well as the local safeguarding board ensure that most children, regardless of their circumstances, make good or better progress.
- The early years leader ensures that most children settle quickly and make an effective start to their learning, regardless of when they join the setting. Strong links between St Christopher's, the local pre-school for the under-threes and the network of childminders ensures coordinated support for the children of military families. Staff take part in joint training and professionals at all settings work closely to ensure a seamless transition to the EYFS unit.
- Parents are overwhelmingly positive about the EYFS unit. They appreciate the approachability of staff and the warm welcome they receive. Parents are particularly appreciative of the home visit that is made. Children settle quickly because staff ensure they form strong bonds with those in their care.
- The EYFS unit's safeguarding and welfare arrangements meet statutory requirements. There is much good practice in the quality of care children receive so that they are happy, safe and keen to learn.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Membership of the SGC has only recently stabilised after a period of uncertainty about the position of Chair. New members, including the incoming Chair, are committed to their roles and come with substantial expertise, including in education and safeguarding.
 - Members have worked quickly to understand the context of the EYFS unit and appraise themselves of its strengths and weaknesses. While those spoken to during inspection have a broad understanding of how well children achieve in their time at St Christopher's, they are less aware of the difference in outcomes between different groups of learners or the impact of teaching on children's learning.
 - The SGC understands that they will need to undertake further training to fully appreciate the links between teaching, learning and the progress children make. Visits are already planned to ensure all members have greater experience of the setting's work so that they can ask more pertinent questions and challenge the early years leader with greater confidence and rigour.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good**Behaviour**

- The behaviour of children is good. They are keen to learn and demonstrate positive attitudes when playing alongside their friends. This supports most children to make good and better progress in their learning.
- Staff have high expectations of how children should behave and consistently apply the setting's 'golden rules' so that children have a well-developed sense of right and wrong. Frequent praise for specific, positive behaviours, such as good sitting or sensible walking, ensures children understand what is acceptable and what is not while working and playing alongside friends.
- Some children exhibit more challenging behaviours, often due to personal, social or emotional difficulties. Staff work hard with the parents of these children and in liaison with external agencies to provide good levels of support to ensure the learning of others is not affected.
- Staff remain calm when dealing with unacceptable behaviour. They support children to think through their actions and encourage them to make better choices. This proactive approach helps children to see their own errors and leads them to make better choices first time around.
- Children have a keen sense of justice. They understand the concept of fairness and the need to cooperate and share their toys and equipment. Rather than saying 'it is my turn now' when negotiating with their friends, they say 'when is it my turn?' This supports children's moral and social development.

Safety

- The school's work to keep children safe and secure is good. Parents overwhelmingly agree.
- Keeping safe in the sun is of paramount importance. Adults act as effective role models in wearing their own sun hats, choosing to work in the shade and drinking plenty of water. Children follow this lead effectively so that they work comfortably outdoors, safe from the harmful effects of the sun.
- Children understand the risks they face while working independently. Adults consciously teach children to assess the potential dangers around them and make their own decisions to ensure they are safe. Adults demonstrate safe practices for children to copy. For example, when helping to cut fruit for snacktime, children carefully watched an adult using a knife before having a go themselves under close supervision.
- Bullying, in all its forms, is exceptionally rare. In part, this is because children understand the differences and, more importantly, the similarities between themselves and others. Staff ensure that any potential prejudice is tackled head-on. For example, when reading a story set in Africa, staff were quick to ensure that children recognised the many similarities to their own life rather than just the ways in which the character was different. In this way, staff support children's cultural development.
- Children enjoy their time in the setting and attend regularly. Leaders monitor children's attendance carefully to ensure they secure good habits that will transfer with them into school at the end of FS2.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching has improved over time and is now good. As a result, most children make good or better progress from their starting points. However, a few inconsistencies in practice remain. This is preventing teaching from reaching the very highest levels and not all children reach their full potential.
- Staff make accurate assessments of children's knowledge, skill and understanding. They also take careful account of children's interests and fascinations. This enables staff to plan activities that not only meet children's learning and development needs but also appeal to their curious and enquiring minds. Activities therefore sustain children's attention and develop their abilities to concentrate and persevere.
- Adult-led activities, such as those that focus on developing children's phonic skills, are well planned and build in difficulty to support effective learning. For example, in learning to read, FS1 staff work hard to ensure children have a strong working memory and a discerning ear for different sounds and rhythms before they introduce them to letters and the sounds they represent. From here, children quickly progress to reading and writing simple sentences in FS2, using stories and texts that build their confidence.
- This focused, adult-led work is not always reinforced across all of the activities children encounter during the day, especially those that children choose for themselves. This prevents children from making as much progress as they could in learning to read, write and apply their knowledge of mathematics.
- Throughout all of their work, adults consistently model effective speaking and listening skills. Staff are particularly adept at introducing new vocabulary so that children become more precise in expressing their thoughts and opinions. For example, one member of staff developed children's language in FS1 from 'bug' to 'spider' to 'tarantula' within one activity. Children develop into confident and articulate communicators.

- Leaders and staff work hard to ensure there is a range of exciting and stimulating activities on offer each day. These are predominantly indoors. While all children have the opportunity to learn in the outdoor environment, activities provided outside do not sustain their interest and enthusiasm for the same period of time. Staff do not think as carefully about the learning potential outdoors as they do indoors.
- Staff understand the needs of all of the children in their care. Those that start with skills and abilities below those typical for their age or who have an identified special educational need have bespoke plans in place to address individual concerns. However, these plans are not as effective as they need to be because staff do not work intensively with these children on a regular basis to remove barriers to learning and bring about a quicker rate of progress.

The achievement of pupils

is good

- Over time, children have joined St Christopher's EYFS Unit with skills and abilities that are typical for their age. Increasingly, a greater proportion start with skills and abilities that are below what is typical, particularly in their social, emotional and communication skills.
- Most children make good progress from their starting points so that a greater proportion than found nationally reach a good level of development by the time they leave FS2. Some children, especially those who have benefited from being at St Christopher's the longest, exceed what is expected for their age. These children demonstrate rapid and sustained progress from their starting points.
- Children are quick to develop a sense of number, recognise numerals up to 20 and begin to solve simple calculations. Practical resources and visual images help children to understand early mathematical concepts, such as when they were observed hanging pairs of socks on a washing line to understand doubling. Greater opportunities are needed for children to use their mathematical skills for real reasons at other times of the day.
- Children whose skills are below what is typical for their age or have an identified special educational need do not always make good progress. While their needs are assessed and identified quickly, including through the support of external agencies such as speech and language therapy, staff do not provide frequent or targeted enough teaching to meet their exacting needs. As such, they do not catch up as quickly as they should.
- The most able children flourish. Many exhibit the skills and understanding of children one year older than their actual age, particularly in their reading and mathematics. While achievement of the most able children is not as high in writing, new initiatives and a focused leadership project by the FS2 teacher is leading to much swifter progress this year.

What inspection judgements mean

School	Grade	Judgement	Description
	Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
	Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
	Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
	Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	132307
Local authority	Service Children's Education
Inspection number	455923

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

Type of school	Early Years Foundation Stage Unit
School category	Ministry of Defence
Age range of pupils	3–5
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	32
Appropriate authority	Service Children's Education
Chair	Mrs Debbie Argyle
Teacher in charge	Mrs Amy Wright
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	0350 200 55550
Email address	gib.secretary@scschools.org

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