

# The Chalet School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	126554
<b>Local Authority</b>	Swindon
<b>Inspection number</b>	315584
<b>Inspection date</b>	6 February 2008
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Julia Coop

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Special
<b>School category</b>	Community special
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	3-11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School	34
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Tracey Broderick
<b>Headteacher</b>	Katharine Bryan
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	1 June 2004
<b>School address</b>	Liden Drive Liden Swindon Swindon SN3 6EX
<b>Telephone number</b>	01793 534537
<b>Fax number</b>	01793 435244

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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

## Description of the school

This is a small special school for pupils with complex learning difficulties. The majority of pupils have autistic spectrum disorders (ASD) and an increasing number start with communication difficulties. Most pupils have statements of special educational need and a few are undergoing statutory assessment. The school shares a site with a mainstream primary school. The school serves a wide socially mixed area and most pupils travel some distance to attend the school. Nearly all pupils come from White British backgrounds. A very small proportion come from homes where English is not their first language. The school has gained the National Healthy Schools Status.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 2

The inspection agrees with parents when they comment that this is a good school. It provides a caring and very friendly environment and works well with a wide range of professionals. Effective support is given to pupils whose complex difficulties and limited communication skills can sometimes make it difficult for them to access the good range of learning opportunities on offer. The pupils are at the centre of all that the school does. This is evident in the pupils' smiling faces, giggles and jumps for joy as they work and play each day, at the school many of them call 'Rainbow'. This is a testament to the way all staff go out of their way to make learning really enjoyable. The well-structured learning environment and well-known routines give the pupils the confidence and ability to learn successfully and this ensures their good personal development.

The school is very bright and cheerful. Many specialist resources are brought together, which, with good teaching overall, means that all groups of pupils make good progress and achieve well. Standards are very low when compared to the national average because of the pupils' complex needs. When occasionally pupils do find learning stressful and occasionally lose control, they are sensitively and carefully helped to become calm again. As a result, more-able pupils can work successfully for one day a week alongside their mainstream peers at the nearby primary school.

Although teaching is mainly good with some excellent practice, the quality is not consistent. A few staff lack experience when working with the ASD pupils in the class group. They are being well supported to ensure that activities are well planned, but the lessons are not always delivered to the best effect so as to sustain pupils' involvement in their learning. This means that pupils sometimes do not make the full amount of progress they could in lessons. Consequently, the school correctly recognises that there is scope for subject leaders to ensure that best practice is shared and further developed. Nevertheless, there are some notable strengths. Foundation stage children receive sensitive and high quality support so they get off to a flying start in developing their social and communication skills. This is very successfully built on as they move through the school. As a result, pupils who start with no verbal communication make excellent progress in developing their speaking skills. Parents appreciate the hard work and commitment of staff and the way that they have helped and guided their children to 'become more independent and able to speak more words'. This ensures that pupils develop more confidence to express their likes and dislikes and to control their emotions more successfully. This in turn means that they are well prepared for life beyond the Chalet school.

The headteacher is a dedicated and well-respected leader, whose vision for the school's future has been the driving force behind its continuing improvement, for example, in the good curriculum, which is better matched to the pupils' more complex difficulties than at the time of the last inspection. She works well with the assistant headteacher and governors, who together form an effective team. Methods of assessment are developing well and provide a good picture of progress over time. However, this does not always provide an accurate picture of the small steps of progress made by some pupils each year to enable the teachers to fine-tune planning and aid even better achievement. However, the school keeps a close eye on its work and has an accurate picture of what it needs to work on next so that it is well placed to continue to improve.

## Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

### Grade: 2

When children start, their standards are understandably much lower than the expected levels for their age because of their complex learning needs and limited communication and personal skills. Nonetheless, children make good progress overall and excellent progress in acquiring the basic skills of communication, including the use of the Picture Exchange Communication system (PECS). Their personal, social and behavioural development is impressive given their very complex needs and many learn to attend to their own personal hygiene needs. This is aided by the effective one-to-one attention. The quality of care and nurture from the staff is second to none, so the children feel happy, settled and safe. The secure accommodation enables good provision for all areas of learning, including outdoor learning. Children love going to Greatwood every Friday, where they learn how to keep safe and help the adults look after the retired racehorses. The good quality of the provision is a testament to the effective leadership and management that ensures that the children are provided with a positive start, although it is recognised that ways of checking on the children's smaller steps of progress could be refined to further aid planning.

### What the school should do to improve further

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- Improve the accuracy in measuring learning outcomes for all pupils to support planning and ensure even better achievement.
- Strengthen the monitoring role of subject leaders, ensuring they identify and share best practice so that inconsistencies in teaching quality are tackled systematically.

## Achievement and standards

### Grade: 2

Parents are very happy with the progress their children are making and consider they have gone 'from strength to strength'. Pupils make good progress and achieve well no matter what their difficulties or background. This is partly because of the specialist support, through the Education of Autistic and, similarly, the Communication Handicapped Children structure (TEACCH) that most of the ASD pupils receive. From the time that they start in the Foundation Stage, priority is given to helping all pupils to develop their communication and social skills. Consequently, most pupils make rapid progress in developing these skills, including reading. As a result, pupils are more settled and challenging behaviour is minimal. Additionally, because of the focus on the development of sensory skills, pupils are much more able to engage in learning activities and to cope in a variety of social situations. This is particularly welcomed by parents, who rightly recognise a considerable difference in their children's achievements. This is aided particularly well by weekly opportunities to work alongside mainstream peers in the adjacent primary school. In the past, pupils' progress has not been as strong in aspects of writing and mathematics, but a recent focus on these skills is aiding better progress. Because of all these achievements, pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education.

## Personal development and well-being

### Grade: 2

Pupils really love coming to school and show great delight and enjoyment for all aspects of school life. Many parents say that their children 'have never been so happy'. Attendance is good and has improved, particularly when considering the impact of some of the medical needs

some pupils have. However, a few parents still take their children on holiday during term time, despite the school's advice to the contrary. Pupils delight in receiving praise and rewards and most try hard all of the time and behave well. The staff are highly successful in creating an atmosphere of trust, where the pupils understand what is expected, so they get less frustrated, confused or anxious and are well able to cope with the challenge of learning new things or trying new types of food. As a result, more pupils are eating healthier foods, although a few still have a restricted diet. The more able pupils understand that 'if you don't drink enough water your brain can get tired', but all pupils love physical exercise, especially swimming and horse riding. Many pupils with ASD initially have difficulties relating to others and do not always recognise how to keep themselves safe. However, because of the many opportunities provided to participate in a wide range of activities outside the school environment, a consistent approach and strong emphasis on health and safety, most pupils make good progress in developing the necessary skills to keep themselves safe and to help in their class and community. The school councillors, for example, are being helped to become effective advocates for their class group, and many pupils understand who to turn to if they are unhappy.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

#### **Grade: 2**

There is a stimulating learning environment including an excellent array of sensory development resources and information and communication technology. This enables all pupils, regardless of their difficulties, to use all of their senses to access activities and enjoy learning. Most staff have a good knowledge and understanding of specialist approaches and successfully meet the learning needs of ASD pupils, with some real expertise evident that supports some outstanding learning. The introduction of class communication managers has ensured that all staff make very effective use of PECS, TEACCH and visual aids to aid communication skills. However, there are occasions when teaching styles do not fully meet the pupils' needs. Teachers use assessment information effectively to plan individualised learning for pupils, so that they can make good progress, more-able pupils being successfully stretched. However, assessment methods do not always provide enough information about the small steps of progress that pupils with more complex needs make to enable teachers to fine-tune planning and aid even better learning. The teacher and three learning assistants in each class work closely and effectively together to support learning and manage any challenging behaviour. They have developed very trusting relationships with the pupils. Pupils feel safe and highly valued as a result of lots of encouragement, humour and celebration of achievement.

### **Curriculum and other activities**

#### **Grade: 2**

The curriculum has improved as a result of the hard work of the headteacher and staff. The recent introduction of ability groups in English and mathematics for older pupils ensures that staff expertise is used to the best effect. In particular, pupils benefit from a range of sensory development experiences that enable them to overcome their individual fears and respond more productively to the wide range of activities on offer. Similarly, those ASD pupils who require more individual support are provided with a highly structured framework that provides the security and predictability that they require to learn effectively. Children in the Foundation Stage benefit from individual carefully tailored programmes. Opportunities for more-able pupils to work with mainstream pupils successfully supports the development of social skills and aids

learning. However, the school recognises that the curriculum adapted for them could be tailored even more closely to the one in mainstream to ensure that their basic skills can be more seamlessly developed. The many opportunities to engage in a variety of social situations and experience a wide range of practical activities, including the Forest School and visits to many different places of worship, enhance pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

## **Care, guidance and support**

### **Grade: 2**

There is a strong emphasis on care and support of individual pupils and on celebrating their achievements. Parents comment that the level of pastoral care 'goes beyond what we could expect'. The commitment of staff to pupils' health, safety and welfare is high and child protection procedures are thorough. The partnerships nurtured with parents and other agencies contribute well to the pupils' confidence and sense of well-being. Well-coordinated provision meets pupils wide-ranging needs well, and as a result they are helped to overcome their difficulties, such as sensory impairments. Arrangements for reviewing and reporting on pupils' academic and social progress are effective and parents and pupils are fully involved in the process. Individual educational targets are good and pupils are helped to understand when they have achieved them, but the short-term targets could be simplified to better aid pupils' understanding of what they need to work on next.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 2**

The headteacher's effective leadership reflects her child-centred approach and her total commitment to further developing her leadership and management skills for the benefit of the school. She is effectively supported by her senior colleague and small team of staff, who together work hard to ensure that the school keeps abreast of developments in the field of ASD to aid school improvement. The introduction of sensory integration work across the school, for example, has successfully enhanced pupil progress. In addition, the newly appointed and trained communication managers have effectively facilitated PECS work across the school so as to better meet the needs of the increasing number of pupils who start with no communication skills. This is testament to the commitment that the school has to ensuring all pupils, regardless of their difficulties, are welcomed and equally valued members of the school community. The school has a clear view of its overall effectiveness because it uses the information it gathers from monitoring well to plan the necessary improvements. Managers recognise that recent moves to develop the role of subject leaders are not yet fully embedded and the time is appropriate for them to ensure best practice is shared and further developed. Governors are very supportive and have a firm handle on finances. Many have the necessary skills to challenge the senior staff to explain and justify their decisions as necessary and relevant training is planned to ensure that all have these critical skills.

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## Annex A

## 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?	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

### Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2

### 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 extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2

### The quality of provision

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

<sup>1</sup> 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.

## Annex A

**Leadership and management**

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
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 so much for the friendly way some of you chatted to me when I visited. I really enjoyed the chance to watch you learn and play. This letter is to tell you some of the things I found out about your school. The most important thing to say is that you go to a good school and it is a very happy place.

Here are some of the best things about your school:

- You try hard and learn about all sorts of things.
- You really enjoy learning.
- You are taught well and make good progress, especially in speaking.
- You all get off to a good start in Rainbow class.
- The staff make sure that you have lots of interesting things to do.
- Everyone takes very good care of you so you are safe in school.
- The headteacher and staff are working hard to make your school an even better place in which to learn. What I have asked the school to do now to make things even better:
  - Make sure that they keep a careful check on the progress you make.
  - Make sure that the school looks very closely at the quality of teaching to make sure that it is always good or better.

You are very lucky to attend such a caring, happy school and I hope you go on trying hard and enjoying all of the interesting activities which help you learn.



7 February 2008

Dear Pupils

**Inspection of The Chalet School, Swindon SN3 6EX**

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Yours sincerely,

Julia Coop

Lead inspector