

Inspection of The St Christopher School

Mountdale Gardens, Leigh-on-Sea, Essex SS9 4AW

Inspection dates: 23 and 24 April 2024

Overall effectiveness

Good

The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Outstanding
Personal development	Outstanding
Leadership and management	Outstanding
Early years provision	Outstanding
Sixth-form provision	Outstanding
Previous inspection grade	Outstanding

The headteacher of this school is Dan Woodman. The school is part of SEN Trust Southend, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer, Jacqueline Mullan, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Jane Oliver.

Until November 2020, the school was exempt from routine inspection because it was judged to be outstanding at its previous inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. The school has not been inspected under section 5 of the Act since March 2014.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils love attending this school and do so regularly. They receive a high level of care from staff. Pupils build incredibly positive relationships with staff and with each other. They show kindness and consideration throughout the school day. This helps to build the strong sense of community that flows through the school.

Pupils have exceptional attitudes towards their learning. They work hard in their lessons to reach the very high expectations the school sets for them. They understand how to use their 'learning powers' and do this throughout the day. They use these 'powers' to help them to achieve well. For example, they develop their independence when accessing the range of clubs on offer to them. These also help to spark interests and talents in areas such as gymnastics, drumming or rugby that pupils never realised they had. Pupils then develop these interests further outside of school.

Pupils are very well prepared for their future. They benefit from the extensive wider opportunities the school provides for them. A vast range of activities in the community help pupils to develop important life skills. Pupils enjoy visiting shops to purchase ingredients for cooking or resources for art and design, for example. Students in the sixth form value greatly their residential trip to Portugal.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

Since the previous inspection, the school has refined and developed the curriculum. This is to reflect the increased number of pupils joining the school with complex learning needs. The school has identified three curriculum routes for pupils. Each route identifies the important knowledge pupils will learn. This knowledge has mostly been broken down into smaller steps and placed into a logical order. For many pupils this is on a more individualised basis due to their level of need. While the school has made great strides in improving the curriculum, this is an ongoing piece of work in a small number of subjects.

The school provides well considered, precise training for staff. This has a demonstrable impact on the school. Many staff take the lead with improving the curriculum. Training helps staff to support the changing needs of pupils entering the school. In a short space of time, this work has moved forward considerably. In some instances, staff are still getting to grips with the improved curriculum areas and the changing context of the school. This can mean there are occasions where learning time focuses more on the completion of activities and not securing the important knowledge which pupils need.

Supporting pupils to communicate effectively has been a key focus for the school. The school does this incredibly well. Staff are experts at understanding the needs of children as soon as they join in the Reception Year. Many children arrive at school unable to communicate their wants and their needs. Consistent approaches to supporting communication help children to do this. The well-designed curriculum in

the Reception Year helps children to secure other important life skills such as how to maintain their concentration. This sets them up very well for future learning.

As pupils learn to communicate, many begin to learn how to read through phonics. The school identifies pupils who are ready for this. Staff share different books with pupils to develop their passion for reading. Older pupils enjoy studying novels in their English lessons, for example. The school is changing some of its approaches towards reading. This includes introducing a new phonics scheme and new strategies to support pupils with specific needs such as dyslexia. While this work is well underway, some of it is in its infancy and is not yet embedded.

Students in the sixth form benefit from an exceptional offer. The rich curriculum and high-quality careers advice help pupils to find new talents and interests. Many then go on to further their studies in these areas when they leave the school. Communication continues to be a high priority. Students learn to communicate in a variety of different situations. For example, students learn to work collaboratively when preparing a two-course meal during food technology lessons. The school uses its caravan in Mersea Island to further develop important life skills. Students relish the opportunity to visit here as a part of their day.

Pupils of all ages learn the importance of keeping healthy and safe through the personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education curriculum. They learn what healthy relationships are. They understand the importance of showing respect towards those who are different to them. Team captains value the chance to be leaders and role models to others.

Trustees and local governors know the school very well. They are highly effective at holding school and trust leaders to account for the quality of provision. They understand why the school has prioritised areas for development in the way it has. Leaders have addressed improvements to the school in a coherent way, for example through ensuring they train staff in the new approaches to behaviour. Leaders have a thorough understanding of how to embed the changes they have made, and are making, to the curriculum. The school engages incredibly well with parents. Parents value the way the school has a positive impact on the lives of their children and their families.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The school has introduced new approaches to the curriculum in some areas. These approaches are not securely understood or embedded across all areas of the school. This can lead to times where lessons focus more on activities than specific learning. The school should ensure that staff fully understand and

implement the curriculum as leaders intend, so pupils secure their understanding of the important knowledge leaders want them to.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	138044
Local authority	Southend-on-Sea
Inspection number	10288514
Type of school	Special
School category	Academy special converter
Age range of pupils	3 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	256
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	11
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Jane Oliver
CEO of trust	Jacqueline Mullan
Headteacher	Dan Woodman
Website	www.thestchristopherschool.co.uk
Dates of previous inspection	13 and 14 September 2022, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The St Christopher School is part of SEN Trust Southend multi-academy trust.
- The headteacher joined the school in September 2022. The leadership team has been further developed since then.
- All pupils have an education, health and care (EHC) plan. These are for a range of needs but most notably autism, speech, language, and communication needs, moderate learning difficulties and some social, emotional and mental health needs. Increasingly the school caters for pupils with more complex needs.
- The school provides a significant amount of outreach work in the local area for mainstream schools.

- The sixth-form building is in a building on the same road as the school. The school also makes use of a caravan at Mersea Island to enhance experiences for sixth-form students.
- There is provision on the school site for respite which is run separately and separately inspected by Ofsted.
- The school does not currently use any providers of alternative provision.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.
- Inspectors discussed any continued impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors held meetings with the chief executive officer, headteacher, deputy headteacher, assistant headteachers, subject leaders, staff, pupils, governors, trustees and representatives of two local authorities.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: communication and early reading, mathematics, physical education and PSHE. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke with teachers, spoke with pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. The lead inspector listened to pupils read. Inspectors also considered evidence from other areas of the curriculum.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of documents, including behaviour logs, bullying records, attendance records, pupil records, minutes of local governing body and trustee meetings, school development plans, records of visits from a local authority and school policies.
- Inspectors considered the views of parents through their responses to the online survey for parents, Ofsted Parent View, alongside speaking with parents as they dropped their children off at school. Inspectors also took account of responses to both the Ofsted pupil and staff surveys.

Inspection team

Michael Williams, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Susan Sutton

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Ruth Brock

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