



**Office for Standards
in Education**

Inspection report
Christian School (Takeley)
Independent school
DfES ref no: 881/6041

Dates of inspection: 22 - 26 March 2004

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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

The Christian School (Takeley) is an independent, non-denominational, co-educational day school providing education for pupils aged 4 to 16. It is a small, family-led school, founded by a group of parents and friends in 1989 to provide a Christian education for their children. It aims to support families who prefer a distinctly Christian education in a small school environment. The school is located in Brewer's End, Takeley, Essex. It is run by the Christian School (Takeley) Trust which consists of three trustees. There are 34 pupils on roll, 15 boys and 19 girls. None of the pupils have statements of special educational need, but the school gives additional learning support to six pupils.

The school draws pupils from a variety of backgrounds but expects all parents to support its aims and values. It has no statement of faith but strongly emphasises the values of integrity, charity, truthfulness and honesty. Pupils are encouraged to develop respect for and tolerance of others, and to understand the world in which they live and the interdependence of individuals, groups and nations. An important aspect of the school's work is the support it provides for parents who prefer to partially home-educate their children. This is achieved through a mixture of curriculum and advisory support sessions for parents which is supplemented by attendance at school for part of the week.

Summary of main findings

The school was previously inspected in 1994, when a published report resulted. It continues to provide a sound education based on Christian principles. It offers a broad curriculum which enables teachers to respond to the individual needs of pupils. Staff provide high quality teaching, which enables pupils to make good progress in their learning and attain high standards. Excellent relationships between staff and pupils help to create a school ethos built on trust, mutual respect and hard work.

What the school does well

- It provides a broad education which fulfils its stated aims and has enabled pupils to gain success in public examinations;
- it prepares pupils to be competent independent learners;
- it provides pupils with a secure and friendly educational environment in which they can develop into confident and mature young adults;

- it has a high regard for the welfare of its pupils;
- it has developed a successful partnership with parents who are fully involved in all aspects of their children's education; and
- it is successful in promoting excellent behaviour and positive relationships.

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

- Ensure that a member of staff trained in First Aid is always available during school hours; and
- rectify the health and safety issues identified in section 5 of this report.

Next steps

Whilst not specifically required by the regulations to address this matter, in its drive for further improvement the school may wish to consider:

- further in-service training aimed at helping staff to plan the extended teaching sessions more effectively.

Compliance with the regulations for registration

1. The quality of education provided by the school

The quality of the curriculum

The school provides a broad and balanced curriculum, which makes provision for pupils' intellectual, personal, social, physical, moral and spiritual development. This is a result of the effective curriculum leadership and guidance provided by the headteacher. The Christian foundation of the school is evident in daily assemblies and through various aspects of the curriculum. Most subjects in the National Curriculum are taught through a range of commercial and school-devised schemes of work. Pupils are organised into the infant class (Reception to Year 2), junior class (Key Stage 2), lower senior class (Key Stage 3) and the upper senior class (Key Stage 4).

The curriculum for pupils in the infant class is carefully devised and consists of a programme of activities which are suitable for their age and ability range. It develops their intellectual, personal, social and emotional skills and is particularly effective in integrating pupils who are partially home-schooled with the rest of the class. In the junior class, pupils are taught all the subjects in the National Curriculum. English and mathematics are taught as discrete subjects while science and the foundation subjects are taught through biblical themes. There are clear cross-curricular links between subjects. The school's own schemes of work are very detailed and include differentiated content and approaches for pupils of varying ability. These are supplemented by the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies.

In Key Stages 3 and 4 pupils follow a curriculum which leads to public examinations. The school makes provision for English, mathematics, science, music, geography, history, physical education, information and communication technology (ICT), design and technology (DT), home economics (child development and food nutrition) and French. Appropriate schemes of work support teaching in these subjects. The school does not teach religious education as a discrete subject.

The school makes very good provision for ICT using laptops with Internet access to support teaching and learning across the curriculum. Parents and pupils can access school policies, schemes of work and other support material from an informative website. The school makes good provision for music and art. All pupils learn to play the recorder and many learn to play an additional musical instrument to a high degree of proficiency. Provision for extra-curricular activities is somewhat limited and pupils expressed a desire for a wider range. However, at various points in their education, they get an opportunity to participate in a range of sports including rugby, basketball, football and hockey. They have regular swimming lessons and gain a high level of proficiency in it. They also have many opportunities to go on school trips and visits.

Pupils make good progress in their learning and achieve well. Some senior pupils make very good progress and complete Advanced Subsidiary (AS) level programmes. There are three pupils currently on the national programme for gifted and talented children. Pupils with

special educational needs receive very good support and make good progress. Those who had failed to integrate happily in previous schools settle in quickly and do well.

In Year 10, pupils have an opportunity to prepare for the world of work through a two-week placement provided by the Trident Trust. The school keeps an up-to-date display of information on career choices and uses the Connexions service to provide pupils with individual guidance.

School resources are generally adequate. Specially prepared topic boxes support the cross-curricular approach to teaching the foundation subjects in Key Stage 2 and are used well by parents who partially home-educate their children.

The quality of the teaching and assessment

The quality of teaching in over half of the lessons seen was good or better, and there were no unsatisfactory lessons. The good lessons were characterised by sound planning, awareness of the strengths and weaknesses of individual pupils, good subject knowledge, effective use of resources, a brisk pace, efficient use of time and an appropriate level of challenge. In the junior class for instance, learning objectives were clear, the planned activities were well structured, and as a result, pupils were engaged and motivated. In addition, the teacher used questioning effectively to assess any misconceptions and deepen pupils' understanding of concepts and ideas.

In the other lessons, some of these elements were missing and the school needs to consider ways of sharing the good practice seen more widely. The school day is organised to take account of the voluntary nature of the service provided by some of the teachers. As a result, teaching sessions last up to 70 minutes in the junior class and 90 minutes for older pupils. In the less successful lessons, planning was weak and activities insufficiently structured. Therefore, much of this time was lost in mundane tasks, which slowed down the pace of learning and reduced the overall effectiveness of teaching.

Pupils responded well when given the opportunity to participate positively in their own learning. Even when lessons lacked stimulus and challenge, their behaviour was good. They generally enjoy their lessons and believe that the level and quality of support they receive is crucial to their academic success.

The school has a very detailed assessment policy but its overall effectiveness is reduced by the lack of consistency in its implementation. In the infant class, the teacher records daily observations on pupils' progress and development. These are added to files, which contain additional information and dated examples of pupils' work. In the rest of the school, teachers carry out regular assessments from which targets for improvement are derived. These are discussed with pupils and parents. Pupils' work over time clearly shows the progress they have made and the detailed mid-term and end of year reports give good indications of their academic progress and personal development. They have regular opportunities to evaluate their own work. Teachers mark pupils' work regularly and give positive feedback, although comments are needed to indicate what they might do to improve.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

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

The school's provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very good. The school is generally successful in meeting one of its stated aims that Christian principles should be emphasised throughout the curriculum. There are daily opportunities for bible study and worship. Although the daily acts of worship seen were of variable quality and there was no explicit Christian content in most of the lessons seen, positive Christian attitudes permeate the school and make it a calm and relaxed environment for teaching and learning.

The school is characterised by excellent relations between staff and pupils. Staff know pupils well and are aware of their strengths and weaknesses. This enables them to give appropriate support and encouragement. Pupils are enthusiastic about their work. They are mutually supportive of each other, demonstrate maturity in their relationships, respond positively to adults and behave extremely well.

The school expects pupils to accept responsibilities, and from Key Stage 2 onwards, they demonstrate this in specific ways. All pupils help keep the school clean and tidy and the younger ones care for their own allotment. There is a school council with members elected from each year group from the seniors upwards. This gives pupils opportunities to participate in decision making within the school. There have been some community-oriented initiatives such as putting together charity Christmas boxes and raising money for an Egyptian school. In addition, pupils undertake initiatives of their own in the wider community, for instance working in an animal sanctuary or helping with a local scout troop. Once a year, all senior pupils have the opportunity to participate in a residential camp, which gives them a chance to experience life together in an out-of-school environment.

Pupils have opportunities to develop a wider cultural appreciation, and in the recent past have visited the theatre, taken part in a poetry workshop and some of them have visited France. Art and music play a significant role in the life of the school and there is a swing band, in which pupils play with skill and gusto. The school benefits from its proximity to London, and, as part of its programme to develop pupils' awareness of British institutions, has visited the Houses of Parliament.

Pupils all come from backgrounds which are within the Christian tradition. Although there is some exposure to other faiths and cultures in the general curriculum, the lack of discrete teaching of religious education means there are limited opportunities to explore the diversity of contemporary British society in a structured and systematic way. The school is considering introducing a religious education course in order to broaden further pupils' opportunities for understanding differences and similarities.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

3. The welfare, health and safety of the pupils

The school gives priority to the welfare, health and safety of its pupils and cares for them very well. The headteacher has devised a comprehensive set of policies which safeguard pupils' wellbeing. All the documentation takes account of national guidance. Staff take pride in knowing the pupils well and gaining their trust. The school environment is one in which pupils feel secure and valued as individuals. There are clearly written policies to promote very high standards of behaviour amongst the pupils and to prevent bullying.

Pupils' attendance is very good. Attendance and admission registers are kept according to the regulations. The school has a child protection policy with the headteacher as the point of contact. He is planning to undertake training during the summer term to extend his expertise in this area. Pupils are adequately supervised while on the school premises and adults follow clear procedures and guidance on out-of-school visits. An accident book is kept up-to-date and there are several First Aid boxes around the school. However, there are no trained First-Aiders on site. The school plans to rectify this situation shortly and has already scheduled appropriate training for all staff. A full fire risk assessment has been carried out; fire drills are held regularly and accurately documented. Fire appliances are checked annually and a satisfactory report was issued following the fire officer's recent visit to the school in January 2004.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

The school meets all but one of the requirements.

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 a member of staff trained in First Aid is always available during school hours (paragraph 3(6)).;*

4. The suitability of the proprietor and staff

The school is run by the Christian School (Takeley) Trust, which is a registered charitable trust. The three trustees, who also act as governors, give good support to the work of the school. Two teach in the school part-time and the third is the financial director. The headteacher is a well-qualified and experienced teacher. Most of the staff are appropriately qualified and bring a wide range of subject expertise and experience to the school. The school has thorough systems for ensuring that all new staff appointments are subject to Criminal Records Bureau clearance at an enhanced level. Longer-serving members of staff

have received List 99 clearances. The school fulfils all other regulations regarding the employment of staff.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

5. The suitability of the premises and accommodation

The school occupies three buildings converted from their original use as a chapel complex. Overall, the accommodation and premises support the school's educational aims. The medium-sized hall is used for assembly and as the teaching base for pupils in the junior class. The workshop and science laboratory allow for specialist teaching in DT and science. The main chapel, which doubles as a music room and teaching base, houses two further rooms used by the infant class.

All buildings are in satisfactory decorative order and are clean and tidy. Displays of pupils' art work in the halls and work areas promote the school's ethos of valuing everyone. Classrooms are sufficiently spacious and the furniture is appropriate to the needs of pupils. However, the carpets in the workshop and infants room are in poor condition and risk being a tripping hazard. Lighting and heating of the premises are effective. Access to each building is good with disabled access to the main building. There are sufficient washrooms and basins in line with regulations. A small side room next to the reception area is used for children who are ill, but it has no wash basin. There is a small outdoor play area and the school makes use of local facilities for swimming and other sports.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

The school meets most, but not all, of the requirements.

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 appropriate facilities for pupils who are ill, in accordance with the Education (School Premises) Regulations 1999 (paragraph 5(l)); and*
- *ensure that all flooring is in good condition- (paragraph 5(s)).*

6. The quality of information for parents and other partners

The school is founded on the principle that parents are jointly responsible for their children's education. They are actively encouraged to be fully involved in the life of the school and as a result, many of them teach at the school. Open communication on both an informal and formal basis is central to the life of the school. Parents are provided with a helpful and informative prospectus and a detailed school handbook. A particular feature of the handbook is the clear information on the ethos and values of the school. It also includes school policies and practical, helpful, details on how the school operates. The school website and a weekly

newsletter, to which parents contribute, provide supplementary information. Parents are welcome to attend trustee meetings if they wish. The school council meets regularly during term time and produces its own newsletter.

Progress reports are issued both mid-year and at the end of the school year for the senior pupils and once a year for the younger pupils. They are clear and detailed and contain information on curriculum coverage, pupils' academic progress and their personal development. There are opportunities for formal consultations where parents can discuss their children's progress. However, in practice, teachers talk regularly and informally with parents, who are always welcome in the school. A large proportion of parents responded to the questionnaire sent out by the inspectors and their views revealed a high level of satisfaction with the school. Some parents however, expressed concern about the relevance of some of the homework.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

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

The school has a clear and effective policy which meets all the regulations for handling complaints. This is included in the parents' handbook, and given to all new parents. The school has not had to use the procedures so far, as any complaints have been settled at an early stage. Parents' response to questionnaires indicated that they are fully aware of the procedures.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

School details

Name of school:	Christian School (Takeley)		
DfES ref number:	881/6041		
Type of school:	Christian		
Status:	Independent		
Age range of pupils:	4-16		
Gender of pupils:	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils):	Boys 15,	Girls 19,	Total 34
Number on roll (part-time pupils):	Boys N/A	Girls N/A	Total N/A
Number of boarders:	Boys N/A	Girls N/A	Total N/A
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need:	Boys N/A	Girls N/A	Total N/A
Annual fees (day pupils):	£600 - £3,240		
Annual fees (boarders):	N/A		
Address of school:	Brewers End Takeley Bishop's Stortford Herts CM22 6QH		
E-mail address:	office@tcst.org.uk		
Telephone number:	01279 871182		
Website:	www.tcst.org.uk		
Headteacher:	Mr M Emlyn Humphries		
Proprietor:	Christian School (Takeley) Trust		
Chair of the governing body:	N/A		
Lead Inspector:	Mrs Florence Olajide		
Dates of inspection:	22 - 26 March 2004		

Notes