

St Christopher's School

48 New Dover Road, Canterbury, Kent CT1 3DT

Inspection dates

24–26 April 2018

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an inadequate school

- Senior leaders have not followed statutory guidance or their own policies to keep pupils safe or to deal with complaints. As a result, the arrangements for safeguarding are not effective.
- The school's actions to promote pupils' welfare are inadequate, because leaders have failed to follow procedures to keep them safe.
- Many staff have lost trust in the school's proprietors and leaders.
- The proprietor has not ensured that all of the independent school standards are met.
- Despite children making a positive start to school, early years provision is inadequate because of unmet independent school standards.
- The school advisory board includes members with highly relevant skills and expertise. However, the proprietor has not used these skills well enough.

The school has the following strengths

- Teaching and learning throughout the school, including in early years, are good.
- Pupils make good progress and achieve well, especially in English and mathematics.
- Leaders have successfully broadened the school curriculum so that pupils study a wide range of subjects and take part in more sport.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding is well developed, as is their awareness of British values such as tolerance and respect.
- Pupils behave well around the school and very well in class. They are focused on their learning and want to do their best.

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?

- Immediately improve the safeguarding culture and better promote pupils' welfare, including for children in early years, by ensuring that:
 - allegations and concerns are dealt with and referred to other agencies swiftly and appropriately
 - recruitment procedures are carried out in line with the latest statutory guidance.
- Rapidly improve leadership by ensuring that:
 - school policies are consistently followed by leaders
 - complaints are logged accurately and dealt with in line with the school's complaints policy
 - communication with staff, parents and carers, and pupils is timely, respectful and appropriate
 - the advisory board has, and fulfils, clear roles and responsibilities that are understood by staff and parents.
- Improve teaching further to secure even better outcomes for pupils, in particular by:
 - challenging the most able more to deepen their learning
 - helping those who have fallen behind to catch up more quickly.
- The school must meet the independent school standards, as set out in the annex of this report.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Inadequate

- A substantial number of staff have lost confidence in the school's proprietors and leaders. Staff work hard and successfully to provide good teaching and help pupils to progress. However, they are hampered by a lack of direction, poor, and at times inappropriate, communication, and frequent changes to policies and procedures.
- The school's hard work and determination ensured that the relevant independent school standards were met at the last progress monitoring visit in October 2016. However, this has been undermined by a number of senior leaders who have disregarded school policies and statutory requirements since then.
- Formal complaints made by parents are not always dealt with in line with the school's published complaints policy. Many of the unmet independent school standards relate to this weakness. Although on paper the written policy meets requirements, it is not implemented effectively.
- Communication with parents through school newsletters by the headteacher is often inappropriate. For example, parents were rightly concerned about the tone of newsletters responding to concerns about pupils' behaviour, promoting parental excursions to France and responding to perceived parental criticisms of the school.
- In recent years, the curriculum has been widened. This has been welcomed by pupils and parents. Pupils' participation in valuable sporting activities has increased as a result of the growing opportunities available. Effective leadership by subject specialists ensures that pupils benefit from a rich range of learning in modern foreign languages, art and music.
- Opportunities for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are extensive. Pupils benefit from the chance to celebrate major festivals, reflect at times of remembrance and support a local food bank.
- The personal, social, health and economic education programme equips pupils well for life in modern Britain. Staff, who are passionate about equality and diversity, ensure that older pupils debate and discuss British values such as democracy and tolerance and tackle tricky issues such as immigration in their discussions.
- Systems to check the quality of teaching and pupils' progress have become more secure and stringent. Leaders, such as the deputy headteacher and subject leaders, accurately check the quality of teaching and provide teachers with constructive feedback to help them improve.
- Teachers benefit from the valuable training they receive. For example, they welcome the opportunity to work with other schools to share teaching ideas and check that their assessments are accurate.
- School leaders monitor how much progress each cohort makes, but do not check the progress of pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities or who have low starting points to see whether they are catching up. Neither are leaders certain that pupils with high prior attainment being suitably challenged.

Governance

- The proprietor has brought together a group of skilled professionals who have the expertise to advise him on aspects of the school's effectiveness. This group is known as the school advisory board.
- The potential benefits of having an advisory board have not been fully realised. There is a lack of clarity about what the roles and responsibilities of the board are, including among staff and parents.
- Although the school advisory board has agreed terms of reference, these are not well adhered to. For example, some members have taken on more operational duties in the management of the school.
- Some members of the advisory board do not feel that their voices are heard or that they are treated equally. For example, some members of the board have access to information about complaints that others do not.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are not effective.
- Despite extensive good work in developing the school's safeguarding systems, the most senior leaders in the school have not followed the statutory guidance or school policy when managing allegations. This completely undermines the culture of safeguarding that had been developed.
- The required checks about the suitability of staff are in place. However, the school does not follow best practice in terms of obtaining references before interview and appointment.
- There is a suitable safeguarding policy that meets latest government guidance published on the school's website. However, important aspects of this regarding recruitment and dealing with allegations are not implemented effectively in practice.
- In recent years, the school has worked with the local authority to strengthen the training that staff receive about all aspects of safeguarding. Every member of staff that inspectors spoke to could clearly articulate their roles and responsibilities around safeguarding pupils. They explained the process they would follow if they had a concern about a pupil or a colleague.
- The designated safeguarding leader ensures that records are kept appropriately. He provides regular helpful updates to staff and opportunities to discuss and explore different aspects of safeguarding.
- Health and safety procedures are strong. Appropriate risk assessments are in place for a wide range of activities and for school trips.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Pupils enjoy learning and are normally very engaged in lessons. They have positive attitudes to their work.
- Teachers have high expectations about pupils' conduct and the content and presentation

of their work. Teachers' strong subject knowledge, skills in asking effective questions and clear demonstrations all contribute well to helping pupils make good progress, most notably in English and mathematics.

- Expert subject knowledge through specialist teaching, for example in art and Spanish, brings these subjects to life. Teachers' enthusiasm encourages pupils to do well.
- Adults check how well pupils are doing in lessons and sometimes reshape tasks to give extra support or challenge. However, sometimes tasks are not matched well to the ability of pupils. The few pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities are well supported in class.
- Assessment systems are secure. Teachers take considerable care to make sure that their assessments of pupils are valid. Older pupils are reflective about how their work can be improved and offer suggestions respectfully to each other.
- Homework is used well to help pupils deepen and apply the knowledge, understanding and skills they have learned in school. Parents are very happy about the homework their children receive.
- The teaching of fluency in calculation in mathematics is highly effective. Pupils also have some opportunities to solve problems. However, teaching is less effective in enabling pupils to develop their reasoning skills in mathematics.
- The deputy headteacher has an accurate view of the quality of teaching and learning in the school. For example, he recognises that pupils need more opportunities to write at length, including in subjects other than English.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Inadequate

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is inadequate. This is because senior leaders have not followed statutory safeguarding guidance or their own policies to ensure that pupils are safe and protected.
- Staff know pupils well and treat them as individuals. Teachers and teaching assistants care about the day-to-day well-being of pupils and ensure that they are happy at school.
- Older pupils' personal development is successfully promoted as they take on additional responsibilities. For example, they act as buddies to younger pupils, are anti-bullying ambassadors or have the role of prefect.
- Pupils, parents and staff have no concerns about bullying. Pupils understand the different forms bullying can take and are aware of how to express any concerns. This includes how to report online bullying.
- The school promotes pupils' physical well-being well. The increase in sporting activities and introduction of new, more popular school meals have contributed to this.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Behaviour in lessons is very positive. Pupils are focused and learn well. The vast majority of pupils take pride in their work and present it neatly.

- Around the school, pupils behave well. They take good care of equipment and each other. Once in a while, the behaviour of older pupils is overly boisterous in the playground.
- Behaviour records are detailed. Improvements in behaviour over time due to the school's use of proportionate sanctions are very clear.
- Attendance is improving and is in line with the average for primary schools nationally. The proportion of pupils who are frequently absent is reducing.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Across all year groups, the majority of pupils achieve at least age-related expectations in reading, writing and mathematics. Many pupils are exceeding these expectations in some aspects of the curriculum. As a result, pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, and many are able to achieve a place at local grammar schools, in line with the school's aims.
- In mathematics, pupils make very good progress in developing their fluency in calculation. Pupils make slower progress in deepening their understanding through reasoning about mathematics.
- Pupils read frequently and from a range of genres. They are taught to answer questions to show that they have an accurate comprehension of what they have read.
- When writing, pupils make their strongest progress in developing their accuracy in grammar, punctuation and spelling. They have fewer opportunities to write at length, and so make slower progress in this aspect of English.
- Pupils achieve well in art, music, and modern foreign languages such as French and Spanish, because of the specialist teaching they receive.

Early years provision

Inadequate

- As in the rest of the school, leaders have not ensured that arrangements for safeguarding in early years are effective. There are unmet independent school standards as a result.
- There are very positive transition arrangements between pre-Reception, Reception and Year 1. Adult-to-child ratios are very generous, meaning that each child is known and taught as a unique individual. Risk assessments are in place and followed carefully, and staff are trained in paediatric first aid.
- In recent years, every child has achieved a good level of development at the end of Reception, showing that they are well prepared for Year 1. Children make particularly strong progress in writing, where they develop clear letter formation and sound out words correctly.
- Children make strong progress in developing independence, and learn to cooperate and work well together. They enjoy playing and learning in the improved outdoor area and in the classroom. Children are very proud of their learning and are eager to share what they have been doing. At the time of the inspection, children were busy preparing for the 'royal wedding' between 'Harry Hedgehog' and 'Megan Mouse' in the castle role-play area.
- Teachers ask appropriate questions that make children think during independent learning

and play. They set up activities that challenge children to think and practise their skills such as counting 39 marbles. There is some inconsistency in the quality of phonics teaching.

School details

Unique reference number	118997
DfE registration number	886/6049
Inspection number	10039156

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 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	85
Number of part-time pupils	4
Proprietor	David and Alison Evans
Headteacher	David Evans
Annual fees (day pupils)	£9,975
Telephone number	01227 462960
Website	www.stchristopherscanterbury.org.uk
Email address	enquiries@stchristopherscanterbury.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	14–16 October 2014

Information about this school

- St Christopher's School is located close to the centre of Canterbury in a large, four-storey Victorian semi-detached house.
- The headteacher, known as 'The Master', is one of the proprietors.
- St Christopher's School provides non-selective education for girls and boys aged between three and 11. There are currently 85 pupils on roll.
- The proprietor has formed a school advisory board made up mainly of invited parents with relevant skills, experience and expertise.
- Approximately 8% of pupils have SEN and/or disabilities. No pupils have an education, health and care plan. None is in the care of the local authority.

- In their final year, the vast majority of pupils take external tests. If pupils achieve sufficiently well in these tests, they are able to transfer to local grammar schools.
- The school uses local facilities to deliver sports and physical education.
- The school's last full inspection was in October 2014. A further emergency inspection took place in June 2015. Progress monitoring visits have taken place in March 2015, January 2016 and October 2016.

Information about this inspection

- This inspection was unannounced at the request of the Department for Education.
- Inspectors observed learning in all classes and looked at examples of pupils' work. The deputy headteacher accompanied an inspector on some classroom visits.
- Inspectors met with different groups of staff throughout the inspection. Some of these staff had leadership responsibilities.
- Her Majesty's Inspector held meetings with the proprietor/headteacher and with four separate members of the school advisory board.
- Inspectors talked to pupils in lessons and around the school. They met more formally with a group of pupils and heard some pupils in Year 2 and Year 6 read.
- Inspectors considered the responses to 26 confidential staff questionnaires. They also looked at 21 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View, including 15 free-text comments. An inspector spoke to some parents before school.
- Inspectors looked at a wide range of school documentation, including documents related to safeguarding, health and safety, pupils' progress, the quality of teaching, and attendance and behaviour.
- Her Majesty's Inspector liaised with the local authority's designated officer when investigating the safeguarding culture of the school.

Inspection team

Lee Selby, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Teresa Davies

Ofsted Inspector

Annex. Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school must meet the following independent school standards

Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

- 7 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that—
 - 7(a) arrangements are made to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils at the school; and
 - 7(b) such arrangements have regard to any guidance issued by the Secretary of State.

Part 6. Provision of information

- 32(1) The standard about the provision of information by the school is met if the proprietor ensures that—
 - 32(1)(b) the information specified in sub-paragraph (3) is 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(3) The information specified in this sub-paragraph is—
 - 32(3)(f) details of the complaints procedure referred to in paragraph 33, and the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year

Part 7. Manner in which complaints are handled

- 33 The standard about the manner in which complaints are handled is met if the proprietor ensures that a complaints procedure is drawn up and effectively implemented which deals with the handling of complaints from parents of pupils and which—
 - 33(d) allows for a complaint to be made and considered initially on an informal basis;
 - 33(e) where the parent is not satisfied with the response to the complaint made in accordance with sub-paragraph (d), establishes a formal procedure for the complaint to be made in writing;
 - 33(f) where the parent is not satisfied with the response to the complaint made in accordance with sub-paragraph (e), makes provision for a hearing before a panel appointed by or on behalf of the proprietor and consisting of at least three people who were not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint;
 - 33(g) ensures that, where there is a panel hearing of a complaint, one panel member is independent of the management and running of the school;
 - 33(h) allows for a parent to attend and be accompanied at a panel hearing if they wish;

- 33(i) provides for the panel to make findings and recommendations and stipulates that a copy of those findings and recommendations is—
- 33(i)(i) provided to the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about; and
- 33(i)(ii) available for inspection on the school premises by the proprietor and the head teacher;
- 33(j) provides for a written record to be kept of all complaints that are made in accordance with sub-paragraph (e) and—
- 33(j)(i) whether they are resolved following a formal procedure, or proceed to a panel hearing; and
- 33(j)(ii) action taken by the school as a result of those complaints (regardless of whether they are upheld); and
- 33(k) provides that correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints are to be kept confidential except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 109 of the 2008 Act requests access to them.

Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

- 34(1) The standard about the quality of leadership and management is met if the proprietor ensures that persons with leadership and management responsibilities at the school—
 - 34(1)(a) demonstrate good skills and knowledge appropriate to their role so that the independent school standards are met consistently;
 - 34(1)(b) fulfil their responsibilities effectively so that the independent school standards are met consistently; and
 - 34(1)(c) actively promote the well-being of pupils.

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