

**BRIDGE SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE<sup>1</sup>**

# **INSPECTION REPORT**

**INSPECTION CARRIED OUT IN ACCORDANCE WITH  
SECTION 162(A)  
OF THE  
EDUCATION ACT 2002 as amended**

**The Christian School (Takeley)**

**DCSF number: 881/6041**

**Date of Inspection: 3<sup>rd</sup> – 5<sup>th</sup> November 2008**

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<sup>1</sup> Bridge Schools Inspectorate (BSI) has been approved by the Secretary of State in the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) to carry out inspections in designated independent schools within membership of Christian Schools Trust (CST) or Association of Muslim Schools UK (AMSUK)

## SCHOOL DETAILS

Name of school: The Christian School (Takeley)	Number on roll:
Address of school: Brewer's End Takeley Bishop's Stortford Hertfordshire CM22 6QH	Full time: Boys: 23 Girls: 22
	Part time: Boys: 2 Girls: 1
Telephone number: 01279 871182	Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need:
Email: office@tcst.org.uk	
Proprietor: The Christian School, Takeley	Type of inspection: Section 162(A)
Head teacher: Mr E Humphries	Dates of inspection: 3 <sup>rd</sup> – 5 <sup>th</sup> November 2008
DCSF number: 881/6041	Lead inspector: Mr Christopher Schenk
Type of school: Independent Christian	Team inspector: Mr Ken Walze
Association affiliation: CST	
Age range of pupils: 4-16 years	

## **The purpose and scope of the inspection**

The main purpose of the inspection is twofold. It is to advise the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) whether the school continues to meet the requirements for registration, and to determine whether the school's religious ethos continues to meet the expectations of its association. Ofsted monitors the work of independent inspectorates, including a sample of inspections.

## **Information about the school**

The Christian School (Takeley) was founded in 1989 by a group of parents and friends, who all belonged to the same church, to provide a Christian education, fostering Christian faith and values. It has changed and developed over the years: in particular, over the last five years it has drawn its pupils and staff from a wider range of backgrounds. The staff includes three full-time and twelve part-time teachers, all of whom are committed Christians. Most of the pupils come from Christian families, but some do not. The school has four sections: the infants (4 – 7 year olds) that includes the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS: 4 – 5 year olds); the juniors (7 – 11 year olds); the lower seniors (11 – 14 year olds); and the upper seniors (14 – 16 year olds). A significant proportion of the pupils, around a fifth, have had unhappy experiences at other schools before being admitted as upper junior or senior pupils. The school places great value on developing a strong partnership with parents, describing itself as a 'parent-led school'. In keeping with this commitment, it is possible for pupils of statutory school age, who are being educated outside school by their parents, to attend part-time. Currently there are two such pupils, whose parents clearly understand that they have the responsibility of ensuring that their children receive a suitable education. The proprietor is a charitable trust and there are four trustees who are all parents of current pupils. The school's overall aim is to provide a Christ-centred education that enables children and young people to become confident, creative, aware and responsible members of their communities.

## **Evaluation of the school**

The school fulfils its overall aim well. Pupils are confident and independent learners who have excellent attitudes to their studies and work with enjoyment and application. They are taught well, in small groups that allow them to be valued and nurtured as individuals. They make good progress in their learning and attain high standards in examinations. Most parents are closely involved with their children's education. There are long-established networks of informal communication between parents, staff and pupils. As the nature of the school community has changed, it has been recognised that more formal structures are needed. This process has begun, but has not yet gone far enough.

## Quality of education

The curriculum is broad and well-planned with sufficient flexibility to meet the needs of individual pupils. In the infants and the juniors, the thematic planning enables good links to be made between subjects, increasing the pupils' motivation. There is a strong focus on helping the pupils to make progress in their key skills within a broad and interesting programme of work that includes some unusual features such as horticulture and looking after chickens. French is introduced in the infants and junior pupils continue with French and begin to learn Spanish. All junior pupils learn to play the recorder and to use computers with confidence for a range of applications.

In the lower seniors, the curriculum includes all the subjects of the National Curriculum as well as religious education. All pupils learn French and Spanish. For most subjects, pupils are taught in year groups but for some subjects year groups are sensibly put together to enable more discussion to take place. Since class sizes are still small, teachers are able to give sufficient attention to individuals to meet the needs of the wider age and attainment range.

The upper seniors follow a broad core. All pupils take GCSEs in English, English literature, mathematics, science and either French or Spanish. Most also take full courses in religious studies and information and communication technology (ICT). In addition to exam courses, all pupils continue with physical education (PE), careers education and personal, social and health education (PSHE). However, the range of options is limited. Pupils can take a second foreign language, separate sciences or art. They are also able to study history or geography using distance learning materials. The school is actively looking at ways of widening the range of options.

The PSHE programme helps the pupils to stay healthy and contains elements of personal finance that make a contribution to the pupils' future economic well-being. A Year 11 lesson on monetary matters that was observed during the inspection began with a consideration of relevant biblical texts. Sex and relationship education is also taught from a specifically Christian perspective. The school is developing a more explicitly Christian approach to other aspects of the curriculum.

The teaching is good. Pupils are engaged and interested in what they are learning and value the close attention they receive in the small classes. As one pupil commented, 'No-one is overlooked; you are helped to do your best.' Some particularly effective teaching was seen in the juniors where pupils, having learnt a skill, were then given the task of teaching it to some of their peers. The lower juniors especially enjoyed setting their older class-mates a challenge, to classify features of newspaper articles, as they had just done, but with the additional difficulty of using French newspapers.

The head teacher leads by example: he teaches across a wide range of ages and subjects with confidence and a strong understanding of the individual pupils. Teaching approaches are discussed among staff, sharing good practice and moving towards greater consistency. A recent focus for development has been on assessment for learning. However, the head teacher's heavy teaching load makes it difficult for him to carry developments through and ensure consistent implementation.

Careful assessments are made of pupils' progress. As a result, the levels of attainment of individual pupils are taken into account in planning the next steps in their learning. The co-ordinator for special educational needs (SENCO) has put in place thorough systems for assessing the progress of the six pupils who have been identified as needing further support. They have individual education plans that are regularly reviewed, taking account of the views of all their teachers, their parents and of the pupils themselves. Three of these pupils have statements of special need and the SENCO ensures that full reports are written for their Annual Reviews. There are good links with educational psychologists and with other agencies in the two local authorities that maintain statements.

Throughout the school, pupils make good progress. By the time that they leave Year 11, they have reached high levels in their academic work. Over the last three years all pupils have gained at least five good GCSE grades, including English and maths. For the last two years just over half the grades have been A or A\*. Some pupils take GCSEs early and a few take AS levels in Y11, usually in mathematics or English. Since the school does not select by ability, these excellent results represent outstanding achievement.

### **Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils**

The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils is good. Christian values underpin and permeate the life of the school. Teachers explain and demonstrate their Christian belief and the pupils have a very positive attitude towards spiritual areas of life. Pupils pray readily and eagerly express their enjoyment of being part of the school. Spiritual matters are often introduced through assemblies or tutorial periods and developed further through class activities. For example, following an assembly, junior pupils displayed attributes and descriptions of the Deity around their classroom where they serve as a daily reminder.

The pupils' moral development is promoted through their involvement in devising and implementing the school's rules and codes of behaviour. The lively school council plays an important role and two of its members produce a newsletter. Pupils are well aware of ecological issues and demonstrate their practical commitment to the moral imperative of reducing waste by operating a recycling project.

The experience of learning in a small and cohesive community helps to develop the pupils' social skills. All ages get on well together and the pupils are polite and sociable. They participate enthusiastically in lessons and confidently engage with the teachers and other pupils. They make a good contribution to the school and the wider community. For example, pupils raised funds recently for the repainting of the toilet areas. Having learnt about the Biblical principle of tithing, on their own initiative they decided to allot a proportion of the money they had raised to a project in Rwanda, with which the school has links. Indeed, so great was their compassion that they doubled the tithe and gave away a fifth of the money they had raised.

Pupils have a secure understanding of their own cultural heritages and of the Christian religion. They learn about other faiths and cultures through a good variety of activities. For example, a recent visit to a Chinese art exhibition has promoted an interest in Chinese culture. Fund-raising activities, such as for the project in Rwanda, give pupils an insight into life in poorer parts of the world. Senior pupils learn about the beliefs and practices of other religions.

### **Welfare, health and safety of the pupils**

The policies and practices put in place by the staff show a high level of care for the pupils. A Christian perspective is implicit in most policies and it is clear that a high priority is placed on the well-being of pupils. Consequently, the pupils feel safe and valued. They can communicate any concerns to the staff or to their peers through the school council. Throughout the school day the pupils are well supervised and move easily around the site free from anxiety.

The pupils are encouraged to adopt a healthy lifestyle and they are made aware of the possible dangers and temptations they may face as they grow up. Risk assessments are carefully undertaken for outside trips and visits. Risk assessments around the school have been undertaken and acted upon, although there is no formal system for ensuring that they are done regularly and recorded clearly. The school seeks help from experts, where necessary and has put in place a good system for the storage of chemicals based on the advice obtained. A written plan to increase accessibility has been drawn up as required by the Disability Discrimination Act.

### **Suitability of the proprietor and staff**

The school's central register shows that all staff have been checked with the Criminal Records Bureau and that all the other checks that are required have been made. The procedures for recruiting new staff are detailed and thorough, following the advice of the Churches Child Protection Advisory Service.

The teachers' commitment to Christianity is very apparent in their attitudes and values and in the excellent relationships between them and the pupils.

### **School's premises and accommodation**

The school uses a former chapel complex which gives an architectural reminder of Christianity. The three buildings are appropriate for use as a school and provide adequate accommodation. Recent improvements in one building demonstrate a commitment to upgrading the quality of the physical environment.

The room used by the infants has enough space for the present numbers, but too much equipment is stored in it, making the play activities too cramped. It is inconveniently located at some considerable distance from the toilets, which are in another building. While there are good arrangements for pupils to be escorted to the toilets whenever they need to go, the school is aware that this is far from ideal and has plans to erect a de-mountable building on the site to provide better accommodation for the infants.

The juniors work in an open-plan building that provides good teaching spaces. Display is used effectively to add interest and to illustrate Christian beliefs and principles. However, some of the chairs and tables are too small for the pupils who use them.

There is a science laboratory, an ICT area and a workshop that provides suitable facilities for art and for some aspects of design and technology. There is also a kitchen that enables some imaginative work in food technology to take place. The chapel itself provides two teaching areas, and its use for worship on Sundays does not cause any difficulties for the school. The laboratory and workshop are also used as classrooms for other subjects and, with careful timetabling, all lessons are suitably accommodated. The planned move of the infants would provide a further classroom for the seniors, making timetabling easier. The quality of displays in the rooms used by the senior pupils varies too widely: there are attractive displays in the workshop, but not in all the other rooms.

There are adequate facilities for PE, which takes place on the playground, in the main area of the chapel and on two nearby fields within walking or jogging distance. In addition, the school uses the local swimming pool.

Maintenance and decoration are satisfactory although some areas look tired. There is no regular system for identifying the maintenance and repairs that are needed and ensuring that they are attended to in a timely manner.

### **Provision of information for parents, carers and others**

The school provides clear and helpful information to parents. The full and detailed handbook is readily accessible to parents through the school's web-site and is also made available in hard copy if requested.

The school sent out a parental questionnaire in April 2008 and intends to do so annually from now on. It gave parents an opportunity to comment on all aspects of school life, including its Christian nature. The parents' comments were carefully considered and a number of changes have been made to take account of their views. A parental questionnaire was also sent out just before the inspection so that parents could make their views known to the inspection team. In both surveys the responses of parents were overwhelmingly positive, unanimously so on many matters. However, the return rate was only around two thirds. Because of the school's commitment to working in partnership with parents, it is seeking ways to engage all parents in dialogue. The small number of parents who came to a meeting at the beginning of the inspection spoke very highly of the way that the school meets the individual needs of their children. The comments on the questionnaires tell the same story: for example, on one questionnaire, parents report that their child was sad and lonely, coming to the school two years ago, and now is happy and fulfilled; another comments, 'It is great that the values and Christian faith taught at home are also encouraged at school.'

### **Procedures for handling complaints**

The school's complaints procedure is easily accessible to parents and meets all the requirements of the regulations. During the last academic year, no formal written complaints were made, following this procedure.

### **Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage**

At the time of the inspection there was one part-time pupil in the EYFS who attended for three sessions a week and was taught alongside four other pupils in the infants. The provision for the age range is largely suitable and covers all areas of learning, although the present accommodation of the infant class restricts the quality of the play activities. The head teacher and the infant teacher have worked together to understand the requirements of the EYFS and to meet as many as possible. They are aware, however, that the qualifications of staff are insufficient and arrangements are being made for staff to attend a course, beginning in December, to gain further qualifications.

## **Compliance with the regulations**

The school meets nearly all of the regulations for registration. In order to meet fully the regulations in **standard 5** in respect of the school's premises and accommodation the school must:

- make sure that all tables and chairs are of a suitable size for the pupils that use them (Regulation 5 (r)) .

The school meets the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act.

In order to comply with the welfare requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage, the school must:

- ensure that at least one member of the EYFS staff has an appropriate qualification at level 3 or higher.

## **Meeting the expectations of the Christian Schools Trust**

The school's religious ethos continues to meet the expectations of CST.

## **What the school could do to improve further**

As part of future development the school may wish to consider the following points:

- implement the plans to improve the accommodation for the infants as soon as practicable
- put management structures in place so that new developments can be overseen and implemented consistently.