

Inspection dates

6–7 October 2015

Overall effectiveness

Inadequate

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Inadequate

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Inadequate

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an inadequate school

- Leaders have not ensured that the systems they have in place to reduce the risk of harm to pupils are followed. Consequently, pupils are not safe in school.
- Leaders have not ensured that statutory safeguarding requirements are met.
- Leaders do not have clear roles and responsibilities or any line of accountability. As a result, capacity for future improvement is severely limited.
- Leaders have not established a commonly understood framework for assessing pupils' progress. They are unable to say how much progress pupils make, or to evidence that it is good enough.
- Leaders do not do all they can to monitor and improve the quality of teaching. They do not have sufficient achievement information against which they can judge if teachers are effective in their posts.
- Leaders have not fulfilled their responsibilities effectively to ensure that all of the independent school standards are met.
- The quality of teaching requires improvement. Both qualified and unqualified teachers plan their lessons with care. However, the progress pupils make varies considerably from class to class.
- Teachers mark pupils' work assiduously. However, they do not focus enough on insisting pupils write using accurate grammar and punctuation. Consequently, some pupils continue to make the same mistakes in their work over time.

The school has the following strengths

- Pupils attain high standards by the end of Key Stage 4. All pupils in 2015 gained GCSEs at high grades across a number of subjects, including in English and mathematics.
- Attendance is high because pupils enjoy coming to school, which feels like an extension of their family.
- Behaviour is good. There are very few incidents of serious misbehaviour, and pupils' books show that pupils enjoy learning and take pride in their work.
- The provision leaders make for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils is highly effective. Leaders promote fundamental British values very well.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school must take action to meet the requirements of the schedule to The Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 and associated requirements. The details are listed in the full report.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Leaders must urgently review the school's safeguarding policy, to ensure that it has due regard for the guidance issued by the Secretary of State. They must ensure that it places the safety of the child at the centre of policy and practice. Leaders must also secure clear lines of referral where staff have concerns about the behaviour of other adults in the school, including the headteacher.
- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by:
 - establishing clear roles, responsibilities and lines of accountability across the school's leadership team to ensure that all school policies are rigorously evaluated and implemented by staff
 - reviewing all the risk assessments relating to the safety of the school site and procedures for taking pupils off-site on school visits
 - establishing clear systems to regularly check that the actions required to mitigate against any identified risks are taken
 - improving the quality of record keeping, particularly in relation to the safer recruitment of staff, and ongoing checks of the safety and welfare of pupils.
- Improve the effectiveness of the leadership of teaching, learning and assessment by:
 - agreeing a common framework for assessing pupils' progress across all subjects and classes in the school
 - using this to check regularly on the progress pupils are making in subjects, and particularly in reading, writing and mathematics
 - using this, and other evidence gained from lessons and pupils' work, to evaluate the quality of teaching, and to identify where improvements and support may be needed.
- Improve the quality of teaching, and by this ensure that pupils' make good progress across all classes in the school by:
 - providing teachers with training and support so that they can implement the new assessment system successfully
 - ensuring that teachers use what they learn about pupils' progress to plan lessons that build and extend on pupils' prior skills and learning
 - ensuring that teachers pay proper attention to the accuracy of pupils' grammar and punctuation.
- The school must meet the following independent school standards:
 - The proprietor must ensure that the teaching at the school enables pupils to acquire new knowledge and make good progress according to their ability so that they increase their understanding and develop their skills in the subjects taught (3 and 3(a)).
 - The proprietor must ensure that teaching at the school shows a good understanding of the aptitudes, needs and prior attainments of the pupils, and ensures that these are taken into account in the planning of lessons (3 and 3(d)).
 - The proprietor must ensure that the teaching at the school demonstrates that a framework is in place to assess pupils' work regularly and thoroughly and use information from that assessment to plan teaching so that pupils can progress (3 and 3(g)).
 - The proprietor must ensure that arrangements are made to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils at the school; and that such arrangements have regard to any guidance issued by the Secretary of State (7, 7(a) and 7(b)).
 - The proprietor must ensure that relevant health and safety laws are complied with by the drawing up and effective implementation of a written health and safety policy (11).
 - The proprietor must ensure that the welfare of the pupils at the school is safeguarded and promoted by the drawing up and effective implementation of a written risk assessment policy, and that appropriate action is taken to reduce risks that are identified (16, 16(a) and 16(b)).
 - The proprietor must ensure that no such person carries out work, or intends to carry out work, at the school in contravention of a prohibition order, an interim prohibition order, or any direction made under section 128 of the 2008 Act or section 142 of the 2002 Act, or any disqualification, prohibition or restriction which takes effect as if contained in either such direction (17, 18(2)(b)).

- The proprietor must ensure that there is a register which shows, in relation to each member of staff appointed on or after 1 May 2007, whether their identity was checked (21(1), 21(3), 21(3)(a), 21(3)(a)(i) and 21(3)(b)).
- The proprietor must ensure that suitable changing accommodation and showers are provided for pupils aged 11 years or over at the start of the school year who receive physical education (23(1) and 23(1)(c)).
- The proprietor must ensure that suitable accommodation is provided in order to cater for the medical and therapy needs of pupils, including accommodation for the medical examination and treatment of pupils and for the short-term care of sick and injured pupils, which includes a washing facility and is near to a toilet facility (24(1), 24(1)(a), 24(1)(b)).
- The proprietor must ensure that the school premises and the accommodation and facilities provided therein are maintained to a standard such that, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare of pupils are ensured (25).
- The proprietor must ensure that suitable drinking water facilities are provided and that cold water supplies that are suitable for drinking are clearly marked as such (28(1), 28(1)(a) and 28(1)(c)).
- The proprietor must ensure that particulars of educational and welfare provision for pupils with EHC plans and pupils for whom English is an additional language are made available to parents of pupils and parents of prospective pupils and, on request, to the Chief Inspector, the Secretary of State or an independent inspectorate (32(1)(b) and 32(3)(b)).
- The proprietor must ensure that in the school's complaints procedure, where there is a panel hearing of a complaint, one panel member is independent of the management and running of the school. This procedure should ensure that the written record of all complaints should include any action taken by the school (regardless of whether they are upheld) (33, 33(g), 33(j) and 33(j)(ii)).
- The proprietor must ensure that persons with leadership and management responsibilities at the school demonstrate good skills and knowledge appropriate to their role and fulfil their responsibilities effectively so that the independent school standards are met consistently. The proprietor must ensure that they actively promote the well-being of pupils (34(1), 34(1)(a), 34(1)(b) and 34(1)(c)).

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is inadequate

- The arrangements for safeguarding are not effective.
- Leaders have failed to ensure that statutory requirements in relation to the safeguarding of pupils have been met. The school's child protection policy is not fit for purpose. It does not give paramount importance to the safety of the child, nor does it enable staff to understand what routes they should follow if they have concerns about other adults, including the headteacher.
- While leaders ensure that the majority of checks are made when recruiting staff, the systems for doing so are not well coordinated. Record keeping is not as secure as it should be. The completed risk assessments of the school site and of activities that take place outside school are not detailed enough, nor are they effective, as leaders do not check they are acted upon. For example, during this inspection, one member of staff was intending to transport pupils without adequate insurance.
- The capacity for improvement in the school is significantly reduced by how few senior leaders there are present regularly in the school. The headteacher is the only full-time leader on site and he recognises that he is unable to oversee all aspects of welfare, health and safety effectively. Other leaders come in to school for short periods of the week, so oversight of the independent school standards is patchy at best. Consequently, a number of standards were not met at this inspection.
- Leaders have not established a common assessment framework against which they can measure progress across the school. End of year tests give them a picture of attainment in English and mathematics, but they do not use information from these tests to support further learning. They do not check on the ongoing progress pupils make in their subjects, so they are unable to identify if individual pupils, or indeed teachers, need more support to ensure that progress is good overall.
- Leaders do not do all they can to improve the quality of teaching. One member of the management committee has recently observed lessons and given some supportive feedback to teachers, but leaders do not have a clear enough view as to what constitutes good teaching. The lack of information on pupils' progress means they are unable to hold teachers to account for their work, nor do they see this as being a part of their role. There are no systems for the performance management of teaching staff.
- Leaders have established a strong ethos for this school which is embraced by the pupils. It is seen as essentially being an extension of the family, where children and adults of like beliefs gather, learn and grow together. It is a nurturing environment, in which pupils thrive emotionally and spiritually. However, leaders' vision for the school, where parents commit to delivering the majority of teaching, is proving to be less successful now than it was in the past. This has recently contributed to the numbers of pupils leaving the school.
- The curriculum is broad and it is well planned, so that all pupils benefit from learning about a range of subjects, including languages, science, technology and the creative arts. It enables pupils to explore their individual talents and they flourish under the close tutoring of encouraging adults. For example, during informal times of the school day, pupils have the opportunity to improve their musical skills.
- The curriculum is based on a 'God-centred' ethos. Pupils spend time each morning in their devotions and then go on to develop their core skills in reading, writing and mathematics. 'Project' work in the afternoon provides good opportunities for pupils to develop their wider knowledge of the world through the lens of their religious beliefs. For example, a project on farming develops their scientific understanding as well as their knowledge of modern technologies, while enabling pupils to reflect on Christian concepts of creation and stewardship.
- The school promotes fundamental British values well. Pupils study democracy and law and visit Parliament. There are many opportunities for pupils to reflect on their own beliefs within the context of modern British life. Leaders ensure that lessons are planned so that pupils can access information from a number of objective sources. For example, in a unit on 'family studies' older pupils study the British law in relation to adoption and fostering and consider same-sex relationships within the same context. Throughout, leaders promote tolerance and respect for others based on the fundamental belief that all humans are made in God's image.
- Pupils have opportunities to learn about and understand other faiths and world views from the perspective of different religions. They learn how these faiths influence others to live and can reflect on the similarities and differences between these religions and their own. This prepares pupils well for study after school, where they encounter pupils from backgrounds that are very different to their own. However, the well-stocked library does not include books explaining different faiths and cultures, so pupils' exploration of these issues is limited to the resources their teachers provide for them.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- The management committee operates as a senior leadership team and makes decisions which range from agreeing policies to deciding if homework can be postponed for a week. They make strategic decisions about the use of finance, which have ensured that the school is well resourced and that pupils have access to a full curriculum. However, they do not strategically oversee the implementation of the policies they agree. Members of the committee do not have clearly defined roles and responsibilities, and this is a significant contributing factor to the unmet independent school standards.
- Members of the management committee also teach in the school. They are highly regarded and in turn they support staff well. However, they are not equipped to challenge staff performance and have no protocols by which they could do so. Similarly, they do not see it as their role to check on the performance of the headteacher, who is also a member of the committee.

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment requires improvement

- The quality of teaching requires improvement because, while teachers plan individual lessons thoroughly and ensure that they are engaging for pupils, planning over time does not enable pupils to make good progress across a range of subjects.
- Teachers do not have a commonly understood assessment framework. Curriculum plans detail topics to be covered and activities to do, but do not explain the learning and skills that pupils should develop. Consequently, teachers are not able to plan lessons that develop or strengthen pupils' knowledge and skills over time. This is particularly the case for the project work that pupils undertake in the afternoon, where it is not clear what subjects or skills teachers should be assessing.
- Teachers mark pupils' work assiduously and sometimes give good advice for improvement that pupils take on board and to which they respond. This is recently more apparent in English and mathematics, where staff have a more informed view of the skills pupils should develop.
- Teachers do not improve pupils' writing skills well enough. Work in books shows that there is no approach to improving the quality and accuracy of pupils' writing. Consequently, when pupils make simple mistakes, such as the misuse of capital letters and the incorrect spelling of frequently used words, they repeat these because they are not corrected by their teachers.
- Teachers' subject knowledge is secure as leaders have ensured that they teach subjects in which they have a particular expertise. They resource their lessons well and this ensures that pupils enjoy learning and work hard in class. However, work shows that teachers miss opportunities to ask questions which probe pupils' understanding and develop their thinking.
- Teachers promote reading well. Pupils have access to a wide range of reading materials and they read enthusiastically with adults and at home with their parents. Displays show they regularly review books and are encouraged to try out new authors and different types of books and styles of writing. .
- Records show that teachers set homework regularly, in line with the school policy. Homework complements what pupils learn in class and is often tailored for individual pupils. Parents say this helps them to support their children well at home.

The personal development, behaviour and welfare are inadequate

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is inadequate. This is because the safety of pupils on the school site and when they are taken off-site on school visits is not assured. For example, assessments of the school site do not identify risks associated with younger children congregating by or using steep stairs. Additionally, dangerous tools and sharp knives are not locked away in the design and technology room, despite the school's risk assessment detailing that this should always be the case. This room is particularly dirty and cluttered, raising concerns about the condition in which the machines are kept and used.
- Risk assessments for off-site visits, either as one-off educational visits or as regular opportunities for physical education, are not adequate. They do not identify all the risks associated with such activities, and senior staff do not check they are in place or adhered to. This puts pupils at potential risk of harm when they are off site.
- Pupils say that bullying does happen and largely involves silly name-calling. However, they are quick to

report it to adults and know their teachers will deal with it well. Positive personal relationships are reinforced all the time, both as part of the Christian ethos of the school and through taught opportunities within the curriculum. Pupils are taught about discrimination, for example, on the grounds of race, culture and sexuality, and they know this is wrong and should not be tolerated.

- Personal safety is taught through project work and covers age-appropriate topics, including sex and relationships education. Where necessary, the school brings in external parties to support pupils' understanding of these important issues. However, the school is only just starting to develop a policy on improving pupils' awareness of online safety and bullying through the use of technologies. Pupils' awareness of these issues is less developed than it should be.
- Pupils are confident, articulate individuals who say they feel safe in school. Testimonies from older pupils show they use the school's careers advice and make the move to sixth form college well and cope with this new environment successfully. In this respect, the school prepares pupils well for the next stages in their education and lives.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. The majority of pupils cooperate with adults at all times and conduct themselves well around the school and in lessons. They demonstrate the school's ethos of love and respect for others.
- Work in pupils' books show that pupils have very positive attitudes to learning. They take pride in their work, presenting it carefully and nearly always completing tasks. Younger pupils were very keen to show their work to the inspector and other adults because they were excited about what they had learned and how well they had done.
- There is no evidence of graffiti in the school, either in books or in the school environment. Pupils look after their school well. The learning environment is a vibrant, attractive space and pupils' work on walls show how happy they are to celebrate their achievements with each other.
- School records show that any sanctions for poor behaviour have significantly reduced since the last inspection. While there are isolated incidents of poor behaviour, sanctions have more recently been focused on a minority of pupils not completing homework.
- Attendance is high. Very few pupils are ever absent from school, and none are persistently so.
- Parents and staff all agree that behaviour is good at the school. None raise any concerns about pupils' behaviour or personal well-being.

The outcomes for pupils

require improvement

- The outcomes for pupils require improvement because, even though pupils leave the school with high standards of attainment, their progress across the school is uneven. Progress is not tracked well enough from pupils' starting points at the school, and work in books shows that it is not consistently strong across classes and subjects.
- In 2015, the few pupils in Year 11 completed their GCSEs with considerable success. They all achieved at least five good GCSEs at a C grade or above, including in English and mathematics. Most achieved very high grades in all their subjects and they all went on to start academic study at local post-16 providers. This demonstrates that outcomes for pupils by the end of Key Stage 4 set them up well for their next stage in education.
- Pupils' progress across other key stages and subjects is less clear because it is either not assessed against an agreed framework, or it is not tracked well. Books show that pupils make variable progress between classes. The school's data on spelling and reading tests also show that some pupils do not securely improve in these skills as quickly as they could.
- Pupils develop a secure understanding of their religious faith and the teachings of the Bible and religious leaders. Very young children know the key tenets of their faith well and can recall these when asked in lessons. As they develop and get older, they use this learning to reflect more deeply on their faith and to become confident in the views they hold.
- Pupils who have special educational needs or disabilities are supported well and make progress in line with other pupils in the school. The school has a specialist teacher for these pupils and they receive regular, individual support. Sometimes this support does not translate into what happens in the classroom however, and this prevents pupils from making accelerated progress.

School details

Unique reference number	106158
Inspection number	10007902
DfE registration number	356/6021

This inspection was carried out under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008, 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.

Type of school	Other independent school
School status	Independent school
Age range of pupils	5–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of part time pupils	None
Proprietor	Dr R Slack
Chair	N/A
Headteacher	Dr R Slack
Annual fees (day pupils)	Nil
Telephone number	0161 432 3782
Website	http://www.covenant-christian-school.co.uk/
Email address	info@covenant-christian-school.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	30 April – 3 May 2012

Information about this school

- Covenant Christian School describes itself as an 'evangelical learning community'. It has been an independent day school since 1981. It aims to 'glorify God in everything that concerns us, including our children's education. We hope that they will come to know and love God, therefore having an opportunity to live lives of hope, meaning and purpose'.
- The school aims to enable parents, either directly or by delegation, to teach their children.
- Since the last inspection, the number of pupils on roll at the school has fallen considerably. At the time of this inspection, there were no pupils currently being educated in Key Stages 1, 3 and 4.
- All pupils are taught in The Hawthorns, a large Victorian house with outbuildings, which is also the home of the proprietor.
- The school does not make use of any alternative provision.
- The school was last inspected by the Bridge Schools Inspectorate in 2012, when it failed to meet a number of the independent school standards. Following this it received two subsequent monitoring inspections in November 2012 and June 2013.

Information about this inspection

- This was the first inspection of the school by Ofsted.
- The inspector met with members of the school's leadership team, including the headteacher and members of the management group. She read their own evaluation of the school's effectiveness and evaluated the evidence which underpinned this.
- The inspector observed learning in Key Stage 2 and observed pupils at informal times of the school day. The inspector scrutinised pupils' work from this and the previous school year. The inspector also evaluated examination results and looked at schemes of learning and lesson plans.
- The inspector looked at a range of information about the school's policies and procedures relating to safeguarding, welfare, health and safety as well as to other aspects of the school's work. She conducted an extensive tour of the school site.
- The inspector spoke to teachers, parents and pupils about their experiences of the school. She also considered three responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire. There were insufficient responses to Parent View (Ofsted's online questionnaire for parents) for this to be considered during this inspection.
- This inspection also included a focus on how the school actively promotes fundamental British values and protects children from the risks of radicalisation and extremism.

Inspection team

Philippa Darley, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

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