

Inspection of a good school: St Christophers Academy

Gorham Way, Dunstable, Bedfordshire LU5 4NJ

Inspection dates:

26–27 September 2019

Outcome

St Christophers Academy continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Staff get all the important things right. They know that to do well pupils first need to feel happy, safe and motivated. Pupils enjoy school. As well as enthusing about their friends and their favourite subjects, they told me all about the many trips and after-school activities they can do, including lots of sport, music and the choir.

Pupils of all ages have positive attitudes to learning. In class, they behave exceptionally well, concentrate hard and try their best. Pupils say that football can be boisterous at times, but that bullying is uncommon. Importantly, they are confident that teachers will quickly sort out any problems. Teachers know when to discipline individuals, when to change unacceptable behaviour.

Teachers have the highest expectations and aspirations for everyone, regardless of pupils' background, starting point or their needs. The careers week, earlier this year, showcased this beautifully. Pupils enjoyed the trips and work-related activities and loved going to London, many for the first time. The published booklet, entitled 'In twenty years' time', where pupils set out their future hopes, is inspiring to read.

Pupils achieve well at St Christophers and are understandably very proud of their school.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

Pupils achieve well at St Christophers. They develop into confident and ambitious young people who are well prepared for life in secondary school. Learning begins from the minute that two-year-olds start playing in the Nursery: learning rhymes and songs, counting and using the playground as a massive canvass for their mark-making and first letters.

Pupils' good behaviour contributes to their positive achievement. Although just a few weeks into a new term, the youngest children are already settled and focus well on their different learning activities.

Pupils genuinely have 'a voice'. In lessons they are expected to say what they think and explain why. They are encouraged to improve the school by agreeing class rules, using the suggestions box and as representatives on the school council.

Provision in the core subjects of reading, writing and mathematics has strengthened since the last inspection, so that most pupils reach the expected standard by age 11. The development of pupils' reading is a real strength of the school's work. Phonics (letters and the sounds they represent) and early reading are taught systematically and skilfully. There is a shared determination amongst staff to make all pupils keen, confident, fluent readers. Weaker readers quickly catch up. Adults instil in pupils a love of reading by reading aloud, enthusing about books and making sure that pupils choose interesting and challenging texts. Across all subjects, teachers take every opportunity to expand pupils' vocabulary. They do not shy away from using difficult language, including in a Shakespeare workshop during the inspection.

Mathematics teaching is based on the principle that 'everyone can do maths'. Teaching is well planned to make sure that pupils' learning builds securely, right through from early years to Year 6. Pupils are given the confidence to succeed but are taught that it is OK to get things wrong. In lessons, teachers check that pupils understand before they move on. In general, this works well but at times the better mathematicians do not always feel stretched and say they could do more.

Leaders say that, beyond mathematics and English, other subjects are at different stages of development. The history and geography subject leaders have worked hard to review the curriculum. Subjects such as art, design, languages and computing need further development. Specialist planning and teaching brings obvious benefits. In geography, for example, the recent changes provide better subject coverage, more precision about what pupils need to know, and greater challenge as they move through key stage 2. It is clear, however, from talking to pupils and looking at their work, that they still have significant gaps in their knowledge. This limits their later learning. New topics are interesting and relevant, but teachers do not yet know the different subjects well enough to make connections and revisit previous learning. In geography, for example, teachers need to link pupils' learning with real places on the class map, and at different scales, and make reference to pupils' learning in science. Pupils are taught some things they do not need to know, at the expense of others.

Parents are overwhelmingly positive about the school. They really appreciate the support that teachers provide for them and their children, particularly pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). The needs of pupils with SEND are carefully mapped so that teachers know exactly how to promote their learning in each subject.

Support from the trust is relatively light touch because the school is in good hands. The principal and vice-principal make their high expectations clear to staff, and lead by example. Staff like taking responsibility for leading developments, but leaders are mindful of the need to keep an eye on people's work/life balance. Responses to last year's staff workload survey have informed a number of positive changes in the way things are done.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

The school has established a strong safeguarding culture. Leaders are meticulous in ensuring that the school meets all statutory requirements in regard to safeguarding procedures, staff recruitment and training, and also with record-keeping. The trust undertakes routine checks to confirm compliance with the most recent guidance.

Adults are acutely aware of their responsibilities in regard to safeguarding and are alert to indications that any child might be unhappy or in any way vulnerable. There are clear procedures for referring and escalating safeguarding concerns to external agencies. When these agencies are slow to respond or deem that a case does not meet their threshold, the school is tenacious in following up issues.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Mathematics teaching is well planned but is not delivered consistently well. Teachers need to provide stretch and challenge for more-confident and knowledgeable pupils.
- Teaching in English and mathematics is well established. Other curriculum areas are at different stages of development. The school's work on curriculum areas such as geography and history has gone well. Subject leaders now need to evaluate teaching to ensure that teachers are clear about the essential knowledge that pupils need to learn in every subject, and the links between knowledge taught in different subjects.

Background

When we have judged a school to be good, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. This is called a section 8 inspection of a good school or non-exempt outstanding school. We do not give graded judgements on a section 8 inspection. However, if we find some evidence that the school could now be better than good or that standards may be declining, then the next inspection will be a section 5 inspection. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the section 8 inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will convert the section 8 inspection to a section 5 inspection immediately.

This is the second section 8 inspection since we judged the predecessor school, St Christophers Lower School, to be good on 26 January 2012.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use Ofsted Parent View information when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

If you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

School details

Unique reference number	138021
Local authority	Central Bedfordshire
Inspection number	10110271
Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	2 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	291
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Ilona Bond
Principal	Pam Jones
Website	www.stchristophersacademy.org
Date of previous inspection	9 February 2016

Information about this school

- St Christophers converted to become an academy in September 2012. The academy joined the Bedfordshire Academy Trust (BEST) in September 2017.
- Children can start at the Nursery after their second birthday.
- An after-school club is managed by an external provider.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector held meetings with the principal, vice principal and school leaders, including the special educational needs coordinator, and school staff. He met with the chair of the local governing body and representatives from the trust. During the inspection, the inspector spoke formally and informally to pupils about their work and about other aspects of school life.
- The subjects considered as part of this inspection were reading, mathematics and geography. In each subject the inspector visited lessons, looked at the work in pupils' books, and held discussions with subject leaders, teachers and pupils.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspector reviewed school policies, procedures and records, including recruitment checks of adults working at the school. The inspector met with the designated safeguarding leader and spoke with pupils and

staff.

- The inspector spoke with parents as they arrived with their children on the first day of the inspection, and also considered 54 responses on Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, including 33 free-text messages. The responses from the nine members of staff who submitted the staff questionnaire were also evaluated.

Inspection team

Paul Brooker

Her Majesty's Inspector

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