



St Christopher's School

Independent Special School

Inspection report

DfES Registration Number 801/6008
Unique Reference Number 109342
Inspection number 296308
Inspection dates 27-28 February 2007
Reporting inspector Mr Andrew Redpath HMI

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 162A of the Education Act 2002 (as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005).

Age group 7-19	Published 23 March 2007	Reference no. 296308
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Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out by Ofsted under section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005, 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 School is a residential special school which provides education for pupils with complex and severe learning difficulties (SLD). Many have additional needs, which include autistic spectrum disorders, physical disabilities and medical needs. The school's education is based on the philosophy of Rudolf Steiner and it seeks to improve pupils' self-esteem and independence through creating *'a stable, caring environment which supports and nurtures the emotional, physical, social and spiritual well-being and development of pupils'*. It sets out to support this aim by providing *'a variety of experiences which stimulate physical, emotional, intellectual and creative awareness.'* Currently there are 48 pupils on roll aged between 7 and 19 years. Approximately three quarters of pupils are boys. All have a statement of special educational need and have their places funded by their local authorities. The school was last inspected in April 2002.

Evaluation of the school

St Christopher's School provides a good quality of education and its provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. The commitment of staff to the school's philosophy underpins the good quality of care which, together with the good curriculum, ensures pupils make good progress. Teaching is satisfactory with some good and outstanding features; although assessment information is not used consistently to match work closely to individual pupils' needs in all lessons. Thorough self-evaluation has provided the basis for good improvement since the last inspection. The school meets all the educational and most of the organisational regulations.

Quality of education

The quality of the curriculum is good and supports successfully the school's central aims. It provides a broad range of experiences with a strong emphasis on developing pupils' sensory awareness and social skills. A daily *'Main lesson'* is provided which includes a focus on particular topics which are taught in rotation. Topics promote pupils' awareness of the natural world and the changing seasons. The school also links these topics with a recognised curriculum for pupils with SLD which takes close account of the National

Curriculum. Individual programmes are in place linked to each pupil's stage of development. There are several opportunities for pupils to work in groups, for example in circle time and eurythmy (rhythmical movement) sessions. The school makes good use of its swimming pool and hall to provide physical education. Pictorial timetables and symbols support effectively pupils' understanding of daily routines. A wide range of therapies is provided which is carefully matched to each pupil's needs to ensure the requirements of their statements of special educational need are met fully. Support from a Connexions adviser is used to help prepare students for transition to their next stage, and some older students complete work experience at a local farm. Independent living skills are promoted effectively through shopping, cooking and personal hygiene programmes; which is strengthened through the work in the residential homes. The school is appropriately extending the planning for its post-16 provision to link it to an accredited course.

The quality of teaching is satisfactory with some good and outstanding features. Teachers, learning support assistants, care staff and therapists work together closely to meet pupils' needs. As a result of this unified approach, underpinned by the school's Steiner philosophy, pupils make good progress and enjoy their education. Staff are confident users of Makaton signing which aids pupils' communication. They also use effectively a picture exchange communication system (PECS) and switches to help pupils make choices and express their needs. These arrangements help pupils at different levels to improve their communication skills. Staff typically treat pupils with patience and respect and consequently adults are trusted by pupils. Anxious and sometimes challenging behaviour is managed in a sensitive and non-confrontational manner. As a result pupils' behaviour is good and they learn to become comfortable working alongside others.

In the best lessons there is a variety of activities which captures pupils' interest. This was especially evident in a religious education (RE) lesson where pupils engaged in singing and left the lesson elated. In some lessons, progress is limited because assessment information is not used to match work closely to pupils' next steps in learning and recording focuses on what pupils have done, rather than on what they have learned. Resources to support teaching and learning are satisfactory. In some classes there is a limited variety of objects of reference and information and communication technology (ICT) is under-used. Occasionally this lack of variety leads to pupils losing concentration. The school is currently extending its range of resources, particularly those for ICT. The school has introduced a new system for assessing pupils' progress using 'P' levels (performance descriptors used for recording the attainment of pupils with SEN working towards the first level of the National Curriculum). This is most appropriate and the data being collected has potential for giving a detailed picture of pupils' progress over time.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. There are valuable opportunities throughout the day when pupils learn to reflect and experience spiritual awareness. These occur during eurythmy sessions, RE lessons, assemblies and before meal times. When participating in these activities pupils demonstrate joy and excitement through gesture and signing. The consistent and clear structure of these activities, both in school and in the residential houses, helps to promote pupils' sense of self-worth and their awareness of others. Staff provide very good role models and treat pupils with respect. This promotes pupils' understanding of right and wrong and helps to reduce their anxiety. As a result they have positive attitudes towards school and their behaviour and attendance are good.

Pupils' social development is promoted specifically through circle time and when they eat together. Several other activities enable pupils to take turns, work together and take responsibility. For example, in cookery lessons when pupils shop for ingredients, cook a recipe and help tidy away at the end. In the residential houses there are detailed programmes to promote pupils' self-help and independence skills. These arrangements have a significant impact on pupils' personal development and help to prepare them well for their next stage.

Pupils benefit from being part of a school community which encourages a strong sense of belonging. They also make good use of local facilities, such as when they visit arts and crafts events, the zoo, parks, shops and leisure centres. Some pupils engage in horse riding and one pupil attends a local school part time. Cultural awareness is promoted through the Steiner curriculum which provides pupils with a good understanding of both their own and other cultures. Various festivals are celebrated and topics cover life in countries in different parts of the world, for example India.

Welfare, health and safety of the pupils

Provision for the welfare, health and safety of pupils is good. Parents appreciate this aspect of the school's work; summed up by one comment 'This is a very caring school.' The residential provision makes an effective contribution to the high quality of care of pupils, a view supported by the recent Commission for Social Care Inspection report. Pupils show through their behaviour that they feel safe in school and enjoy the familiar routines. Residential and education staff share information well and review each pupil's targets, their well-being and, where necessary, their behaviour. There are strong arrangements in place to ensure pupils' intimate care needs are met with dignity. Pupils are encouraged and enabled to adopt healthier lifestyles through the nutritious food

served and well organised mealtimes. Pupils with more complex needs are given the right amount of help with eating which ensures independence is not compromised.

Arrangements for safeguarding pupils are robust. There are good procedures to assess key risks for each pupil and appropriate levels of staffing to ensure pupils are safe. Staff have received appropriate training in manual handling and child protection. There are generally rigorous health and safety policies and procedures in place, although some aspects of the risk assessments of the buildings are not sufficiently well coordinated, for example to ensure safe use of power tools in the design and technology (DT) room. The school keeps an admission register, which contains most, but not all of the required information. The school has planned well to improve access for disabled pupils and will be drawing up a plan to review the possibility of further improving access.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

The school's arrangements for the recruitment and appointment of staff are thorough. All appropriate checks are made before staff appointments are confirmed, including clearance to ensure they are suitable to work with children.

School's premises and accommodation

The school provides a satisfactory standard of accommodation. Pupils reside in several large Victorian houses and a specially designed building for pupils with physical disabilities which is of a very high quality. All houses provide a homely environment. Classrooms are provided in purpose built adjacent buildings. Classrooms are of a generous size and lifts and ramps provide access for wheelchair users. There are specialist rooms for teaching DT, music and art, and for providing therapies and sensory experiences appropriate for the needs of pupils with SLD. The school also benefits from a large hall and a swimming pool which is equipped with a hoist. Some parts of the school are in need of redecoration and the school has plans to tackle this imminently. There is attractive space for outside play with a sensory garden and a vegetable plot maintained by the pupils.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

The school provides most of the necessary information for parents, carers and others required by the regulations. An attractive prospectus is given to parents of prospective pupils which sets out the school's aims and ethos. Once a child has been admitted, their parents receive a '*Parents' Handbook*' which contains useful information, such as details of therapy support, domestic arrangements and how to maintain communication. Parents receive six-monthly reports which

contain detailed information on their child's progress in developing academic and social skills. Class newsletters have recently been introduced which give information about activities that take place at the school. Parents hold overwhelmingly positive views about the work of the school and feel well-informed about their child's education.

Procedures for handling complaints

The school has a complaints policy which sets out how informal and formal complaints can be made. The policy has been recently up-dated to meet all the 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 provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety (standard 3) and must:

- have regard to the Department of Education and Skills guidance Health and safety: responsibilities and powers, (paragraph 3(4))
- maintain an admission register in accordance with the Education (Student Registration) (England) Regulations 2006, (paragraph 3(9)).

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the provision of information for parents, carers and others (standard 6) and must:

- provide particulars of academic performance during the preceding school year, including the results of any public examinations, (paragraph 6(2)(i))
- where a student who is registered at the school is wholly or partly funded by the local authority, submit an annual account of income received and expenditure incurred by the school in respect of that student to the local authority and on request to the Secretary of State, (paragraph 6(7)).

What the school could do to improve further

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

- use assessment information more consistently to plan lessons and check pupils' progress
- complete plans to provide an accredited course for post-16 students.

School details

Name of school	St Christopher's School		
DfES number	801/6008		
Unique reference number	109342		
Type of school	Residential special school		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	1945		
Age range of pupils	7-19		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 34	Girls: 14	Total: 48
Number of boarders	Boys: 34	Girls: 14	Total: 48
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need	Boys: 34	Girls: 14	Total: 48
Number of pupils who are looked after	Boys: 26	Girls: 11	Total: 37
Annual fees (boarders)	£130,571 - £190,962		
Address of school	St Christopher's School 2 Carisbrooke Lodge Westbury Park Bristol BS6 7JE		
Telephone number	01179733301		
Fax number	01179743665		
Email address	St-christophers@st-christophers.bristol.sch.uk		
Headteacher	Ms Orna Matz		
Proprietor	St Christopher's School (Bristol) Chair of Trustees: Mrs Maggie Bennett		
Reporting inspector	Mr Andrew Redpath HMI		
Dates of inspection	27-28 February 2007		