

St Christopher's School

Independent special school inspection report

DCSF registration number 801/6008
Unique reference number 109342
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Inspection number 296308
Inspection dates 13–14 October 2009
Reporting inspector Jill Bainton
Social care inspector David Kidner

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended. The inspection of boarding was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000.

Age group: 7–19

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Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester
M2 7LA

T: 08456 404040
Taxiphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

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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, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.¹

An inspection of the care provision was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000 having regard to the national minimum standards for children's homes. This inspection took place at the same time but the full report is published separately on Ofsted's website and should be read in conjunction with this report which covers the educational registration of the school.

Information about the school

St Christopher's School in Bristol is a residential special school which provides education for pupils with complex and severe learning difficulties (SLD). Residential care provision is available all year round. Many pupils 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 49 pupils on roll aged between 7 and 19 years. All have a statement of special educational needs and have their places funded by their local authorities. The school opened in 1945 and was last inspected in February 2007, when it met most of the regulations for registration.

Evaluation of the school

St Christopher's School is successful in meeting its aims. It is a caring, supportive environment where the pupils experience a wide range of activities to promote their education and well-being. It provides a good quality of education through an outstanding curriculum and good teaching which has many outstanding features. Pupils make good progress, particularly in gaining independence and communication skills and in their personal and social development. The pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness and their welfare, health and safety are promoted effectively. The school's procedures to safeguard the pupils are very good and all child protection regulations are met. The school has improved since the last inspection and now meets all the regulations for registration.

¹ www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2002/ukpga_20020032_en_14#pt10-ch1-pb4-l1g162

Quality of education

The curriculum is outstanding and reflects much hard work and dedication on the part of the school to devise a carefully formulated and well-documented curriculum which meets the needs and abilities of the diverse range of pupils. The curriculum is a merging of the Steiner Waldorf curriculum and Equals Schemes of work (National Curriculum for pupils learning below and within Level 1). This is a recognised curriculum used for pupils with SLD, and covers a range of skills within their capabilities. The Equals-Moving On curriculum for the older pupils is based on three main areas, world studies, life skills and vocational studies. This is an accredited course which helps prepare them for adult life.

The curriculum provides a very broad range of experiences with a strong emphasis on developing the pupils' sensory awareness and social skills. The Steiner curriculum is mainly provided through the 'main lesson', which includes a focus on particular topics which are taught in rotation. In addition, the school uses a wide range of approaches which include intensive interaction, sensory work and multi-disciplinary working with a range of therapists. These therapies include, among others, sensory integration, language and communication, physiotherapy and music therapy. The curriculum provided is very carefully matched to each pupil's needs to ensure that the requirements of their statements of special educational needs are met fully. The school makes good use of its swimming pool and hall to provide physical education (PE).

The detailed personal, social and health education (PSHE) policy underpins the main aims of the school. In addition, pupils have the opportunity to experience a range of creative opportunities, for example through art, craft, drama, music and eurythmy (rhythmical movement). Learning through practical experience is an important element of the school day with pupils taking part in activities such as horticulture and PE. Provision for information and communication technology (ICT) has been extended and the school now has three interactive whiteboards. There are clear intentions to use ICT more widely throughout the curriculum to provide an additional dimension to learning.

The extended, varied and interesting curriculum which is carried out after the school day includes a very wide range of activities, such as rock climbing, rambling and cycling, which are led by the care staff who work in very close liaison with the teaching staff. This ensures a smooth transition and continuity between the school and residential experiences of the pupils. The range of out-of-school visits includes those to a residential centre where the older pupils have the opportunity for work experience on a farm. Day visits include those to places of interest such as local museums, SS Great Britain and Bristol Zoo.

The quality of teaching and assessment is good, with many outstanding features. The staff plan their lessons very well and include familiar routines which are reassuring to the pupils and also opportunities for new learning experiences. These plans include very careful and well-planned activities which reflect the requirements of each pupil's individual education plan. This shows clearly that the staff have a

thorough knowledge of the pupils and their differing abilities, interests and specialist requirements. The use of pictorial timetables and symbols support effectively pupils' understanding of daily routines. The staff use the Steiner 'main lesson' well to engage the pupils' interest with songs, stories and visual stimuli. For example, a group of pupils following a main lesson on The Charge of the Light Brigade threw paper cannon balls and one rode an imaginary horse while holding a sword, with a background of smoke which helped them imagine what it may have been like to be present. Many of the pupils have formed close relationships with both the teaching and support staff that have been at the school for some time. The staff manage the pupils' behaviour well; there is an effective system of withdrawal for poor and disruptive behaviour in class. The staff are consistent in their approach and have a shared understanding of each pupil's needs and try to address these through the teaching and support given, and are successful in achieving this. The good range of resources is used effectively to support pupils' learning. Each day begins with secure, safe routines and this structure to the school day helps to establish a common framework which the pupils can understand. The very caring and committed staff give the pupils space to be themselves, with the flexibility to have time out of lessons if needed. The classroom support staff, who are well directed by the teaching staff, are very supportive and engage well with the pupils in their care.

The school has made many improvements to the assessment procedures since the last inspection. The carefully planned individual education plans for each pupil effectively covers the whole curriculum and identifies a number of targets, usually a small number to encourage a greater focus, towards which the pupil is working. Each pupil's progress towards their individual education plan targets is monitored very regularly and the appropriate level of support provided. The school now has a good evidence base to show that most pupils are making good progress. The school takes part in the annual review with placing authorities. These thorough initial and ongoing multi-disciplinary assessments and recommendations inform every aspect of the pupils' education and care and support a consistent approach. The school has begun the process of enabling the pupils to become more involved with their own assessment through the use of video footage and now plans to extend this.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

The school makes outstanding provision for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils. Through the Steiner curriculum, the pupils are introduced to the changing of the seasons and the annual festivals, and this gives an added spiritual dimension to their learning. This is extended very effectively with opportunities throughout the day in planned eurythmy sessions, assemblies and meal times. Each week there is a short concert in which all pupils take part. Pupils demonstrate joy and excitement through gesture and signing during activities. The consistent and clear structure of activities, both in school and in the residential houses, helps to promote with great success pupils' sense of self-worth and their awareness of others. Staff provide very good role models and treat all pupils with respect. This promotes pupils' strong understanding of right and wrong and helps to

reduce their anxiety. As a result, they have very 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. Many other activities enable pupils to take turns, work together and take responsibility under the careful supervision of the staff. An example occurs during living skills, which are part of the Equals curriculum lessons, where pupils help to wash up after cooking. The staff work hard to try to ensure that the pupils' experience at school is positive and meaningful. In the residential houses, there are detailed programmes to promote pupils' self-help and independence skills. Their economic well-being is fostered through the curriculum effectively. These arrangements have a significant impact on pupils' personal development and help to prepare them well for their next stage of education. Pupils benefit from being part of a school community which encourages a strong sense of belonging. They also make good use of local facilities to increase the pupils' awareness of British services and institutions through their planned range of visits

Their cultural awareness is promoted successfully through the Steiner curriculum, which provides them 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. A festival to celebrate Michaelmas, to which local people were invited, has recently taken place. There is racial harmony at the school with the ethnic origin of both the pupils and staff celebrated with many planned activities.

Welfare, health and safety of the pupils

The provision for the welfare, health and safety of the pupils is good and has many outstanding features. The school is a safe place in which to work and learn. It has devised and implemented a range of well-thought out policies which are reviewed regularly. These include health and safety of pupils on visits outside school, behaviour, anti-bullying and safeguarding. The members of staff responsible for safeguarding and child protection have attended the high level of training currently required and all staff have been trained by an external accredited trainer. There are numerous staff trained in first aid and qualified nurses, a detailed first aid policy, careful recording of all accidents and a well-equipped medical centre on site. The school is very vigilant about fire safety and has very robust procedures in place. These include detailed fire risk assessments on all areas, annual checking of all equipment, regular documented fire drills and fire marshal and safety training for staff. In addition, the local fire and rescue services have carried out a detailed fire safety audit during this term on all the buildings on the site. Comprehensive risk assessments are carried out for all activities, both on and off site. The planned programme for physical activities helps to ensure that all the pupils are encouraged to stay healthy. Pupils enjoy the fresh, wholesome, organic food and are encouraged to take part in planned exercise. The admission and attendance registers are kept according to the regulations. The school has drawn up a three-year plan to show how it will fulfil its duties under the Disability Discrimination Act 2002.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

The school checks carefully and systematically the suitability of all staff to work with children and holds the information on the single central register.

School's premises and accommodation

The school's premises and accommodation are suitable to ensure effective learning. Pupils live in several large Victorian houses and there is a specially designed building for pupils with physical disabilities which is of a very high quality. Classrooms are provided in purpose-built adjacent buildings. They are of a generous size and lifts and ramps provide access for wheelchair users. There are specialist rooms for teaching design and technology, 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. There is a continual planned programme of upgrading the premises and currently one building is being renovated. 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 keeps parents, carers and others well informed through the prospectus, website and newsletters. Parents receive regular detailed reports on their child's progress and have planned opportunities to meet the staff if they wish to discuss any aspect of their child's life at the school. The parents and local authority representatives who responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire expressed a very high degree of satisfaction with the school, with one parent commenting, 'an excellent school with excellent staff, we are happy with all aspects'.

Procedures for handling complaints

The school has a set of procedures which fully meets the regulations.

The care provision was judged to be good and national minimum standards were met. A full report on the care provision is available on Ofsted's website and should be viewed in conjunction with this report.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school meets all of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended ('the Regulations').

Please see the report on Ofsted's website relating to the care provision in the children's home which should be read in conjunction with this report.

What the school could do to improve further

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

- extend the use of ICT throughout the curriculum
- extend the use of video footage in order to enable pupils to become more involved with their own assessment.

Inspection judgement recording form

outstanding	Good	satisfactory	inadequate
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The quality of education

Overall quality of education		✓		
How well the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of pupils	✓			
How effective teaching and assessment are in meeting the full range of pupils' needs		✓		
How well pupils make progress in their learning		✓		

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

Quality of provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	✓			
The behaviour of pupils		✓		

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

The overall welfare, health and safety of pupils		✓		
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The quality of boarding provision

Evaluation of boarding provision				
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School details

Name of school	St Christopher's School		
DCSF 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: 36	Girls: 13	Total: 49
Number of boarders	Boys: 36	Girls: 13	Total: 49
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need	Boys: 36	Girls: 13	Total: 49
Number of pupils who are looked after	Boys: 26	Girls: 7	Total: 33
Annual fees (boarders)	£139,925-£204,624		
Address of school	2 Carisbrooke Lodge Westbury Park Bristol BS6 7JE		
Telephone number	0117 9733301		
Fax number	0117 9743665		
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	Jill Bainton		
Dates of inspection	13–14 October 2009		