

# The Branch Christian School

Independent school inspection report

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|-------------------------------|------------------|
| DCSF registration number      | 382/6018         |
| Unique Reference Number (URN) | 107795           |
| Inspection number             | 344458           |
| Inspection dates              | 24 February 2010 |
| Reporting inspector           | Michael Thirkell |

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## Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out by Ofsted under section 162A of the Education Act 2002<sup>1</sup>, as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005<sup>2</sup>, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

This was a light touch inspection which focused principally on the quality of education provided by the school; its provision for the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development; the arrangements for safeguarding pupils and the improvements the school has made since its last inspection.

## Information about the school

The Branch Christian School is situated at the Dewsbury Gospel Church near to the centre of the town. The school's ethos is distinctly Christian serving parents of various Church backgrounds, but is also open to applications from children of non-church and other faith backgrounds. It was opened in 1994 by members of the Dewsbury Gospel Church to provide 'an alternative education' to the local Christian community. The current premises provide temporary accommodation as the school will shortly move to a nearby and extensively refurbished former Anglican church. It presently provides places for 26 boys and girls between the ages of three and 16; the four children in the nursery who are below compulsory school age and in the Early Years Foundation Stage of their education, attend on a part-time basis. One pupil has a statement of special educational needs. The school aims to 'provide an education based on Biblical principles', to 'equip students academically for future vocations' whilst 'at the same time helping them to become socially aware and balanced in their relationship to others'. The school was last inspected by Ofsted in June 2007.

## Evaluation of the school

The Branch Christian School is successful in meeting its mission aims and provides a good quality of education for all pupils, including the children in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Pupils are happy and say that they enjoy being at school. Their behaviour is outstanding. The provision for the pupils' welfare is good and all matters relating to child protection and safeguarding are well documented and implemented effectively. The quality of provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good with some outstanding features. The school has maintained the good quality of provision identified by the last inspection report despite the constraints imposed by its temporary accommodation, in particular in the Early Years Foundation Stage. All regulations relating to independent schools are met.

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<sup>1</sup> [www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2002/ukpga\\_20020032\\_en\\_14#pt10-ch1-pb4-l1g162](http://www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2002/ukpga_20020032_en_14#pt10-ch1-pb4-l1g162)

<sup>2</sup> [www.opsi.gov.uk/ACTS/acts2005/ukpga\\_20050018\\_en\\_15#sch8](http://www.opsi.gov.uk/ACTS/acts2005/ukpga_20050018_en_15#sch8)

## Quality of education

The quality of education is good. The curriculum is good and provides pupils of all ages and abilities, including children in the Early Years Foundation Stage, with a good range of learning opportunities, despite the current limitations on outdoor play space for the youngest children. It meets the needs of pupils of all abilities, including those with a statement of special educational need, and enables them to make good progress. The curriculum is based on the Accelerated Christian Education (ACE) programme. Pupils are taught a range of core subjects comprised of English language, literature and word building, mathematics, science and social studies through Packages of Accelerated Christian Education (PACEs). They complete these each morning, through their study at individual work stations. The level of work undertaken by each pupil is based on the ability and aptitude of the individual. The outcome of this is informed by ongoing monitoring and testing.

The curriculum is extended and enhanced by the addition of practical mathematics, practical science, history, geography, physical education, French, art, music, design and technology, information and communication technology (ICT), personal, social and health education (PSHE) and citizenship. The school recognises the importance of using this time to extend pupils' opportunities for intellectual challenge, through for example discussion in groups, using their initiative to plan activities and developing creative and practical skills. Pupils' personal and social development is supported further through 'Devotions' on four days of the week which encourage pupils, through discussion, to recognise and reflect upon issues and their own responses to them. Such opportunities for discussion in age-related groups provide good opportunities to develop pupils' speaking and listening skills. ICT is integrated well into the curriculum for all junior and senior pupils, but limited space constrains its use as part of the Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum. Careers education is good and supported by specialist teaching and, for older pupils, work experience. Open spaces near to the school provide opportunities for games and pupils say that they enjoy regular visits to a local sports centre where they have the opportunity to swim and play volleyball. The curriculum is supported by a good range of extra-curricula activities, including the annual European Students Convention, which provides pupils with opportunities to take part in a range of activities that help them to build on their individual physical, musical and communication aptitudes.

The curriculum is supported by a clearly articulated policy which is helpfully described for parents in the school prospectus. It is supported well by schemes of work and other documents which carefully focus on the progressive development of pupils according to age, but also their ability. Teachers are encouraged to plan individual approaches for learning wherever feasible. As a result of the good progress they make in developing skills in literacy and numeracy, as well as in communication and social skills, pupils are prepared well for their future life and education. Older

pupils confidently describe a range of pathways for their further education or training.

The quality of teaching and assessment is good throughout the school. Lessons are conducted in a very positive learning atmosphere and are well planned and managed. The quality of learning is enhanced by the outstanding behaviour of pupils and the positive relationships that exist between teachers and pupils. Teachers show great commitment to their pupils and reflect on how they can 'contribute positively to God's plan for the pupils' through planning opportunities for learning. Pupils say that they appreciate the support of their teachers. Pupils of all abilities, including those identified as having special learning needs, quickly develop self-confidence and self-reliance and independent attitudes to learning.

Procedures for assessing and recording pupils' progress are good, including in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Pupils receive regular feedback on completed PACEs and their subjects in general. Teachers show good knowledge of their pupils' abilities and capabilities evidenced through tests and other information retained on pupils' prior attainments. Teachers' knowledge of the pupils' learning needs and their rates of progress are used well in their planning. This is supported significantly by the small size of teaching groups and calm learning environment which pervades the school; this ensures regular opportunities for teachers to speak with pupils about their work. Pupils are regularly involved in assessing their own achievements and progress which, they acknowledge, involves them in having a say about their own rate of work and levels of challenge. Reports to parents are regular and helpful in most respects, but comments in reports on pupils' progress in the PACEs aspect of the curriculum are too brief.

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

The quality of the provision for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils, and children in the Early Years Foundation Stage, is good with some outstanding features. The spiritual and moral aspects of pupils' development show some outstanding features and reflect the Christian ethos of the school. Pupils are effectively supported in their developing self-knowledge by being involved in regular discussion with teachers and evaluating their own progress and responses to learning. Bible teaching supports pupils' moral development. The development of their understanding of right and wrong is supported and enhanced through discussion of personal disputes where they might occur and discussion of issues raised in the media. At a practical level, close links with local police officers support this development, as well as establishing their knowledge of the law. Pupils' behaviour is invariably outstanding, supported by the calm nurturing atmosphere they regularly experience in school. They show initiative through taking responsibility for organising and undertaking cleaning tasks within the school and older pupils readily take responsibility for their younger peers. It is clear that pupils enjoy being at the school. Their attendance rates are high and they have very positive attitudes to their learning and wider involvement in school activities.

Good opportunities are provided for pupils to develop knowledge of public institutions in England, through visitors to the school, such as a local councillor as well as through studying citizenship. They develop community responsibility in a number of ways, for example by going on walks to raise money for good causes and they have put together parcels to provide some cheer to soldiers away from home at Christmas. Pupils are encouraged to develop positive attitudes and to have harmonious relationships with other cultures through contacts with pupils from schools in different countries, for example through the annual European Students' Convention attended by older pupils. In school, pupils from different Christian cultural heritages develop positive relationships. National flags from all over the world which hang in the main hall emphasise the range of nationalities that have attended the school. The range of pupils' educational development and experiences prepares them well for their future experiences of life and economic well-being.

### Safeguarding pupils' welfare, health and safety

The school has in place a full range of good policies and procedures for safeguarding pupils' welfare, health and safety; these include the checks on the suitability of staff to work with children. The policies demonstrate an appropriate response from the school to the guidance provided by the department for children schools and families, relating to safeguarding children and safer recruitment in education. All matters relating to fire safety, including detailed risk assessments, checks of fire fighting equipment and records of regular fire drills are in place. Records are detailed and well maintained. Parents are encouraged to provide pupils and children in the early years foundation stage with healthy snacks for during the school day and the curriculum ensures a good range of opportunities for physical activity. A policy relating to access has been provided for the temporary accommodation which fulfils the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 as amended.

### Effectiveness of the early years foundation stage

The provision for Early Years Foundation Stage is good. The skills and abilities of children when they enter the school are in line with those expected of children of their age group. Good induction arrangements help children to settle well and transition into Year 1 is managed effectively. All children make good progress in their learning. The school provides a good balance of adult directed and independent learning. Independence is developed, for example, through encouragement to take responsibility for their work stations and clear away equipment efficiently and safely.

The school has very effective links with parents. Their daily contributions to each child's journal ensure they play a very active part in their child's education. The curriculum offers a broad range of activities which support learning in communication skills, numeracy, science, language personal development and literacy, and a range of well planned tasks help children to develop confidence and

inquiring minds. The children's relationships with each other and staff are very good. Behaviour is exemplary and reflects the caring Christian ethos of the school. Children are happy and say they enjoy school.

In spite of temporary accommodation, resources are deployed well and are suitable for all ages in the nursery. Effective management ensures limitations on space do not impede children's progress. The current outdoor play area is limited in space and equipment. This constrains opportunities for creative play and physical development. Leadership and management is good. Effective planning and self-evaluation and good use of assessment to inform learning assure improved outcomes for all children.

## Compliance with regulatory requirements

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

## What the school could do to improve further

While not required by the regulations, the school might wish to consider the following points for development.

- Ensure that reports to parents on pupils' progress in the PACEs aspect of the curriculum are more detailed.
- Improve opportunities for outdoor play in the Early Years Foundation Stage when feasible.

Inspection judgement recording form

|             |      |              |            |
|-------------|------|--------------|------------|
| outstanding | good | satisfactory | inadequate |
|-------------|------|--------------|------------|

The quality of education

|  |  |   |  |  |
|--|--|---|--|--|
| Overall quality of education   |  | ✓ |  |  |
| How well the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of pupils |  | ✓ |  |  |
| How effective teaching and assessment are in meeting the full range of pupils' needs         |  | ✓ |  |  |
| How well pupils make progress in their learning  |  | ✓ |  |  |

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

|  |   |   |  |  |
|--|---|---|--|--|
| Quality of provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development |   | ✓ |  |  |
| The behaviour of pupils  | ✓ |   |  |  |

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

|  |  |   |  |  |
|--|--|---|--|--|
| The overall welfare, health and safety of pupils |  | ✓ |  |  |
|--|--|---|--|--|

The quality of the Early Years Foundation Stage provision

|   |  |   |  |  |
|---|--|---|--|--|
| How good are the outcomes for children in the EYFS?                                     |  | ✓ |  |  |
| What is the quality of provision in the EYFS?   |  | ✓ |  |  |
| How effectively is the EYFS led and managed?  |  | ✓ |  |  |
| Overall effectiveness: how well does the school meet the needs of children in the EYFS? |  | ✓ |  |  |

## School details

|   |   |           |           |
|---|---|-----------|-----------|
| Name of school  | The Branch Christian School                               |           |           |
| DCSF number   | 382/6018  |           |           |
| Unique Reference Number (URN)                                 | 107795  |           |           |
| Type of school  | Christian   |           |           |
| Status  | Independent   |           |           |
| Date school opened  | November 1994   |           |           |
| Age range of pupils   | 3-16  |           |           |
| Gender of pupils  | Mixed   |           |           |
| Number on roll (full-time pupils)                             | Boys: 11  | Girls: 11 | Total: 22 |
| Number on roll (part-time pupils)                             | Boys: 0   | Girls: 4  | Total: 4  |
| Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need | Boys: 1   | Girls: 0  | Total: 1  |
| Annual fees (day pupils)                                      | £ 2470.00   |           |           |
| Address of school   | 17 Halifax Road<br>Dewsbury<br>West Yorkshire<br>WF13 2JH |           |           |
| Telephone number  | 01924 465600  |           |           |
| Fax number  | 01924 411021  |           |           |
| Email address   | branchsch@aol.com   |           |           |
| Headteacher   | Mr R Ward   |           |           |
| Proprietor  | Dewsbury Gospel Church                                    |           |           |
| Reporting inspector   | Michael Thirkell  |           |           |
| Dates of inspection   | 24 February 2010  |           |           |