

The Vine Christian School

Basingstoke Road, Three Mile Cross, Reading, Berkshire RG7 1AT

Inspection dates

17–19 October 2017

Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Requires improvement
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Requires improvement
Early years provision	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Outstanding

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Leaders and those responsible for governance have not ensured that pupils make good progress in all subjects. Plans for improvement are not sufficiently detailed. Issues such as staffing turbulence have affected the quality of education provided.
- Overall, teaching is not good enough. Teachers are not held to account for the variable progress that pupils make. Too often staff have low expectations of what pupils can achieve. Teachers do not plan well enough for skills development in subjects such as art and physical education.
- Pupils do not have enough work experience opportunities.
- Progress is inconsistent. Pupils do not have enough chances to write at length, and their understanding of paragraph construction is often weak. Those pupils who are just starting to read often make slow progress. This is because some staff have not had appropriate training in delivering phonics (letters and the sounds they represent) skills. The books provided to help pupils in their early reading are sometimes too hard.
- Leadership has not addressed how it will manage the two different phonics schemes that currently operate in the school.
- New governance has not yet ensured that leaders are held to account for the quality of teaching and pupils' progress. They have not made sure that all staff have job descriptions.

The school has the following strengths

- Leaders are aware of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They have ensured that the independent school standards are met. The school is starting to improve.
- In some subjects, such as mathematics and science, pupils make good progress.
- Nursery children make good progress from their starting points.
- Pupils' personal development and behaviour is good. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is strong.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school meets the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve leadership and management by ensuring that:
 - plans of the school’s priorities to drive further improvements are refined to include success criteria and timescales
 - there is clear planning to build on pupils’ skills in subjects such as art and physical education
 - governors hold leaders fully to account for the quality of teaching and pupils’ progress
 - all staff have job descriptions
 - pupils take part in more work experience opportunities.
- Improve the quality of teaching, so staff have higher expectations and challenge pupils to always do their best, by:
 - ensuring that teachers take responsibility for the progress their pupils are making
 - giving pupils more opportunities to write at length and providing them with more guidance on paragraph construction
 - ensuring that all staff have training on delivering phonics skills
 - providing books for pupils new to reading that gradually increase in difficulty
 - addressing the different approaches to teaching phonics between the early years and the rest of the school.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Leaders and trustees have not secured a good standard of education for the pupils attending the school. While all the independent school standards have been met, other aspects of leadership have not been fulfilled. One of the reasons for this is staffing turbulence and a change of most of the trustees and governors in the last year.
- Leaders' plans to improve the school are in their infancy. Although some areas have been identified, many objectives are too vague. The plan has no success criteria or timescales identified.
- Teachers are not held sufficiently to account for the progress that pupils are making. This is because leaders were not evaluating the quality of teaching or checking on pupils' progress. In the last month this has started to happen; however, there has been too little time to demonstrate an impact.
- Careers options are studied through PACE (Packets of Accelerated Christian Education) booklets, supplemented by a programme of visits. For example, pupils learned about jobs in the aerospace industry when they visited a major air show. However, work-experience provision is rather limited in its scope.
- The curriculum reflects the school's Christian values. Pupils' skills are developed in many subjects in a structured way through the PACE booklets. However, in other subjects, such as art and physical education, work is not planned carefully enough to ensure that pupils' skills are developed.
- Spiritual and moral provision is strong. Pupils have regular opportunities to be reflective of their own beliefs and other world religions, such as Islam and Judaism. Social skills are carefully developed and the school works hard to ensure that pupils become confident and self-assured. Pupils demonstrate a good cultural understanding. They know about the wide range of cultural influences that have shaped Britain's heritage. Pupils are well prepared for life in modern Britain.
- The school provides extra-curricular activities through a programme of visits designed to expand the curriculum. For example, pupils recently developed their understanding of the solar system by a visit to a local planetarium.
- Parents are pleased with the school. They are very involved in school life and some come in to school on a regular basis to help in lessons. Parents say they send their children to this school because they want their children to follow a Bible-based curriculum.

Governance

- The new trustees and governors do not hold leaders sufficiently to account for pupils' progress and the quality of teaching. Until recently, the headteacher has had insufficient time to fulfil this role as she has been teaching full time in class.
- Governors have not ensured that all staff have a written description of their duties. This leads to some uncertainty regarding specific responsibilities within the school.
- Until very recently the two main priorities of the trustees and governors were to ensure the financial stability of the school and to meet all the independent school standards. It is

clear that they have done a considerable amount of work to achieve both of these aims.

- Trustees and governors have clearly defined roles. They are committed to ensuring that the school continues to improve. They bring a range of professional expertise including business, finance and information technology skills.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Pupils say they feel safe and well cared for in school. Leaders are vigilant in ensuring that they take appropriate action to identify any pupils who may be at risk. Staff have undertaken a range of safeguarding training and are fully aware of the procedures to follow if they have any concerns. When required, staff work well with outside agencies to support pupils and their families.
- The safeguarding policy reflects the latest statutory guidance and is available on the school's website.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- Pupils make inconsistent progress across the school due to staff not always having high enough expectations about what pupils can achieve. Teachers do not always challenge pupils to do their best, particularly in the non-PACE subjects.
- Across both the primary and secondary phases, pupils are not given enough opportunities to develop their skills in writing longer pieces of work. Skills in planning paragraphs are not always taught well enough.
- Staff do not support pupils' development of early reading skills effectively. For example, some staff are not trained to teach phonics. The school does not provide reading books for pupils that gradually increase in difficulty. This means that sometimes pupils are discouraged from making progress in their early reading skills as their reading book is too difficult.
- Mathematics is often well taught. Staff typically have good subject knowledge and provide effective help and support. Pupils are given a range of strategies to solve challenging problems.
- When pupils join the school their skills and knowledge in a variety of subjects are assessed using the online tests provided by Christian Education Europe. The tests inform staff of the appropriate PACE booklet the pupil needs to start working on. These are usually well matched to the pupil's next step in learning.
- Teachers are consistent in their management of pupils' behaviour. Attitudes to learning are good and this means that lessons proceed well.
- Homework is well used to consolidate pupils' learning. Pupils are also given the opportunity to research a range of topics.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- From the earliest years, pupils develop a good understanding of what it means to be a successful learner. In many lessons pupils concentrate hard on completing their PACE books. After they finish an exercise, they quietly self-check their work when comparing their responses with an answer booklet.
- Pupils know about how to stay safe, such as when using the internet. Staff work hard to ensure that pupils learn how to stay safe when out of school; for example, they teach pupils how to cross the road carefully. Pupils say that there are no issues with bullying at the school, but they would go to a teacher if they ever had any concerns.
- The five-day residential trip to the annual Christian convention helps to develop pupils' independence and personal skills.
- Healthy eating is carefully promoted, pupils learn about the different food groups and the importance of eating a balanced diet.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- The school provides a very orderly environment. In classes, pupils of all ages mix well together. They are attentive and respond quickly to any requests from staff.
- During play and lunchtimes, pupils behave well towards each other. They show consideration and respect. A typical comment of pupils was, 'We are like a big family so most of the time we get along very well.'
- Attendance is good. There are no issues with persistent absence. There have been no fixed-term or permanent exclusions in recent years.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- The progress pupils make from their different starting points is inconsistent and varies between subjects.
- Pupils do not make fast enough progress in developing their early reading skills. This has the effect that some pupils are delayed in starting on their PACE booklets, as all of the booklets require a significant amount of reading. Once pupils have acquired their basic reading skills, however, their progress improves. Pupils also make good progress in developing their comprehension skills.
- Pupils' progress when writing more lengthy pieces of work is often too slow. However, other writing skills such as punctuation and spelling are well developed.
- Pupils often make rapid progress in mathematics. Skills in calculation, mental arithmetic and problem-solving are often strong. Pupils have the opportunity to reason and apply their knowledge in a wide range of situations.
- In science progress is good. Primary pupils enjoy conducting experiments. Secondary pupils make good progress in physics, chemistry and biology.
- Progress is strong for the most able pupils, particularly in mathematics because the PACE

booklets provide the right level of challenge. Secondary pupils have completed work on topics such as Fibonacci (a system of sequencing numbers) and the 'golden ratio'. These pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education.

- The PACE booklets lead towards the International Certificate of Education. Last year a few completed the certificate at both advanced and foundation level. Typically, pupils leave at the age of 15 to complete their studies at college.

Early years provision

Good

- Leaders have ensured that all of the independent school standards are met for the early years. There are no breaches of statutory welfare requirements.
- The school currently only has Nursery-aged pupils. Most of these children have skills, knowledge and understanding that are either at or above what is typical for their age. Since starting school a few months ago, these children have made good progress in all areas of learning.
- Leaders have been effective in establishing a vibrant learning environment both in the class and outside. There are accurate assessment systems in place and leaders use these to plan each child's next step in their learning.
- Children are well behaved, they are polite and share resources happily, such as when setting up a shopping game. Children have good attitudes to their learning, they quickly learn the Nursery rules of, 'gentle hands, listening ears, quiet voices, looking eyes and walking feet'.
- The teacher provides exciting and interesting activities. For example, children enjoy growing and cooking runner beans when investigating plants. In all activities the teacher questions the children carefully to extend their thinking and understanding.
- Children in the early years make good progress in developing their phonics skills. However, they follow a phonics scheme which is different from the one used in the rest of the school. School leaders have not considered how this is going to be addressed to avoid children being confused by the two different approaches.
- Parents like the fact that they can stay with their children for some of the day. They are pleased with how well their children have settled into the Nursery.

School details

Unique reference number	134424
DfE registration number	872/6013
Inspection number	10033951

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 category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	3 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	27
Proprietor	The Trustees of the Vine Christian School (Reading)
Chair	Deon Esterhuizen
Headteacher	Johanna Esterhuizen
Annual fees (day pupils)	To age 11: £3,450 From age 12: £3,840
Telephone number	01189 886464
Website	vinechristianschool.org.uk
Email address	office@thevinechristianschool.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	11–13 March 2014

Information about this school

- The Vine Christian School opened in 2003. It is a non-selective Christian day school which is part of the Christian Education Europe network of schools. The school is situated within the complex of the Three Mile Cross Church Centre in Reading.
- The school follows a curriculum provided by Christian Education Europe, which is a Bible-based education. Much is taught through a series of progressively more difficult booklets called Packets of Accelerated Christian Education (PACE). Each morning pupils work individually through booklets in six core subjects including English, mathematics, science, history and geography. In the afternoons pupils learn other subjects including art and physical education.

- The school is smaller than most schools. There are 27 pupils on roll. The school consists of four classes. There is a pre-school, where a small number of Nursery-aged children attend part time. There is a reading readiness class for Year 1 pupils who are not yet able to read the PACE booklets. Eight pupils between Years 1 and 5 attend the ABC junior class. Twelve pupils between Years 5 and 10 attend the senior class. There are currently no pupils who attend the sixth form. Pupils typically leave the school at 15 or 16 years old to continue their studies at colleges of further education.
- The proprietors of the school are the trustees. They have responsibility for the finance of the school. Many of the trustees are also governors. They are responsible for all other aspects of the school. Almost all of the trustees and governors, including the chair, are new.
- The last standard inspection took place in March 2014 when the school was judged to be outstanding. Since then there has been considerable staffing turbulence. Over a third of the pupils have joined the school in different year groups in the last few months. In January 2017 the school opened an early years provision.
- The school's aim is to, 'encourage every pupil to become a mature Christian disciple through an education carefully designed to give pupils academic training based on a biblical world view'.
- There are no disadvantaged pupils or pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities in the school.
- The school uses no alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

- Teaching and learning were observed across all classes, often with senior leaders.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, the pastoral principal and other staff. There was a meeting with trustees and governors. The trustees are the proprietors of the school.
- The inspector listened to pupils read, scrutinised their work and talked informally with them during breaktimes. The views of pupils were also considered during more formal discussions.
- A wide range of the school's documentation was studied, including policies and information relating to safeguarding practices.
- The opinions of six staff who had responded to Ofsted's questionnaire were taken into account.
- Parents were spoken to informally to ascertain their views when they were collecting their children at the end of the day. A letter from a parent was also considered. There were no responses to the Ofsted questionnaire, Parent View.

Inspection team

Liz Bowes, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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