



Chiltern Gate School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 110578
Local Authority Buckinghamshire
Inspection number 288710
Inspection dates 27–28 September 2006
Reporting inspector Margaret Goodchild

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Verney Avenue
School category	Community special		High Wycombe
Age range of pupils	4–11		HP12 3NE
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01494 532622
Number on roll (school)	80	Fax number	01494 441478
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Ms Margaret Ewart
		Headteacher	Ms Sarah Snape (Acting)
Date of previous school inspection	5 November 2001		

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This is a special school for pupils with complex difficulties, including moderate learning difficulties, communication difficulties, autistic spectrum disorders and emotional and behavioural difficulties. A small number of pupils board for part of the week. There have been several staff changes and management difficulties since the last inspection. An acting headteacher - who took up post as deputy in April 2005 - was appointed in March 2006.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

This is a satisfactory and improving school. After the last inspection, the school went into decline as a result of management difficulties. In January 2005, the local authority identified it as a school causing serious concern and began to provide intensive support to turn the school around. The joint efforts of the acting headteacher and the local authority have led to rapid improvement over the last year and the school is now providing pupils with a satisfactory education. The school is securely moving in the right direction and is satisfactorily placed to improve further.

Pupils are well cared for and their personal development is good. They are happy to come to school and enjoy good relationships with the staff. Pupils who board say that they enjoy the experience. Where teaching is good, pupils show interest in learning and are keen to contribute. Behaviour is good because staff deal quickly with any incidents to prevent them escalating and pupils generally learn in an atmosphere that is calm and orderly. Pupils have begun to contribute their ideas about how the school could improve, and they have satisfactory opportunities to take responsibility.

Overall, standards are well below average as a result of pupils' complex difficulties although pupils' achievement is satisfactory, including within the Reception class and communication centre. This is because teaching is satisfactory and the curriculum is reasonably well matched to pupils' needs. In classes where teaching is good, and in one or two where it is outstanding, pupils make good progress but this is not consistent across the school as a whole. Managers are at an early stage of introducing systems to iron out the inconsistencies in teaching and achievement and to track pupils' progress. A key strength in the school's capacity to move forward is the fact that it has a few highly skilled teachers who have the potential to work with their colleagues to improve the quality of teaching in the school as a whole. Until recently, systems for checking how well pupils were doing were inadequate. They are now satisfactory because good improvement has been made in this area over the last few months. Self-evaluation is satisfactory and improving. However, until a greater quantity of information has been gathered about pupils' progress, managers will not be able to use this to gauge the school's effectiveness fully.

While the local authority has been working closely with the school, local advisers have undertaken a lot of the checking that will now be done by the school's own staff. The acting headteacher is clear about the school's main strengths and weaknesses, and is strongly committed to building on the work that has already been done. The school is identifying the right priorities to take it forward and some good work has been done by staff with key responsibilities. None of the managers are suitably trained in the detailed monitoring of the school's work, however, and senior managers, subject co-ordinators and governors are not yet working as a closely knit team in judging the school's effectiveness and shaping its future.

The school is oversubscribed and many parents are highly satisfied with its work. The acting headteacher has gained parents' confidence, being described, for instance, as 'very approachable, a clear thinking leader and focused problem solver'. However, a

significant minority of parents express dissatisfaction about a number of aspects of the school's work and are particularly critical about the way the school communicates with them. This is partly because the difficulties within the school in recent years have, necessarily, created a climate of rumour and uncertainty. The school has begun to look at ways of working more closely with parents but it is not yet involving parents as much as it should in school improvement.

Effectiveness and efficiency of boarding provision

Grade: 2

The school provides well for those pupils who board for part of the week. Pupils are happy, relaxed and say that they enjoy boarding. Very good levels of staffing mean that they are well looked after. Some care staff do not have sufficient skill, however, to meet all the needs of pupils with communication difficulties. Care plans are linked well to pupils' school targets, and the variety of activities provided contributes effectively to their personal development and academic achievement. The boarding provision is well organised and managed effectively by the head of care, although she would benefit from some management training to extend her role further. The residential accommodation is good. The school has made good improvement since the last inspection, and it meets - and in some cases exceeds - all the National Minimum Standards. A full report on the boarding provision by the Commission for Social Care Inspection may be found on the internet by following the link below.

<http://62.73.173.233/CSCI/RSS/98/CS0000023098.V239126.R01.S.pdf>

What the school should do to improve further

- Clarify responsibilities, provide management training where necessary, and strengthen the way managers and governors work together to collect detailed information about the school's effectiveness.
- Improve the quality of teaching to ensure that more lessons are at least good.
- Strengthen the way data is collected and analysed to identify how well pupils are doing.
- Gather parents' detailed views about the school's work and find ways of involving parents as active participants in school improvement.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Although standards are well below average as a result of pupils' complex difficulties, there is a wide range of attainment in the school, with a few pupils working close to national expectations in some areas and others working well below average.

Achievement is satisfactory in English and mathematics and it is good in science, where pupils receive specialist teaching. In classes where teaching is good, and in one or two classes where it is outstanding, pupils make faster progress than they do in the rest of the school. There is no obvious underachievement by any particular group of pupils

but the school does not yet have enough information to track accurately the progress of individuals or groups.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils make good progress in their personal development and have good attitudes. They enjoy good relationships with the staff, and make good progress in their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. In lessons where teaching is good, pupils show obvious enjoyment in learning and are keen to contribute. Their overall enjoyment is satisfactory as some lessons are made more interesting than others. Pupils are making good progress in learning about healthy living and in learning how to stay safe, and they have taken part in various activities as part of the school's work towards Healthy Schools status. Pupils are making a satisfactory contribution to the school community and the school has, rightly, identified the need to listen more closely to what pupils think about how it could be improved. The recently established school council means that they are beginning to contribute their ideas and some take responsibility, for instance by helping around the school. The progress that pupils make in acquiring basic skills makes a satisfactory contribution to their future well-being.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

There is some good and outstanding teaching and most of the teaching is at least satisfactory. There are some inconsistencies, however, in the way teachers meet pupils' needs. Where teaching is good, work is matched closely to the needs of individuals and groups of pupils and teaching assistants are also used well. Nevertheless, there are shortcomings in both these areas in some lessons, and teachers who lack experience in working with pupils with particular special needs do not receive sufficient detailed support. Consequently, these pupils do not always learn as much as they should.

The way that teachers check how much pupils have learnt, record their progress and then use the information to plan future learning varies from being very thorough in some classes to being rather sketchy in others. The school has only just begun to put together information about how each pupil is doing across a range of subjects, and so is not yet in a position to identify whether all pupils are making as much progress as they should. It has made good improvement in introducing personal targets and recently set academic targets for all pupils.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum meets pupils' personal development needs well and their academic needs satisfactorily. Work over the last year means that satisfactory plans are in place

in all subjects. The introduction of themes is beginning to add coherence to pupils' learning but some refinement is needed to ensure that planning addresses the needs of different pupils within classes sufficiently. Good attention is given to meeting the needs of pupils with autistic spectrum disorders and communication difficulties through the grouping of these pupils within the communication centre, with satisfactory use of specialist approaches to meet their needs. The development of information and communication technology has been held back by resourcing difficulties but the school is in the process of rectifying this and will be in position to move forward very shortly. Good opportunities are provided for pupils to go on visits and to take part in other activities that enrich their learning.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school provides good care and support for its pupils and satisfactory guidance. Pupils are protected well and their behaviour is managed effectively. The improvement in the way pupils are managed is evident in the substantial decline in the number of incidents where staff have to intervene physically to restrain pupils. Provision for pupils who board is good and there are good arrangements for care staff and teachers to work together in meeting pupils' needs. The school works closely with a number of other agencies as well as with the therapists who work on the site. Pupils are made aware of their personal targets, which stem from their statements of special educational need and are regularly reviewed. Where teaching is outstanding, teachers are exceptionally skilled in making pupils aware of how to overcome their difficulties. Not all teachers are as skilled in this respect, but all pupils now have curriculum targets in English, mathematics and science, which make them aware of what they need to do to improve. Home-school diaries provide an effective means of informing parents about their children's education, and some provide incredibly detailed information.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory. Strengths in the management of pupils' personal development and care have been sustained since the last inspection but a great deal of work has been done over the last year to improve other aspects of the school's work to a point where it is now satisfactory.

Staff with management responsibilities will now gradually be taking over from the local authority the job of checking the school's effectiveness. The school has begun to monitor aspects of its own work, for instance to see how well pupils have progressed against their individual targets and to determine the quality of teachers' planning. However, no staff with management responsibilities have undertaken training in observing lessons or analysing information to judge the school's effectiveness. Performance management, has been completed for teachers but not support assistants, and is therefore not as rigorous as it should be. The chair of governors has a thorough and detailed understanding of the school. Governance is satisfactory overall because,

although supportive, the governing body is at an early stage of evaluating the school's effectiveness and contributing to plans for future development.

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Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	3
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	3
The effectiveness and efficiency of boarding provision	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The behaviour of learners	2
The attendance of learners	2
How well learners enjoy their education	3
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Thank you for making me feel welcome when I visited your school. I enjoyed my visit and am writing now to let you know about what I found.

This is a satisfactory and improving school. The school has had some difficulties but the local authority has been helping it to sort these out and it has got a lot better over the last year. It should now be able to carry on getting better without so much help from the local authority.

The staff make sure that you are well cared for and you are making good progress in your personal development. I was pleased to see that you have good relationships with the staff and you behave well. You are doing reasonably well with your work, but how much progress you make depends partly on which class you are in. Those of you in classes where teaching is really good are getting on particularly well. It is important that all of you now have the same chance to make progress.

The acting headteacher and other managers want to make the school as good as they can for you. I have asked them to do this by:

- making sure that the managers, governors and parents all work together to look at ways of improving the school
- making sure that teaching in all lessons is as good as it is in the best lessons
- collecting and using more information about how well you are doing.

Carry on enjoying your time at Chiltern Gate.

Yours sincerely

M Goodchild

Lead Inspector