



# The Cedars 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:** 887/6003  
**Association:** CST  
**Date of inspection:** 21<sup>st</sup> - 24<sup>th</sup> January 2013  
**Lead Inspector:** Mr C Schenk  
**Team inspector:** Mrs H Jones

**Age range of pupils:** 4 - 16 years  
**Number on roll:** 15  
**Full-time:** 6 boys 8 girls  
**Part-time:** 1 boy  
**Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need:** None

**Proprietor:** The Cedars Foundation; Chair Mr M Salter  
**Head teachers:** Miss C Pakington and Miss S Bolton  
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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**

The Cedars School was founded in 1969, and its founder remained head teacher until July 2010. Currently, there are two joint head teachers, one for the primary part of the school, the other for the secondary, who have both worked at Cedars for more than 25 years. They are assisted by four part-time teachers, and ten regular helpers as well as a large number of other volunteers who give support from time to time. None of the staff receives a salary, though the joint head teachers live in a community house where they are given free accommodation and are provided with living expenses.

There are two pupils in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), one of whom attends part-time. There are two pupils in Key Stage 1 and three in Key Stage 2. In the seniors, there are six pupils in Key Stage 3 and two in Key Stage 4, both in Year 11. No fees are charged; instead, as the prospectus states, 'parents and friends contribute so that "each one's plenty will supply another's needs" (2 Corinthians 8:14), financially, materially, practically or spiritually.'

The school states its aims as follows:

'We aim to equip children with the age appropriate skills, knowledge, understanding and attitudes so that they have a rounded education and are able to take their place in the world of work.

We also aim to develop an understanding of the spiritual gifts such as wisdom, self-control, goodness and kindness that God gives so that children become discerning about music, television programmes, books, films and internet sites and the other fields of entertainment or knowledge they are likely to encounter.

However, our chief aim is to teach the Lordship of Jesus Christ and to encourage children to develop a faith of their own where they refer to the scriptures for guidance and grow their personal trust in Jesus Christ as well as listening to and/or speaking with trusted adults and parents with respect.'

## **Evaluation of the school**

The school meets its aims well. The strong Christian ethos pervades all aspects of its life and work, enabling pupils to grow in their faith and trust. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent, in a school community where individuals are valued and where adults provide inspiring role models. Pupils are given a good start in the EYFS, where adult-led activities are effective, although the

learning potential of child-initiated activities is not always realised. Throughout the age range pupils make good progress in their learning as a result of the thorough and caring teaching they receive. The curriculum is coherent and carefully planned, giving them a broad range of interesting things to learn about in the primary and lower secondary parts of the school. While the oldest pupils are well prepared for public examinations, their educational opportunities are limited by the lack of subject specialist teachers. The teaching is generally good, but the head teachers have too little time to monitor and support other staff, making it difficult to identify and meet their training needs. Pupils are looked after very well indeed and the policies and procedures for safeguarding and promoting their welfare are thorough and are effectively implemented. There are very strong links with parents: as one of them commented, 'There is an excellent school and home relationship culture at the Cedars.' The extensive buildings and the attractive grounds provide a good place for the pupils to thrive, in a safe and secure environment in which they can develop academically and spiritually, growing in wisdom, self-control, goodness and kindness. The school meets all the regulations.

### **Quality of education provided**

The curriculum is carefully planned and given coherence by the Christian principles that are evident in all subjects and age groups. In the EYFS, pupils are given experiences in all the areas of learning with an appropriate emphasis on laying the foundations for their literacy and numeracy. For the primary age range, the school has developed its own programme of work in mathematics, making use of Montessori methods and apparatus. It has also adapted curriculum materials for other subjects from another Christian school, using a thematic approach to give pupils a good range of interesting things to learn about while retaining a strong and appropriate focus on speaking and listening, and on literacy. In Key Stage 3, pupils study all the subjects of the National Curriculum, although work in design and technology is currently largely limited to food technology.

The school is aware that the range of choices open to pupils in Key Stage 4 is limited because there are not enough teachers to provide a full range of secure, specialist subject knowledge. Improvements have been made but there is still further to go. In the recent past, pupils were prepared for only six examinations, mostly at GCSE though with English taken at Scottish Standard Grade. In 2012, some options were introduced through distance learning courses enabling an IGCSE to be taken in business studies and a short course GCSE in information and communication technology (ICT). The present Year 11 cohort took four GCSEs or equivalents at the end of Year 10 in religious studies, history, science and additional science. The school has been able to respond to the interests and aptitudes of the pupils by offering additional examination courses in chemistry and biology, because of the secondary head teacher's subject specialism. This year both pupils are preparing for IGCSE English, GCSE mathematics and a Higher Project, a level 2 qualification offered jointly by the Assessment and Qualifications Alliance (AQA) and City and Guilds, requiring them to undertake an extended study on a topic of their choice. In addition, one pupil is preparing for an international GCSE in French by distance learning with some help from a Francophone volunteer. A part-time teacher with good mathematical subject knowledge has started at the school recently, but there is

still a need for further specialist input, particularly in English and modern foreign languages.

The curriculum is enhanced by a stimulating range of visitors to the school and of visits to places of interest. The school grounds are well used for environmental studies, with the pond providing a particular focus. The historic centre of Rochester with its castle and cathedral is a rich source that is well used. Visits to places further afield, such as Spitalfields in London, are well planned to extend the pupils' experiences.

Personal, social and health education is planned for carefully and taught in a Christian context through subjects like science and Bible study. Pupils also receive citizenship education and an appropriate programme of careers guidance, for example through a course called 'Time for others' and one called 'Work related learning'. The Year 11 pupils reported that the work experience they had done during the previous summer holidays had been interesting and worthwhile. They have clear ideas of what they want to do next in their education and have benefited from information and advice about the options available to them.

The joint head teachers lead by example. They teach well across a wide range of age groups and subjects. However, their full teaching commitments leave them with too little time to monitor and support other members of staff. There are some opportunities for continued professional development through the local authority (LA), through examination boards and through the Christian Schools' Trust. The school now needs to develop more systematic ways of identifying and providing for the training needs of all staff.

The teaching is generally good. Lessons are carefully planned and prepared and delivered in a way that captures the interest and attention of the pupils. The small numbers currently in the school allow for flexible arrangements, so that, for example, pupils in Key Stage 3 sometimes work in the same room as those in Key Stage 2 and sometimes join with the Key Stage 4 pupils. A few pupils work outside their chronological year group for part or all of the time, with older or younger pupils according to their attainments. These arrangements work well, and are kept under continuous review.

Teachers know their pupils very well and assess their progress frequently and thoroughly. The results of their assessments are used effectively to plan the future programme of work for individuals and groups. The joint head teachers mark books regularly and thoroughly, giving plenty of encouragement as well as clear pointers for further improvement.

Pupils make good progress in their learning. They are responsive listeners and articulate speakers, confident to ask pertinent questions and to request help when they need it. They read well, with enjoyment and are encouraged to read a range of worthwhile stories and poems. They are able to express their ideas in writing, using ICT effectively to integrate text and images, for example in the year book for 2012 that they are preparing. They have a sound understanding of mathematical ideas, built up through practical activities and their use of Montessori equipment. The

results of public examinations are good: over the last four years nearly all grades have been in the A\*-C range and just over two fifths of them have been A\* or A.

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

The pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent. The school's clear Christian purpose and aims foster a deep and distinctive spirituality. Every day starts with 'Praise Time' in which pupils participate enthusiastically, worshipping through singing a wide repertoire of songs, accompanied by instruments played by pupils and staff. There are readings from Scripture and pupils express their concerns and thoughts in prayer. On four days a week, pupils from the whole age range worship together and the interactions between the older and the younger pupils are remarkably harmonious and positive. Once a week, the four youngest pupils stay in their classroom for their own worship and this enables both groups to worship in ways that are particularly appropriate to the different age ranges. For secondary aged pupils, worship is usually followed by thoughtful, systematic study of the Bible in a relevant way that has messages that can be applied to their everyday life.

The moral values of the pupils are evident in their caring and supportive attitude to one another in class and in their good behaviour around the school. They have very positive attitudes to work and are diligent and conscientious in their studies. The school discipline policy is founded on Scriptural principles with encouragement, support and forgiveness being central. At the end of the day, pupils are encouraged to reflect on their own behaviour in the light of Scriptural principles and say sorry if they feel that they need to.

The pupils' social development benefits from their experience of working in a caring and cohesive community. Pupils show initiative and take responsibility for contributing to the school community. For example, during the inspection, they joined adult helpers in their lunch break to assist in clearing snow from the playground, ready for physical education (PE) on the following day. The school keeps a photographic annual record of pupils' activities which show their contribution to the lives of those living and working in the locality and to society more widely. Older pupils have worked in a local care home. Year 11 pupils discussed the importance of helping in the community and said how pleased they are that the school has close links with a food bank for those in need. They recounted their own experience of an activity when they had to build shelters from cardboard and slept outside at night in the school grounds in order to understand better the plight of the homeless.

Pupils and staff come from a range of ethnic and cultural backgrounds and treat each other with respect. The strong foundations and understanding of their own faith, which is evident throughout the day, permeates all that is done in school. Pupils also learn about other faiths. Older pupils reported that their visit to Spitalfields had widened their horizons, describing how the area used to have a Jewish population and now has many mosques and other Islamic institutions. They also have some knowledge of Sikhism and of Sikh attitudes to Christianity.

The school is aware of the recent changes that have been made to regulations in this part and an addition to the curriculum policy has already been drafted stating that partisan political views will not be promoted in any subject and that whenever political issues are considered, pupils will be offered a balanced presentation of opposing views. During the inspection, a lesson about democracy and the British Parliamentary system was observed. It was delivered in a non-partisan way, giving pupils an important insight into fundamental British values.

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

Pupils are very well cared for and their welfare is actively promoted. There are robust policies in place for child protection and safeguarding. The school has benefited from LA training and from advice from the Churches Child Protection Advisory Service. All health and safety policies are regularly reviewed by senior staff and by the trustees. They emanate from a Christian viewpoint and are underpinned by pertinent texts from Scripture. The school meets the requirements of the Equality Act 2010. There is a thorough and effective equal opportunities policy, in the context of a Christian concern for social justice. There is also a written plan setting out the school's aims for improving accessibility to the buildings and the curriculum.

The primary head teacher has an up-to-date paediatric first aid qualification and there are suitably stocked first aid boxes around the school. The accident book shows that on the rare occasions when accidents occur they are attended to speedily and effectively. There is a thorough fire risk assessment that has recently been updated. Fire equipment is regularly checked and fire drills are carried out once a term.

The school is vigilant in protecting its pupils and has identified the dangers of internet use as an area of concern. All members of staff have undertaken a course in e-safety. During the inspection, an effective lesson on the topic was given to Key Stage 2 pupils who gained a good understanding of potential dangers and the need for caution without having their confidence in using the internet undermined.

Secondary pupils responded very positively to a questionnaire given to them at the time of the inspection. They are unanimous in saying that they are happy in school and that they are not worried about bullying. One pupil wrote a comment on the back of the questionnaire that gives moving testimony to the way in which the school provides a safe and secure learning environment: 'This school has strengthened me in my Christian walk from an early age, always supporting my family, and myself as an individual. I can trust the teachers and I know I can talk to them whenever I need. This reassured trust is a constant blessing to me. I am extremely grateful for my experiences at this school.'

### **Suitability of staff, supply staff, and proprietors**

The school has thorough procedures for ensuring that all staff, including parents and friends who volunteer their help, are carefully vetted and checked. The trustees of the charitable trust that is the proprietor are also checked in line with requirements. A single central record of checks is kept in an appropriate format.

## **Premises of and accommodation at schools**

The school provides a very good physical learning environment for the pupils. The extensive buildings are set in spacious grounds, which are well maintained, attractive and safe for the use for the pupils. A climbing frame has been built by a generous benefactor and pupils play a part in maintaining it in good order. There is a hard-standing play area that is also used for PE lessons.

The three buildings that are currently used by the school, are well maintained, kept clean and are in good decorative order. Primary and EYFS pupils use two spacious classrooms that have plenty of room for practical activities. The secondary pupils' classrooms are smaller in size but more than adequate for the numbers that use them. In addition, the school has a good range of specialist accommodation including a science laboratory, an art room, a food technology kitchen, and a games room with table tennis and table football.

There are good toilet and shower facilities. Each building has its own toilets and drinking water supplies, which are clearly marked as such in accordance with new regulations. There is a medical room with a sink, immediately adjacent to toilets, with a bed in it for pupils who are ill.

The lighting, ventilation and heating in all classrooms is appropriate and adequate. There are external lights that come on automatically, ensuring that people can safely enter and leave the school premises. There are attractive displays in all buildings in which pupils' work features highly; they are age appropriate and reflect the Christian ethos. Photographic displays and historical information provide a sense of all pupils being involved in the making of school history.

A fourth building, previously used by the school, is on the periphery of the grounds and is currently used by a local charity. Volunteers working for the charity gain entrance to it without going through the school grounds and so its use does not interrupt the school day or pose any problems for the health and safety of the pupils.

PE takes place in a large classroom, in the games room and in the school grounds. In addition, pupils use playing fields at a nearby school, go to a well-equipped gymnasium, where they have a specialist coach, and to a local swimming pool. The pupils walk under supervision to the nearby playing fields and parents transport them to the gymnasium and swimming pool.

## **Provision of information**

The prospectus gives full and up-to-date information to prospective parents and makes the school's religious purpose and Christian ethos abundantly clear. The web-site meets all requirements, but the school rightly judges that it should be further developed and improved. There are very strong links with parents and the flow of information on a day-to-day basis is efficient and comprehensive. Annual reports are thorough, detailed and informative, demonstrating to parents how well the teachers know their children. All parents responded to a questionnaire sent out at the time of the inspection and they were unanimously positive about every aspect of school life.

One parent commented: 'I cannot praise the Cedars enough for an excellent job very well done'.

### **Manner in which complaints are to be handled**

The school has an appropriate complaints procedure set in a Christian context that is made known to parents and meets all the regulations. There have been no formal complaints in the last year.

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

There is one full-time and one part-time pupil in the EYFS, who are taught in the same classroom as the two Key Stage 1 pupils. The school meets all the requirements of the EYFS. Both part-time teachers have Qualified Teacher's Status and are helped by a number of volunteers so that there are usually two adults present giving a very advantageous child to adult ratio.

The classroom is spacious and has a good range of play and other equipment, including Montessori apparatus. The strong Christian ethos underpins all the work in the EYFS and gives pupils a clear sense that they are unique and special people who are cared for and valued.

Good use is made of the attractive school grounds, for example when pupils noticed animal tracks in the snow and looked for shapes, finding pentagons and semi-circles as well as triangles and squares. Adult-led activities are carefully planned and prepared and are generally carried out effectively leading to clear progress, particularly in the pupils' literacy and numeracy. Sometimes, however, activities go on for a little bit too long, beyond the pupils' ability to sustain their concentration. There are also child-initiated activities, but these are less carefully planned and the learning opportunities they provide are not fully exploited.

Members of staff make frequent assessments of progress based on observations of the pupils' day-to-day activities. Full records are kept that trace the pupils' steps towards the early learning goals. The LA early years adviser visits regularly and has given valuable support and advice. Relationships with parents are excellent. There is a home-school contact book and they are welcome to come in at the beginning and end of the day.

### **Compliance with the regulations**

The school meets all of the regulations for registration as well as the requirements of the Equality Act 2010.

### **Meeting the expectations of 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:



- broadening further the educational opportunities for pupils in Key Stage 4 by recruiting staff with specialist subject knowledge in a wider range of subjects, particularly English and modern foreign languages
- using planned, purposeful play more effectively in the EYFS
- developing more systematic ways of identifying and providing for the training needs of all staff.