

Inspection of St Christophers Academy

Gorham Way, Dunstable, Bedfordshire LU5 4NJ

Inspection dates:	4 and 5 February 2025
The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Early years provision	Good
Previous inspection grade	Good

The executive principal of this school is Thomas Clarke. This school is part of Bedfordshire Schools Trust (BEST), which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer (CEO), Alan Lee, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Ilona Bond. The executive principal is responsible for this school and one other.

What is it like to attend this school?

The school's core values of ambition, community, respect and responsibility are threaded through all aspects of life at St Christophers Academy. Pupils are friendly, polite and welcoming. Typically, pupils behave sensibly around the school and focus well on their learning. They are happy and sociable at break and lunchtimes.

There is a culture of aspiration for pupils' academic and wider development. Pupils rise to adults' high expectations and learn well, particularly in the core subjects of reading, writing and mathematics. Pupils develop a sense of responsibility and strength of character through leadership opportunities. Eco councillors look after the school environment, saving energy and litter-picking. School councillors suggest improvements to school life. Members of the junior leadership team are excellent ambassadors for the school. They are positive role models for their peers.

Pupils celebrate the differences between them in a richly diverse school community. They learn about other cultures through special events or themed days such as Chinese New Year, Diwali and 'French Day'. Pupils relish the trips they go on to enhance their learning. These include museums, the zoo or a science, technology, engineering and mathematics discovery centre. External visitors inspire pupils to consider the options for their future careers.

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

The school has designed an ambitious curriculum. The curriculum is well structured and sets out the steps of learning in each subject, from the early years through to Year 6. This helps teachers to know what to teach and when to teach it. It supports pupils to build their knowledge securely over time.

Each lesson starts with a recap of prior learning. Teachers help pupils to remember what they have learned and apply it to new, more complex concepts. Teachers explain things clearly. They give pupils opportunities to practise and apply their learning. In the early years, staff design activities skilfully. These promote children's curiosity and help them to learn through play. Occasionally, the resources or tasks staff provide are not adapted to meet pupils' needs. They do not always enable pupils who need additional support to succeed or stretch pupils who are ready for deeper learning.

Teachers check pupils' understanding regularly. This helps them identify and address misconceptions. In the early years, adults use high-quality interactions to assess children's knowledge. They move children's learning on by joining in with play, for example, modelling new language so that children develop a rich vocabulary. In English and mathematics, the school uses information about what pupils know and can remember effectively to improve the curriculum. In other subjects, this approach is not as well developed. The school's overview of how well the curriculum is working is not as strong as it could be.

The school has strengthened the way it identifies pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). It puts plans in place promptly to support pupils with SEND. Overall, pupils with SEND access the same curriculum as their peers and achieve well. Occasionally, however, the weaknesses in adapted resources or tasks described above hinder their progress.

Reading is a priority. From the early years through to Year 6 the curriculum is book based. High-quality texts underpin learning in a range of subjects. Pupils are encouraged to read regularly and widely. The book vending machine and reading achievement badges motivate them further. In the early years, stories, songs and rhymes prepare children for reading. Throughout the Reception Year and key stage 1, skilled adults teach daily phonics lessons effectively. Pupils learn the knowledge and skills they need to decode words. Any pupils who fall behind get the extra help they need to help them to catch up.

The school has introduced a new approach to managing pupils' behaviour, underpinned by the school's core values. Overall, pupils behave well and have positive attitudes. However, there are inconsistencies in the way the school's expectations are applied by staff and understood by pupils. While some pupils' negative view of behaviour is informed by historic incidents, other pupils' current experience is that their learning is occasionally disrupted by poor behaviour.

The provision for pupils' personal development is strong. Pupils learn about personal safety, healthy relationships and the fundamental British values in an age-appropriate way. Their understanding of diversity, equality and tolerance are well developed. Extra-curricular clubs offer pupils the chance to develop new interests. Community-based activities and charitable fundraising promote citizenship.

Since the last inspection, there have been many changes at the school, including to staffing. These have led some parents to have a negative view of the school. The trust has supported the school through a challenging period. It provides development opportunities and well-being support, so that staff can be effective in their roles. Trustees and governors support and challenge leaders to realise their vision of a high-quality education for every pupil.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Sometimes, the resources or activities staff give to pupils are not well matched to pupils' needs, including pupils with SEND. This hinders pupils' access to the curriculum, or their progress through it. The school and trust should support staff to adapt the

curriculum and design learning activities effectively that support all pupils to achieve well.

- The school's approach to assessment is not as well developed in foundation subjects as it is in English and mathematics. As a result, the school does not have the information it needs about how well pupils learn the curriculum and therefore, what is going well and where improvements can be made. The school and trust should strengthen assessment in foundation subjects so that areas for improvement can be identified and acted upon.
- The school's revised approach to managing behaviour is not consistently applied by staff or fully understood by pupils. Some pupils' learning is disrupted by the behaviour of their peers. The school and trust should ensure that staff and pupils fully understand the expectations of behaviour and the school's new approach to behaviour management.

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.

Further information

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

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	138021
Local authority	Central Bedfordshire
Inspection number	10345333
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	427
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Ilona Bond
CEO of the trust	Alan Lee
Principal	Thomas Clarke (executive principal)
Website	www.stchristophersacademy.org
Dates of previous inspection	26 and 27 September 2019, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- This school is part of the Bedfordshire Schools Trust (BEST). It joined the trust in September 2017.
- There have been significant changes in staffing, governance and leadership since the last inspection. The executive principal took up the post on an interim basis in June 2023 and substantively in March 2024. The head of school was appointed substantively in March 2024.
- There is wraparound care before and after school. This is run and managed by the school.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.
- There is provision at the school for two-year-olds.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. During a graded inspection, we grade the school for each of our key judgements (quality of education; behaviour and attitudes; personal development; and leadership and management) and for any relevant provision judgement (early years and/or sixth form provision). Schools receiving a graded inspection from September 2024, will not be given an overall effectiveness grade.

- Inspections are a point-in-time evaluation about the quality of a school's education provision.
- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with a range of senior leaders, including the executive principal and head of school. They met with trust leaders, including the CEO and the director of education. The lead inspector met with governors and trustees, including the chair of governors and the chair of trustees.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics, computing, history and religious education. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke with teachers, and spoke with some pupils about their learning. Inspectors looked at samples of pupils' work and listened to several pupils read to a familiar adult.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of school documentation and policies. These included the school improvement plan, school self-evaluation form, and minutes of governing body meetings.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school site.
- Inspectors considered the responses to the online survey, Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text comments. The lead inspector reviewed letters and emails submitted by parents and met with a parent. She also reviewed the responses to the online staff survey. In addition, inspectors spoke with pupils, parents and staff to gather their views of the school.

Inspection team

Caroline Crozier, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Stephanie Wilcox

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