

BRIDGE SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE¹

INSPECTION REPORT

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

Covenant Christian School

DCSF number: 356/6021

Date of Inspection: 3rd - 5th December 2008

¹ 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: Covenant Christian School	Number on roll: 27
Address of school: 48, Heaton Moor Road Stockport Greater Manchester SK4 4NX	Full time: Boys: 15 Girls: 12
Telephone number: 0161 4323782	Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need:
Email: info@covenant-christian-school.co.uk	Boys: 0 Girls: 0
Proprietor: Dr Roger Slack	Type of inspection: Section 162(A)
Head teacher: Mrs Ruth Slack	Dates of inspection: 3 rd - 5 th December 2008
DCSF number: 356/6021	Lead inspector: Mrs Meg Buckingham
Type of school: Independent	Team inspector: Mr Richard Britton
Association affiliation: Christian Schools Trust (CST)	
Age range of pupils: 5 -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

Covenant Christian School is an independent day school for boys and girls aged between five and 16 years, although currently there are no pupils attending who are in the Early Years Foundation Stage. The school was founded by the proprietor and his wife, the head teacher, in 1981 as 'a learning community with an evangelical foundation but is not linked to any one church or denomination.' It is organised as a parents' cooperative and parents are involved directly in the teaching, administration and maintenance of the school, as it is believed that 'the responsibility for educating children lies ultimately with the parents'. There is one part-time paid teacher; the remaining staff work on a voluntary basis, and all, except for the head teacher, are part-time.

Currently, the 27 pupils are taught on two sites. Pupils in Years 1 to 4 are taught on St Andrew's Church site in Cheadle Hulme, approximately five miles away from the 'The Hawthorns', a large Victorian house in the Heaton Moor area of Stockport, used by Years 5 to 11. No fees are charged as parents make financial contributions, as well as giving other service to the school.

Evaluation of the school

Covenant Christian School provides a good quality of education with outstanding features. The shared Christian commitment to education as being given by God and the close partnership between the school and its families, results in pupils being very well cared for. The overall good teaching, pupils' positive attitudes to learning and their enjoyment of school, contributes to their good progress. Pupils are nurtured in their faith and personal well-being, growing into mature and confident young men and women, well prepared for the next stage of their education and they are eager to contribute as Christian citizens in their future lives. Since starting the school the proprietor and his wife have worked unstintingly to realise their vision for the school, which is firmly established.

The school has remedied the action points from the last inspection in 2004 and has one regulation to attend to from this inspection.

Quality of education

The curriculum is broad, providing ample opportunities for all pupils to make good progress in literacy and numeracy, as well as experiencing scientific, creative and aesthetic, physical, technological and practical areas of learning. An outstanding element of the provision is the school's success in fulfilling its aim to provide a 'God-centred education...concerned with the whole of life ...teaching everything from a biblical perspective'. The curriculum is carefully planned from a biblical perspective integrating naturally the religious ethos of the school into pupils' learning. This is particularly demonstrated in Project, a cross-curricular scheme developed by the proprietor and his wife when the school started. It is a thematic approach with a series of Projects taught throughout each year with a biblical starting point and incorporating elements of history, geography, science and the arts. Topics are carefully planned to provide excellent opportunities for links to be made across areas of pupils' learning. For example, topics such as water, plants and local studies at Key Stages 1 and 2 are based on biblical principles and an understanding of God's creation and help pupils to develop scientific and geographical knowledge in relevant contexts. As pupils move through the school the curriculum continues to be broad but at Key Stage 3 more discrete subject lessons are introduced. As well as Project, pupils study English, mathematics, science, history, geography, French, design and technology, information and communication technology (ICT), physical education (PE) and sport, art, music and religious education. In addition, the Project units on law and communications make a valuable contribution to pupils' personal and social development and give them an understanding of citizenship and what it means to be a Christian citizen.

By the time pupils reach Key Stage 4, in addition to modules in World Views and Family Studies, they study GCSE courses in English (language and literature), mathematics, science (dual award), history, French, geography, religious studies and expressive arts. Some pupils may be entered for GCSE subjects at the end of Year 10. Recently, those pupils who were successful in GCSE mathematics at the end of Year 10 went on to study advanced level statistics in Year 11. A particular strength of the curriculum is that it can be responsive to individual pupils' interests and aptitudes. Imaginative activities, such as making a radio programme and well-chosen educational visits augment pupils' learning and broaden their horizons.

Schemes of work vary in form and quality; some are commercial schemes, for example, mathematics in Key Stages 1 and 2, and these are used effectively. The schemes of work in the secondary subjects give an adequate overview of topics to be covered, although there is little indication of planning for pupils of differing abilities. In contrast, the planning for Project is detailed, with helpful teachers' notes, and ensures progression in knowledge and concepts as pupils move through the school. Similarly, daily lesson plans vary in quality; generally they give a useful outline for the lessons, although not all identify clearly what the objectives are for pupils' learning.

As a parents' cooperative, extra-curricular activities most often take place within the family and their church communities. Educational visits are organised regularly by the school to enrich pupils' experiences and extend their work in class. Class 3 were particularly enthusiastic after a recent visit to the Salt Museum and demonstrated good understanding of the scientific application to everyday life. A visit to Blackpool Zoo was enjoyed by younger pupils, again bringing first hand experience to their Project topic of animals.

Many opportunities are included across the curriculum for developing pupils' personal, social, health and citizenship education, for example in Project topics, science, sport and PE and in Devotions that start each school day. Careers education is organised at Key Stage 4 and includes work experience at the end of Year 10, which is enjoyed and appreciated by pupils. A more structured programme is helpfully being developed by the Year 11 class coordinator to include life skills related to the world of work.

Pupils achieve very good results in GCSE examinations. Although numbers in each year are very small, in the last three years all pupils have achieved the higher grades in English, mathematics and science. Some pupils sit examinations a year early, for example, in mathematics and expressive arts and results are equally high. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, not only achieving very well in examinations, but also in their confidence and positive attitudes to learning and respect for others.

The school is planning to undertake a curriculum review; this is timely. While the many strengths of the integrated Project will continue, the school is to review and update aspects such as resources and increase the use of ICT as a tool for learning across the curriculum. In practice, some teachers are already beginning to use inventive ways to extend pupils' learning and make Project increasingly relevant to their everyday lives. For example, in Class 3 the law unit of Project, which has a biblical and historical focus, has been extended to include aspects of citizenship in Britain today.

All teachers are parents and volunteers and only a few are qualified teachers. There is sometimes unexpected and high turnover of staff, if families move away. Nevertheless, the school is mindful of this and seeks to use the expertise of parents with particular knowledge and skills. All staff are highly committed to the aims of the school and support is given by more experienced colleagues, for example, through mentoring, to help those with less experience in order to develop their teaching skills.

Overall the quality of teaching is good and, on occasion, has outstanding elements. Lessons are purposeful, time is used wisely and relationships are excellent. Pupils respond with excellent behaviour and positive attitudes; they show interest in their lessons and say they enjoy learning. As a consequence, they make good or very good progress. Teachers are continually seeking to find imaginative ways to engage pupils in learning through role play, paired working and practical activities. In the very best lessons the infectious enthusiasm of the

teaching motivates pupils and they make good strides in their learning, building well on previous work. In a Class 3 lesson on the meaning of covenants, an excellent introduction set the topic firmly in a biblical context and was brought alive with a pupil playing the role of an Old Testament rabbi. Pupils were fully involved; it reinforced their understanding and they were able to relate the principles directly to their lives, collaborating well with each other to write their own modern day covenants. Teachers have high expectations and much of the teaching is directed effectively to meeting the needs of individual pupils; the small classes enable teachers to give each pupil targeted help during lessons. This was exemplified in a Key Stage 3 French lesson, as each pupil was challenged appropriately and prepared very well to listen to the French language tape. These pupils were fully engaged, stayed focused and worked hard, independently and with their peers. On occasion, with younger pupils, while the teaching is thoughtfully planned and is encouraging, the tasks set do not always ensure abler pupils have more challenging work than others in the group.

Staff know the pupils very well and there is much day-to-day informal assessment, helping pupils to improve. In addition, subject teachers keep records of pupils' assessments and external tests such as reading tests and cognitive ability tests are used. As each class has many different teachers throughout the week, a daily communication book helps to pass information from one teacher to another. Together with the frequent and ongoing discussion between staff, generally this book works well. The information recorded does not always give sufficient detail of what particular support an individual pupil might need with the next piece of work. Each class has a coordinator with a broad remit. They oversee the pupils' personal and spiritual development, as well as their academic progress. Class coordinators take their responsibilities very seriously and play a vital role in working with all the many part-time staff, liaising with parents and the head teacher, as well as providing pastoral support for pupils. However, the school does not have a coordinated system for recording all the assessment information it has for individual pupils as they move through the school. It has rightly identified this as an area for development.

Marking of pupils' work is conscientious and supportive with some excellent examples of reflective and helpful comments by the teacher, for example, in the creative writing books in Class 4. Here pupils are commended for what they have done well, whatever their ability, and are given clear guidance on how to improve their work. Pupils with learning difficulties are very well catered for, and as a consequence, they make good progress in their learning and personal development. Careful initial assessment by the school's special educational needs coordinator leads to detailed individual education plans and the implementation of these is closely monitored. In addition, this experienced coordinator provides useful written notes, which are much appreciated by teachers as this enables them to effectively support those pupils who require extra help.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils is outstanding. The shared understanding of Christian aims and values amongst the staff underpin the foundation of the school. This is reflected in all areas, including teaching, curriculum, behaviour and discipline. Behaviour is excellent reflecting the strong moral ethos of the school, and pupils are encouraged to take responsibility for their actions; they do this very well. Pupils are respectful of each other showing mutual care, concern and support. Year 11 pupils are aware of limited friendship choice within their year group as numbers are so small, but view it positively saying this gives opportunity for relationship issues to be faced and dealt with. They value the small classes as it enables individual attention from their teachers. They confidently ask for clarity in relation to anything they do not fully understand in lessons. Pupils came across as mature, self-aware, self-confident young people who had been encouraged to grow and develop in their Christian faith. An excellent devotional time on the Lord's Prayer with the Years 7, 8 and 9 encouraged moral life choices to do with forgiveness, recognising when they are in the wrong and needing to put relationships right. They appreciated the difficulties that need resolving within a family context and the familiarity that can surround school and family relationship issues. The lively yet reflective and challenging ensuing discussion showed pupils developing faith in God with both mature and sophisticated insights.

Pupils have opportunities to learn about the diversity of cultures and faiths in Britain today. As part of their World Views course, Year 11 pupils learn about western ideologies such as consumerism and post-modernism and a variety of other perspectives, for example, those of Muslims and Hindus and the values different faiths may have in common. This is seen as an important preparation for life as pupils move on to sixth-form colleges, where many former pupils reportedly befriend peers from diverse heritages represented in the United Kingdom today. Pupils learn about public institutions and services in England, as in the Year 6 Project on the Law. In the child development section of Family Studies, each 14-year-old pupil is paired with a younger pupil to work together, for example, on sport and creative activity, as well as looking at issues relating to personal and social concerns. Currently, Years 1 to 4 are preparing for a Christmas concert to give to a ladies' fellowship group in the local community.

Welfare, health and safety of the pupils

The provision for the pupils' welfare, health and safety is good. The Christian ethos permeates through each of the welfare, health and safety policies, which begin with a biblical introduction. Pupils are exceptionally well cared for and are nurtured in their personal development and well-being. They feel safe within the school community and do not believe that serious bad behaviour or bullying is an issue in their school. Relationships between staff and pupils are excellent, both friendly and respectful. The close family atmosphere with parental involvement across all areas of school life ensures pupils are well supervised and cared for.

Close monitoring of behaviour and relationship issues are quickly picked up before escalating into serious indiscipline or bullying.

All appropriate policies and procedures are in place and understood by staff and pupils where relevant. However, due to unforeseen circumstances, four trained first-aiders have left the school in the last six months. New staff, although competent in many respects, have not undertaken up-to-date first aid training. This has meant that the St Andrews site does not have first aid cover for every day of the week. The school is fully aware of this gap in first aid provision and is seeking to remedy the situation immediately. Although the health and safety policy is in place with appropriate risk assessments, a minor potential hazard was drawn to the attention of the school.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

The necessary checks for suitability of staff have been made and a single central register is in place.

School's premises and accommodation

The school continues on the same two sites as at the previous inspection, some five miles apart. Classes 5 and 6 (Years 1 to 4) occupy two adjacent single storey buildings to the rear of the premises of St Andrew's Church in Cheadle Hulme. These younger pupils have use of a large grassed area. Much effort has been made to make the two rooms suitable spaces for the age group, with attractive displays of pupils' work and photographs of a recent visit to the zoo, as part of the Project on animals, as well as posters that support learning. Older pupils in Years 5 to 11 are taught in part of the large Victorian house 'The Hawthorns' in Heaton Moor that is also the home of the proprietor; there is clear demarcation of those areas for school use. Rooms are of an adequate size for the current numbers in each class. Here too, displays enhance the environment and often include a biblical text relevant to the work in hand. As a part of their contribution to the school community pupils have responsibility for keeping their classrooms tidy. Parents undertake all the maintenance and cleaning and keep the school clean. Pupils benefit from a small science laboratory and a design and technology workshop, and the recently installed new computers in a designated room. Following the last inspection the lavatory facilities are now appropriately arranged on this site. While outside play space is at a premium, the school makes good use of sports facilities at a local leisure centre.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

The provision of information for parents, carers and others is good and distributed in a wide variety of forms. The prospectus and the school's website make accessible all the required information. In addition, there are newsletters

and regular e-mails to keep parents informed about the school. There is overwhelming parental support for the school as indicated in the parents' pre-inspection questionnaire: *"As a parent I have found the education and general 'pastoral care' my child, and indeed all the family has received, to be exceptional."*; *"The training is invaluable for the emotional, social, spiritual well being of the family"* and *"I feel privileged to have this school so close to us."* As a parent's cooperative, many parents appreciate the informal opportunities they have on a daily basis to discuss their child's progress. Secondary-aged pupils have reports once a year at the end of the summer term. Primary pupils have reports twice a year; at the end of the autumn and summer terms. The reports are concerned for the whole child, in line with the school's Christian ethos, reporting on an individual's well-being, as well as progress in the curriculum. Staff are concerned with the pupil's spiritual maturity and see this as key to progress being made in all areas.

Procedures for handling complaints

The school's procedure for handling any complaints is based firmly on the Christian principle of being 'gentle, patient and bearing with one another in love'. There have been no formal complaints in the past year and the written policy outlining the procedures, should there be any, meets all the regulations.

Compliance with the regulations

The school meets all but one of the regulations for registration. The school must take action to meet the regulation as listed below. An action plan should be prepared detailing the action to be taken.

In order to meet fully the regulations in **standard 3** concerning the welfare, health and safety of pupils the school must:

- ensure that there is at least one qualified first aider on the St Andrew's Church site for every session (Regulation (3(6))).

The school meets the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act.

Meeting the expectations of the Christian Schools Trust (CST)

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 might wish to consider the following points:

- be more systematic in coordinating and recording individual pupils' assessments; as part of this, ensure that the communication books record sufficient detail to increase continuity of support for individual pupils

- further enhance the excellent aspects of the curriculum and its vision, and carry out the planned curriculum review and updating.