

Inspection of a good school: St Christopher's Academy

St Christopher's Hall, Renfrew Road, Ipswich, Suffolk IP4 3HG

Inspection dates:

11 and 12 May 2022

Outcome

St Christopher's Academy continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils who have missed long periods of schooling due to their medical health needs learn to re-engage and enjoy school again. Although this provision is new, it is already making a difference to pupils' lives. Pupils gain renewed confidence and self-esteem because of the high-quality care and support provided for them. Pupils' parents describe the school as 'fantastic' and 'life-changing'.

Pupils are welcomed into school and behave well in and out of lessons. Pupils feel safe and bullying does not happen. Staff find out about pupils' previous learning, needs and interests. They use this information to provide pupils with a personalised learning plan. These plans combine learning and support in school with taking part in lessons taught online and at other schools. Over time, pupils are helped to return to their previous schools.

Pupils thrive in the caring and supportive environment. They attend regularly and catch up quickly. As pupils develop routines and understand the expectations of them, they begin to engage fully in school life. They forge good relations with staff and learn how to manage their emotions, take responsibility and become more independent. Reading and mathematics are prioritised so that gaps in pupils' knowledge are filled. They develop a firm grounding in basic skills.

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

All pupils have a four-week induction programme where staff pinpoint what needs to be done to enable pupils to return to school and begin to catch up with their learning. Staff produce an individual health plan and a separate learning plan. Promoting pupils' social and emotional well-being underpins much of the school's work. Tailored care and support enable pupils to overcome barriers that have prevented them from previously attending school regularly. Once pupils feel safe and valued, they begin to enjoy school life.

Pupils are registered at this alternative provision and at a maintained school. The design and implementation of the curriculum are the responsibility of their mainstream schools. Pupils take part in lessons in English, mathematics, science and a range of foundation subjects using a 'robot'. Pupils use this tool to engage in and contribute to lessons remotely, in school or from home. Parents and staff praise the use of this innovative technology. Pupils can learn alongside their classmates and regain the confidence they need to return to mainstream school. However, the full impact of this is unclear as leaders do not monitor the quality or quantity of work completed.

Staff identify gaps in pupils' previous learning using a range of assessments. They also identify other special needs that have not been spotted previously. Reading is taught systematically using proven resources provided by the trust. Suitable texts are chosen and are matched to pupils' reading ages. Books relate to topical issues such as illness, disability, morality and relationships that pupils find meaningful. In additional mathematics lessons, pupils work on gaps in their knowledge and understanding. Pupils quickly gain in confidence and begin to catch up due to the effective one-to-one support they receive.

Pupils who have not attended well in the past now attend regularly. They engage well with staff because, eventually, they aim to return to their mainstream school. Experienced staff are adept at sensitively managing pupils' feelings and emotions. Staff prompt meaningful conversations with pupils about their future and what interests them. Those pupils with an interest in animals have regular work experience at a local community farm.

The trust has made changes to its admissions procedures this year to meet the needs of pupils with significant medical and mental health issues. The provision is new, but it is working well. Parents and staff at local mainstream schools comment favourably on the impact of the school in providing pupils with a pathway back into learning. Trust leaders and the local authority work together, but in the local community the purpose and the impact the school is having remain underdeveloped. Leaders' checking of what is working well and what needs improving further is not sufficiently rigorous.

In discussion with the headteacher, it was agreed that leaders' marketing of the school and its provision, together with monitoring and evaluation of the impact of leaders' work, may usefully serve as a focus for the next inspection.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

There is a strong culture of safeguarding. All of the necessary checks are made when appointing adults to work with children. Experienced trust leaders ensure staff are well trained in safeguarding. They understand fully the additional risks pupils face. They ensure that staff know and use the procedures if they have a concern. Leaders make regular checks that concerns raised are followed up in a timely and effective way. Partnerships with local support agencies are well established. The trust has a police community support officer to support staff in managing serious safeguarding concerns.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Changes have been made to the school this year to enable it to better meet the needs of pupils with significant medical and mental health issues. This provision is new. More needs to be done to raise awareness of leaders' purpose and what they aim to achieve. In conjunction with the local authority, leaders should ensure that other school leaders are fully informed of the school's purpose and aims, its admissions criteria and the process of referring pupils to the school.
- Monitoring of the impact of the school's work is underdeveloped. Leaders should put in place robust, systematic procedures to monitor and evaluate how effectively pupils learn. This should include gauging the quality of their learning on site, or remotely, when using the 'robot' to attend lessons taught at their mainstream schools.

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 or outstanding school, because it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on a section 8 inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, 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 deem the section 8 inspection as a section 5 inspection immediately.

This is the first section 8 inspection since we judged the predecessor school, St Christopher's, to be good in June 2013.

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 information from Ofsted Parent View 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 the school and 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	143490
Local authority	Suffolk
Inspection number	10227555
Type of school	Alternative provision
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	7 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	2
Appropriate authority	The Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Angela Ransby (Chief Executive Officer of Trust)
Teacher in charge	Cath Sparrow
Website	www.raedwaldtrust.org
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The school caters for pupils with medical health needs. Pupils have missed long periods of schooling due to surgery or concerns about their social, emotional and mental health.
- Referrals are made by the local authority, supported by the local Medical Needs in Schools team.
- Pupils are dual-registered with their mainstream school. The intention is, following a short stay in school, to reintegrate them back into their previous schools.
- The school converted to an academy in December 2017. It is part of the Raedwald Trust.

Information about this inspection

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the chief executive officer and two other senior leaders of the Raedwald Trust, the lead teacher, and other support staff.

- An inspector held telephone conversations with leaders from local secondary schools, parents, and a representative of Suffolk local authority.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives into reading and mathematics. This included discussions with leaders, scrutiny of planning documents, visits to lessons and scrutiny of pupils' work.
- Inspectors scrutinised the school's single central record and met with the designated leaders for safeguarding.
- Inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted's staff survey. There were no responses to Ofsted Parent View or Ofsted's survey of pupils' views.

Inspection team

John Mitcheson, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Sue Cox

Ofsted Inspector

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