

Inspection of The Branch Christian School

Dewsbury Gospel Church, West Park Street, Dewsbury, West Yorkshire WF13 4LA

Inspection dates: 11 to 13 July 2023

Overall effectiveness

Good

The quality of education

Good

Behaviour and attitudes

Good

Personal development

Good

Leadership and management

Good

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Requires improvement

Does the school meet the independent school standards?

Yes

What is it like to attend this school?

This is a small, friendly and welcoming school. Pupils and staff treat each other with genuine warmth and mutual respect. Pupils enjoy coming to school. Staff feel privileged to teach them. Staff expect pupils to behave well and have positive attitudes to their learning. Pupils rise to these high expectations and understand the importance of working hard. They say that they feel safe and well looked after. Pupils are confident that if any poor behaviour or bullying were to occur, staff will deal with them effectively.

The Christian ethos pervades all aspects of this nurturing school. Pupils enjoy learning independently in their 'offices' and one-to-one or small group teaching. They enjoy progressing through the Packets of Accelerated Christian Education (PACE) that form the curriculum. There is a broad range of subjects for pupils to study. Pupils are encouraged to aspire to do their best.

Pupils relish spending their merits in the 'merit shop'. They take part in the annual student convention, where they compete and perform against pupils from other Christian schools across Europe. Pupils develop social skills and build their confidence and resilience. Wider curriculum activities and experiences, such as camping, help pupils to develop skills to prepare them for adulthood.

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

The school uses the Accelerated Christian Education (ACE) curriculum. It is ambitious and clearly sequenced. Learning begins in the early years and builds coherently. There is a strong focus on pupils developing depth of knowledge across a broad range of subjects. Pupils build their knowledge logically and at their own pace. Staff use assessment to match the curriculum to the needs of each pupil. Pupils progress through the curriculum in a way that suits them. Staff check frequently what pupils know and can remember. Pupils use 'check-up' opportunities to assure themselves that they have grasped essential knowledge. When needed, staff provide timely support for those who need extra help.

Pupils have frequent opportunities to revisit and consolidate their learning. However, there are inconsistencies in the design and implementation of some aspects of the curriculum. There are missed opportunities for pupils to practise, connect and apply their learning from the ACE curriculum, in wider curriculum activities.

Leaders place strong emphasis on teaching pupils to read from the very start of their school lives. Reading is essential for pupils to access the curriculum PACE. Children develop their communication and language skills in pre-school. They learn songs, rhymes and initial sounds in words. They are supported to make rapid progress with phonics and early reading skills from Reception. Books match the sounds that pupils know. Pupils quickly become fluent and confident readers. Those who speak English as an additional language and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are well supported through the structured approach to teaching

phonics. When pupils struggle to read, they receive extra phonics and reading sessions to help them to catch up. Staff promote reading for pleasure and for information well. Pupils enjoy reading. They speak enthusiastically about the books and authors they enjoy. They appreciate the wide choice of books they can read in school. They enjoy using a computer programme to help them practise reading at speed.

Some pupils do not speak English as their first language. Appropriate adult support and resources help pupils understand and learn English. Staff provide pupils with SEND with extra support to help them to access the curriculum. The individualised approach means that some pupils with SEND can progress through the curriculum at a slower pace, if needed.

Pupils aim to attain the International Certificate of Christian Education by the end of their time in school. Leaders provide pupils with careers guidance and support to help them with further education and employment applications. Pupils receive independent advice to help them to make informed decisions.

Pupils' personal development is promoted well through the curriculum. Pupils learn age-appropriate relationships and sex education. Pupils develop the required knowledge to form positive relationships and live healthy lives. Assemblies support aspects of the curriculum that promote personal development. Pupils learn about equality and diversity. They take on positions such as school council members. They are encouraged to develop oracy through presentations to others linked to the curriculum. Through these opportunities, pupils learn responsibility and leadership skills.

The religious ethos of the school is at the heart of the school's curriculum. Pupils develop a good understanding of spiritual, cultural and moral issues in the wider world. They appreciate the way that the school helps them to be independent and reflect on the views and opinions of others. They develop strong, trusting relationships with staff.

The proprietorial board and governors ensure that the school meets the independent school standards. The health, safety and welfare of pupils are high priority. The school meets the requirements of schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010. Governors meet frequently to monitor the school's work closely. They work with the headteacher to ensure that actions to improve the school are effective.

Staff are proud to work at the school. Parents and carers are highly supportive. Together, they all want the best for pupils. Staff feel valued and fully involved in the work of the school.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

The proprietor ensures that staff are appropriately trained to safeguard pupils. Staff are vigilant. They understand that despite the school being small, safeguarding remains high priority. They get to know pupils and their families very well. They can offer prompt and effective support. Pupils trust adults working in school to help them. They are confident that they always have someone to talk to if they are worried. Pupils learn about risks to their safety and how to manage them. These include relevant topics such as road safety, healthy relationships, the effects of drugs and alcohol and the importance of internet safety.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and proprietor)

- There are inconsistencies in the way some aspects of the curriculum are devised and taught. Sometimes, learning in the wider subjects does not link well to the subjects in the ACE curriculum. This means that pupils cannot apply their knowledge as skills in different contexts effectively. Leaders should ensure that the content of the wider curriculum activities are carefully sequenced and linked to the ACE curriculum, and that staff receive appropriate training to help pupils to explore, develop, connect and apply their knowledge as skills.

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.

School details

Unique reference number	107795
DfE registration number	382/6018
Local authority	Kirklees
Inspection number	10267596
Type of school	Other independent school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	3 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	22
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	The Dewsbury Gospel Church
Chair	Stephen Hodgson
Headteacher	Jill Holt
Annual fees (day pupils)	£3,770 to £1,783
Telephone number	01924 452511
Website	www.branchchristianschool.org.uk
Email address	office@branchchristianschool.org.uk
Dates of previous inspection	6 to 8 July 2021

Information about this school

- At the time of the inspection, there were only 3 children in the early years. There are currently no students in the sixth form.
- The school does not make use of any alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

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

The school meets the independent school standards. These are the requirements set out in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

- This was the second routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed any continuing impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors held meetings with the headteacher, the designated leader for safeguarding, some governors who are also volunteers, staff and pupils.
- The lead inspector met with the chair of the proprietorial body.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives into reading and English, history, geography and science. Inspectors looked at curriculum plans, visited lessons, spoke to staff and spoke to some pupils about their learning. Inspectors also looked at samples of pupils' work, including their PACE.
- Inspectors spoke to leaders about the curriculum in some other subjects, including mathematics, design and technology and computing.
- Inspectors spoke with leaders and staff about the school's approach to safeguarding pupils in school. Inspectors checked the single central record and reviewed records relating to behaviour, attendance and safeguarding. Checks were made on staff training and safeguarding procedures. Inspectors checked the implementation of risk assessment and health and safety policies, including the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005.
- Inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted's surveys for parents, pupils and staff. The lead inspector also spoke with some parents at the beginning of the school day.

Inspection team

Stephanie Innes-Taylor, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Kate Rowley

Ofsted Inspector

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