

# The St. Christopher School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	115385
<b>Local Authority</b>	SOUTHEND-ON-SEA LA
<b>Inspection number</b>	311933
<b>Inspection dates</b>	15–16 January 2008
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Declan McCarthy

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

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<b>Type of school</b>	Special
<b>School category</b>	Foundation
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	3–16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School	169
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mr John Purkis
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mrs Jackie Mullan
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	10 January 2005
<b>School address</b>	Mountdale Gardens Leigh-on-Sea Essex SS9 4AW
<b>Telephone number</b>	01702524193
<b>Fax number</b>	01702526761

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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

### Description of the school

The school is a Specialist Foundation Trust Special School. Since the last inspection pupil numbers have risen markedly from 130 to 169. The school has been subject to significant change over the past five years with Local Authority re-structuring set against a background of increasing pupil numbers and over-subscription. The school was re-designated in September 2005 to cater mainly for primary aged pupils with a range of learning needs and for secondary aged pupils with Autistic Spectrum Disorder and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. The school also now provides respite care for a small number of its pupils in Christopher's Cottage. This facility is also open to other pupils with a statement of special educational need in the south east of Essex. All pupils have a statement of special educational need and the school has specialist trust school status for communication and interaction. Half of all pupils have varying degrees of Autistic Spectrum Disorder, the remainders have behavioural, emotional and/or social difficulties, speech, language and communication disorders or moderate learning difficulties. The autism bases prepare pupils to be fully included in lessons. Most pupils are from White British backgrounds. Pupils come from Southend, Essex, Grays and Thurrock and their attainment on entry is well below average. The school provides outreach services to local schools and colleges and is a recognised centre for training. It has recently been given Trust Status and has a number of awards including Investors In People, Football Association Charter Award and Healthy Schools Award. The new headteacher, who was deputy head in the school for 10 years, has been in post since September 2007.

### Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 2

The St. Christopher School provides a good education for its pupils, as acknowledged by parents and evaluated accurately by the school. One parent said, 'I could not wish for a better place for my son to be. I am very pleased with his progress and knowing how happy he is'. Good leadership by the headteacher and senior leadership team has ensured that the school continues to develop good teaching, a good curriculum and good quality care, guidance and support for its pupils. This enables pupils to make good progress. The development of specialist school and trust status has led to further improvements in high quality provision for pupils such as the development of respite care and the Communication and Interaction Centre. The school has a good capacity to improve further.

Although, given the nature and complexity of pupils' learning difficulties and disabilities, standards are well below average, pupils make good progress because teaching is good. Pupils also receive very good support for their learning from support staff and therapists so that they make very good progress in their communication and interaction skills. Children in the Foundation Stage make good progress because they are provided with a good start to learning through the well-conceived curriculum and good teaching. The curriculum throughout the school effectively enhances pupils' progress and enjoyment through a wide range of opportunities to enrich learning and through its strong focus on the development of communication and interaction skills. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, their behaviour and attendance are good. This is due to the good quality care guidance and support provided for all pupils. Outstanding pastoral care enables pupils to maintain excellent relationships with others and make very good progress in their personal development. Good procedures for safeguarding pupils ensure they are safe. Although good systems of assessment are in place, teachers do not always use these well enough to ensure learning tasks are matched to individual needs or to set realistic and measurable targets for pupils to achieve. Although leadership is good overall, governance is satisfactory because governors have not yet developed a system of focused visits to monitor the school's work formally. Subject leadership is also satisfactory because coordinators have yet to monitor the effectiveness of provision within their subjects and its impact on pupils' learning.

## Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

### Grade: 2

The Foundation Stage provides a good education for its children, who make progress in all areas of learning because of good teaching and a well thought out curriculum. Children will not reach the goals expected nationally because of their complex learning difficulties and disabilities. They make particularly good progress in communication and social interaction because there is a strong emphasis on the development of speaking and listening, the use of phonics and the consistent use of effective systems of communication within the curriculum. Very good support provided by support staff and speech and language therapists considerably enhances children's progress in communication skills. The outside play area is adequate and due for refurbishment within the next few weeks. Good leadership continues to ensure that staff are well trained, activities are well designed and resources, including interactive whiteboards, are used effectively to stimulate enjoyment and achievement.

## Effectiveness of boarding provision

### Grade: 2

Christopher's Cottage, which is run by the school, provides effective respite care for pupils. The arrangements for introducing children/young people to boarding are outstanding. The initial Tea Visits are highly effective in introducing pupils slowly into residential respite care. The excellent accommodation and the wide range of very well conceived activities, considerably enhances pupils' personal development, well-being and enjoyment. Pupils are engaged in activities of their choice for the whole weekend and their economic well-being is considerably enhanced through the carefully conceived programme for developing independence skills. Since the last social care inspection, Christopher's Cottage has made good progress on most of the recommendations. However, it is unable to make progress on improving the outside recreation area until the adjacent building work has been completed. The provision is well led and managed and is already proving to be very popular with parents and the community.

### What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that assessment information is used more effectively in the few lessons where work is not always matched to pupils' abilities or where measurable and realistic targets on individual education plans are not set.
- Ensure subject leaders monitor provision within their subject and its impact on pupils' learning.
- Ensure governors implement a system of focused monitoring visits so they have their own independent view of how good the school is and how well pupils are achieving.

## Achievement and standards

### Grade: 2

Given the nature and complexity of pupils' learning difficulties and disabilities, standards are well below average. However, pupils make good progress throughout the school because leadership is effective in ensuring that they are well taught and learn effectively. There are no differences in the progress made by girls or boys, those with more complex needs (such as autism), looked after children or those with moderate learning difficulties. Pupils make good academic progress in lessons and in their accredited courses. By the time they leave school they have gained at least one qualification from a wide range available to them, including GCSE, the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) Youth Awards and Entry Level certificates. All pupils move on to further education or training when they leave school. They make very good progress in communication and social interaction skills and in their personal development. This is because there is outstanding joint planning to meet their needs and teamwork between teachers, therapists and support staff and excellent pastoral care. Pupils make satisfactory progress against their individual education plan targets but these can occasionally be too difficult to measure.

## Personal development and well-being

### Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development and well-being is good. The school's very positive approach and outstanding pastoral care help pupils to develop their confidence and they mature into sensible and well-behaved young people. Pupils enjoy attending school and one Year 11 pupil commented 'I can not believe it! The school is so good at helping us'. Pupils speak highly of their teachers and attendance is good. The school council takes its responsibilities seriously and pupils enjoy

using their initiative through, for example, the introduction of cricket lessons and the design and artwork for the playground.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. They said that the very few incidents of bullying are well managed so they feel safe. Behaviour is good during lessons and around the school. The fixed term exclusions last year arose because of the challenging behaviour of the few pupils with severe psychiatric needs. Relationships are excellent and lessons take place within a calm and purposeful atmosphere. Pupils adopt safe practices and healthy lifestyles well and additional sporting activities are especially popular. Their good personal qualities and the good progress made in basic skills prepare them effectively for the next stage of their education.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

#### **Grade: 2**

The school is accurate in judging teaching as good because the headteacher and senior leaders provide effective training, mentoring and support to teachers new to the school. In nearly all lessons seen, teaching and lesson planning was good and sometimes outstanding. Outstanding teamwork between teachers, therapists and support staff has a very positive impact on pupils' progress. Teachers and support staff make very good use of specialised systems of communication such as the Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS), signing, the use of symbols and objects of reference ensures that pupils make very good progress in communication and interaction. In most lessons, teachers make good use of their detailed knowledge of pupils and assessment information to move their learning forward. However occasionally, work is not matched accurately enough to the different needs of pupils, so that a few do not make sufficient progress.

### **Curriculum and other activities**

#### **Grade: 2**

The school's good curriculum is reflected in the award of several quality marks. Pupils undertake a wide range of externally accredited courses, including GCSEs, ASDAN Bronze and Silver Challenge and entry level English, mathematics, science, art and information and communication technology (ICT).

The school's status as a specialist provider for communication and interaction is reflected in a curriculum that focuses clearly and effectively on developing these skills. As a result, specialist methods such as PECS, symbols, signs and objects of reference are used very effectively. The curriculum is highly individualised and there is a clear emphasis on developing pupils' learning, and personal and social skills. The school is currently reviewing all subject policies and schemes of work to reflect this more sharply. The good provision for developing pupils' skills in literacy, numeracy and communication is reflected in their good progress. Pupils' personal development is enhanced well through a wide range of enrichment activities, including theatre trips, visits to outdoor activity centres and an annual residential visit for each class.

Provision for pupils' personal, social and health education and citizenship is good. They receive guidance on sex, drug and alcohol education and this helps them to learn how they can stay safe and healthy. They also learn how to deal with bullying through participation in initiatives

such as national anti-bullying week. Strong links with external agencies, such as Connexions and well-chosen work experience programmes, prepare pupils well for life after school.

## **Care, guidance and support**

### **Grade: 2**

Pupils and parents speak highly of the pastoral care the school provides. There are outstanding relationships with external agencies and, through these; the school ensures that pupils have access to additional support when it is available. In addition, strengths include very good provision for speech and language therapy and the role of the three co-educators. They provide a high level of specialist expertise in areas such as counselling, personalised learning and child protection, providing outstanding personal support for pupils who face particular problems. Day-to-day health and safety, and child protection procedures are secure. The school has strong links with community organisations and these are used well to ensure that individual pupils receive specialist support as and when the need arises. Academic guidance is satisfactory. Although good assessment systems are in place the information is not always used effectively enough to set individual targets. Pupils' individual education plans include targets for literacy, numeracy and personal, social and health education. These are reviewed each term. However, a few targets are too challenging or too imprecise to measure progress. The monitoring of attendance is good and parents are well informed about their child's attendance and academic progress.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 2**

The new headteacher has effectively developed a strong and shared drive for continuous improvement in all aspects of the school's work. The senior leadership team provide good support for the headteacher and carry out their responsibilities for key aspects of the schools work effectively. Under the good leadership of the headteacher, they are continuing to build on the many strengths identified in the previous report so that improvement since the last inspection is good. Subject leadership is satisfactory as not all subject leaders are monitoring provision effectively enough. Governance is satisfactory. Although governors support the staff well, their formal monitoring of the school's work is not yet fully developed. There are outstanding partnerships with parents, local schools and within the community, which greatly benefit pupils. For example, respite care is provided not only for St Christopher's pupils but also for other pupils with a statement of special educational needs from other special or mainstream schools. The school is not only a successful centre for training teachers but also provides excellent training and professional development opportunities for health professionals, the police and social workers. The school uses its resources well and it provides good value for money.

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## Annex A

## Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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### Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of boarding provision	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

### Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2

### Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2

### The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

<sup>1</sup> Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

## Annex A

**Leadership and management**

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

## **Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

17 January 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of The St Christopher School, Leigh-on-Sea SS9 4AW

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave us and for showing us around when we visited your school. We enjoyed talking to you and here is what we found out about your school.

Your school is good and Mrs Mullan and all the staff work very hard to take care of you and make sure you are happy and make good progress in your learning. We think you are very well cared for and that you stay safe in school. Your good attendance and participation in all the school activities shows that you enjoy school. Good teaching ensures that you make good progress so by the time you leave school you can continue to learn in colleges. You are making very good progress in speaking and communicating with others and your behaviour is good. Your school is well run and those of you who stay at Christopher's Cottage enjoy it.

Here are some things that we think could be improved. We have asked the school to:

- make sure staff always give you work which you can do and to always give you targets which can be measured.
- check how well you are doing in all your subjects
- make sure all governors visit your school to see for themselves how good it is and how well you are doing.

We wish you all the best and hope you will continue enjoying your school.

Declan McCarthy

Lead inspector