

The Lincoln St Christopher's School

Hykeham Road, Lincoln, Lincolnshire LN6 8AR

Inspection dates

4–5 June 2019

Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Outstanding
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Outstanding
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Early years provision	Outstanding
16 to 19 study programmes	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Since the previous inspection, leaders have successfully led the school through a period of improvement. Staff share leaders' ambition for every pupil to achieve their best.
- The school's curriculum has been redesigned to ensure that it meets pupils' needs. Pupils are grouped according to the learning pathway that will enable them to make good progress.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social, cultural (SMSC) and personal development is promoted very well through the school's curriculum and the trusting relationships they build with adults.
- Relationships between staff and pupils are exemplary. Adults use a variety of highly effective strategies to communicate with pupils and to ensure that they are well cared for and kept safe.
- Governance of the school is strong. Governors are knowledgeable and provide good-quality support and challenge to school leaders. They are determined for all pupils to receive high-quality care and education.
- Leadership at all levels is a great strength of the school. Staff feel valued and are actively encouraged to 'step up' and contribute to the management of the school.
- Pupils are immensely proud of their school. They cooperate with each other in lessons and conduct themselves extremely well around the school.
- Pupils across the school, including those who are disadvantaged, make good progress from their starting points.
- Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education. They receive effective guidance, which supports them well in securing places in further education.
- Children in the early years make an outstanding start to their school life. Provision is precisely matched to their needs.
- The post-16 provision is good. Students are appropriately challenged to gain good examination grades and to participate in vocational courses. However, improvements to the variety and quality of courses are in the early stages of implementation.
- The quality of teaching and learning is good. However, too few pupils are taught to solve mathematical problems and explain their reasoning.
- Not all teachers use time in lessons productively to ensure that pupils make strong progress. This is particularly the case with the most able pupils.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Develop pupils' mathematical reasoning and problem-solving skills.
- Ensure that teachers across the school maximise time in lessons by consistently planning work that challenges all, and particularly the most able, pupils to achieve their very best.
- Maintain and build on the recent improvements in the range and quality of courses offered to post-16 students in order to raise their aspirations and broaden the options available for their future lives.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Outstanding

- School leaders have created a strong, cohesive leadership team. Leaders demonstrate a firm commitment to the school and a shared vision for every pupil to succeed to the best of their ability.
- Since the previous inspection, senior leaders have taken significant actions to rapidly improve the school. They set high expectations for staff and lead by example. Meticulous monitoring of pupils' personal development and well-being, as well as their academic achievements, ensures that pupils are well cared for and make good progress in their learning.
- The executive headteacher and acting headteacher are highly proficient in leading the necessary improvements in the school. Leaders' introduction of a new approach to the monitoring of the effectiveness of teaching and learning has successfully improved the quality of teaching. Teachers are held to account effectively through an in-depth 'spotlight' process of evaluation of their performance and of pupils' progress.
- Leaders place high priority on the continued professional development of staff. This has been instrumental in the improvements made to leadership and the quality of teaching. Staff say that a strong team ethos with a shared vision for pupils has been established. Opportunities for teachers to attend 'solution circles', where they can work with colleagues to discuss their practice and plan solutions to problems, have ensured that there is always someone who will listen when staff experience difficulties. A comment expressed by one member of staff typified the views of many, 'There is now a real team spirit and staff feel valued and proud to work at the school.'
- Leaders at all levels have an accurate and thorough understanding of the strengths of the school and the areas in need of development. Senior and middle leaders work together highly effectively to ensure that their vision for all pupils to achieve their best is realised.
- Middle leadership is an emerging strength of the school. Senior leaders have provided middle leaders with relevant, good-quality training and support to lead their areas of responsibility well. Middle leaders have a comprehensive understanding of their responsibilities and are eager to drive improvements forward to improve outcomes for all pupils. Members of staff who are aspiring leaders are ambitious and feel well supported by their colleagues to advance in their careers.
- School leaders continually review school improvement strategies to ensure that they are clear about what needs to be done to develop the school further. For example, leaders accurately identified that improvements to the teaching of mathematics were necessary. New resources have been purchased and relevant training for staff has taken place. Further training for the mathematics leader is planned in order to establish improved strategies for the teaching of mathematics across the school.
- The school's curriculum provides pupils with a range of learning experiences. There is a broad variety of interesting topics, projects and courses that develop pupils' understanding of SMSC issues well. Pupils have ample opportunities to use and apply their communication, English and mathematics skills in other subjects. Leaders' recent

introduction of a long-term plan to improve the curriculum has enabled teachers to develop their expertise and to focus more precisely on the knowledge and skills that pupils need to acquire. Different pathways of learning are tailored to meet the diverse and complex needs of pupils and enable them to make the best possible progress.

- Leaders have established comprehensive systems to evaluate pupils' progress in reading, writing, mathematics, communication and cognition. Leaders methodically analyse and respond to the information staff provide. If pupils make less progress than they should, leaders ensure that appropriate support is promptly provided.
- Information from pupils' education, health and care (EHC) plans is used to inform teaching strategies and identify accurately pupils' personal and academic targets. Leaders ensure that additional adult support and activities are precisely planned to meet pupils' needs. Regular reviews are carried out in a timely way with parents and carers and external agencies to reflect pupils' progress and changing circumstances.
- School leaders use effectively the pupil premium to support disadvantaged pupils. These pupils receive additional support designed to raise their achievement, enhance their social and emotional development and meet their personal targets.
- Leaders work collaboratively with the federated school and have established effective links with other local schools and with a variety of external agencies. They use these links to check the impact of their actions to improve the school.
- Staff work tirelessly to make sure that parents are well-informed and active partners in pupils' education. For example, parents are invited to attend workshops and stay and play sessions, which help them with strategies to support their children at home. Parents are actively involved in reviews of their children's learning, personal development and transition to the next stages of their education.
- The antiquated school building is increasingly unsuitable for the complex needs of pupils attending the school. However, leaders and staff are resilient and make the most of every available space in the building to ensure that pupils are safe, well looked after and their needs are met. Nevertheless, leaders have had to make the decision to educate the majority of post-16 students at the federated school site where the space and facilities are much more suited to their requirements.

Governance of the school

- Members of the governing body for the federation bring a wealth of relevant knowledge and experience to their roles. They support the executive headteacher and acting headteacher well in the strategic oversight of the school's performance.
- Governors have successfully driven the necessary improvements to the school since the previous inspection. They provide strong governance for the school.
- Members of the governing body talk perceptively about the key areas of the school's performance, including safeguarding, the impact of additional funding, the achievement of pupils and the effectiveness of the curriculum.
- Governors receive a range of information from leaders that ensures that they are well informed. They check the accuracy of the information they receive through visits to school and regular meetings with leaders, staff and pupils.

- Governors are resilient and demonstrate a strong commitment to the school and to pupils. Governors' determination to provide pupils with a safe and aspirational education is realised in the pupils' behaviour, relationships between pupils and staff, and the school's curriculum.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. There is a strong culture of safeguarding across the school. The necessary employment checks are carried out on the suitability of all staff working in the school.
- Leaders for safeguarding ensure that all staff receive regular and appropriate safeguarding training. Staff are well informed about safeguarding practices and about the pupils in the school. They are alert to signs that may indicate that a pupil may be at risk or may be vulnerable. Leaders take prompt action when concerns are raised.
- Potential risks are managed well by leaders, which means that pupils have good opportunities to develop their independence as well as work with others. They are supported to understand the impact of their behaviour on one another.
- Pupils in need of high levels of care and supervision are supported very well. This support does not compromise pupils' capacity to make choices and to accept the consequences when things do not turn out as intended.
- Systems to safeguard pupils are understood by all staff. Leaders keep meticulous records of any incidents that occur. Records for safeguarding show that leaders work diligently to ensure that vulnerable families receive the support they need. Leaders work very effectively with external agencies, when necessary, to ensure pupils' well-being and safety.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- The quality of teaching is good. Since the previous inspection, changes to teaching staff, and high-quality training and support from senior leaders, have swiftly improved the quality of teaching and learning. Where teaching is less effective, leaders provide targeted support so that it improves.
- Relationships between pupils and adults are strong because staff know pupils well. They have a comprehensive understanding of individual pupils' personal needs and learning targets. Mixed-age learning 'pathway' class groups enable staff to support pupils according to their needs and ensure that they make progress in their learning. Pupils are able to build trusting relationships with adults. Teachers ensure that pupils who are anxious or in need of extra support socially and emotionally always have someone to turn to or somewhere safe to go.
- Teachers are raising their expectations of what pupils can achieve. They use good-quality texts and resources to interest pupils in their learning. The majority of teachers expect pupils to review their learning and to look critically at their own work, as well as the work of their peers. Pupils understand that this helps them to improve their work. For example, key stage 2 pupils were learning how to improve their sentence structure based on their prior reading of the text, 'Suddenly' by Colin McNaughton. The teacher

encouraged pupils to use their previous knowledge of punctuation and sounds to spell words and to write extended sentences.

- Teachers and teaching assistants use questioning well to consolidate pupils' learning and develop their vocabulary. Where questioning was most effective, it encouraged pupils to explain what they were learning and make choices based on their prior knowledge, which helped to clarify misunderstandings. For example, in a key stage 3 English lesson, the teacher's precise questioning enabled pupils to identify unsuitable language and phrases in a formal email accurately.
- The teaching of phonics is effective. Teachers ensure that, where possible, pupils gain a knowledge of phonics to communicate verbally or through the use of sign language or technology. Pupils from across the school who read to inspectors did so with enjoyment and expression. The majority read with fluency and most demonstrated good or developing comprehension skills.
- Teachers plan topics of learning to extend pupils' knowledge and skills in different areas of the curriculum. Visitors to school and trips to places of interest deepen pupils' learning and broaden their life experiences. For example, members of the emergency services visited the school as part of a recent 'keeping healthy, keeping safe' project.
- Teachers prioritise the development of pupils' communication skills. Where pupils use pictures and technology to communicate, teachers encourage them to create sentences, make choices and answer questions. Where pupils are able to write, teachers encourage them to write for a variety of purposes. For example, key stage 3 pupils developed their imaginative writing skills by writing humorous diary entries about what they might do if they were prime minister for the day. They were enthused and excited by the topic. One very imaginative example was, 'I went running into Buckingham Palace throwing pancakes at the Queen. I then jumped into my golden Lamborghini and drove away.' Writing is often linked to curriculum topics that inspire pupils to write imaginatively and factually. For example, scrutiny of pupils' books showed pupils developing their writing skills through topics in science and history.
- Improvements to the way mathematics is taught have ensured that there is a more consistent approach across the school. Many pupils find aspects of mathematics challenging and require constant repetition and consolidation in areas such as handling money and understanding time. Leaders have identified that problem-solving skills are not taught consistently well. As a result, although some pupils are able to complete problem-solving questions, not enough pupils have developed effective problem-solving skills. Also, too few pupils are encouraged to reason mathematically.
- Teachers use their ongoing assessments of pupils' progress against their learning and developmental targets to plan work to meet pupils' needs. However, not all teachers ensure that pupils, particularly the most able pupils, are appropriately challenged in their work. This is compounded by the fact that some teachers do not use the time available in lessons as well as they could to maximise pupils' learning. For example, in some lessons, pupils sit and wait for teachers to move them on in their learning. Consequently, not all pupils make the progress that they could.

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- Relationships between pupils and adults in the school are excellent. Staff know pupils very well and are nurturing and positive. Staff across the school use a range of effective strategies to keep pupils safe, reassure them and enable them to make progress in their learning and development. As a result, pupils trust staff, feel valued, are interested in their learning and are proud of their school. This is exemplified in a whole-school display where each pupil contributed a print of their hand. The caption around the picture reads, 'We're all unique and beautiful but together we are a masterpiece.'
- Staff provide motivating learning environments that inspire and support pupils to learn. Comfortable, thoughtfully created areas, both indoor and outdoor, provide pupils with spaces to take time out to reduce their anxieties and calm their behaviour.
- Parents who spoke with inspectors and the majority of parents who responded to Ofsted's free-text service were extremely positive about the way staff support them and their children. A typical comment from parents was, 'The school is inclusive. Staff are dedicated and have an insatiable drive to provide the very best to all their pupils.'
- Pupils experience and enjoy responsibility through their elected positions as members of the school council and as sports or well-being leaders. Through these roles, they are involved in decision-making and competitions for the school and organise fundraising events for charities.
- Pupils are taught how to stay safe in a range of situations, including when using social media and the internet. Older pupils learn vital life skills to help prepare them for living independently, including training in how to travel safely on public transport. Pupils receive very effective support for their mental health through the school's curriculum and through the support of the 'well-being team'.
- From a young age, pupils are encouraged to develop their independence skills. For example, staff provide regular 'sabotage' experiences and attention-focusing activities as part of everyday learning to encourage pupils to think for themselves and cope with unexpected events. Inspectors saw examples where pupils could not find what they wanted because adults had made it deliberately difficult for them. Pupils were then supported to work out how to communicate what they needed to find the missing equipment themselves. In another lesson, where pupils were learning to sustain their attention by observing and listening carefully, pupils were thoroughly entranced when the teacher made a lemonade fountain.
- Pupils are well prepared for transition to post-16 education and training by effective careers guidance and the careful planning of school visitors and work experience placements. Highly effective relationships with staff in the post-16 provision, the federated school and local colleges enable pupils to settle quickly into the courses of their choice.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding.
- Pupils are respectful and polite and have good attitudes to learning. There is a calm atmosphere across the school that is highly conducive to learning.
- Pupils have an excellent understanding of the school's expectations for their behaviour. Behaviour in the classrooms and around the school is outstanding as a result. Parents who spoke with inspectors, and the vast majority of parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, agreed that pupils are well behaved.
- School leaders have established very effective systems for staff to help pupils manage their behaviour. When pupils struggle to manage their behaviour or become extremely anxious, staff respond swiftly and skilfully to ensure that the behaviour does not disrupt other pupils. Pupils are given time and support to help manage their behaviour in a caring, safe environment. Older pupils spoke positively about how they are increasingly able to recognise when their behaviour maybe escalating and can independently take steps to remove themselves from a situation.
- Pupils are kept safe and feel safe in the school. The majority have a good understanding of what constitutes bullying. They know who to talk to if they have any worries and are confident that any problems will be resolved. The recent creation of the 'well-being team' is highly valued by pupils and parents. The team ensures that pupils, staff and parents are well supported.
- Pupils are proud of their school and of their achievements. Older pupils support younger pupils in a caring and responsible way. During the inspection, pupils were eager to talk about their work and keen to show inspectors their achievements. For example, one pupil showed an inspector his design for the new school logo. He also proudly explained that a mural he designed recently was soon to be displayed at the new tri-station (housing fire and rescue, ambulance and police services) in Lincoln.
- Pupils are keen to come to school and enjoy their learning. Attendance has been above or in line with the national average for at least three years. Leaders work very effectively with families and external agencies to ensure that pupils are safe and attend school every day.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Evidence seen in lessons and in pupils' books, and information provided by the school, indicate that the majority of current pupils across the school are making good progress in different subjects and in their personal, social and emotional development.
- Pathways of learning are precisely matched to pupils' needs. This enables pupils to make good progress against their individual targets.
- Pupils make good progress in developing their communication and cognition skills.
- Disadvantaged pupils make good progress from their starting points, in line with their in-school peers.
- Pupils are encouraged and challenged to gain relevant qualifications that are necessary for their chosen college courses and interests as well as for their future careers.

- In 2018, all pupils who left the school at the end of Year 11 achieved or exceeded their target qualifications in English and mathematics. In addition, all pupils achieved a level 2 pass in the employability course.
- In 2018, all Year 11 pupils gained a place at college or moved on to the school's post-16 provision. Leaders provide good-quality impartial advice and effective guidance to pupils to help inform their future career choices. Pupils have meaningful work placements and experiences, which ensure that they are very well equipped for the next stage of their education.
- Staff work closely with pupils, parents and external agencies to review pupils' progress in respect of their EHC plan. They ensure that pupils' next steps are appropriate to their needs.
- Some pupils do not make the progress they should in their learning. This is particularly the case for the most able pupils.
- Some pupils do not make the progress they should in mathematics. This is because their problem-solving and reasoning skills are underdeveloped.

Early years provision

Outstanding

- Leadership of the early years provision is outstanding. The complex and varied needs of children entering the provision are carefully considered. Staff work closely with parents and external agencies to plan activities to meet children's individual needs precisely.
- Leaders are extremely knowledgeable and have high expectations for children's learning. They ensure that staff working with children in the early years are highly trained. Adults have the necessary skills to provide children with good-quality support and care. For example, adults competently use sign language and pictorial clues to communicate with children who are unable to verbalise their needs. Children are increasingly able to use these tools effectively to communicate with adults within the school and at home.
- Teachers' thorough and ongoing assessment of children's needs and abilities is ensuring that all children, including those who are disadvantaged, make good progress from their starting points. Children are very well prepared for the next stages of their education. Skilled adult support and effective assessment procedures accurately contribute to subsequent steps in children's learning and development.
- Children in the early years are very well cared for and procedures for keeping them safe are effective. The classroom environment is a calm and safe place for children to learn. They benefit from a well-structured curriculum that engages and stimulates their interests. Adults place high priority on extending children's communication and cognition skills. Adults use repetition of spoken language, questioning and repeated modelling of communication methods to encourage children to think for themselves and make decisions. For example, at snack time, adults encourage children to independently use their chosen method of communication to make choices about what snack they would like to eat. Some children use pictures to communicate their preferred choices while others use hand gestures, and some made verbal choices.
- The classroom environments provide children with exciting opportunities to develop

their knowledge and understanding in different areas of the curriculum. For example, children can develop their physical skills in the outdoor soft play area. Adults expertly play alongside children in the many indoor and outdoor activities to show them how to play and to develop their language and understanding. Children are often absorbed in their learning.

- Relationships between adults and children are extremely good. Well-structured routines and procedures mean that children move happily around the classroom spaces and behave exceptionally well. Adults know children well. Children are nurtured and make a good start to their school lives as a result.

16 to 19 study programmes

Good

- Leadership of the post-16 provision is good. Since the previous inspection, a new leader for the provision has been appointed and more-able students now access a wider range of courses.
- Leaders closely check the quality of the provision. This includes checking on the quality of teaching and learning, the progress students make, and their attendance. Senior leaders have a thorough understanding of the strengths of the provision and the areas in need of further improvement.
- The rapidly increasing number of pupils attending the school and the limited space available in the building have restricted the number of courses the school has been able to offer in the past, particularly for the most able students. However, the federation with St Francis Special School has enabled leaders of the federation to work collaboratively to ensure that students have access to courses across the federation that are relevant to their needs, interests and chosen career paths. For example, current students are studying courses such as horticulture, hair and beauty, cooking, animal care and functional skills in English and mathematics.
- The quality of teaching and learning is now good after a period of improvement which is still ongoing. The majority of teachers plan learning well to ensure that activities allow students to make good progress, including in their personal development. Teachers and teaching assistants use questioning skilfully to check students' understanding and encourage them to think more deeply.
- Students who require continual support to meet their personal and academic needs are sensitively cared for by skilled staff. Staff use a range of communication techniques to enable students to express their needs and develop their cognition and social and emotional understanding.
- Students have regular opportunities to develop their understanding of independent living and skills necessary for everyday life such as travelling on public transport, shopping and cooking healthy meals. All students take part in work experience opportunities where they develop and practise the skills needed for possible future careers.
- Retention of students from Year 11 into the post-16 provision is high because of the strong care and guidance students receive. At the end of Year 14, the vast majority of students move on to further education or training. In 2018, all students leaving the provision moved on to further education.

- Students learn how to be safe, including online and when out in the community. Adults support students to be independent and aware of potential risks.
- Students' behaviour is extremely good. They have positive attitudes to their work, enjoy being at school and are proud to be a member of the school community.
- Transitions to further education, training or employment are carefully planned with parents and students to ensure that students make the best choices for their future lives. Leaders liaise closely with the local authority and parents to ensure that students who move into adult care services receive the appropriate support and care.
- Although students are now able to access a wider range of options in relation to academic and vocational courses, arrangements are still in the early stages of development and have not yet had time to demonstrate sustained strong impact on pupils' outcomes.
- Students receive good-quality, impartial careers advice and guidance to help them to make decisions about their next steps when they leave the post-16 provision. However, leaders are ambitious to build on the success of students now accessing the wider variety of courses available through the federation. Plans are in place to develop further the quality and frequency of the careers advice and guidance to raise students' aspirations and broaden their options for future careers.

School details

Unique reference number	120754
Local authority	Lincolnshire
Inspection number	10053109

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

Type of school	All-through
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	3 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	238
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	21
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Nigel Sisley
Executive headteacher	Ann Hoffmann
Acting headteacher	Kyna Adkins
Telephone number	01522 528378
Website	www.lincolnstchristophers.com
Email address	enquiries@lincolnstchristophers.com
Date of previous inspection	23 January 2018

Information about this school

- The Lincoln St Christopher's School provides education for pupils with moderate, severe and profound, and multiple learning needs. Many of the pupils have autism spectrum disorder.
- All pupils have an EHC plan.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is above the national average.
- Pupils are often taught in mixed-age classes where they access learning pathways to suit their needs.

- The school is part of The Federation of St Francis Special School Lincoln and The Lincoln St Christopher's School.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching in all year groups. This included some lessons that were observed jointly with leaders.
- Inspectors observed the teaching of reading and listened to pupils reading. Inspectors talked with children, pupils and students about their school and looked at examples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors held meetings with the acting headteacher, the assistant headteachers, the coordinator of the provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and several middle leaders. They also spoke to several members of staff including those who are aspiring for leadership roles. The lead inspector met with the vice-chair of the governing body and had a telephone conversation with the governor responsible for safeguarding. The lead inspector also held telephone conversations with the school improvement partner for the local authority and the executive headteacher of the federation.
- Inspectors met formally with a group of five parents during the inspection. They took account of the 31 responses to the Ofsted online questionnaire, Parent View, and the 30 free-text responses received during the inspection. They also considered the 51 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaires for staff, and the 87 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaires for pupils.
- Inspectors looked at a range of documents, including: the school's self-evaluation of current performance and plans for improvement; the school's most recent information on achievement and progress; information relating to safeguarding; information about behaviour management; information relating to the school's use of the pupil premium funding and funding for pupils with SEND; the school's most recent information relating to attendance; and minutes of the governing body meetings.

Inspection team

Stephanie Innes-Taylor, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Jackie Thornalley	Ofsted Inspector
John Edwards	Ofsted Inspector

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