

# The Branch Christian School

The Dewsbury Revival Centre, West Park Street, Dewsbury, West Yorkshire WF13 4LA

**Inspection dates** 10–11 February 2016

**Overall effectiveness** **Good**

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Early years provision	Requires improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a good school

- The Principal has a good understanding of the strengths and areas in need of improvement within the school. The close and dedicated team of staff and volunteers share his vision and work hard to ensure pupils who attend make good progress in their studies.
- The board of trustees is highly committed to supporting the school.
- Pupils follow individual programmes within Accelerated Christian Education (ACE), a whole-school curriculum which is delivered from a biblical perspective. This is further enhanced by practical sessions in science, mathematics, design technology, computing and physical education. Overall pupils make good progress in mathematics and English from a range of starting points.
- Staff, both supervisors (teachers) and volunteers, work hard to support pupils' learning. They are skilled at recognising when pupils need more detailed explanation or just a helping hand in order to move on.
- They assess the speed at which a pupil is progressing and alter the curriculum as required. This ensures that more-able pupils are able to make the accelerated progress of which they are capable.
- Pupils greet visitors politely and extend a friendly welcome. They say that coming to school feels like coming into a family and this makes them feel safe and secure. They are knowledgeable about how to keep safe on the internet and are clear about the different forms bullying can take and who to turn to should an incident occur.
- Pupils' attendance is above that of others nationally and they take pride in being on time and punctual for each lesson.
- The school's curriculum promotes British values effectively. Through, for example, 'Kids Church' pupils learn how to work together and respect others.
- Children who attend the school's early years unit make good progress in learning to read and write.

### It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Children who attend the early years unit do not have sufficient opportunity to learn through experience and play, particularly outside the classroom. This slows their creative development.
- The early years supervisor does not have a good enough understanding of the requirements of the early years curriculum and does not yet monitor and record children's progress in some areas effectively.
- The board of trustees offer school leaders good levels of support but do not yet offer leaders sufficient challenge.

### Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school meets the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements.

## Full report

### What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the outcomes for children who attend the school's early years provision by:
  - creating a more exciting environment outside the classroom in order for children to learn through play and exploration
  - improving the recording of pupils' progress against the areas of learning within the Early Years Foundation Stage.
  
- Improve the quality of leadership and management by increasing the training opportunities offered to the trustees in order that they may offer a greater challenge to school leaders.

## Inspection judgements

### Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- The Principal and trustees have ensured that staff are well trained and support for pupils' learning is good. As a result pupils make good progress from a variety of different starting points.
- Since the last inspection the school has increased the amount of time pupils spend on practical subjects alongside pupils' continuous study of the Accelerated Christian Education (ACE) curriculum through completion of their daily packets of accelerated Christian education (PACEs). This ensures the curriculum meets the needs of all pupils.
- The Principal and staff have high expectations of what pupils can achieve and closely monitor pupils' progress through regular weekly meetings. This enables them to alter the curriculum by, for example, moving some more-able pupils more quickly through their programmes. This ensures all groups make equally good progress over time from their individual starting points.
- This good and better progress is clearly evidenced by the fact that all pupils who have left the school over the last five years have made a successful transition to higher education or the world of work.
- Staff performance is managed effectively. Although performance-related pay is not yet in place teachers, or supervisors as the school prefers to call them, have their performance regularly appraised by the Principal.
- 'Coming to school is like being with your family', commented a group of pupils. This happy and positive approach is clearly reflected in their very good levels of attendance and punctuality. They are also very keen to help others. As several said, 'we are lucky because we have people who care for us; other people are not so lucky'. Many of the older pupils assist their teachers in 'Kids Church', a voluntary organisation which runs clubs in areas of deprivation in and around Dewsbury. This contributes well to developing pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding.
- Through activities such as learning about the structure of our government and working within the community, pupils develop an understanding of British values. By talking to others from different faiths and undertaking residential visits to the annual ACE convention, pupils are helped to develop good levels of spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding.
- Parents spoken to during the inspection held very positive views of the school. They felt that their children were nurtured and cared for when they came to school. They commented on the lack of bullying and the family atmosphere. Although the school does not offer GCSEs or other more recognised forms of accreditation, parents spoken to believe the International Certificate of Christian Education (ICCE) is a well-recognised qualification which prepared their children well for the next stage in their education or workplace.
- Children attend the early years section of the school from three years of age. They spend much of their time in a sectioned off area at the front of the church building in which the school is located. While they join the main school outside at breaktimes they do not often access the outdoor area in order to learn. This limits their opportunities to learn through play and exploration and slows their progress in gaining skills in the 'creative' and 'understanding of the world' elements of the early years curriculum.
- The early years supervisor/teacher ensures pupils join the main school with good literacy and numeracy skills. However she is not always aware of the necessity of recording children's progress against all areas of the early years curriculum and of using this information to inform the planning of new learning. This, at times, slows their progress overall.
- Safeguarding policies and practice meet requirements. Keeping pupils safe is one of the core values of the school. This can clearly be seen in the caring attitudes shown by staff to pupils and also the caring approach taken by older pupils towards younger pupils.
- School leaders have ensured all required policies are in place and meet the independent standards. All reflect the unique nature of the school.
- **The governance of the school**
  - The school's board of trustees have formed a sub-committee which has a clear focus on supporting the school. The sub-committee is made up of members who have held or currently hold posts which bring key skills to their role as governors. For example governors include ex-members of the police and healthcare professionals, as well as members of the business community.
  - Trustees offer key skills in safeguarding and information technology, recruitment and finance. However they recognise that although they are highly supportive of the school leadership and can offer a good level of challenge on matters such as the school's financial propriety, they are not able to

challenge sufficiently well in such areas as the quality of the work undertaken by supervisors/teachers. They are planning to improve this by attending further training but this has not yet come to fruition.

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. The Principal and staff ensure that safeguarding is a key priority within the school. They strive to ensure safeguarding processes and procedures are of the highest quality. When a small error was found in the safeguarding policy, the school leaders ensured it was immediately rectified and followed up with the local authority, ensuring that the error was also rectified on their website.

## Quality of teaching, learning and assessment **is good**

- Staff and leaders have high expectations of what all pupils can achieve. The ACE curriculum used by the school involves pupils working independently for the majority of the time. Supervisors/teachers have established a calm working atmosphere which enables pupils to flourish and produce their best.
- Supervisors/teachers who teach practical subjects have good levels of subject knowledge overall. They plan work which engages and challenges pupils. For example, in a design technology lesson, senior pupils were using an electrical saw confidently to cut out and make a wooden puzzle. Their practical skills at using the saw were impressive and the finished puzzles looked highly professional.
- Supervisors/teachers use questioning effectively to gauge pupils' levels of understanding of the work set for them. This enables pupils to build upon learning, and benefit from being challenged to do even better.
- The curriculum offered within the school offers pupils a range of different opportunities to improve their English and mathematical skills. They have many opportunities to present their work to their peers and adults and this improves their confidence in speaking, listening and reading.
- Pupils work independently on a series of PACEs workbooks. This system delivers English, mathematics, science, history and geography, and social studies learning using a biblical approach. All the activities build on previous learning and are marked by pupils and staff. This enables staff to assess pupils' progress and also develops pupils' independence skills.
- Pupils' behaviour is good and sometimes exemplary. They show good attitudes to learning both individually and when they come together in larger groups. They are clear about what is expected and the vast majority work exceptionally hard to complete the tasks set in their PACEs books. However occasionally one or two do not make the progress expected of them. When this happens work is sent home as homework and must be completed by the next morning.
- The curriculum builds on pupils' previous learning and daily assessment information is used successfully to plan pupils' individual learning targets for the next day.
- Staff ensure pupils do not waste learning time. If they become stuck and are unable to proceed they are trained from an early age to raise a small flag on their desk in order to indicate they need help. They are also encouraged to continue work on another aspect in their PACEs book. This approach ensures that pupils maximise learning time and make good progress overall.

## Personal development, behaviour and welfare **is good**

### Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils say they enjoy coming to school, as evidenced by their good levels of punctuality and attendance.
- Staff and pupils are proud of the school and the work that it carries out in the community. The importance the school places on promoting individual students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is evident in the care and concern shown for the welfare of all pupils and their families.
- Pupils start school at a range of different times. For example, many have been coming to the school since they were three or four. However a significant number start after a period of time in other schools. When pupils start at times other than the beginning of the school year they settle quickly into the calm and caring atmosphere of the school and make progress, socially, emotionally and academically.
- Pupils often take part in a range of sporting, musical and dramatic activities, which successfully promote their physical and emotional well-being.
- Older pupils are offered effective and impartial careers advice which helps them to understand, and make, better and more informed choices at the end of their time in school. The effectiveness of this can clearly be seen in the results from the last three years' leavers, all of whom continued their studies at

college or university after leaving the school.

- The promotion of British values of respect for the rule of law, democracy, tolerance and respect of other groups of people is integral to the school's ethos. Pupils spoken to were very clear that everyone is equal and therefore everyone should be respected.
- These values are reflected in opportunities for pupils to show a sense of responsibility, for example through ensuring the building is tidy and well ordered at the end of the school day.
- Pupils are aware that discrimination and bullying can take many different forms, including cyber and homophobic bullying. They feel safe in school, and the work they do in school helps them to keep safe outside school.
- Through learning about other faiths including Hinduism and Islam pupils learn tolerance, understanding and respect for the beliefs of others.

### **Behaviour**

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils' behaviour when they are learning is good and is often exemplary. They are polite to visitors and staff and are caring and friendly to each other.
- Just occasionally when adults talk for a little too long, some pupils become restless and fidgety; however this rarely interferes with learning.
- Pupil attendance is above the national average. Last year it was slightly higher in the autumn term than this year; however this is because recently there has been a greater incidence of illness. On the day of the inspection, attendance was 100%.

## **Outcomes for pupils**

**are good**

- Pupils make good progress overall. While all groups follow the same curriculum, they progress at their own pace.
- Pupils' progress through their PACEs booklets is closely monitored by staff. Those that do not make expected progress or above are identified and extra support is put in place to help them to improve.
- Pupils all study for the International Christian Certificate in Education. All pupils graduate with one of six levels of certification. The least-able pupils, often with identified special educational needs, leave with a basic certificate. The most-able group of pupils often leave with an advanced certificate, sometimes gained at the end of Year 11 rather than Year 13.
- The school does not identify disadvantaged pupils and as such does not collect data on their progress. However it does identify pupils with special educational needs or disability and this group make equally good progress to others.
- Recent school leavers have all left with either advanced or intermediate certificates from a variety of different starting points, demonstrating good and better progress over time.
- A range of books was looked at during the inspection. More-able pupils were offered more challenging work which met their needs. Less-able pupils made equally good progress because work set matched their needs accurately.
- At times work is repetitive; however if staff feel that a pupil has gained an understanding of a concept they give them permission to move on at a faster pace. This enables them to make accelerated progress.
- If a pupil falls behind or does not complete work set in the lesson they are required to complete it for homework. This also maximises progress.
- Pupils say they enjoy reading. Many read a varied selection of books, although most are from an approved list. Younger pupils' progress in reading is good, due in part to the good-quality teaching of phonics (letters and the sounds that they make) delivered in the early years.

## **Early years provision**

**requires improvement**

- The leadership of the early years aspect of the school requires improvement because the supervisor in charge of the unit does not yet record children's progress against all areas of learning in the early years curriculum. As a result data are not collected on all areas of learning and planned learning does not always reflect the full curriculum.
- The majority make good progress in learning to read and write. They often also develop good numeracy

skills. However their progress in developing skills and knowledge is slower in other areas. This is because they have too few opportunities to learn through exploration and play, particularly outside the classroom.

- They take breaks at the same time as others in the school and use the playground equipment with confidence. They are well looked after by members of staff and older pupils. However apart from at breaktime they rarely enter the outdoor space and there is no bespoke equipment or area laid out for their use.
- They develop good levels of phonics skills and this helps to ensure they are fluent readers by the time they join the main school. However their understanding of the world is limited, as are their creative skills.
- The trustees and senior leaders ensure children are safe and are well cared for. Safeguarding procedures and processes mirror the good practice seen within the school.
- Children join others in the school in art classes which they clearly enjoy. They develop their understanding of different textures and colours in art work which supports their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well.
- Parents believe the early years unit gives their children a good start to their education. They say that their children are happy at school and that they 'can't wait to get to school each morning'.

## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	107795
<b>Inspection number</b>	10008555
<b>DfE registration number</b>	382/6018

This inspection was carried out under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

<b>Type of school</b>	Independent
<b>School status</b>	Independent school
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	3–16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	20
<b>Number of part-time pupils</b>	0
<b>Proprietor</b>	The Dewsbury Gospel Church
<b>Chair</b>	Pastor Robert
<b>Headteacher</b>	Pastor Robert
<b>Annual fees (day pupils)</b>	£2,920
<b>Telephone number</b>	01924 452511
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.branchchristianschool.org.uk">www.branchchristianschool.org.uk</a>
<b>Email address</b>	<a href="mailto:office@thebranchchristianschool.org.uk">office@thebranchchristianschool.org.uk</a>
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	24 February 2010

## Information about this school

- The Branch Christian School is located on the outskirts of Dewsbury in West Yorkshire.
- The school is registered for up to 60 pupils between the ages of three and 16. Currently there are 20 pupils on roll.
- The last inspection took place on 12 December 2010. Since then the trustees have purchased new premises and the school has moved into much more spacious accommodation within a redundant church.
- The school has a strongly Christian ethos but accepts pupils from other religious backgrounds.
- The school teaches the Accelerated Christian Education (ACE) curriculum.
- The school does not use any external providers to deliver education to its secondary pupils.

## Information about this inspection

- The inspection was carried out with one day's notice.
- The inspector scrutinised all policies and procedures required in order to establish the school's compliance with the independent school standards.
- Pupils' learning was observed in a range of curriculum areas across the school. The Principal accompanied the inspector during one of these observations.
- Meetings were held with the Principal, staff and individual pupils as well as three members of board of trustees.
- The inspector took into account the views of four staff members who returned inspection questionnaires.
- The lead inspector spoke to two parents, one by telephone and one informally outside school. Eight parents responded on Parent View (Ofsted's online survey), which was an insufficient number to generate a report.

## Inspection team

Marian Thomas, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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