

The Branch Christian School

Independent School

Inspection report

DfES Registration Number	3826018
Unique Reference Number	107795
Inspection number	301626
Inspection dates	19-20 June 2007
Reporting inspector	Elisabeth Linley HMI

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 162A of the Education Act 2002 (as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005).

Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out by Ofsted under section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005, in order to advise the Secretary of State for Education and Skills about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Information about the school

The Branch Christian School is a non selective independent Christian school based in Heckmondwike, West Yorkshire. It was opened in November 1994 by members of the Dewsbury Gospel Church. There are currently 18 students, aged between 5 and 15 years, who attend the Branch Christian School. The curriculum they follow is based on the Accelerated Christian Education (ACE) programme. This is an individualised programme of work in which students work through Packages of Accelerated Christian Education (PACEs). Students complete their PACEs in the learning centre at individual work stations during the morning. In the afternoons, students work in small groups covering an expanded curriculum. The school aims to provide *'a Bible based education promoting spiritual welfare and academic advancement'*. The Branch Christian School was awarded the status of 'Model School' in July 2006 by Accelerated Christian Education.

Evaluation of the school

The Branch Christian School successfully meets its aims and provides a good education for its students and a good quality of care. Students respond well, make good progress and their behaviour is excellent. The headteacher and staff know the school well and the school's self-evaluation is accurate. The school meets the requirements of all the regulations.

Quality of education

The curriculum provided is good. The ACE curriculum includes five core subjects of mathematics, English grammar and literature, general science, social studies and word building. It provides an individualised programme of learning that enables every student to achieve well whilst promoting motivation and self discipline. The expanded curriculum in the afternoon provides students with the opportunity for discussion, group interaction, project work and research. It includes a range of subjects and activities such as essay writing, information and communication technology (ICT), French, practical maths, sporting activities and more. The school does not provide specifically for students to engage in extra curricular activities. However, the school's aims are clear that parents hold equal responsibility to educate their child and provide for the clubs that they might wish to attend after school. As a result, many enjoy activities beyond the school day such as archery, music and dancing.

When students start at school they are given a diagnostic assessment and then they are placed at an appropriate starting point on the curriculum. In this way the individualised learning programme begins. A strong focus is given to English in the early years to establish good reading skills and the phonetic system is used to aid children in their learning. Once children have completed their 'ABC Learning to read' course they move on to the ACE junior Learning Centre. As students progress through school they follow a curriculum that is well planned and makes clear how their skills and understanding will develop. Students develop good learning habits and high levels of concentration.

The older students are appropriately prepared to consider their future careers. Careers advice is provided by staff and other experienced volunteers who contribute further information when required. Students can aspire and work towards the International Certificate of Education and at each level they choose elective subjects that complement their talents and abilities. Past students have been successful in a range of placements upon leaving school such as in the Royal Air Force, studying for degrees at university in music and photography and gaining apprenticeships.

Teaching and assessment are good. The supervisors and monitors have a good understanding of the ACE curriculum. Their teaching is characterised by good quality relationships where mutual respect between all adults and students is evident. Staff take time to explain clearly and they question and probe to ensure that students fully understand what they are doing. Students working in the Learning Centre score their own work and staff discuss with them where improvement is needed. There are regular formal assessments and continuous daily assessments through the PACEs whilst goal charts provide motivation as well as marking achievement. Students say that they are helped in their learning and they are clear about how well they achieve and what they need to do to improve. As a result, students make good progress no matter what their starting points and they do so at their own pace.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good and is underpinned by the school's Christian foundation. Students are encouraged at all times to strive to achieve their best and to be thoughtful of others. Through the curriculum provided for personal, social and health education and citizenship they develop a satisfactory understanding of other faiths. Time given to devotions during the day enables students to share their thoughts and prayers. They have a personal understanding of the Bible which is developed throughout the day in everything they do. Their involvement in the community goes beyond the school. Students are actively involved in working with others, for example, in the Kids Church Club. The club's team leader speaks very positively about the students' commitment.

The European Student Convention provides very good opportunities for students' personal development. At the time of the inspection students were practicing and performing in preparation for this event in July. They showed real accomplishment in

their gifts and talents, for example, when playing the trumpet, in their dramatic dialogue and preaching; their confidence and self esteem was clear. Many students in the past have won awards and one student did particularly well in the International Convention held in Arizona this year. The conventions provide the chance for students to meet up, socialise and compete with other students from a wider group of similar schools. This contributes well to their social development and students and staff talk positively about the experience.

Students' behaviour is outstanding. They are courteous and show respect to adults and fellow students alike. They have a clear understanding of right and wrong. They willingly take on responsibilities within school and they are rewarded with merits for their help and care. Students enjoy school and value its strong Christian ethos: *'everyone gets on well together'* and *'there is no bullying in school,'* they say. This reflects the strong moral and social guidance that is provided for them. Students' attendance is good. Throughout their time in school students develop good linguistic and mathematical skills and become accomplished in ICT. As a result, they are well prepared for the next stage of their education and the world of work.

Welfare, health and safety of the pupils

The school provides a good level of welfare, health and safety for its students. All guidance is provided within the context of the school's Christian philosophy. Students are taught to keep safe and healthy through the curriculum for personal, social and health education (PSHE) and citizenship. They are encouraged to bring healthy food such as fruit and vegetables to school for snacks at their break times. Although the outdoor space is limited good use is made of local facilities to ensure that students receive regular exercise.

Risk assessments are carried out for fire safety and visits out of school. A number of staff have received training for first aid and any accidents are recorded appropriately. Parents agree that their children are safe at school and the students have the same view. The named person for child protection has attended the relevant training and has passed information and knowledge gained on to colleagues. The school has a comprehensive policy to ensure that their students are safeguarded; it has been updated to meet the requirements of the 2007 legislation. The school fulfils its duties under the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 2002.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

Appropriate checks have been made on staff prior to appointment to confirm their suitability to work with children. However, as staff have been working at the school for some time no medical checks on individuals have been carried out. The school knows it has to ensure this procedure is complied with at the time of the next appointment. All staff have undergone Criminal Records Bureau screening at the enhanced level.

School's premises and accommodation

The school is based in converted residential buildings. Spread over three floors, it provides a good standard of accommodation for teaching and learning; rooms are both light and airy. There is a specialist room for science and another that provides for ICT and design technology. The staff room is spacious and also provides for home economics. A room is available for music and another is provided for art. There is a hall for physical education and a library. The outdoor paved play area is small but it is adequate for the number of students that currently attend the school.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

The prospectus provides a good range of information about the work of the school and makes clear the policies that are available for parents. Parents receive reports that provide comprehensive detail about their child's progress each term and they are invited into school twice yearly to discuss their child's achievements. Newsletters are informative and also celebrate students' successes, for example, medals received at Convention and levels of the National Christian Schools Certificate that have been awarded. Parents are very supportive of the school.

Procedures for handling complaints

The schools' complaints policy satisfies requirements. Parents are made aware that it is available for them. The school reports that no formal complaints have been received.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school meets all of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended January 2005.

School details

Name of school	The Branch Christian School		
DfES number	3826018		
Unique reference number	107795		
Type of school	Christian all-age		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	2 November 1994		
Age range of pupils	3-19		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 9	Girls: 9	Total: 18
Annual fees (day pupils)	£ 2160.00		
Annual fees (boarders)	£ N/A		
Address of school	8-10 Thomas Street Heckmondwike West Yorkshire WF16 0NW		
Telephone number	01924235637		
Fax number	01924411021		
Email address	BranchSch@aol.com		
Headteacher	Mr R Ward		
Proprietor	Dewsbury Gospel Church		
Reporting inspector	Elisabeth Linley HMI		
Dates of inspection	19-20 June 2007		