

Inspection report  
St. Christopher's School  
Independent school  
DfES ref no: 878/6050

Inspection under Section 162A of the Education Act 2002

Dates of inspection: 26 – 27 September 2006

# Introduction

## Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out by the Office for Standards in Education under Section 162A of the Education Act 2002 as part of pilot inspection arrangements 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

St. Christopher's is a co-educational preparatory school providing for children aged three to eleven years. There are 104 children on roll. The school was established in 1991 and moved to its present site at Staverton, Devon in 1993. It occupies 19th century stables and barns converted for educational use, and is surrounded by countryside. The school aims *'to treat each child as an individual, striving to discover the needs and abilities of each child while giving them security and a sense of belonging to the community of the school family. In preparing children not only for the next stage of education, but for the wider world, the school aims to provide solid foundations based on a clear Christian ethos, resulting in sound values and the ability to make clear judgements'*.

## Overall evaluation of the school

Parents are overwhelmingly positive about the work of this school and they are right to be so; it is a good school. Its work is underpinned by the commitment of the headteacher and her staff to a broad and balanced curriculum which provides opportunities for children to work, grow and develop self-esteem.

The curriculum is good. A broad range of activities is provided for children in the nursery and reception classes. These activities cover all the required areas of learning. Daily emphasis is given to the teaching of early reading as well as exploring number. Particularly strong emphasis is given to encouraging independence and social skills, but opportunities for spontaneous access to creative activities are slightly reduced in the reception class. Across the school, the curriculum is broad and includes all subjects appropriate to the needs of these children. In addition, the school provides teaching of Latin to older children. Literacy and numeracy skills are developed well. Planning of all subjects is at least satisfactory and secures opportunities for children to make progress. Resources are generally very good, although some geography text books are out of date.

Personal, social and health education is rooted in the Christian ethos of the school. Children take part in regular exercise, including a good range of sporting activities. All children have swimming lessons; this is exceptional provision and ensures that all leave the school able to swim. Some children represent the school in swimming gala and rugby competitions. Many activities enrich the curriculum, for example, cookery, local walks, chess and craft clubs. There are regular visits to local sites of historical and cultural interest. The school has good links with the community and these

encourage children to recognise and actively contribute to local life.

Teaching across the school is typically good and, as a result, all children, including those with learning difficulties and special educational needs, make good progress. In nursery and reception classes, staff make good use of resources to help children learn. Younger children in particular are totally engaged throughout the day. Staff give clear explanations and encourage children to think and put their thoughts into words. Staff know each child very well and thus pitch tasks at the appropriate level so all children make good progress. In the rest of the school, the best lessons contain a good variety of activities so children are kept alert. Teachers direct questions to individuals to stretch their thinking, and they give clear oral feedback to children so that the next steps in learning are pinpointed. Tasks are well matched to children's ability levels and teachers use children's misconceptions as opportunities to clarify concepts.

Where teaching is satisfactory, routines are less strong so some learning time is lost. In some classes, there are few opportunities for children to debate and challenge each other's thinking. The school recognises that the teaching of phonics across younger classes should be more consistent and has plans to achieve this. Assessment records are not incisive enough in some subjects and are not passed from year to year, so some time is wasted at the beginning of each academic year whilst teachers, particularly of younger classes, re-assess each child's ability.

In the round, however, children make good progress during their time at the school. They enjoy their learning and attain high standards by the time they leave, particularly in English. A high proportion of children move on to grammar schools or pass Common Entrance.

Throughout the school, behaviour is very good. Children welcomed inspectors warmly. They approach all aspects of their school work with the same high enthusiasm. The rate of attendance is high. The school provides a daily act of worship which underpins the Christian ethos of the school. Children sing, pray and reflect on moral issues. Opportunities are also taken to celebrate individual effort. During an assembly observed by inspectors, children listened enraptured to an older pupil playing the clarinet, and applauded afterwards. Children contribute to their own community through, for example, collections for and attendance at the Harvest Festival Service at Staverton Parish Church. Their cultural development and awareness of the wider world is heightened by fundraising for a school in Uganda. A residential trip is arranged annually for older children, which gives them the opportunity to co-operate and be team players on a larger stage.

Provision for the welfare, health and safety of children is sound. Staff show a strong and genuine commitment to children's welfare. The policy for managing behaviour is rooted in the principle of rewarding good behaviour and it has a very positive impact. Staff supervise children well. Children feel safe, and say that there is someone to whom they can turn if they feel worried. Relationships between staff and children are very good and are marked by caring concern. Each class has a form tutor whose pastoral responsibilities include oversight of the personal development

of children. The school is successful in its aim of encouraging respect for the individual as well as meeting children's emotional and social needs.

Children are encouraged to follow active and healthy lifestyles. They have access to filtered water at all times and only fruit and vegetables are permitted as snacks at break times. There is an appropriate health and safety policy, which ensures that regular safety checks of the building are undertaken. Appropriate risk assessments are carried out, for example, relating to visits away from the school. Procedures for the administration of First Aid are rigorous and the policy offers comprehensive guidance to staff. The child protection policy does not, however, reflect the latest guidance because the training for the nominated staff member is out of date.

Premises and accommodation are of a good standard. There are a number of well-equipped specialist rooms which are effectively used and enhance learning opportunities for children. The school has planned well to increase accessibility and will be drawing up a further plan to look at ways of continuing to improve this. There is a good outdoor play space for break times, and additionally, the school hires a field in Staverton for weekly games lessons.

All but two longstanding staff have been checked with the Criminal Records Bureau. There are minor technical gaps in the information carried on one or two other staff. For example, identity checks on staff who have been at the school for some years and who were known to the proprietors before appointment have not been carried out. The school is taking steps to deal with this.

The quality of information to parents and prospective parents is generally good, and is usefully supplemented by an attractive website. However, termly reports do not identify clearly what a child has learned and needs to learn next. The vast majority of parents think this school provides everything they want for their children but a small number feel that the school could issue a curriculum brief in advance of each term to enable them to support their child's learning at home. Inspectors agree. Most parents feel very comfortable about approaching the school with problems, but a few are unaware of the complaints procedure. The school has recently rewritten this policy to ensure it meets regulations.

## Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school meets all of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended January 2005, with the exception of those listed below.

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the welfare, health and safety of pupils (standard 3) and must:

- prepare and implement written policies, reflecting current guidance, to safeguard and promote the welfare of children at the school (paragraph 3(2)(b)).

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the suitability of the proprietor and staff (standard 4) and must:

- prior to the confirmation of the appointment of all staff, check with the CRB to confirm their suitability to work with children (paragraph 4(b)); and
- prior to the confirmation of the appointment of all staff, carry out appropriate checks to confirm their identity, medical fitness, previous employment history, character references, and, where appropriate, qualifications and professional references (paragraph 4(c)).

## What the school could do to improve further

Whilst not required by the regulations, the school might wish to consider the following points for development:

- improve assessment so that systems identify next steps in learning for children and are used to smooth children's progress from year to year; and
- publish a curriculum brief for each year group in advance of each school term so that parents know what their children will be learning.

## School details

Name of school:	St. Christopher's School
DfES Number:	878/6050
Type of school:	Preparatory
Status:	Independent
Date school opened:	1 January 1991
Age range of children:	3 - 11
Gender of children:	Mixed
Number on roll :	Boys: 61      Girls: 43      Total: 104
Annual fees (day children):	£4,905
Address of school:	Mount Barton Staverton Totnes Devon TQ9 6PF
Telephone number:	01803 762202
Fax number:	01803 762202
Email address:	office@st-christophers.devon.sch.uk
Headteacher:	Mrs Jane Kenyon
Proprietor:	Mrs Jane Kenyon
Reporting Inspector:	Bradley Simmons HMI
Dates of inspection:	26 – 27 September 2006

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