

# Chesnut Lodge Special School

Green Lane, Ditton, Widnes, Cheshire, WA8 7HF

## Inspection dates

20–21 November 2013

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	<b>Good</b>	<b>2</b>
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a good school.

- Pupils make good progress from very low starting points because adults quickly build excellent and supportive relationships which help build knowledge, skills and understanding. Achievement is good across all key stages.
- The quality of teaching is good. The best teaching encourages pupils to think for themselves and makes use of every opportunity to enhance their communication skills.
- Reading, writing and mathematics are taught well through the thematic curriculum which has been planned and modified creatively to meet the needs of all pupils effectively.
- Teaching assistants and other adults in the class effectively and sensitively support pupils' medical, sensory and behaviour needs and encourage a positive attitude to learning.
- Behaviour is good in lessons and around the school. Pupils benefit from well-planned and rigorously implemented rules. Pupils feel safe in school and are confident that any concerns they share with staff will be dealt with effectively.
- The school is well led and managed. Leaders and managers have a clear understanding of the steps needed to ensure the school provides a good quality education.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and their physical well-being are good. They are well-prepared for when they leave the school.
- The governing body is highly supportive and challenging of the school and supports on-going improvements in all aspects of the school's work. Safeguarding arrangements are secure.

### It is not yet an outstanding school because

- The analysis of data about attainment does not enable leaders and governors to challenge the level of progress pupils make over time.
- Greater use could be made of the positive links with outstanding schools to improve teaching and raise the level of challenge for pupils to work more independently.
- The school could do more for a small number of pupils during their extended absence due to medical reasons.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 12 lessons, two jointly with the headteacher, which allowed them to see every pupil being taught. A range of pupils' responses to learning, from sensory reactions to written evidence, was also examined.
- A meeting was held with a group of pupils in Key Stage 3 and 4 in order to gather their views about the school and inspectors spoke with pupils in lessons and around the school. One inspector listened to pupils reading individually.
- Pupils' communication ability, including the development of early reading skills, was observed across all key stages. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage were seen practising communication skills in many different situations and pupils of all ages were observed using a range of additional communication systems, such as signing.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, members of the senior leadership team, teachers, others with posts of responsibility and members of the governing body. A telephone call was held with the School Improvement Officer from the local authority.
- Inspectors took account of 16 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View); 20 questionnaires completed by staff, and three written responses from a parent, governor and independent therapist working within the school.
- The inspectors looked at a range of documentation including information on pupils' progress and attainment and ways in which these are tracked and monitored, teachers' assessments and planning, the school self- evaluation and development plan, a range of policies and procedures and documents relating to the management of teachers' performance. The inspectors took account of the school's procedures for safeguarding as well as records relating to attendance and behaviour. Pupil profiles, reporting to parents' documents and the school website were also taken into account. Inspectors also took the local authority review report and governing body documentation, including the headteacher's annual report to the governing body, into account.

## Inspection team

Christina McIntosh, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Drew Crawshaw

Her Majesty's Inspector

## Full report

### Information about this school

- Chesnut Lodge Special School provides education for pupils aged 2 to 16 with a wide range of physical disabilities; medical and increasingly complex learning needs, including profound and multiple learning difficulties. Pupils' skills on entry are below the level expected for their chronological age.
- Pupils are drawn from the Halton area and some from Warrington. Pupils join at any stage in their school life but most start in the Nursery, with some attending on a part-time basis from mainstream schools. The Early Years Foundation Stage consists of a Nursery class that provides for children who will remain at Chesnut Lodge Special School and for children who will attend other primary schools.
- Nearly all pupils are of White British backgrounds and none speaks English as an additional language.
- The proportion of students for whom the school receives pupil premium funding (additional funding allocated by the government for certain groups of pupils, in this case, those who are known to be eligible for free school meals and who are looked after by the local authority) is above average.
- The school has Arts Mark Gold, Full International School Award, Silver Kite Mark for School Games, Enhanced Healthy School status, and is an accredited expert centre for global learning.
- The school provides an outreach service and hosts the local assistive technology service. The school provides help and support for pupils with physical disabilities who attend local schools in the county.

### What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure data about attainment and progress are analysed more effectively so expected levels of progress over time can be seen. Make sure this information is available to the governing body so that groups of pupils can be easily identified as making less than expected, and better than expected progress, thereby ensuring an accurate assessment of achievement in the school.
- Develop the school website and resources to support learning for pupils who have to have extended periods away from school due to medical reasons, so that they are able to make progress and keep up when they return to school.
- Make more use of the positive links with other schools to:
  - ensure assessments of pupils working at lower levels and National Curriculum levels are accurate
  - observe outstanding teaching that challenges pupils and encourages independent learning
  - inform the secondary key stage class teachers about thematic teaching methods in primary mainstream schools.

## Inspection judgements

### The achievement of pupils

**is good**

- Attainment on entry to the school is lower than found nationally as a result of children's special educational needs. There is a wide range of ability in the school and recently needs have become more complex in all key stages. However, in relation to their starting points, pupils continue to make good progress and achieve well.
- Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage make good progress given their starting points. They learn how to play, explore their surroundings and become more active in learning because adults model expectations well. They develop early communication skills through the use of signs and symbols.
- Leaders and staff have improved the use of alternative forms of communication and, as a result, many pupils have become more confident communicators. The school has developed good systems for non-verbal pupils to answer through the use of eye pointing. Sensory stimulation is used well to promote learning in Key Stage 2 and is being further developed in the secondary phase (Key Stages 3 and 4) due to increased number of pupils moving up and joining the school with complex sensory and communication needs.
- Mathematical skills are practised and developed in a range of real life settings, such as students running their own tuck shop and deciding how to price items they have made in the Christmas Fayre.
- Reading is developed effectively and supported well by the use of phonics (the understanding of letters and their sounds). Many pupils enjoy reading at school and at home.
- The school takes good steps to accelerate individual's progress, for example: pupils who show a particular talent in a subject are stretched through inclusion in mainstream schools, the benefit of which is shown in accelerated learning and improved social skills. However, sometimes the work for some pupils at Chesnut Lodge does not stretch them enough and they find the tasks too easy. Achievement is therefore not yet outstanding.
- The pupil premium is allocated effectively, enhancing performance in early communication, literacy and numeracy. Some pupils benefited from specialist support programmes and others from inclusion at mainstream schools.
- There is no noticeable difference in the rate of progress between groups of pupils; this is because of the individual approach to meeting all pupils' varying and complex needs which, in turn, ensures equality of opportunity for all.
- The planning for the use of the new funding to promote sport and fitness has been carefully targeted, to expand opportunities for all the primary pupils to engage in sport and to increase the opportunities for pupils to strengthen their core stability.
- Pupils are well prepared for the next phase of their lives with virtually all remaining in education in local colleges. Some pupils are able to travel independently to college due to the training they received at Chesnut Lodge.

### The quality of teaching

**is good**

- Teaching across the key stages and in most classes is good with some outstanding features. This enables most pupils to make good progress in all areas that is in line with and often better than that found in similar schools.
- Teachers plan carefully, they know their pupils very well and take individual pupil needs into account. They work closely with teaching assistants to create very effective teams in each class. This creates a high level of individual support so pupils' needs can be met and they make progress. For example: in some lessons seen teachers planned well with good resources that use a sensory approach so pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties make small but significant steps of progress. In other lessons for pupils with verbal communication skills, familiar

songs with rhythm and rhyme were used well to encourage pupils to use numbers.

- Staff work well together to create a supportive and positive climate for learning and this helps pupils to thrive and encourages positive attitudes to learning and to other people. Pupils were observed giving positive support and encouragement to other pupils during lessons and in the wider school community.
- Resources in lessons are used well to make sure they are matched well to pupils' abilities. Teachers have high expectations of the pupils but sometimes not high enough as they do not always make good enough use of their excellent assessment; therefore, tasks and the level of questioning is not used well enough to challenge pupils.
- Work is marked and assessed regularly; teachers are skilled in monitoring the small steps of learning that are the norm. However, in some evidence collected it is not always clearly stated what progress is being demonstrated and how this links with the individual pupil's targets.
- Where teaching is most effective, teachers provide a suitable structure and level of challenge for pupils of different abilities, encourage independent learning and use every opportunity to develop learning. In Key Stage 2, the thematic approach encourages pupils to establish links between their skills and knowledge and this reinforces their understanding and helps them progress more quickly.
- Where teaching is less effective, it is sometimes because there is too much time spent on whole-class teaching, which restricts the amount of time pupils have to work individually or in groups at their own level. Sometimes, the work set for the most-able pupils in classes is not challenging enough for them to work more independently and make better than expected progress. Teaching is therefore not yet outstanding.

### **The behaviour and safety of pupils**

**are good**

- Excellent relationships are evident throughout the school. Pupils benefit from very high-quality interactions with adults, which go a long way in helping them to develop their self-image, confidence, communication skills and ability to cope with change. Pupils and staff made the inspectors feel very welcome.
- Staff, pupils, parents and carers all believe strongly that the school is a very safe environment. Pupils enjoy coming to school and attendance is improving and close to that of other special schools. A considerable amount of absence is a consequence of medical conditions and appointments which impact on pupils' progress.
- Pupils say the school is a safe place to be and that they get along well together. They know about the different kinds of bullying and the importance of e-safety. If there were instances of bullying they said the school would immediately deal with them.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted well through a rich and varied curriculum. Pupils are given a variety of opportunities to take responsibility for themselves, for others and for their school community with roles such as health stars, school councillors and by running a tuck shop in the school.
- When there is any disruption in class it is usually well managed due to the increased use of behaviour plans which contain effective strategies to use with individual pupils. However, some pupils become disturbed and frustrated when waiting for their turn, or become less willing to engage when they are not given their own choices.
- Safeguarding meets requirements, however, seven new staff have not been risk assessed for their need to have safeguarding at a higher level than the school's induction programme due to their role within school.

### **The leadership and management**

**are good**

- The school is well led and managed. Leaders and managers have a clear understanding of the steps needed to ensure the school is an improving school. There is a secure capacity for

improvement, as shown in the developments since the last inspection. For example: the development of a multi-sensory approach in the secondary curriculum; the development of suitable pathways for pupils to gain access to external awards; and increased involvement of governors.

- The school's self-evaluation of its strengths is robust. However, the school's action plan does not focus sharply enough on tackling areas requiring improvement. Leaders agreed with inspectors on the areas for improvement in the quality of teaching seen and the use of achievement data.
- Teaching is good and improving. Leaders have identified how more rigorous monitoring and sharing of best practice through links with other schools can enhance the coaching and support that is being offered to new and existing staff within the school.
- Although there has been increased rigour in the assessment and tracking of pupils' progress it is not always used with sufficient clarity and sharpness to demonstrate easily how well pupils are making progress, and thereby to challenge leaders and staff to make still more rapid improvements.
- The school has successfully introduced multi-sensory methods to very effectively meet the needs of those pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties. This has been based on comprehensive academic research and aims to promote pupils' communication and interaction skills, understanding, physical development, self-help and independence.
- The curriculum, during and beyond the school day, is broad and balanced and individualised according to the specific needs of the pupils to promote learning in the areas of physical development, thinking skills, care and independence. The extension of the primary thematic curriculum across parts of the school is due for review to see how far it has reinforced learning and enhanced literacy skills across the school.
- Leaders make certain that additional funds, such as the pupil premium, are used to good effect by providing additional opportunities for eligible pupils. It is clear that the funding is making a positive difference.
- All parents who responded to the recent school survey would recommend the school to other parents. Partnership with parents is excellent, as a result of good communication between home and school.
- The local authority knows the school well and offers a light touch, but effective, approach to continuing improvements in this good school. The School Improvement Officer has reviewed the school and supported the governing body during the headteacher's review of her performance.
- The school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils meet statutory requirements.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- Governors are passionate about the school and are deeply committed to improving it further. They are keen to engage with parents and other partners with the school to develop the effectiveness of the governing body. They recognise its many strengths through their increased presence around school and the links they have developed with each class. Governors have been instrumental in providing clear direction and support for the school: a recent example is their focus regarding homework and the governor challenge they offered pupils to demonstrate the importance of life-long learning. They know how the pupil premium has been spent and are generally well informed. They have ensured that there is a suitable link between pay and the quality of teaching. They have a sound understanding of the school assessment information, but recognise that this needs to be simplified to help them to make comparisons with national performance more easily. They have a strong focus on the budget and ensure that the school is financially secure. They have asked for and attended presentations on sections of the curriculum, including assessment, and this has helped them to check the work of the school more effectively.

## What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	111514
<b>Local authority</b>	Halton
<b>Inspection number</b>	427159

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

<b>Type of school</b>	Special
<b>School category</b>	Community special
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	2–16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	72
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Liz Hindley
<b>Headteacher</b>	Heather Austin
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	22 September 2010
<b>Telephone number</b>	0151 424 0679
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