

The Christian School (Takeley)

Dunmow Road, Brewers End, Takeley, Bishop's Stortford, Hertfordshire CM22 6QH

Inspection dates

5–7 December 2017

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

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 all of the independent school standards are met.
- Leaders' self-evaluation is underdeveloped. It does not give a clear picture of the strengths and weaknesses of the school.
- Development plans are not specific enough and do not list all of the key areas to be improved.
- The information gained from monitoring pupils' progress, behaviour and attendance is not consistently used to secure improvement.
- Staff carrying out safeguarding checks and fire safety checks do not maintain the records systematically enough.
- Trustees and governors do not currently provide sufficient challenge to assure themselves of the school's effectiveness.

The school has the following strengths

- The unique environment helps children to grow in confidence. This helps them to thrive socially and academically.
- Pupils are safe and well cared for. Parents say the school is a 'happy and inclusive community'.
- Pupils make good progress. The high level of challenge helps pupils attain well.
- Teachers have high expectations of what pupils can achieve. They plan work carefully so that it meets pupils' needs.
- The attendance for most groups of pupils is above the national average. Pupils who arrive with a history of low attendance show a clear improvement.
- Children in the early years benefit from a caring and nurturing environment. They develop good habits and are well prepared for Year 1.
- Leaders' monitoring of teaching helps them understand where pupils learn well.
- Staff swiftly identify pupils who need extra help. They provide valuable support to help these pupils learn more effectively.
- Staff get on well with pupils. The strong relationships help pupils to behave well.
- Parents receive useful information about the school. They are very positive about the difference the school makes for their children.

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?

- Strengthen leadership and governance by:
 - ensuring that self-evaluation is based on an up-to-date review of the strengths and weaknesses of the school
 - sharpening the school's plan for improvement so that it focuses on the specific areas that require improvement and includes precise targets so that leaders are able to assess the impact of their actions
 - ensuring that leaders are familiar with new assessment systems and can use the information provided to secure further improvement
 - making sure that those responsible for governance receive sufficient information so they can challenge leaders more effectively on the progress, attendance and behaviour of pupils over time more readily.
- Improve the administration of safeguarding practice and fire checks by ensuring that all staff record actions and maintain files systematically.
- Ensure that the premises and accommodation are maintained to a high standard.

The school must meet the following independent school standards

The proprietor must ensure full compliance with the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 (paragraph 12).

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 (paragraph 25).

The proprietor must ensure that persons with leadership and management responsibilities at the school demonstrate good skills and knowledge, appropriate to their role, fulfil their roles effectively, and actively promote the well-being of pupils so that the independent school standards are met consistently (paragraph 34(1), 34(1)(a), 34(1)(b), 34(1)(c)).

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- The school's self-evaluation is too vague. It does not present an accurate reflection of the school's strengths, or the areas that need further development. There is no useful baseline for the school's improvement. As a result, the school development plan does not cover some key areas that need to be addressed.
- The school's systems for tracking pupils' behavioural and academic progress are comprehensive. However, leaders are not completely familiar with the new system and do not evaluate the impact of their work sufficiently or always use the information they have to improve pupils' outcomes.
- Clear monitoring processes, including observations, work scrutiny and learning walks mean that leaders know broadly where strengths in teaching, learning and assessment lie. Where practice is less secure, leaders' actions have started to bring about improvements. Although inspectors noted the individual training some staff had received to help them improve, the links between monitoring teaching and staff training are not sufficiently developed.
- Leadership at all levels has been strengthened, and responsibilities are distributed more evenly among the senior leadership team than previously. However, the headteacher is still responsible for many areas of leadership and management. With his significant teaching commitment and increasing pupil numbers, this limits his capacity to be effective. Other leadership roles within the school, including governance, are not developed well enough.
- Leaders have established a school with a real sense of community, where pupils can thrive in a safe, inclusive environment. Many pupils arrive with confidence issues, low self-esteem and behavioural issues. The individual care, attention and support they receive help the vast majority to flourish both socially and academically. As one parent said, 'This school provides a caring and nurturing environment for each child to flourish as an individual.'
- Pupils follow a well-planned curriculum that provides a good balance to support their personal development, extend their knowledge and ensure sufficient focus on literacy and numeracy. The core curriculum is complemented through additional subjects, such as citizenship, life skills, personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education, art, music and computer studies. Pupils gain a wide range of qualifications, including GCSE and functional skills. In key stage 4, pupils generally sit full GCSE examinations in up to 10 subjects.
- Parents are overwhelmingly positive about the school and the education their children receive. They particularly praise the way staff keep them informed of their children's progress and how staff support all pupils well. One parent summarised by saying, 'The school provides a unique environment for children to thrive.' The vast majority would recommend the school to another parent.
- The team that manages pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities works well together. Where staff identify pupils not making expected progress, the team investigates cases individually and provides support to help the pupils make the

progress they should. Evidence seen on inspection shows the positive difference this has made. In many cases, pupils who arrive at the school without a diagnosis are helped to secure the wider support that they need.

- Leaders' assessment and feedback policy works well. Teachers record pupils' strengths and areas for improvement, and follow these up appropriately. Inspection evidence shows that in most areas the policy is now well established. Staff are familiar with the system and pupils say it is useful in helping them to improve their work. Some particularly effective practice was evident in English and history.
- The staff work well together and morale is high. They are a cohesive group who feel proud to work at the school. As one said: 'I love this school... we teach children from different backgrounds, many of whom face daily challenges... and treat all with respect, understanding, compassion... and challenge them to exceed expectations.'
- The student council, where pupils' suggestions are considered by leaders and acted on, exemplifies fundamental British values, including democracy. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is developed well through PSHE education, assemblies and collective worship. Pupils demonstrate a clear understanding of what is right and wrong. Inspection evidence shows pupils to be courteous, conscientious and caring.

Governance

- Leaders and those responsible for governance have not paid enough attention to ensuring that the school meets all of the independent school standards. Consequently, some of them are unmet. The premises and accommodation do not meet the independent school standards because some areas are too cluttered, materials are not always stored appropriately and some maintenance aspects need attention. Additionally, staff do not always record the checks linked to the testing of fire alarms properly. Leaders' policies specify the regularity of checks, and measures are now in place to address the shortcomings found.
- All leaders, trustees and governors acknowledge the need to create greater accountability and have already started to put measures in place so that the school improves.
- The trustees and governors mirror the vision and ethos that leaders have for the school.
- Minutes from meetings show that trustees judiciously manage the school's financial affairs. Governors are increasingly challenging leaders' work to ensure that standards are maintained.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders ensure, and governors have plans to check, that all of the pre-employment checks for staff are carried out and recorded precisely.
- A well-planned induction programme ensures that staff understand their responsibilities to protect children. School policies, including the safeguarding policy, are available on the school's website, are up to date and reflect the latest statutory guidance.
- Pupils and their parents appreciate the pastoral care provided by the school.
- The curriculum effectively informs pupils about some of the potential risks to their safety.

Pupils spoke knowledgeably about the training they have received on how to stay safe online.

- While staff carry out their safeguarding responsibilities well, and document actions taken, their records are not filed systematically enough.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- The relationships that exist between staff and pupils are a particular strength of the school. These positive relationships help pupils, some of whom found accessing education difficult elsewhere, to grow in confidence and make good progress. As one parent said: 'The staff make strong bonds and positive relationships with all the children. This is the first time that our son has wanted to complete his work at school and his homework.'
- Teachers plan work carefully. They know the pupils well, and provide useful resources that meet pupils' different levels of need within each class. As one parent said, 'The school encourages a love for learning and helps each individual child make progress at an appropriate rate for them.'
- Teachers have high expectations of what pupils can achieve. They choose meaningful activities that capture pupils' interests. For example, in science, pupils were keen to study how the archerfish takes account of refraction at the air–water boundary to catch its prey.
- Pupils make good progress because they tackle work that challenges them. Teachers' very good subject knowledge, and clear explanations, help pupils understand difficult concepts well. In mathematics, for example, Year 10 pupils' work on the factor theorem and iteration shows a level of understanding way beyond the age-related expectations.
- Teachers guide pupils well on how to improve their work. This is specifically true for English and history, where teachers' clear instructions help pupils to structure their extended writing more effectively. For example, pupils plan their thoughts, write in their own words, use research materials and add quotations to elaborate on their views well.
- In the primary areas, teachers' subject knowledge, effective use of resources and good use of key subject vocabulary help pupils make good progress and develop the skills they need for the upper school. Pupils say they do well because teachers provide the support that they need, listen to them and explain the work carefully so that they understand.
- In the primary area, there was some evidence that the good standards of literacy seen in pupils' English books is not replicated in their project work.
- In a few areas, where teaching is less effective, pupils' concentration starts to wane and their progress slows.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Staff know pupils very well. The strong community feel of the school is based on a caring, sharing and nurturing ethos. Staff have a clear picture of each child's individual needs through frequent interaction. Teachers' daily observations help them to monitor each

pupil's performance over time and investigate where issues arise. Staff are then able to address the root cause of any issues, possibly linked to a pupil's emotional well-being rather than the presented behaviours.

- All staff work hard to create a culture of acceptance and inclusion. Pupils learn about fundamental British values, such as respect and tolerance, alongside celebrating diversity and life in a multicultural society.
- Pupils follow clear, fair and firm guidelines on how to behave and treat others. They are kind to each other. The 'mood maps' that pupils lay in the playground indicate how they are feeling. Other pupils support them if they are feeling low.
- Pupils benefit from the many opportunities they have to work in small groups with other pupils, often in different age groups. This helps to learn valuable social and communication skills.
- Pupils say they feel safe within school and they are well looked after. The school teaches them how to stay safe through lessons in citizenship, assemblies and communication with parents. Pupils spoke knowledgeably about internet safety, including appropriate filters, protocols and sharing of information. Parents were unequivocal in their view that their children feel safe at school.
- The school keeps parents very well informed about the progress their children make. Weekly communications give a breakdown of performance in lessons. The 'open door' policy means that staff are frequently available for individual discussion. Parents appreciate this. As one said, 'The school encourages parent involvement, which is refreshing, and it's a wonderfully warm and welcoming environment.'

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils conduct themselves extremely well throughout the day. They are polite, courteous and move around the small site sensibly and purposefully. Pupils enjoy breaktimes and mealtimes because they are pleasant social events, reflecting staff efforts to promote high standards.
- Staff are patient and understanding. They model clear expectations about how to behave and treat each other kindly. When pupils make mistakes, they spend time with pupils, helping them to better manage their behaviour and develop the self-discipline that will prepare them well for the future.
- Pupils enjoy coming to school. Some who have not enjoyed education elsewhere have thrived at the school. Levels of attendance for most groups are significantly above national figures. Parents speak about the positive difference they see in their children because of the individual care and attention staff provide. As one parent said, 'The school has turned my son from a little boy who hated school into a happy young man who is excited about learning.'
- Pupils confirm that staff deal with any signs of bullying quickly and effectively. They say that bullying is rare, and they are all very much aware of what is right and wrong. If they see things happening they do not like, they report them to staff, who deal with issues well.

- The attendance of a small group of pupils is below average. Often these pupils have additional needs, and had a history of poor attendance when they joined the school. Leaders are aware of the importance of both supporting and monitoring this group closely.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Pupils' prior attainment, on entry to the school, is often below age-related expectations. Some pupils arrive with a history of disrupted education. Leaders' assessments of what pupils can do when they arrive, alongside continual tracking, helps teachers match work appropriately to meet pupils' needs. Consequently, the vast majority of pupils make good progress from their various starting points.
- In 2017, five pupils in Year 11 successfully took GCSE examinations. The small cohort makes any comparison against national averages somewhat meaningless. However, pupils attained well against their expected grades, indicating consistently strong progress over time.
- In 2017, Year 11 pupils made good progress in English and mathematics. All the pupils achieved GCSEs at level 4 or above, while four out of five pupils achieved at least level 5 in both subjects.
- Most-able pupils attain well and make good progress. In Year 11 last year, pupils recorded scores of 8 and 9 in the new English and mathematics examinations respectively. In science, all the GCSE results were at grade C or above, with two thirds of all grades achieved being A or A*. Similarly high scores were seen in religious studies and other curriculum areas.
- Pupils are encouraged to read both for pleasure and to extend their knowledge. In English, some pupils' work demonstrates a wide-ranging knowledge of different genres and authors. They analyse texts, compare different authors and evaluate the key messages from the books they have read.
- The vast majority of current pupils show accelerated progress because the work they are set challenges them to achieve well. This is particularly the case in mathematics and science. A scrutiny of pupils' books showed pupils developing scientific enquiry skills well through practical work, while pupils' work demonstrates their confident handling of number using indices and standard form.
- Regular testing using a range of assessment materials show that the vast majority make accelerated progress from their starting points.
- Pupils who arrive speaking English as an additional language receive intensive support. Individual programmes help pupils to build on what they already know, and overcome any language barriers to learning. Teachers' records show that the pupils make consistently good progress over time.
- Staff support pupils well with their applications to further education. Pupils receive useful careers advice through the life skills curriculum, helping them to develop good interview, presentation and communication skills. All last year's leavers progressed on to post-16 education or employment and training.

Early years provision

Good

- Leadership of the Nursery and Reception classes is good. Staff work well together to ensure that safeguarding arrangements are effective and welfare requirements are met.
- The Nursery and Reception classrooms provide a safe, nurturing and inclusive environment. Children are keen to do well and are encouraged to take part in activities. For example, all the children in Reception were enthusiastically rolling out play dough to 'strengthen their hands before doing their writing work'.
- Children in the Nursery and the Reception Years make at least good progress from their different starting points. This is because teachers carefully model their expectations, take account of what children know and can do, and plan activities to help children make progress from their different starting points.
- The clear structures and routines that staff have established help children to settle quickly, listen carefully and follow instructions well. They enjoy school and inspectors observed excited children playing in the sand. Children are good at recognising letters and their associated sounds. This prepares them well for Year 1.
- Teaching in the early years is effective. Both the Nursery and Reception classrooms are well organised so that children are easily able to access a variety of learning activities. Staff use resources effectively, meaning that children are interested and enthusiastic about learning.
- Phonics is taught effectively. Children are able to blend sounds to make words and then use them appropriately in sentences. Children enjoy the activities, especially 'whack it' that helps them to practise their sounds. Children are able to develop their skills elsewhere. For example, children's written work shows good phonics knowledge and letter formation development.
- As with the rest of the school, the relationships between children and adults are strong. This gives children the confidence to talk articulately about what they are doing. They are able to explain activities to the inspector and say that they 'like it a lot'.
- Staff keep parents up to date on their child's progress through regular assessments that are shared through online learning journals. Parents praised the level of communication and, as one said, 'We love the school. It is one of the reasons we moved here.'

School details

Unique reference number	115436
DfE registration number	881/6041
Inspection number	10040367

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 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	63
Number of part-time pupils	12
Proprietor	Christian School (Takeley) Trust
Chair	C Bowman
Headteacher	M Humphries
Annual fees (day pupils)	£5,892–£8,268
Telephone number	01279 871 182
Website	www.tcst.org.uk
Email address	head@tcst.org.uk

Information about this school

- The Christian School (Takeley) was registered with the Department for Education (DfE) in 1989. The school was founded by a group of parents and friends who belonged to the same church. The school's aim is to provide an education based on Christian faith and values. The school is governed by trustees and a board of governors.
- There are currently 63 pupils on roll aged from three to 16 years, including 11 children in Nursery and Reception, of whom eight attend on a part-time basis.
- There are four children in the early years foundation stage who are home-educated and attend school for only part of the week. Their parents understand that they have the responsibility of ensuring that their children receive a suitable education.

- Most pupils are White British. There are an increasing number who speak English as an additional language.
- About one fifth of pupils have SEN and/or disabilities arising mainly from social, emotional or mental health needs or medical conditions. No pupils have an education, care and health plan.
- Some pupils join the school having had difficulties, such as bullying, at other schools.
- The school does not use supply staff.
- The previous standard inspection, by Bridge Schools Inspectorate (BSI), took place on 30–31 March 2015, where the school’s quality of education was judged as good.
- In November 2015, Ofsted carried out a material change inspection. Following the inspection, the DfE agreed that the school was able to increase its overall capacity from 60 to 70 pupils.

Information about this inspection

- This inspection was carried out with one day's notice.
- Inspectors observed learning across a wide range of subjects and year groups, including all key stages. Some observations were carried out jointly with the headteacher.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, trustees and governors, members of the senior leadership team and staff. The inspectors scrutinised minutes of governors' and trustees' meetings.
- An inspector met with a group of 10 pupils who were part of the school council, including representatives from different year groups.
- Inspectors considered the views in the 35 free-text responses sent by parents and the 14 members of staff who completed Ofsted's questionnaire for staff.
- Inspectors checked the school's compliance with the independent school standards. Inspectors carried out a tour of the premises and scrutinised a range of documents. These included the required policies, records of the checks made on staff, curriculum planning, and records of pupils' behaviour and attendance.
- The school's tracking of pupils' progress was evaluated. Inspectors looked at a wide range of pupils' work, both in lessons and through a detailed work scrutiny to evaluate pupils' progress over time.

Inspection team

John Randall, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Marianick Ellender-Gele

Her Majesty's Inspector

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