

St Christopher's

St Christopher's Hall, Renfrew Road, Ipswich, IP4 3HG

Inspection dates 27–28 June 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Strong and consistent leadership by the highly experienced headteacher ensure that the quality of education and care is consistently good.
- Pupils achieve well and make good progress. On arrival many have poor attitudes to school and their work is well below average for their age. Attitudes often change quickly. The unit successfully enables pupils, in both the primary and secondary sectors, to reintegrate into mainstream education.
- Teaching is mainly good. Careful and thoughtful planning enables the pupils to make better than expected progress, especially in reading, writing and numeracy.
- Pupils enjoy their learning and feel safe in the caring and stimulating environment provided. Most behaviour is good because it is skilfully managed by staff. Many pupils boast greatly improved attendance records.
- Leadership is good and staff morale is high. The determination to improve pupils' education is strong and has had a positive impact on pupils' achievement and the quality of teaching. The unit is well supported by its highly committed governing body. Partnership work is strong. The unit works successfully with its local authority and many schools and other agencies.
- The commitment to spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is particularly noteworthy. Consideration for others and promoting responsibility and respect are key elements underpinning much of the unit's work.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- In a small minority of lessons, especially at Key Stage 3, the progress pupils make is restricted when staff do not apply the unit's behaviour policy with sufficient consistency.
- Opportunities to encourage pupils to do more reading and writing in lessons, especially reading aloud, are not always nurtured.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed five lessons and various other learning activities, including opportunities to hear pupils read.
- Meetings were held with pupils, with the chairwoman of the governing body, a representative from the local authority and staff. A number of stakeholders were contacted by telephone to gain their views.
- There were too few submissions to the online questionnaire (Parent View) for data to be considered, but the inspector took account of the unit's own surveys of parents and carers. Returns from 12 questionnaires completed by staff were also considered.
- The inspector scrutinised examples of pupils' work and looked at various documents. These included the unit's self-evaluation and planning, information on pupils' academic progress and records relating to behaviour, attendance and safeguarding.

Inspection team

Bill Stoneham, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- St Christopher's provides short-term support for pupils aged seven to 14 whose behavioural problems have resulted in them being permanently excluded from a mainstream school, or being in danger of being excluded.
- The aim is to re-integrate all pupils into a mainstream school. Most attend for a maximum of 30 weeks, though this term can be extended if necessary. Most remain on a school roll while attending St. Christopher's.
- Most of the pupils attending are boys. At the time of the inspection, there were no girls in Key Stage 2. There are equal numbers of pupils in Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3.
- All pupils have a history of disrupted education and exhibit behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. All have special educational needs at a level of school action +; with two having statements of their special educational needs.
- Half of the pupils are entitled to free school meals and a small number are in the care of the local authority. At the time of the inspection, no pupils were the children of serving military personnel.
- The unit does not receive any pupil premium or Year 7 catch-up funding. These are additional funds made available by the government for pupils who are eligible for free school meals, are in local authority care, or the children of service families. Such funds are paid to, and held by, the pupils' mainstream schools. No additional funding has been delegated to St. Christopher's.
- The vast majority of pupils are of a White British heritage. It is rare for a pupil to have a first language other than English.
- The unit makes no use of other, external, learning providers; no pupils are educated off-site.
- The unit runs a daily breakfast club.
- During the previous academic year, the work of St. Christopher's was reorganised and its outreach work finished. As a consequence, there has been considerable staff turnover during the last 18 months or so.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the quality of teaching and learning by making sure that in every lesson:
 - the progress pupils make, especially in Key Stage 3, is not restricted because the unit's effective behaviour code is not applied consistently
 - staff always seize every opportunity to encourage the pupils to produce written work and to read both for themselves and out aloud.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Though attainment frequently remains below average on their return to mainstream education, all groups of pupils, including those of primary age, and irrespective of their special educational needs, make better progress than predicted when they first entered St. Christopher's. Progress and achievement are good.
- Pupils almost always join the unit with low standards of attainment. This is because they have had considerable periods out of school because of poor attendance, exclusion or personal circumstances and difficulties.
- Pupils of all ages are suitably prepared for re-integration. There are no significant differences in the achievement and progress of different groups, with boys and girls making similar gains. Pupils, whose heritage is other than White British, make similar progress to their peers.
- Pupils improve their skills in reading, writing, communication and mathematics. All pupils were heard to read. Many read enthusiastically and with feeling, although not enough opportunities for them to read, both for themselves and aloud, are sometimes provided.
- Writing skills also improve but at a slower rate. This is because pupils do not have enough chance to write in detail and for different audiences.
- In a Key Stage 2 literacy lesson on alliteration, outstanding progress was made through a creative exercise in which the pupils had to write a detailed and vivid sentence that made extensive use of the letter 'w'. Learning was fun and great enjoyment was evident. All wrote well and neatly and many enjoyed the challenge of reading the long and complex alliterated sentence accurately.
- Achievement is not confined solely to academic improvement. Virtually all pupils make significant strides in their personal development. Confidence and self-esteem improve and there are notable gains in attendance and behaviour.
- Staff carefully check and monitor the progress and performance of every pupil. The manner in which data are used to set targets and track progress and outcomes has improved considerably since the previous inspection.
- An approach that takes in the needs of the whole child is key to the unit's success. Staff are committed to making sure that all the needs of each individual pupil are met as far as possible. Staff work in partnership with an array of other professionals, in health and social care for example, to see that good outcomes are maintained.

The quality of teaching is good

- Progress is good because most lessons are taught at least well. In most lessons there was a clear determination to challenge and extend the pupils' knowledge and understanding.
- Teaching has continued to improve since the previous inspection. This is because of robust monitoring. The unit has struggled recently with teacher recruitment and staff turnover has been high. Careful staff training has resulted in the unit's behaviour support workers leading in some

lessons. This arrangement has worked well and has helped to ensure that a good quality of teaching has been maintained.

- Teachers plan well for the frequently unresponsive attitudes and lack of self-esteem which many pupils display. Teachers adapt resources and activities well to match pupils' abilities and needs, usually inspiring them to believe that they can succeed. This careful and thoughtful planning has a significant impact on motivation and leads to good progress. Many pupils re-engage with education so that when they return to their 'home' schools their attitudes and commitment are greatly improved.
- Teachers and behaviour support workers display great patience and fortitude to see that lessons progress well and that learning is at least good. On the rare occasions where the quality of learning slips, this is because classroom staff do not apply the unit's behaviour code properly. Occasionally teaching was disturbed, notably in Key Stage 3, because the behaviour of one or two pupils was not correctly managed.
- In contrast, in very effective Key Stage 2 lessons in mathematics and design and technology, very young pupils were seen to impose sanctions on themselves. In both cases, when a pupil realised that his concentration was slipping, he quietly left the lesson and referred himself to the unit's 'quiet room' to take time out before returning to play a full part in the lesson. Such responsibility showed maturity but also meant that teaching and learning were not disturbed.
- Staff take much pride in their pupils' work. Classrooms and corridors are adorned with high quality examples of pupils' work. These included interesting displays of life in Anglo-Saxon England, including a visit to Sutton Hoo and science fieldwork undertaken at a visit to a 'forest school'. Teachers' thoughtful planning and determination to offer new and different experiences means that learning is at least good.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- St. Christopher's successfully meets its core aim of motivating its pupils and re-engaging them with education. Many pupils markedly change their attitudes and commitment during their time at the unit. Conduct improves and this is witnessed by fewer incidents of unacceptable behaviour and a significant rise in attendance. Many now have 100% attendance records, with overall attendance being well above the national average.
- Behaviour in lessons and around the site is invariably good. Where teaching is especially engaging, behaviour can be outstanding. Staff place considerable emphasis on encouraging pupils to behave well, to be polite, show respect and take pride in their achievements. These qualities are reinforced daily at breakfast club and in assemblies.
- Where these standards are not met staff encourage pupils to reflect on their conduct and remedy their ways. This was seen to work with great success during the inspection especially with Key Stage 2 pupils. The application of the unit's behaviour policy was less consistent in Key Stage 3, and this occasionally impinged on the pace and quality of learning.
- Staff place much emphasis on acknowledging and rewarding success. During an assembly on the first day of the inspection, many pupils received certificates in recognition of their contribution to a school fete held earlier in the week in which a significant sum of money had been raised for charity. For many, being congratulated on an achievement, or being praised for doing something well, is a new experience. The successful nurturing of worthiness boosts self-esteem and contributes well to an individual's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

- All are encouraged to lead safe and healthy lives. Much work is done to ensure personal safety. This involves eating healthily, adopting safe practices, especially in relation to the use of the internet and mobile phones. Key Stage 3 pupils are provided with clear guidance on the dangers of alcohol and substance abuse and information on personal relations.
- Pupils are aware of different types of bullying such as cyber bullying, racist or homophobic name-calling and other forms of anti-social behaviour. Pupils know how to respond to unpleasant incidents. They have faith in their staff to deal with unsavoury incidents; they also feel safe, valued and respected when attending the unit.

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher leads by example. His sensitive and caring approach, underpinned by a desire to improve the pupils' education, is amply supported by the governing body and staff at all levels. Consequently, despite some recent significant changes in staffing, morale is high and there is a unified desire to improve the life chances of pupils whose prior experiences of education and society in general, have often been anything but positive.
- The unit provides a calm and restful environment in which the pupils can learn and play safely. Though no parental responses were received via the inspection questionnaire, the unit's own surveys indicate high levels of satisfaction. St. Christopher's plays a key role in re-engaging pupils with education, helping to boost self-esteem and confidence. As one appreciative parent commented: 'St. Christopher's has changed my son's life!'
- Partnership work is strong. Partners consulted during the inspection praised the unit for its work. They identified key strengths in helping pupils, who have often had negative experiences of school, to change their lives and successfully re-engage in education. Many also described St. Christopher's as being an essential resource in the local community; a place where other professionals can turn to for advice and guidance, especially when dealing with challenging, difficult or disillusioned pupils.
- A keen commitment to equality is making sure that all pupils, including those whose circumstances have made them vulnerable, make good progress. Relationships are good, with no evidence of discrimination.
- Achievement and the quality of teaching are improving well because of improved monitoring, tracking and target setting processes, as well as improvements in staff training.
- The good range of enrichment activities, including visits, visitors and sports activities, adds richness and enjoyment to the pupils' learning. Activities including an inspirational visit to key attractions in London such as the Houses of Parliament and the Tower of London and an annual school fete, offers pupils with memorable experiences that they might otherwise never enjoy. These events have a profound impact on the emotional well-being of the pupils and contribute strongly to the quality of their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- Self- evaluation is effective and contributes well to improvements. A good development plan aids improvements, as does the helpful support offered by the local authority.
- Arrangements for safeguarding are thorough and meet statutory requirements. Risk assessments, including those for occasions when pupils might be working off-site, are detailed

and fit for purpose.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- Governors share the desire to make the unit even better. They challenge leaders through close checks on pupils' performance, and they visit regularly. Governors have a good understanding of the quality of teaching. They check decisions on pay awards for teachers and make sure that pupils' progress justifies better pay or promotion. Governors fully endorse leaders' actions to tackle underperformance. They know about the targets set for teachers to manage their performance and how well they are progressing towards meeting them. Financial planning is good, but governors lament the fact that pupil-premium funding is not devolved to the unit. They see this as a possible impediment in improving progress and achievement further.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	134874
Local authority	Suffolk
Inspection number	402648

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

Type of school	Pupil referral unit
School category	Pupil referral unit
Age range of pupils	7–14
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	12
Appropriate authority	The local authority
Chair	Sally Voelcker
Headteacher	Simon Whitney
Date of previous school inspection	27 April 2010
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