



# Potter's House School

## Inspection report

This inspection was carried out under section 162 (A) of the Education Act 2002 as amended. Bridge Schools Inspectorate (BSI) has been approved by the Secretary of State in the Department for Education (DfE) to undertake inspections in designated independent schools within membership of the Christian Schools' Trust (CST) or the Association of Muslim Schools UK (AMSUK).

**DfE number:** 351/6011  
**Association:** CST  
**Date of inspection:** 15<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> November 2010  
**Lead Inspector:** Mr C Schenk  
**Team inspectors:** Mr R Evans  
Ms S Munir

**Age range of pupils:** 2 - 11 years  
**Number on roll:** 36  
**Full-time:** 5 boys      4 girls  
**Part-time:** 11 boys      16 girls  
**Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need:** None

**Proprietor:** Potter's House School  
**Head teacher:** Mrs M Mitchell  
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## **The purpose and scope of the inspection**

The main purpose of the inspection is twofold. It is to advise the DfE whether the school continues to meet the requirements for registration, and to determine whether the school's religious ethos continues to meet the expectations of its association. Ofsted monitors the work of independent inspectorates, including a sample of inspections, and you can find the latest evaluation of the work of The Bridge Schools Inspectorate on the Ofsted website.

## **Information about the school**

In 1994 a charitable trust, Potter's House School, was set up and the head teacher and her husband opened a nursery in 1995 under its auspices. In 1999 the nursery moved to its present premises in 6 Arley Avenue. The age range was gradually extended and in 2003, Potter's House was registered with the DfE as an independent school for pupils up to the age of 11. In 2008 the trust bought number 4, the adjacent detached house and it has been used as part of the school since September 2010. The Nursery is currently based in number 6 and has 26 pupils aged between two and four, one of whom attends full-time; the others have varied patterns of part-time attendance. The Primary School is in number 4 where pupils are usually taught in two classes. As well as the eight full-time pupils there are two pupils who are being educated outside school and attend for four days a week at their parents' request. The parents clearly understand that they have the overall responsibility of ensuring that their children receive a suitable full-time education. On most days, Class 1 has five pupils from Reception to Year 2, and Class 2 has five pupils from Year 4 to Year 6. All the pupils in the Nursery and the two Reception aged pupils in Primary are in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS).

While most of the pupils in the Primary School have come through the Nursery, nearly a third came into Primary after unhappy experiences in other primary schools. Although the numbers are small, the attainment range is wide in both the Nursery and Primary, reflecting the inclusive nature of the admission policy. Most pupils in Primary, and some in the Nursery, come from committed Christian families, who worship at a number of nearby churches. There are also pupils whose families are of different faiths, or none.

The 5 to 11 age range was last inspected by Ofsted in November 2007; the under-fives were inspected separately by them in March 2008. This inspection covers the 3 to 11 age range. The provision for under-threes will continue to be inspected by Ofsted.

The mission statement of Potter's House is 'To give our children God's view of the world and themselves, not the world's view of God and themselves.' The school aims to fulfil its mission statement 'by providing a Christian environment and ethos which will enable each child to have:

- a Bible based curriculum and teaching
- a Christian example and role model from staff and trustees
- a foundation for the future that will enable pupils to hold firm to God's word, teaching and example in the next stages of their education and their lives beyond

- a loving, nurturing and fair family environment of acceptance and mutual respect.’

## **Evaluation of the school**

The school meets its aims very well. Members of staff are good role models, providing a loving and nurturing environment in which every pupil is treated as a unique individual and is able to thrive. The curriculum and the teaching are given particular coherence and purpose by the Christian perspective that runs through everything in a natural way and is always presented positively and joyfully. Being at Potter’s House is a very special experience for pupils across the age range and provides an excellent foundation for their future. Many aspects of the school are outstanding: the pupils’ spiritual, moral, social and cultural development; their welfare, health and safety; and the effectiveness of the EYFS. Pupils make good progress in their learning and develop a strong sense of self-esteem, giving them confidence without arrogance. Pupils of all ages are eager to learn and relish the interesting and challenging activities that they are given. As an older pupil said, ‘It’s good because you learn a lot: it’s quite challenging and it’s fun in the lessons.’ The teaching is generally good and examples of outstanding teaching were observed in all classes. Members of staff have very good opportunities for professional development and attend a wide range of training courses. They sometimes observe each other’s teaching, but could do so with benefit more frequently. Attendance is very good but although efforts have been made to improve punctuality there is still more to be done. While resources are well used and are good in range and quality, time is not always used to the full. Pupils in the Nursery are carefully assessed, enabling their progress towards the early learning goals to be accurately recorded. Assessment is also well used in Primary to inform future planning, and annual standardised tests give national comparisons. However, the teacher’s assessments and the test results are not analysed closely enough to track the pupils’ progress through National Curriculum levels. All the regulations are met showing a clear improvement since the last inspection.

## **Quality of education provided**

The curriculum is broad, carefully planned and given coherence by the Christian worldview that runs through everything. In the Nursery, pupils are given a wide range of stimulating activities that enable them to develop their skills in all areas of learning. Pupils are encouraged to be creative and adventurous and to develop their independence. The plans for each session, displayed on the wall for parents to see, identify spiritual development as well as focused activities, developmental matters and early learning goals. A strong emphasis is given to developing the pupils’ communication skills and the good adult to child ratios are well used to encourage them to listen carefully and to talk about what they are doing with increasing confidence.

In Primary, the curriculum includes all the subjects of the National Curriculum, together with French and Latin in Class 2. Following a recent review, many subjects are now taught through integrated topics that are carefully planned to provide a balance between subjects over the year, and to ensure that everything is taught from a Christian perspective. A topic called ‘fearfully and wonderfully made’ had been

studied shortly before the inspection and included strong scientific and geographical elements. At the time of the inspection, pupils were studying a topic on 'light and dark' that included historical and scientific work, as well as many opportunities for spiritual and moral development.

Building on the good practice in the Nursery, Primary pupils have good opportunities to develop their speaking and listening skills. They listen to each other, as well as to their teachers, and are given time to gather their thoughts so that they can articulate their ideas clearly. All pupils have plenty of opportunities to speak and grow in confidence and understanding as a result. Literacy and numeracy are given appropriate allocations of time and in the small classes pupils are given a good balance of individual work, at the right level for their different attainments, and whole class sessions that give opportunities for discussion and interaction.

The older pupils are enthusiastic about learning French and make good progress in their receptive understanding, though they do not yet have enough opportunities to speak in French. Their enjoyment in learning Latin was evident when they sang 'Happy Birthday' in that language and they are aware of the Latin roots of many English words. They follow a stimulating programme of work in music and art, singing very well and developing a range of artistic techniques. They have frequent opportunities to perform. Following an established tradition, the three oldest pupils have written the Christmas play, which will be performed to parents, and to the residents of nearby old people's homes.

Nursery pupils make frequent use of computers and so do pupils in Primary, who also have a lesson once a week in information and communication technology (ICT) to develop their understanding and skills. Older pupils use ICT with confidence to carry out research on the internet and to produce multi-media presentations.

Both in the Nursery and Primary, incidental opportunities are well used to foster personal, social and health education (PSHE) in a Christian context. In addition, Primary pupils have a lesson a week in PSHE and citizenship that follows a well-planned scheme of work, and is further enhanced by assemblies and Bible study.

Although the numbers are small, there is a wide range of attainment in all classes. The early identification of pupils with additional needs in the Nursery is particularly helpful in enabling targeted support to be given. In the school as a whole six pupils have been identified who need additional help with their learning and receive support from external agencies as well as from school staff. The head teacher, who has extensive knowledge and experience of special educational needs, co-ordinates this provision very effectively and the school has good links with the local authority and other agencies. As a result, the pupils concerned are fully integrated, enjoy their learning, make good progress and grow in self-esteem.

The small number of pupils in the Nursery who speak English as an additional language are well supported. For example, key workers display charts for individual pupils of common words spoken in the Nursery written in English and in the pupil's own language in Roman script as well as the script of the home language.

The teaching is generally good and examples of outstandingly effective teaching were observed in all classes. In the Nursery, skilful teaching enabled pupils to develop their number skills very well in an outside play activity as they counted the number of plastic pots that they knocked down and kept their own tally score. In Class 1, an introduction to the mathematical topic of symmetry engaged the pupils' interests greatly as they looked at themselves in mirrors and later made symmetrical images. The teacher talked them through their activities, giving them a chance to express their own ideas and drawing out mathematical vocabulary, as well as the wonder of God's creation. In an outstanding art lesson in Class 2, pupils made collages inspired by the chiaroscuro paintings of Caravaggio and Rembrandt.

Where there were relative weaknesses in lessons, these often related to the use of time. Some lessons started late; in some the pace was rather slow; in others too much time was spent on individual work, leaving insufficient time for whole class discussion. While pupils were occasionally given deadlines, or told how much time they had left to complete their task, these reminders that time is precious were not given often enough.

There are very good opportunities for professional development and the school benefits from the advice and support given by the local authority and the training courses that they provide, particularly for Nursery staff. Two members of the Nursery staff are embarking on training leading to Early Years Professional Status. The school also makes good use of the network of support provided by CST, and senior leaders in particular benefit from attending local and national CST meetings, courses and conferences. While members of staff in the Nursery work together and therefore have many informal opportunities to observe each other, there is no regular, formal programme of peer observation in either the Nursery or the Primary. This is a missed opportunity for further professional development since there is much that staff can learn from each other.

Throughout the age range, assessment is frequent and accurate and is well used to give pupils tasks at the right level of difficulty to move them on in their learning. In the Nursery, assessments are made, based on observation of pupils' day to day activities. They are recorded and collated, making excellent use of photographs, to form detailed and informative developmental records for each pupil, showing their progress towards the early learning goals. In the Primary, teachers are continuously making informal assessments of their pupils' progress and using them to plan or modify what the pupils should do next. These assessments are supplemented from time to time by tests of work recently covered and there are annual standardised tests in reading, writing, spelling and mathematics. These tests give National Curriculum levels as well as standardised scores, but the use that the school makes of this information is variable, and is more systematic in numeracy than in literacy. Teachers' assessments are not currently linked to National Curriculum levels, except in science.

The school is particularly successful in preparing its pupils for the next stage in their education and for their future lives. The head teacher of a nearby primary school, to which many Nursery pupils transfer, writes that 'We have always found them to be well-adjusted, happy and sociable children who have settled into life in the Foundation Stage here very quickly.' Pupils who have left the Primary School over

the years give remarkable testimony to the way in which they were prepared for secondary school. One of them, who is now in Year 10, writes as follows: 'Potter's has prepared me for High School in every way possible. They taught me independence. I had a massive change from leaving such a small school and starting a school with 1700 pupils. I had no problems at all in Year 7. Potter's views on faith and Christianity made my faith a lot stronger and helped me stand up for my religion in High School. The teachers at Potter's have prepared me for anything I do later in my education and I do not think I could have had a better start.'

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

The pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Through the school's Christian beliefs, the attention given to the pupils' spiritual development is strong. Throughout the Nursery and Primary, pupils are encouraged to reflect about their responsibility to God and to each other. Assemblies, Bible times, prayer and the celebration of Christian festivals are significant and often moving experiences for the pupils. They naturally turn to prayer and from the youngest pupils upwards, they speak to God in their own words.

The behaviour of the pupils is outstanding. The spiritual emphasis of the school reflects well in their dealings with their peer group and with adults. They are polite and respectful to visitors and look after each other in classrooms and at play. Their attitude to work is also very good, with a keenness for learning. Pupils' moral development throughout the school is fostered well because they are encouraged to take responsibility for their own actions. They have a growing understanding of right and wrong and appreciate that the choices they make have consequences. Repentance and forgiveness are important features of the discipline policy.

The pupils learn tolerance, perseverance and patience towards each other. They make a very positive contribution to both the school and the wider community. Primary pupils carry roles of responsibility enthusiastically. Social responsibility is encouraged through the pupils visiting nearby homes for old people to sing songs, act out drama and recite poetry to the residents. They have also helped in the building of a sensory garden at the residential home next door and are frequently invited to share in their special events. The pupils are learning that they are not too young to make a difference in the community. They take part in school fundraising, for a variety of local and international charitable causes; for example, for homeless people in the locality and to buy books for children in Malawi.

The pupils gain an understanding of public institutions through citizenship lessons and the opportunities that arise when visitors come to the school. For example, at the time of the last election, they considered the right and wrong behaviour of MPs and held a mini-election. Shortly afterwards, they invited the newly elected local MP to visit their school and impressed him when they prayed for him and his parliamentary colleagues.

Pupils' cultural development is enhanced as they are introduced to literature, art and music of good quality. They learn about faiths and cultures other than their own in a variety of ways. Nursery pupils recently had the experience of eating Indian and Chinese food brought in by parents and of learning about other cultures through

dressing up, singing and dancing. Primary pupils have learned about families in Africa, China, Italy and Russia as part of a recent topic. They have also been on visits that have increased their knowledge of other faiths, for example to the Manchester Jewish Museum.

### **Welfare, health and safety of pupils**

Pupils are looked after very well and their welfare, health and safety are promoted in an outstandingly effective way. The school gives excellent attention to pupils' personal welfare needs; as one parent said, 'Staff take a genuine and caring interest in each and every child at Potter's House'. The school's full and detailed policies strongly reflect the Christian ethos.

Arrangements for the health and safety of pupils are robust and current safeguarding procedures meet all the regulatory requirements, an improvement since the last inspection. The designated child protection officer has been trained to an appropriate level through the local safeguarding children board (LSCB), which also provides training for the rest of the staff. New members of staff are inducted into the school's procedures by the designated person and booked on LSCB courses as soon as places are available. Thorough risk assessments ensure the safety of the pupils in school and on educational visits. Fire safety drills are carried out every term.

Pupils say that they feel safe, secure and happy at the school and feel highly valued by staff. The outstanding behaviour of pupils helps them to stay safe. Inappropriate behaviour is very rare. Pupils are well supervised. They are polite, courteous, thoughtful and kind to each other. They take on responsibility willingly, enjoying the range of responsibilities they are given. Admission and attendance registers are kept in good order. Attendance is very good and the school has worked hard to improve punctuality, though these efforts have not yet been fully successful.

Pupils understand and articulate well the importance of leading a healthy lifestyle. They make good choices in school, regularly drinking water and enjoying a range of healthy foods and snacks. Some Nursery pupils are given a nutritious, hot lunch; the food is prepared by a member of staff who has a qualification in food hygiene.

The school is committed to including as wide a range of pupils as possible and so is particularly concerned to improve access to the accommodation and to the curriculum for pupils with disabilities. Improvements have already been made and there is a carefully considered accessibility plan for further improvements as funding allows. As a result, the school fully meets the requirements of the Equality Act 2010.

### **Suitability of staff, supply staff, and proprietors**

All the required checks on staff and proprietors are made and are carefully recorded in an appropriate format. This represents a clear improvement since the last inspection. The procedures for recruiting new staff are carefully followed and have recently been revised to take account of changes in legislation. All members of staff are committed Christians; they provide good role models for the pupils.

## **Premises and accommodation**

The school is located in two detached houses which have been suitably adapted to provide good accommodation for the number of pupils. The Nursery has two indoor playrooms, both of sufficient size for the number of pupils who use them and both with direct access to the garden, which has been imaginatively developed to provide a very good outside play area with grass and hard standing, and a range of fixed and moveable play equipment. The Primary School has two classrooms, both sufficient in size for the present numbers. The garden has also been developed well, to provide an interesting and adaptable playground, as well as giving opportunities for growing plants and for ecological work. There is just sufficient room for outdoor physical education (PE) in the paved area of the garden. The school also uses a nearby church hall for indoor PE and a large field for more adventurous outdoor PE lessons. The use of the hall is a recent development that makes a welcome addition to the PE programme and is appreciated by parents.

A recent inspection carried out by Bury Local Authority Planning Department confirms the good structure and maintenance of the school premises. Displays around the school celebrate and support pupils' learning, as well as stimulating their ideas and reinforcing the school's Christian ethos. The school now has appropriate facilities for pupils who are ill and this is an improvement since the last inspection.

The toilets and sinks are sufficient for the number of pupils in the school and there is a good supply of hot and cold water. A new boiler has recently been installed and the school has acted swiftly to ensure that the temperature of the hot water is not excessive.

## **Provision of information**

The information provided through the school website and through the prospectus meets requirements and helps parents to understand clearly what the school stands for and to appreciate its Christian ethos. Parents of Nursery pupils receive half-termly overviews of the work that is planned, setting out topics and the Biblical focus and suggesting ways in which parents can contribute. The school is considering making similar information available to the parents of Primary pupils.

In the Nursery, parents are welcome to view their children's developmental records at any time and have frequent opportunities to talk to members of staff, including their children's key worker. Parents of Primary pupils also have frequent access to their children's teachers. Once a term, all parents are given a more formal opportunity, often during a parents' evening, to discuss their children's progress. Every term, parents of Nursery pupils receive a report and when their children leave the school, the parents are given full, detailed and informative transitional reports which are copied to their children's next school. The parents of Primary pupils receive written reports twice a year. The end-of-year reports are particularly full and detailed and comment on each subject, highlighting individual strengths as well as pointing out areas for development. Parents are able to compare their children's attainment with national norms through standardised test scores and, in some cases, National Curriculum levels.

A high proportion of parents completed a questionnaire that was sent out at the time of the inspection and their response was overwhelmingly positive. Meetings held at the beginning of the inspection were attended by parents of all the Primary pupils and some of the Nursery pupils. Parents said how much they value the combination of good academic standards and excellent spiritual growth. Parents of pupils who had come to the school with low attainments spoke movingly of the rapid progress their children had made and the way they had grown in self-esteem.

### **Manner in which complaints are to be handled**

The complaints policy and procedures fully meet requirements and reflect the school's Christian beliefs. There have been no formal complaints in the last twelve months.

### **Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage**

The two Reception pupils are taught alongside the Year 1 and Year 2 pupils in Class 1. They are making good progress and benefit from the close contact they have with the three older pupils in their class. The three year olds and younger four year olds are taught in the Nursery alongside pupils aged two. All the pupils follow a programme of work which covers all the EYFS areas of learning and is appropriate to their age and stage of development.

The EYFS provision is of outstanding quality and enables the pupils to get off to an excellent start. They are motivated and encouraged and enjoy learning in a calm and purposeful environment. Pupils settle in quickly when they first join and older pupils are well prepared for their move up to the next school. The pupils clearly enjoy coming to school where they are cherished as unique individuals and effectively helped to learn and develop. Activities are well matched to pupils' needs, interests and abilities and support is firmly focused on the next step each pupil needs to take in their learning. There are very good opportunities to develop pupils' ICT skills.

Parents are positive about all the school offers; as one said, 'During both my children's time at the Nursery, I have seen them develop in faith, confidence, self-esteem and maturity'. Parents are made welcome and are well informed.

Progress in communication, language and literacy and in personal, social, and emotional development is particularly strong. Early identification of pupils with additional needs enables good support to be given effectively, for example to pupils who speak English as an additional language and those who come to the Nursery with developmental delays. Any pupils who are not confident in speaking when they first start receive extra help so that they quickly gain skills and catch up with their classmates. By the time they leave, most pupils are working above the levels normally expected for their age.

The teaching is very good and often outstanding. A particularly good feature of the teaching is the way in which adults interact with pupils, seizing every opportunity to promote the development of spoken language and to extend their knowledge and understanding of the world. During the inspection, an exciting and stimulating

outdoor activity was observed. 'Going on a bear hunt' captured the pupils' interest and promoted very effective learning through enquiry and exploration. The pupils excitedly used their imagination of being in a train going through an underground tunnel to look for the bear.

Well-planned indoor and outdoor activities engage pupils effectively to play and work in a safe environment. The two indoor playrooms are exciting, well organised learning spaces with a good range of activities, eye-catching displays and good quality resources that are easy for pupils to access and use independently. The garden is also full of interest and, as a result, outdoor learning is particularly effective. Every day pupils spend time learning outdoors, in nearly all weathers, with adult support. Outdoor resources include a range of large equipment. Pupils love learning about insects and exploring the 'Minibeast Hotel'. Regular outside play gives pupils good opportunities for physical exercise. Fruit snacks and healthy cooked meals effectively foster their understanding of healthy eating.

There is an effective balance of welfare, care and stimulation. Good attention is paid to ensuring that pupils are safe and to promoting their welfare. They are appropriately supervised at all times. Well-established routines help them to settle in and develop positive relationships with their key workers and other members of the Nursery staff.

Pupils' personal, social and emotional skills are developing well. They are encouraged to be independent and are given many opportunities to initiate activities themselves as well as experiencing well-planned adult-led tasks. Excellent spiritual, moral, social and cultural development results in very good behaviour: Pupils are learning to be polite and considerate to each other. Pupils show great respect for the different cultures, traditions and beliefs of the ethnic groups represented in the school. They enjoy it when parents of different cultures bring in traditional food to share and clothes to dress up in.

Key workers regularly assess and record meticulously the progress each pupil makes towards the early learning goals, with the use of photography capturing the pupils' achievements well. This information is used to inform the planning of the next stage of learning and is readily shared with parents so that they are kept fully informed. Teamwork amongst the staff is excellent and they have a good understanding of how young pupils learn. The leadership and management of the Nursery are excellent.

### **Compliance with the regulations**

The school meets all of the regulations for registration. The school meets the requirements of the Equality Act 2010.

### **Meeting the expectations of CST**

The school's religious ethos continues to meet the expectations of CST.

### **What the school could do to improve further**

As part of future development the school might wish to consider:

- providing more frequent opportunities for members of staff to observe each other's teaching
- improving punctuality and making better use of time throughout the day
- analysing test results and teachers' assessments more closely, using National Curriculum levels more consistently to track the progress of the older pupils.