



Hope House School

Inspection report

This inspection was carried out under section 162 (A) of the Education Act 2002 as amended. Bridge Schools Inspectorate (BSI) has been approved by the Secretary of State in the Department for Education (DfE) to undertake inspections in designated independent schools within membership of the Christian Schools Trust (CST) or the Association of Muslim Schools UK (AMSUK).

DfE number: 370/6001
Association: CST
Date of inspection: 14th -17th October 2013
Lead Inspector: Mr C Schenk
Team inspectors: Ms S Munir
Miss F Norcross

Age range of pupils: 4 – 16 years
Number on roll: 78
Full-time: 48 boys 30 girls
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need: 1

Proprietor: Hope House School Trust
Head teacher: Mr G-J Barnes
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The purpose and scope of the inspection

The main purpose of the inspection is twofold. It is to advise the DfE 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, and you can find the latest evaluation of the work of The Bridge Schools Inspectorate on the Ofsted website.

Information about the school

When the school was founded in 1985, it was called Barnsley Christian School and drew its pupils very largely from Christian families in membership of two local churches. Over the years, the nature of the intake has changed considerably with the admission of a growing number of pupils from families who are not committed Christians. These pupils now comprise around two thirds of the total number on roll. Nevertheless, the school retains its Christian character. It is a part of the mission of Hope House Church, with which it shares the town-centre building that has housed the school since it began. The pastor of the church is the chair of the school's governors. All teaching staff are committed Christians, from a number of different churches. The school changed its name to Hope House School in September 2012 and Hope House School Trust was set up as a company with charitable status to be the school's proprietor. The three trustees are all members of the governing body.

While a few pupils come to the school in Reception and stay through until Year 11, the majority enter the school at some stage during their primary or secondary education. Among these, several have experienced difficulties of one sort or another at their previous schools. At the time of the inspection, there were 33 pupils in the primary age range, including 3 in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), and 45 pupils in the secondary age range.

The school states that its aim is 'to provide a high quality education for children according to Christian ethics, morality and belief, whilst respecting the beliefs of those from other positions'. It was last inspected by BSI in September 2010.

Evaluation of the school

The school meets its aim well and has made clear improvements since the last inspection. The teaching is generally good, and often excellent. Teachers share common approaches to planning and teaching. The assessment of pupils' progress is frequent and thorough and the results are well used to plan future work. As a result, pupils of different levels of attainment are all given work that is suitably challenging for them. Class sizes are small and pupils benefit from the individual attention they receive from teachers and teaching assistants, who give valuable support and are well deployed. The staffing has been very stable over the years, though recently there has been some turnover, which has been well managed to encourage continuity. In particular, the induction of the new teacher of French, who has been working alongside her predecessor since September and is due to take over in November, provides an excellent model.

Pupils generally behave well and work hard, though on a few occasions their behaviour in lessons is a little over-exuberant. They are making good progress in their academic work and in their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Pupils with special educational needs are very well supported and some pupils who have come to the school with emotional and behavioural difficulties have been transformed by the experience of being part of a small and caring community.

The head teacher leads the school well and has played an important part in bringing about improvements, with the assistance of the very efficient administration, and with excellent support from governors. Staff and governors have worked together to begin to clarify the school's vision and aims in view of the changing nature of the intake. However, they are aware that as yet they are not fully successful in their dual task of nurturing the faith of Christian pupils and giving non-believers a positive experience of faith communities.

The school has worked hard to make the best use of the limited accommodation provided by its town-centre premises. The building is well maintained, if a little chilly at times, but the regulation that requires the provision of suitable space for pupils to play outside is still not being met. All other regulations are met.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

The provision for EYFS pupils continues to be good. There are three Reception pupils who often work with the four Year 1 pupils to their mutual benefit. Pupils are happy and enjoy a range of interesting activities. They are confident, enthusiastic, friendly, articulate and welcoming. They feel safe and secure and clearly enjoy coming to school. The two members of staff hold good qualifications: one is a qualified teacher, the other a qualified nursery nurse. The early years unit (EYU) is well managed. The current teacher is covering for a maternity leave and has settled quickly into her new role.

Pupils are making good progress towards their early learning goals, particularly in their self-confidence, their speaking skills and their understanding of the world, as a result of the high expectations of the teacher and the nursery nurse. Partnership with parents is good. Families are informed clearly about the progress that their children are making and there are regular meetings to tell parents about the work of the unit. Parents appreciate the progress that their children are making at school: as one commented, 'It's fantastic; they learn so much in the time that they're here'.

The teaching is good and detailed plans effectively match activities to individual pupils' learning styles, abilities, interests and needs. Pupils engage well with their activities and the good pace of the teaching ensures high levels of interest. Members of staff interact skilfully with pupils to promote the development of spoken language and their understanding of the world. There is an effective balance of welfare, care and stimulation.

Regular assessments are made. The teacher uses photography well to capture the pupils' achievements. The structure of the EYFS profile is used to help track progress towards the early learning goals. Staff record and celebrate progress in attractive 'learning journey' books.

The curriculum provides a good balance of adult-led and child-initiated activities with good quality resources that are accessible to the pupils. Educational visits take place throughout the year. Pupils are encouraged to bring healthy packed lunches. There is a small area for outdoor play and a satisfactory range of resources is available. However, the school is aware of the need to improve the outdoor area further.

Quality of education provided

The curriculum is broad and well planned. In the primary classes there is a strong and appropriate emphasis on the key skills of speaking and listening, literacy and numeracy. Good links are made between subjects so that work in literacy and numeracy is enriched by using contexts from other subjects like history and science to add interest and increase relevance. French is taught from Year 3. In Key Stage 3, pupils study all the subjects of the National Curriculum, and some links are made between them, for example between history and English. While choices are limited at Key Stage 4, all pupils are prepared for GCSEs in English language, English literature, mathematics, double award science and religious studies (RS); nearly all take French; and all choose a humanities subject (history or geography) and an arts subject (art or drama). A small number of pupils are able to take additional arts subjects through a community theatre group, with which the school has well-established links. In addition to GCSEs, all pupils take an accredited qualification in information and communication technology (ICT), and have one period of physical education (PE) and one period of careers a week.

Throughout the age range, teachers make intelligent use of appropriate textbooks and commercial schemes, not following them slavishly, but using them to provide a structure, within which they plan creative ways to bring the subject matter to life. The long-term, medium-term and short-term planning is detailed and effective. The head teacher and two of the governors have worked with staff to develop assessment procedures. These are now very effective. Assessments are frequent and thorough and pupils are productively involved in the assessment of their own progress and that of their peers. Pupils have individual targets and have a clear idea of what they need to do next in order to improve. The results of assessment are well used by teachers to inform the planning of future work, taking account of differences in attainment levels within classes. Marking is nearly always done conscientiously and frequently. Some of the marking is excellent, giving encouragement and pointers for further improvement, as well as assessing with insight how well the pupils have understood the topics they have been studying.

In the primary classes, where every day begins with time for reflection and prayer, the Christian dimension is discernable throughout the curriculum. In the secondary part of the school, while the Christian values of the teachers are evident in many lessons, the explicit teaching of Christianity takes place in religious education (RE). The syllabus chosen for GCSE has a strong Christian content, along with some teaching about other faiths. Pupils, however, have too little direct contact with members of other faith communities to bring this teaching to life.

There is a well-planned programme of personal, social and health education (PSHE) that is sometimes taught in separate lessons and sometimes taught through subjects

like RE, science and PE. While there are no separate PSHE lessons in Key Stage 4, the RS syllabus includes the consideration of a good range of PSHE topics.

Since the last inspection, the school has improved the provision of careers guidance. Pupils in Year 10 have an opportunity to undertake work experience and in Year 11 they have a weekly period of careers. The school also gives pupils access to an external adviser. Nearly all the pupils in Year 11 have clear, realistic and appropriate ideas about what they want to do when they leave the school and comment that they have benefitted from the advice and guidance they have received. Most of them found their work experience valuable though for some it was not profitable, indicating that there is still more to be done in developing links with suitable employers.

The school has a good programme of educational trips and residential visits that enhance the curriculum. Particular efforts have been made to plan outdoor activities in partial compensation for the school's lack of an outside playground. In response to a request from the pupil council some lunchtime clubs for senior pupils have recently been started. There is also a breakfast club and an after-school club that together provide wrap-around care for about ten younger pupils that is available from half past seven in the morning until six o'clock in the evening.

Around ten per cent of the pupils have been identified as having special educational needs. The substantive special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO) is on maternity leave and a governor, who worked with her last term and has taken over the recording system that she has developed, is covering her role. The system is efficient and helpful, involving teachers and parents and tracking progress. For some pupils, with greater needs, the school works effectively with a range of other agencies, including health professionals and the local authority. During the inspection, an occupational therapist visited the school and gave valuable advice and support. Pupils make good, and sometimes excellent, progress as a result of the carefully targeted support that they receive. One parent commented: 'My child has special educational needs and has been enabled to access the full curriculum, engage in the life of the school and make remarkable progress in all aspects of his health, wellbeing and development.'

The teaching is generally good and often excellent. Some excellent lessons were observed during the inspection throughout the age range and in a variety of subjects. Lessons are well organised, proceed at a good pace and include a variety of activities and methods of presentation. All classrooms now have ICT equipment, either in the form of interactive white boards or with flat-screen monitors large enough to be easily seen by the whole class. Teachers use them well to enliven their lessons with video clips, presentations and interactive demonstrations. Speaking and listening skills are effectively developed and teachers use questioning skilfully to encourage pupils to deepen their understanding by articulating their ideas. In nearly all lessons, teachers manage the behaviour of pupils well, largely by giving praise and encouragement, but also by making their disapproval clear when a pupil oversteps the mark. As a result, pupils listen carefully to their teachers, stay on task and work hard. On a few occasions, however, teachers allow some pupils to get away with inappropriately exuberant behaviour, which slows the pace of the lesson and limits the opportunities for the rest of the class to learn.

As a result of the thorough teaching, underpinned by careful assessment, pupils make good progress in their learning. Over the last three years, the proportion of pupils gaining five good GCSE grades including English and mathematics before they leave the school has been above the national average.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils is good. The school is a ministry of the church and as such reflects the church's desire to serve both its own families and those of the local community. Pupils in Key Stages 1 and 2 have ample opportunities to explore Christianity in lessons, assemblies, prayer times, alpha groups and praise parties, and this leads to them receiving a positive experience of the Christian faith and its values. While these opportunities are less explicit in Key Stages 3 and 4, the teachers of the older pupils are equally committed to helping the students understand the Christian faith and where relevant or appropriate, introduce Christian perspectives into the lessons. In Key Stage 3, the pupils follow well-structured RE and PSHE programmes, which give them an opportunity to explore some of the bigger issues of life in the light of a Biblical worldview. The Key Stage 4 pupils follow a GCSE RS syllabus where they examine religion and life from a Christian perspective. There is a weekly assembly for seniors as well as another shorter session each week, called 'thought for the day'; together these give the senior pupils opportunities to reflect on key aspects of the Christian faith, for example, the importance of carrying each other's burdens. There are also regular visits from Elevation, a group led by an ex-pupil that tours local schools presenting the Christian gospel in a relevant way.

Pupils show a clear understanding of right from wrong. This is effectively reinforced by the staff who model high standards of Christian behaviour and also endeavour to resolve issues quickly, being particularly aware of the need for repentance and forgiveness, and the restoration of relationships. The pupils are generally considerate toward each other and visitors and this helps to foster a welcoming and secure environment. The school has good links with the South Yorkshire Police and Year 6 pupils are involved with the annual Crucial Crew Project, which considers aspects of anti-social behaviour. Issues of bullying are addressed seriously and pupils clearly understand the importance of valuing individuals and giving each other support.

During this academic year, and the last one, the elected pupil council has been led by the appointed head boy and head girl and as a result is functioning more effectively and beginning to take initiatives within the school. The elected council members are becoming increasingly aware of the views of their fellow pupils and with maturity and enthusiasm are seeking to establish some new ventures. They have gained permission to open both a lunch time study room and a recreation room. Interest in the concerns of others does not stop at the door of the school however and in line with the church's wish to communicate the hope of the Christian gospel, the pupils are reaching out to others in need. They sent the proceeds of the harvest festival to the local food bank, raised money for a rehabilitation centre in Derby, and are supporting a Guatemalan child. Relationships with the local community are also established through a variety of educational visits to places of interest, for example to see the working practices of a local pizza restaurant.

The school has sought to develop an appreciation and respect of other cultures in a variety of different ways. Pupils have recently been involved in a European day of languages, which enabled them to build upon a unit of work that they completed on French-speaking countries in Europe and Africa. In addition to this, they have also looked at South American culture in the sessions led by Elevation, and studied other faiths in RE. However, in line with its aim, to 'respect the beliefs of those from other positions', the school could do more to enable its pupils to have positive experiences of people from different faiths and cultures, particularly those represented in Britain today. The school works hard to help its pupils understand the value of democracy and to appreciate the spectrum of political opinion in the country. Pupils study democracy, law, liberty and respect in the Key Stage 3 PSHE programme and older pupils are currently being prepared for a trip to London, which will include a visit to the Houses of Parliament.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

The school makes good provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety throughout the age range, providing a caring and nurturing environment. In response to the questionnaire sent out at the time of the inspection, parents and carers were unanimous in agreeing that they feel that their children are safe and well cared for. Pupils' attitudes and relationships with adults and with each other reflect the values on which the school is based. They behave well around the school at breaks and lunchtimes.

There is very good attention given to the health and safety of pupils on the school site and on outings, with well-established safety procedures in place. Pupils say they feel safe at school and are aware of the dangers of using the internet. There are clear and detailed school policies, which are implemented effectively and consistently by all staff, and reviewed on a regular basis. Robust safeguarding arrangements ensure that all adults working at the school receive the appropriate level of training in child protection. Detailed risk assessments of the premises, fire safety and on-site and off-site activities are carried out. All the necessary checks for fire safety are made at the required intervals and logged carefully.

The prevention of bullying policy is effectively implemented and gives clear guidance to staff by describing different forms of bullying and how to deal with them. In response to a questionnaire given to the secondary pupils at the time of the inspection, hardly any of them said that they worry about being bullied at school. When bullying comes to light, the school endeavours to deal with it quickly and careful records are made in an incidents file. The admission and attendance registers are up to date and completed appropriately. Attendance rates are above the national average. The school meets the requirements of the Equality Act 2010 and has a written three-year plan to increase accessibility as funding allows.

Suitability of staff, supply staff, and proprietors

The required checks on staff and governors are carefully undertaken and properly recorded on a single central record. The administrator has been on safer recruitment training and has written the school's safer recruitment policy, which

includes a helpful checklist. He acts as clerk to appointment panels and is therefore able to ensure that the policy is always followed.

Premises of and accommodation at schools

The premises provide suitable teaching accommodation for the whole age range that is more than adequate in size for the present number on roll. The building is maintained in good decorative order and repair. Attractive displays both in classrooms and around the school celebrate pupils' work and support learning; a few displays also promote the Christian ethos. The premises are well lit, and suitably ventilated. However, the heating is not always sufficient. There are now thermometers in each classroom and teaching space. A system needs to be put in place to monitor temperatures systematically so that additional heating can be supplied when necessary. The recent purchase of a heater for the sports hall is a sensible way of ensuring that the system can be put into practice.

The church makes some use of the building that it shares with the school. During the school day, church activities only take place on the ground floor and do not interrupt the work of the pupils or compromise their health and safety.

There are adequate facilities for PE. The school makes regular use of a large sports area in the nearby YMCA, as well as the sports hall in its own building. Some use is also made of local parks and the grounds of a cricket club for PE lessons and sports days. The residential trips give pupils opportunities for outdoor and adventurous activities.

One of the regulations in this part was not met at the time of the last inspection, and continues not to be met. There is no outdoor space provided to enable pupils, other than those in the EYU, to play outside. There are plans to develop a small courtyard, using funds that the Friends of Hope House School are in the process of raising, to provide a safe outdoor play space. In order to fulfil the requirement, the use of this area would have to be carefully timetabled to ensure that it does not become too crowded.

Provision of information

The school communicates well with parents and gives them information in a variety of ways including through the prospectus, on the notice board in the entrance hall, and through the website, which has recently been redesigned and updated. Annual reports are sent out to all parents, giving a full and detailed picture of their children's progress.

All prospective parents are clearly informed about what the school stands for when they apply for a place for their children and even if they themselves are not Christians, they are expected to attend an envisioning evening and a church service so that they fully understand the ethos and perspective of the school. Potential new pupils also come for a 'taster' period of at least a week, to make sure they feel comfortable with the school and its faith ethos.

A high proportion of parents responded to the questionnaire sent out at the time of the inspection. Nearly all the responses and comments were positive, though a small number indicated general unhappiness. Ten parents attended a meeting with inspectors: they were uniformly positive and in some cases gave moving testimony of the ways in which the school had helped their children. Parents at the meeting said that they particularly value the disciplined environment and the individual attention given to their children.

Manner in which complaints are to be handled

The school has a complaints policy that is placed in the context of its Christian ethos. The policy sets out the procedures, timescales and overall management of complaints and meets all requirements. There were three formal complaints in the last academic year, which were all resolved without the need to go to a panel meeting. In all cases, the policy was carefully followed and full records were kept.

Compliance with the regulations

The school meets all but one of the regulations for registration.

In order to meet fully the regulations in **part 5**, premises of and accommodation at schools, the school must:

- carry out its plans, as soon as practicable, to develop the small courtyard, in order to provide suitable outdoor space to enable pupils to play outside, taking care to timetable its use to ensure that it is never too crowded (Regulation 23G (1) (b)).

The school meets the requirements of the Equality Act 2010.

Meeting the expectations of CST

The school's religious ethos meets the expectations of CST.

What the school could do to improve further

As part of future development the school might wish to consider:

- continuing to clarify its vision and adjust its practices to meet the needs of the mix of believers and non-believers among its pupils
- finding ways to give pupils more frequent contact with people from other faiths and cultures represented in Britain today
- making sure that behaviour is consistently good in all lessons.