



The Cornerstone 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: 936/6558
Association: CST
Date of inspection: 13th-16th June 2011
Lead Inspector: Mr C Schenk
Team inspectors: Mrs J Purnell
Mrs F Abdulla

Age range of pupils: 4-18 years
Number on roll: 50
Full-time: 24 boys 24 girls
Part-time:* 1 boy 1 girl
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need: 3

Proprietor: Epsom Christian Fellowship Trust
Head teacher: Mr G Davies
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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 Cornerstone School was started in 1988, by the Epsom Christian Fellowship to educate children of families in membership of the church in premises also used for worship by the Fellowship. Over the years, the school has also admitted pupils from Christian families who belong to other churches, and just over half are now in this category. There are currently 24 full-time pupils of primary school age, including five who are in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), and 24 of secondary school age, including one in Year 13, who works with the Year 11 class since the school does not normally cater for over 16 year-olds. In addition, two primary aged pupils, who are being educated outside school, attend lessons for one day a week; their parents clearly understand that they have the responsibility of ensuring that their children receive a suitable education. As well as the three pupils who have statements of special educational need, the school has identified thirteen others with some learning difficulties.

The Epsom Christian Fellowship Trust is the proprietor of the school, and there are also governors, the majority of whom are members of the Fellowship though some are from different churches. The school is staffed largely by parents, sharing their expertise. Parents are supported by some members of the Epsom Christian Fellowship who make up the remainder of the staff. All members of staff work voluntarily. The school was last inspected by Ofsted in May 2008.

The school states its threefold aims as follows:

1. To teach pupils scripture, and about the nature of God and His salvation.
2. To create a learning and social environment that allows each child to flourish.
3. To provide an education which gives a thorough academic grounding, a preparation for public exams and an enjoyable school day.'

Evaluation of the school

The school meets its aims very well indeed. Through assemblies, and in some lessons, pupils are developing a deep, Bible-based faith. The strong Christian ethos that pervades every aspect of school life creates an environment in which each pupil is valued as a unique individual. Pupils of all ages and with different characters and aptitudes are able to flourish. The academic grounding is very thorough. In the primary years, the pupils' key skills are well established, and in the secondary years they are very well prepared for public examinations, achieving particularly high

standards. All this takes place within the context of enjoyable and interesting activities, giving pupils excellent attitudes to learning.

The school achieves its goals by having clear routines and expectations and a high number of members of staff, who individually are good models of Christian behaviour and who collectively have a wide range of subject knowledge. The favourable pupil to adult ratio is well used to give individual attention and to promote high standards. The curriculum is broad and carefully planned and it is taught well, in a flexible and varied way that takes good account of the pupils' prior attainments, interests and learning styles. In particular, pupils are given an excellent start to their schooling in the EYFS. Throughout the age range, the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good, with particular strengths in their self-esteem and self-confidence, but with some missed opportunities for developing further their awareness of cultural differences. Behaviour is excellent and pupils are well looked after by the staff and by each other. Altogether, the high academic standards and the strong ethos prepare pupils very well for the next stage of their education and for the rest of their lives. However, the careers education programme, while sufficient to meet requirements, does not give them much insight into the world of work. The school meets all the regulations.

Quality of education provided

The curriculum is broad, carefully planned and delivered in a flexible way so that it meets the needs and interests well of the diverse range of pupils in the school. In the infant class, EYFS and Year 1 pupils follow a stimulating and appropriate curriculum in which all the areas of learning are skilfully interwoven enabling the pupils to learn very effectively both through adult-led and child-initiated activities. The other primary age pupils study a wide range of interesting topics, with a strong emphasis given to the development of key skills in speaking and listening, reading, writing and mathematics.

From Years 3 to 7, pupils spend part of their time learning through self-study materials that include commercial mathematics and language schemes, and Accelerated Christian Education booklets. Because pupils are highly motivated and work hard, the self-study sessions enable them to make good progress in their knowledge and skills. A good balance is kept between individual self-study and group and class activities, giving opportunities for practical work and for discussion, in order to deepen the pupils' understanding. However, the balance between the times spent on the acquisition of skills and on their application is not always as good. In particular, there are not enough opportunities for pupils to write at length in their own words.

Year 7 pupils spend part of their time learning alongside pupils in Years 5 and 6, and part of their time in separate lessons, that include French. From Year 8, pupils are taught in year groups. In Key Stage 3 (Years 7 to 9), they study all the subjects of the National Curriculum, though opportunities for design and technology are limited. In Key Stage 4 (Years 10 and 11), pupils follow GCSE courses in a good number of subjects, generally between eight and eleven, as well as taking a computer literacy and information technology (CLAIT) qualification in information and communication technology (ICT) and continuing with physical education (PE) as a non-examination

subject. Music, art and drama play a strong part in the life of the school and pupils across the age range have regular opportunities to take part in performances. Many pupils learn an instrument outside school. There are also more unusual musical experiences, for example, when pupils sing educational songs composed by the head teacher to help them remember aspects of mathematics, science and English grammar. It is not currently possible for pupils in Years 10 and 11 to continue to study art or music, or to take drama as a separate subject. The school is considering ways in which this can happen in the future; it would be a valuable enhancement of the curriculum, enabling pupils to build on the good skills they have acquired in Key Stage 3 and earlier.

In the infant class, the Christian dimension is naturally and effectively woven into the daily routines and the programme of work. The school has recently revised its lesson planning format to require teachers to identify Christian aspects in every lesson. In some lessons, the result of this initiative is clearly apparent, with well chosen Biblical texts used to enhance and deepen the pupils' understanding. However, practice in this respect is not yet consistent and too many opportunities are missed to make natural and helpful references to Christian values.

Pupils in Key Stage 4 follow a self-study course in citizenship, which gives them a good knowledge of public institutions and services in England, but too little opportunity for discussion and debate. They also have time allocated for careers education, mainly through self-study using selected web-sites on the internet. As a result, they are able to make well informed decisions about the next stage of their education, knowing what courses are available at nearby schools and colleges. Some of them have done work experience organised by their families in school holidays, but the school does not itself arrange work experience opportunities, or teach other elements of careers education.

Personal, social and health education (PSHE) is taught to pupils in a Christian context, sometimes through separate PSHE lessons and sometimes through other subjects, such as science and religious studies. The school intends to draw up a list of topics to be covered to ensure that PSHE is taught systematically and comprehensively, but has not yet done so.

A third of the pupils have been identified as having special educational needs. These pupils cover a range of conditions, the most common being autistic spectrum disorder and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). The pupils' needs are catered for very well indeed. They benefit greatly from the small classes, and indeed from the small size of the school as a whole. The co-ordinator for special educational needs is a skilled practitioner with considerable experience, particularly of autism. She works closely with parents to keep them informed about the present provision and to help them to plan for their children's futures. The flexible nature of the school enables some pupils to work for all or part of their time in a younger year group. While this is working well at present, the school is aware that some pupils will soon reach a point where it is no longer appropriate. One of the three pupils protected by a statement receives additional funding, enabling a learning support assistant to be employed. The assistant makes a valuable contribution, not only to the pupil concerned, but also to the school as a whole. As a result of the well co-ordinated support that they receive, pupils with special educational needs make

exceptionally good progress in their academic and social skills and in their self-esteem.

The teaching is good, sometimes outstandingly so. As a result the pupils show high levels of enjoyment and interest and have excellent attitudes to learning. Throughout the age range, they respond well to their teachers' high expectations, appreciating the need to work hard and give of their best. As one Year 11 pupil said, 'We are given a lot of work, but it is not pointless.' The teachers have a good knowledge of the subjects and age groups that they teach and know the strengths, weaknesses and characters of their individual pupils very well indeed. The full-time teachers make a critically important contribution to the success of the school. They each fulfil many different roles. The part-time teachers prepare their lessons conscientiously and fully. Teaching assistants are well deployed and give valuable support.

Teachers assess their pupils' progress thoroughly, both formally and informally. They use their assessments well to plan future work that is at the right level of difficulty for all the pupils in their class. They also use a variety of teaching styles so that pupils are able to learn in different ways that suit their particular aptitudes and characters. There are opportunities for staff to go on courses or attend conferences, and they give each other support.

Pupils in Years 3 to 8 take annual Richmond tests enabling the school to track their progress in language and mathematical skills. Over the last three years, GCSE results have been consistently very high. All pupils have obtained at least five good grades including English and mathematics. Two fifths of the grades have been A* and a further fifth have been A. For a non-selective school, these results represent exceptionally good achievements.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

The pupils' spiritual, moral, social, and cultural development is good, with particular strengths in aspects of spirituality though with some relative weakness in cultural awareness.

The school's vision is to be 'a place with an atmosphere full of love and the wisdom of God' and to be somewhere where a 'desire for God would be kindled in every pupil.' The fruit of this vision is evident in the lives of the staff, pupils and parents. There is a very clear Biblical focus, and scripture is often quoted and memorised by pupils throughout the age range. Daily assemblies ensure that the work of the school is built on a foundation of scripture, prayer and praise. In assemblies the whole school comes together and on Fridays parents are also invited to come and join in. The very close relationships formed between parents, staff and pupils have led to a strong sense of community. As pupils progress through the school, they develop impressive self-confidence and self-esteem and become mature and reflective young people whose faith is strongly established. Year 11 pupils spoke very positively about the contribution the school has made to their lives and about how it has helped them make wise choices for the future. As one of them said, 'Coming here has been a life-changing experience for me.'

In spiritual and moral matters, teachers provide very good role models for their pupils. This was evident in a lesson where a teacher honestly admitted her own shortcomings and made her pupils very aware of the importance of repentance and forgiveness. Similarly, the active faith of another teacher brought an added dimension to the pupils' study of Mark's gospel. The recent initiative to focus on a specific biblical character trait each week gives the pupils further training in Christian values.

Pupils' moral development is further enhanced by the high expectations of good behaviour and the clear boundaries that are set. Discipline is excellent with rewards and sanctions that are understood and respected by the pupils. The school operates a merit system for good behaviour with pupils able to exchange merits for small items, once a fortnight, at the 'merit shop'. This system requires pupils to be good stewards of what they are given as they need to make wise choices. Pupils can choose to trade merits to make a cash donation to a specified charity and frequently do so.

This is a small school with a wide age range, which is used to great effect in helping the pupils' social development by encouraging them to form good relationships not only with their peers but also with those of a different age to themselves. There is a high level of care and respect shown between pupils, who mix easily together. They are courteous and well mannered in their interactions with each other, and with teachers and visitors. Pupils' care and concern for those younger than themselves is exemplary, and was beautifully demonstrated when a much younger sibling came with a parent to join in the activities at the park over lunch time.

The school is ethnically diverse and attitudes of tolerance and respect are clearly demonstrated. Older pupils learn about other faiths in their religious studies lessons. The school is outwardly focused: There are well-established links with schools in Africa, Holland and Borneo. Pupils raise money for international charities; for example, they donated to a fund for victims of the recent earthquake in Japan by bag packing at a local supermarket. However, the many opportunities to broaden the pupils' cultural awareness are not always followed up. The school acknowledges that there is little time specifically allocated for pupils to explore the nature and effects of cultural diversity in the world, and in the immediate locality.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

The pupils are very well cared for. Members of staff are fully committed to promoting the pupils' welfare, health and safety. The selflessness and warmth of the staff enable pupils to thrive in a safe and secure environment. In response to a questionnaire, secondary pupils were unanimous in stating that they were not worried about bullying. This healthy situation has come about because the school takes bullying seriously and appropriate sanctions are in place to combat it, beginning with space for reflection and opportunity for making amends. On the rare occasions when there are more serious behavioural issues, there are set and clear procedures to deal with them, in which the governors play an appropriate part.

Health and safety procedures are thorough and effective. All the required policies are in place and designated members of staff have received the necessary training.

Each staff member keeps a checklist of possible hazards and takes responsibility for ensuring the environment is safe for the whole school community. A fire risk assessment has recently been undertaken and fire drills are held regularly.

The teacher with designated responsibility for child protection has up-to-date training for this role and all staff receive suitable training every three years. New members of staff go through an induction programme following appointment. They are required to sign and date a form to confirm that they have read the safeguarding policy, as well as other key health and safety policies.

Appropriate risk assessments are made for educational visits to the immediate locality and to further afield. There are three staff members who have been trained in first aid. Pupils are properly supervised in and around school. They are encouraged to adopt a healthy lifestyle, for example by including fruit or vegetables in their lunches. The pupils enjoy robust recreational play in the hall or at a nearby park. Registers are properly kept and attendance figures are very high, demonstrating the pupils' enjoyment of school.

Suitability of staff, supply staff, and proprietors

The school has thorough procedures for checking all the adults who come into contact with pupils. These checks are recorded in a way that meets the regulations. This is particularly important, given the high number of voluntary staff. All members of the proprietorial body have been properly checked.

Premises and accommodation

The school is in the church building, which provides suitable accommodation for the present number of pupils. There are sufficient classrooms of an adequate size to ensure pupils of all ages can learn effectively in comfort and safety. A hall is used for assemblies, PE, indoor recreation and lunch. There is an ICT room and a craft room with a small science laboratory behind it. The kitchen, which is used as a staff room for most of the time, enables food technology lessons to take place at least once a week. To overcome limited space, solutions are found in creative timetabling; for example, the boys and girls in Year 10 take turns to use the ICT room and no more than five or six pupils use the laboratory at any one time, with the exact number determined by the nature of the experiment.

The premises are used by the church in the evenings and at weekends. Only two outside activities take place during school time: a weekly parent and toddler group, and a monthly meeting of elderly people. Both use the hall and neither adversely affects the work of the school.

Classrooms are brightly lit with some cheerful displays of pupils' work. Some of these displays reflect the Christian ethos but the school is aware that more could be done in this respect. The school buildings are generally in a good state of decoration and repair. Sensible plans are made to carry out maintenance in good time, often using parental expertise. For example, following the severe weather last winter, there is some evidence of damp seeping through the walls in one place. With the help of a parent who is a structural engineer, remedial work will be carried out in the

summer holidays. There is only a small courtyard in the school for outdoor play, but there is a park very close by, that is reached by walking along quiet side roads. This has very good facilities and is used daily whenever weather permits.

Provision of information

The school communicates very effectively with parents in a variety of ways, making good use of email and giving them access to a virtual learning environment, through the web-site. The written reports that are sent to parents annually are thorough and informative and comment on both attainment and effort. They cover all the subjects taught and also have an initial section that describes each pupil's character and personality. Parents are given the results of Richmond tests with a helpful guide on how to interpret them.

Nearly all parents responded to a questionnaire sent out at the time of the inspection. The response was overwhelmingly, though not unanimously, positive. The parents who came to a meeting with the inspectors were also very positive. They particularly value the character training which the school imparts, and the fact that school and home share the same Christian ethos.

Manner in which complaints are to be handled

The school's policy and procedures for handling complaints meet the regulations and are made known parents. There were no formal complaints last year.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

The overall provision for the five pupils in the EYFS is outstandingly good. They are usually taught in the infant class that also includes two or three Year 1 pupils. The teachers responsible for delivering the curriculum are a gifted, confident team. Although some members of staff are part-time, there is a consistency of approach that gives the pupils security. The provision is very well led and managed.

High standards are underpinned by a strong foundation of Christian morality which is clearly and effectively communicated to pupils. They are aware of right and wrong and their behaviour is exemplary, responding to their teachers' high expectations. A visual reminder for pupils is the 'sunshine and cloud' system in which pupils' names are added to the cloud should they behave inappropriately, but remain in the sunshine when they behave well. At the end of each session those who have names in the cloud are returned to the sunshine on the premise that God loves to give us a second chance. The good working relationship with parents means that this system is supported at home.

The pupils are enthusiastic learners. They come into school confidently and with purpose, bringing things from home for the sound table or other items of interest. The well-established routines developed in the setting ensure pupils are secure and safe both in the classroom, around the school and in the local park.

Parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the teachers and the provision for the pupils in the EYFS. The close parent-teacher partnership further enhances pupils'

learning and achievements. Activities are sent home each evening to help parents to support their children's reading and their recognition of letters and sounds.

There are effective long, medium and short term plans covering all six areas of learning. Planning takes into account assessments made of individual pupils that are recorded in their pupil profiles. There is a good balance between adult-led and child-initiated activities. There is clear purpose to the activities provided and teachers are not afraid to allow pupils to follow their individual ideas. They sensitively draw out pupils' knowledge and understanding and are gifted in their ability to listen carefully, question skilfully and make suggestions when appropriate. This allows pupils to be inquisitive investigators who are making their own hypotheses from personal experience. The pupils' diversity of response was beautifully illustrated when an activity involving creating items for a seaside shop led one child to make an ice cream cone and another to create a telescope for nearby ships.

The pupils' personal development is very good: they have excellent negotiation skills and freely interact with each other and their teachers. They are confident and articulate and are given plenty of opportunities to learn and develop their skills and knowledge. Examples of their early writing are displayed in role play areas, demonstrating the teachers' commitment to encouraging their pupils' efforts and valuing their contributions.

Thorough and accurate assessments of progress are recorded in individual pupil profiles. Assessments are based on a mixture of observations, photographs and pupils' work. Pupils make good progress: all are working securely within or beyond the early learning goals by the end of the EYFS.

The classroom is well organised in spite of its small size. The layout is carefully thought out to enable the space to be used to the best advantage. Furniture and equipment and toys are kept clean and well presented. A small yard area is used effectively for water play and sand activities. It is also used for break and snack times, with older pupils, weather permitting. Should it rain, pupils enjoy very boisterous play in the hall. At lunch times they are escorted with the older pupils to the local park, where there is ample opportunity for them to develop physical skills, such as running, climbing and jumping using some of the very good range of equipment available.

Pupils are aware of what it is to be healthy and know that fruit is good for them. Once a month they are involved in a Fruit and Vegetable week where they are encouraged to be like Daniel and eat only fruit or vegetables for snack. They are encouraged to serve each other by taking on responsibilities such as returning registers, taking messages to other classes, changing the calendar and weather boards, and being responsible for clearing away after they have finished activities.

Compliance with the regulations

The school meets all of the regulations for registration and 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:

- developing the pupils' cultural understanding further and their practical experience of being good citizens
- improving the range and quality of the careers education programme
- including the Christian dimension more consistently in lessons when it is natural and right to do so.