



Office for Standards  
in Education

# Covenant Christian School

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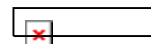
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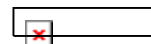
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## Introduction and summary

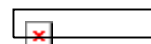


## Purpose and scope of the inspection



This inspection was carried out by the Office for Standards in Education under Section 163 of the Education Act 2002 in order to advise the Secretary of State for Education and Skills about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

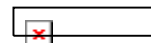
## Information about the school



Covenant Christian School is an independent day school for girls and boys aged 5 to 16. It was established in 1981 as a parents' co-operative learning centre. It is situated on two sites. One, for pupils in Key Stages 2, 3 and 4, is in the Heaton Moor area of Stockport, and the other, which caters for Key Stage 1 pupils, is in Cheadle Hulme. At the time of the inspection the school had 38 pupils on roll, of whom there were 19 boys and 19 girls. There were no pupils with statements of special educational need.

An important and fundamental characteristic of Covenant Christian School is that its educational provision is underpinned by well thought out religious and philosophical principles. These are clearly articulated in the school's prospectus. The aims of the school are based on the premise that education is the responsibility of the parents, that the home is central to a child's development, and that the school is an extension of that. All parents are therefore expected to participate fully in the life of the school, and they do so by offering their services for teaching, maintenance, administration, and in diverse other ways. The school's management committee is elected directly from the body of parents. There are no fees and the school relies entirely on contributions from parents and other sources.

## Summary of main findings



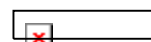
The school has a clear statement of aims in the prospectus which is given to parents and prospective parents. This states, among other things: "The aim of a Christian school should be the development of the whole man through a general education in the best and widest sense, with a wide choice of interest and activity and an appreciation of spiritual values. Specifically, the presentation of the Evangelical Christian faith both by example and teaching is to be an essential part of the school's life. The school's aim is to enable the parents either directly or indirectly to teach their children ....." The school is very successful in meeting these aims.

## What the school does well



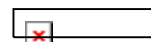
- It has a distinctive Christian ethos in which pupils can grow in their faith and develop a mature understanding of themselves and of the world around them;
- it provides pupils with a sound and imaginative education which prepares them well for further and higher education and for life in the outside world;
- it enables parents to participate on a regular basis in the day-to-day education of their children; and
- it provides a secure environment which is characterised by good relationships and excellent behaviour at all levels.

### What the school must do in order to comply with the regulations



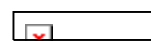
- ensure that there are separate toilet facilities for adults on both sites, and ensure that at the Heaton Moor site there are also separate toilets for boys and girls;
- provide the Secretary of State with a fire risk assessment in relation to the Heaton Moor site;
- ensure that there are qualified First Aiders on both sites, and
- ensure that its complaints procedure fully meets the requirements of section 7 of the current regulations.

### Compliance with the regulations for registration

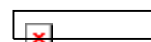


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#### 1. The quality of education provided by the school



##### The quality of the curriculum



The school prospectus clearly sets out, both in text and in diagram form, what is taught at the school, and this provides an easily accessible guide to the curriculum. There is an explicit statement that the curriculum is theocentric and that, as far as possible, everything should be taught from a biblical perspective. The school is successful in achieving this.

The curriculum is broad and balanced and covers all the areas of learning that are required by the current regulations. At all stages the basic curriculum statement is supported by detailed schemes of work, some of which are produced by the school and some of which are commercial publications.

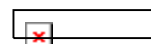
A characteristic of the curriculum, particularly in Key Stages 1 and 2, is the extensive use of well thought out projects, all of which are based on biblical themes. These explore a variety of topics through a multi-disciplinary approach. Among other things, these topics cover such areas as water, dry land, plants and animals; work, family and worship; and man himself. Alongside this project

work, English, mathematics, physical education, music, and art and craft, are taught as discrete subjects. In Key Stages 3 and 4 there is a gradual move towards teaching through conventional subjects, although in Year 7 pupils study a topic entitled "The Law", and in Year 9 there is a topic entitled "Family Studies" which covers elements of personal, social and health education (PSHE). In Year 6 there is a three term project called "Communication" which includes a language taster course and which leads into the introduction of French as a modern foreign language. Although the facilities for teaching information and communication technology are limited, all pupils learn to use word processing and are encouraged to use this in the presentation of their work. Careers guidance and work experience are arranged on an individual basis and are effective. The school has no sixth form provision, but most pupils go on to local sixth form colleges.

At the time of the inspection there were no pupils with statements of special educational need, but the small number of pupils in the school and the close relationships which exist with staff mean that pupils' individual needs are well known and catered for effectively. The school operates the Code of Practice for pupils with special educational needs and has identified one pupil for whom an individual learning programme has been set in place. This pupil is well supported by staff and fellow pupils.

The school does not organise extra-curricular activities on a regular basis, believing this to be a part of family responsibility, but it supports initiatives by pupils such as organising occasional sporting activities with other Christian schools in the area, and organising fund-raising activities. In discussion, many pupils indicated that they have an extended social life outside school based on school friendships.

### **The quality of the teaching and assessment**



Overall, the quality of teaching is good. During the inspection 26 lessons were observed, 18 of which were good or better, and in seven of which the strengths of teaching outweighed the weaknesses. One lesson, which was a Bible study and prayer time in Year 8/9 was ungraded. No unsatisfactory teaching was seen.

There were several examples of very good teaching. These lessons included clear aims and objectives which were explained succinctly to pupils. A good range of varied activities, including role play and debate, maintained the pupils' high level of interest throughout the lessons. Most of the very good lessons provided opportunities for investigative and practical work with pupils either working independently or collaboratively. Teachers made very good use of cross-referencing to other subjects or earlier work. For example, in Year 10/11, religious education was linked to earlier work in geography, and in Year 8/9, discussion on Romeo and Juliet was linked effectively to pupils' experience of other Shakespearean works. Pupils were encouraged to express and discuss their ideas, as in a history lesson in Year 2/3 on shopping signs and symbols. In all lessons, teachers used effective questioning skills to extend the pupils' understanding and to assess their progress.

In lessons where strengths of the teaching out-weighted weaknesses, elements of good teaching were observed, but some lessons started too slowly and lacked pace. A small number of lessons did not provide sufficient challenge for the most able pupils. In a project lesson for the younger children, abstract concepts of the solar system proved difficult for their level of understanding. Overall, time was used well, but some lessons observed were rather long.

In all lessons, effective class management is firmly based on good and mature relationships. The positive ethos of the school promotes teamwork between all members of the school community. Teachers make good use of praise to promote pupils' confidence and self-esteem, and so encourage their very good progress.

The school makes suitable use of the many specialist strengths to be found amongst the teachers

who all have sound subject knowledge. Each class has a co-ordinator who is responsible for informing all part-time teachers of any immediate issues and who oversees their planning. This is an important role in maintaining continuity in provision for pupils. Day-to-day planning is generally satisfactory. Nevertheless, teachers could be more reflective and evaluative when writing up what has been covered each day in the class diaries.

The work provided for pupils is closely matched to their individual abilities. The higher attaining pupils are usually challenged appropriately. Effective use is made of resources to promote learning and to extend interesting tasks. High standards of display, especially for the youngest children, indicate that the pupils' work is valued and provide clear evidence of the work that has been covered and of the standards attained.

Assessment procedures are generally sound. The school uses a commercial assessment system annually to assess English, mathematics and study skills for pupils in Years 4 to 9. There are several reading tests for pupils from Year 2 onwards. These are used annually before reports for parents are written and as and when it is deemed appropriate for individual pupils. The results of tests are used effectively by teachers to inform their planning, for example, if there seems to be a dip in standards of punctuation or in some aspect of mathematics.

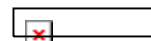
Primary age pupils do not take national tests, but at the age of sixteen the pupils sit a wide range of GCSE examinations. Although the numbers of pupils who take these examinations has usually been small, the results have generally been very good.

Marking is generally good. It is constructive and informs pupils of how they can improve their work. A very good example of marking was seen when a teacher added a range of questions to stimulate pupils to think their ideas through to promote their knowledge and understanding.

***Does the school meet the requirements for registration?***

Yes.

**2. The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils**



The school is very successful in providing for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development within a community that is firmly based on an evangelical Christian foundation. Working closely with parents, it helps pupils to grow into confident and self-assured young people who are able to talk maturely about their own strengths and weaknesses.

The school places a strong emphasis on community, particularly in the context of family and church. Each class has a period of Bible study and prayer at the start of the day. Pupils take an active part in these by suggesting topics for prayers, often including the needs of specific individuals and groups, and by leading the prayers themselves. This reflects the very strong ethos of mutual concern and support among pupils and staff. In one excellent session in Year 8/9, pupils discussed the role of conscience in the light of biblical teaching and their own experiences, and displayed mature and sophisticated insights into the nature of law, obedience and disobedience. In another session, pupils in Years 10/11 looked at Islam as part of a series of discussions on worldviews which had previously looked at Hinduism and other faiths originating in Asia. This lesson provided pupils with the opportunity to understand some of the misunderstandings that have arisen about Islam and helped them to a more positive view.

Pupils have many opportunities to learn about public institutions and services in England, particularly in history lessons and project work, especially in the Year 6 project on "The Law". There is a good programme of PSHE, and in Year 8/9 the Family Study enables pupils to look at several

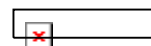
issues relating to personal and social concerns.

It was clear from discussions that inspectors had with pupils of all ages that they value highly what the school has done for them. They recognise that the school is distinctive, not only because it is clearly founded on Christian principles, but also because it is small. They recognised that this meant that, to some extent, they were in a very protected environment, but they did not feel that this left them unprepared for life in the wider world. Many pupils indicated that they had an extended social life outside school, based not only on school friendships, but also including participation in clubs and other activities. Most of the older pupils were looking forward to continuing their studies in other institutions when they left the school.

***Does the school meet the requirements for registration?***

**Yes**

**3. The welfare, health and safety of the pupils**



The school's provision for the welfare, health and safety of pupils is good.

All appropriate policies and procedures are in place. A named person has been appointed to be responsible for issues relating to child welfare and protection. Policies for safety on out-of-school visits, transport, and health and safety all cover important aspects of the provision. There are good guidelines for supervision of pupils at break times.

There are sound procedures in place for fire safety. The staff have had recent training on the use of fire extinguishers and First Aid, including resuscitation. Fire drills are held each term and details of evacuation times are logged. Fire precautions and procedures are displayed in all areas of both sites. There are regular fire extinguisher, alarm and emergency lighting checks. The portable electrical appliances were tested recently. A fire risk assessment for the Cheadle Hulme site has been forwarded to the Department for Education and Skills (DfES), but the fire risk assessment for the Heaton Moor site is in draft form and should be formally agreed and passed to the DfES.

There is effective promotion of good behaviour with clear sanctions for misbehaviour. The rewards and sanctions are detailed in a policy document, which also includes the procedures leading to exclusion. There is a separate anti-bullying policy. The school keeps a serious incident log book for any major breaches of its code of conduct.

Accidents are recorded and filed, and the school has recently revised the details required on the forms. There is a policy for First Aid, but at present there are no First-Aiders with up-to-date qualifications on either site. The school has recently replenished the first aid boxes, one of which is always taken on visits to the sports grounds and on out-of-school visits. Each pupil has a health record with details of such information as immunisations, infectious diseases and allergies. The school asks for all pupils to have a pre-school health check.

The school has a policy for pupils with special educational needs, including talented and gifted pupils. There is a policy for equal opportunities for all. The school fulfils its duties with regard to the Disability Discrimination Act 2002.

***Does the school meet the requirements for registration?***

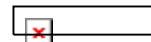
**No.**

***What does the school need to do to comply with the regulations?***

In order to comply with the Independent Schools Standards Regulations 2003 the school should:

- ensure that on both sites there are adults who are qualified First Aiders (paragraph 3(6)).

#### 4. The suitability of the proprietor and staff



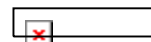
The proprietor and headteacher are a husband and wife who opened the school in 1981 as a parents' co-operative learning centre. The school is distinctive in that it continues to function in the same way. It operates under a charitable body known as the Christian Education Trust. Parents play a major part in the running of the school, and there is a management committee elected from the parent body. There are regular meetings of parents for prayer and discussion.

The school charges no fees, but parents are expected to contribute financially, and also to give of their time and talents either as teachers, administrators, or by helping with maintenance. At the time of the inspection, there were 28 members of the teaching body, of whom almost all had degrees or similar professional qualifications, but only one of whom was salaried. All teachers are part-time. They are able to benefit from a good programme of in-service training, organised either by the school itself or under the auspices of the Christian Schools' Trust, of which it is a member. All adults who have unsupervised contact with children have been checked through the Criminal Records Bureau.

#### ***Does the school meet the requirements for registration?***

Yes.

#### 5. The suitability of the premises and accommodation



The school is situated on two sites, one in the Heaton Moor area of Stockport, and the other about five miles away in Cheadle Hulme.

The Heaton Moor site consists of a large late Victorian house with adjacent coach house and large front and back garden areas. The house belongs to the proprietor and his wife and is their family home. Domestic and school areas are in juxtaposition to each other, but throughout the house there are areas which are designated as being for private family use only. Most of the areas that are used for school purposes are either on the ground floor or in the basement, but upstairs there is a small library and a sick room. The coach house has been refurbished for use by the school. There is no conflict of interest caused by the dual use of the building and it is part of the school's philosophy that education should take place in a family and home environment.

There are four general classrooms, a small computer room, a workshop for practical subjects, and a science laboratory. There are adequate toilet and washrooms for the numbers at present on roll, but these are used by both boys and girls and there is no toilet area designated as being for adults only. Part of the back garden has been covered and provides a hard surface play area. Sections of this play area are used for parking, but very close attention is paid to pupils' safety.

The other premises are on the site of a church in Cheadle Hulme. These consist of two substantial detached buildings, one of brick and one of wood, and they provide accommodation for pupils in

Key Stage 1. They meet the current regulations for premises and accommodation except that, as at the Heaton Moor site, there is no toilet designated as being for use by adults. Pupils on the Cheadle Hulme site have access to a spacious play area. The school does not have any gymnasium facilities of its own, but it makes use of a local sports centre.

***Does the school meet the requirements for registration?***

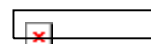
No.

***What does the school need to do to comply with the regulations?***

In order to comply with the Independent Schools Standards Regulations 2003 the school should:

- ensure that on both sites a toilet area is designated as being for adults only, and that on the Heaton Moor site toilets for pupils are designated as being for boys and girls respectively (paragraph 5(k)).

**6. The quality of information for parents and other partners**



Overall, the provision of information for parents is good, and parental support for the school is strong. The school provides an informative prospectus for parents, which gives a full and detailed description of the school's aims, ethos and curriculum. Regular, lively newsletters, at least one a term, enable those parents not in close contact with the school to be fully informed about school events and issues, and a termly prayer letter is also sent home. Monthly management minutes are displayed within the school for parents' information.

Detailed progress reports are provided annually for the parents of secondary pupils and twice a year for parents of primary age pupils. The reports include any test results undertaken by pupils from Year 2 onwards, and, if necessary, teachers will explain what the results signify at termly parents' meetings. Parents appreciate the informal and formal opportunities they have to discuss the child's progress. All those who responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire stated that they feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions, suggestions, or problems.

The fire risk assessment for the Cheadle Hulme site has been forwarded to the DfES, but the assessment for the Heaton Moor site is still in draft form. The school recognises that it needs to formally agree the assessment and forward it to the DfES.

***Does the school meet the requirements for registration?***

No.

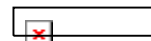
***What does the school need to do to comply with the regulations?***

In order to comply with the Independent Schools Standards Regulations 2003 the school should:

- forward to the DfES a copy of the fire risk assessment in relation to the Heaton Moor site (paragraph 6(9)).

**7. The effectiveness of the school's procedures for handling complaints**





The school has a complaints policy dated 2003. The school has made good progress in formulating a staged complaints policy that is fair to all parties, but some additions, as specified below, are needed in order to meet the regulations fully.

***Does the school meet the requirements for registration?***

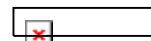
No.

***What does the school need to do to comply with the regulations?***

In order to comply with the Independent Schools Standards Regulations 2003 the school should:

- provide clear time scales for the management of the complaint (paragraph 7(c));
- allow for parents to attend panel hearings and be accompanied (paragraph 7(h));
- provide copies of any findings and recommendations to all concerned (paragraph 7(i));
- ensure that written records are kept of all complaints indicating whether they were resolved at the preliminary stage, or whether they proceeded to a panel hearing (paragraph 7(j));
- state that all correspondence, statements and records of complaints be kept confidential (paragraph 7(k)).

**School details**



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Name of school:	Covenant Christian School		
DfES ref number:	356/6021		
Type of school:	Evangelical Christian		
Status:	Independent		
Age range of pupils:	5-16		
Gender of pupils:	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils):	Boys 19,	Girls 19,	Total 38
Number on roll (part-time pupils):	Boys ,	Girls ,	Total 0
Number of boarders:	Boys ,	Girls ,	Total 0
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need:	Boys ,	Girls ,	Total 0
Annual fees (day pupils):	There are no fees		
Annual fees (boarders):	n/a		
Address of school:	The Hawthorns 48 Heaton Moor Road Stockport SK4 4NX		
E-mail address:			
Telephone number:	0161 432 3782		
Fax number:			
Headteacher:	Mrs R Slack		
Proprietor:	Dr R S Slack		
Chair of the governing body:			
Lead Inspector:	Dr Roy Long HMI (R)		
Dates of inspection:	23-27 February 2004		

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