

Chesnut Lodge Special School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	111514
Local Authority	Halton
Inspection number	356930
Inspection dates	22–23 September 2010
Reporting inspector	Hilary Ward

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	2–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	63
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Roy Radley
Headteacher	Mrs Heather Austin
Date of previous school inspection	28 January 2008
School address	Green Lane Ditton Widnes WA8 7HF
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 13 lessons and viewed the work of 12 teachers. Discussions were held with senior staff, groups of pupils, members of the governing body and the outreach/inclusion team. They observed the school's work, and looked at a range of documents including the school development plan, specialist school renewal bid, curriculum planning, policies and assessment information, 15 parents and carers' questionnaires and pupil and staff questionnaires.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- How assessment is used to plan for the changing and diverse needs of pupils.
- How appropriate the curriculum is to meet the range of pupils' needs.
- The impact of the school's specialist status on pupils' outcomes and on partnerships to improve learning.
- How well governors know the work of the school to support improvement.

Information about the school

Chesnut Lodge Special School educates pupils with physical difficulties and complex medical needs. However, an increasing number of pupils being admitted have profound and multiple learning difficulties, sensory impairments and/or communication difficulties. Some pupils are admitted for assessment but most pupils have a statement of special educational needs. The Early Years Foundation Stage consists of a Nursery class that makes provision for children who will remain in Chesnut Lodge School and for children who will attend other primary schools. The Reception class provides solely for children for whom full-time mainstream education would be inappropriate at the present time.

Nearly all pupils are of White British backgrounds and none speak English as an additional language. The school draws pupils from across the Borough of Halton and from a neighbouring authority. The number of pupils looked after by the local authority is very small but the proportion known to be eligible for free school meals is much higher than the national average. The school has specialist status in the physical and sensory strand and also has Healthy School status, Sportsmark, Activemark and Artsmark Gold awards. The school provides an inclusion/outreach service in collaboration with the local authority and hosts the local assistive technology service.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

Chesnut Lodge is a good school. It cares exceptionally well for its pupils and makes good educational provision to meet their complex and varied needs. The school enjoys positive relationships with its parents and carers. A typical comment was that, 'It is difficult to convey how wonderful Chesnut Lodge is.' Pupils attend willingly, behave exceptionally well and are polite and caring of each other.

The school has made recent changes to its Early Years Foundation Stage and primary curriculum to reflect the more sensory and complex needs of children being admitted to the school and has begun planning a review of the secondary curriculum. As a result of these changes in the nature of pupils' special educational needs and/or disabilities, the school has placed a strong emphasis on the development of social and communication skills. The success of this shows in the good quality of pupils' social development and in the good contribution they make to the life of the school. Pupils also have a good understanding of the need to adopt healthy lifestyles and they do their best to put this into practice.

Pupils make good progress and achieve well. Teachers and teaching assistants have a good understanding of their pupils' needs and work together very effectively to make learning interesting and fun. In the primary department, where the range of needs is more complex, staff plan lessons which include a multi-sensory approach to match different learning styles. However, this approach is not yet sufficiently developed in the secondary department to meet the increasingly diverse needs of pupils and needs to be developed further to ensure future cohorts are also able to achieve external awards. Pupils are encouraged to be active and they clearly enjoy using their refurbished outdoor learning areas and participating in the range of extended day activities.

Senior leaders and managers have high expectations for the education, care and welfare of their pupils. They regularly review provision and take into account the views of staff and parents to ensure that it is relevant to pupils' needs. Self-evaluation is very effective, giving leaders a good understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. Improved rigour in the assessment and tracking of pupils' progress further demonstrate the school's good capacity for sustained improvement. The governing body has undertaken a recent self-evaluation of its own roles and responsibilities but is not yet well informed enough about recording and reporting processes to be able to contribute fully to further improving school performance.

The school has used its specialist status to enhance the outreach and inclusion service. This has resulted in outstanding partnerships with other schools and agencies which create opportunities for pupils to attend sessions in other schools and ensure the

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necessary support for parents, carers and pupils at all stages of the pupil's life.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Enhance the learning and progress of pupils in the secondary department by:
 - – developing a multi-sensory approach within the secondary curriculum
 - – completing the development of a suitable range of pathways through which pupils can gain access to external awards.
- Further improve school performance by increasing the involvement of the governing body in procedures to achieve this, enabling it to provide informed challenge to school leaders.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Pupils achieve well and make good progress from their low starting points. Due to the increasingly complex and restrictive nature of their special educational needs and/or disabilities, it means that pupils are unlikely to attain levels reached by pupils of a similar age nationally. As a result of the good range of strategies used by teachers in lessons, including signs, symbols and real objects, to help pupils express their needs and wishes, pupils make particularly good progress in their communication and social skills. In those lessons where teaching greatly enthuses pupils and stimulates their creativity, they make outstanding gains in their learning.

Progress is good across the range of pupils' special educational needs and/or disabilities. The more able pupils develop good writing and numeracy skills which will be useful in their future lives. All pupils have a work experience placement and go on to further education when they leave the school. Where the school is unable to meet a pupil's particular interest, the inclusion team supports them to attend another school. For example, one pupil is attending performing arts lessons in a neighbouring secondary school leading to a 'B Tech' qualification. The number of pupils who can access academic awards is decreasing as pupils are admitted with more complex needs. Lower school pupils enjoy real life experiences. They use their outdoor learning areas well and learn through practical activities. For example, one group had great fun in the garden looking at how the sunflowers they had grown were making seeds and the teacher made use of a learning opportunity when children found insects.

Pupils demonstrate that they feel very safe in the calm environment of school through their outstanding behaviour and through their excellent relationships with adults. They are learning about the importance of healthy foods and how to look after themselves and they join willingly in extended school sporting activities in which past pupils also participate, as well as in the range of sporting opportunities offered in school. Pupils have been involved in planning improvements to the school environment. For example, even the youngest pupils contributed to plans for their outdoor learning environment. Some pupils are members of the school council and make suggestions for change and for fundraising for charities. These are often linked to their own past and present experiences, for example, local respite care facilities and therapeutic centres. Pupils

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have been involved in a global citizenship conference and are making links with a school in India. This is a happy school where pupils care for each other and learn about the cultural needs of other communities. Absences are almost always related to medical conditions.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	*
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	1
Pupils' behaviour	1
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

Teaching is at least good and sometimes it is outstanding. Where it is outstanding it is stimulating and enthuses and excites pupils. Teachers include the learning of language, literacy and numeracy skills through all lessons, for example, through counting rhymes with young children. Teachers use information and communication technology and assistive technology effectively to support teaching and learning. There is careful assessment and tracking of pupils' small steps of learning against their individual targets, although this is not always reflected in clarity about expected learning outcomes

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low.

* In some special schools inspectors do not make a judgement about attainment in relation to expectations of the pupils' age.

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for individual pupils in each lesson.

Assessment of the changing pupil population has informed the development of school curriculum plans to match the differing needs of groups of pupils, for example, through the development of a multi-sensory approach and the introduction of a creative curriculum in the primary department. Leaders and managers are planning different curriculum pathways in the secondary department to meet pupils' increasingly varied and sometimes very complex needs and to ensure a range of opportunities for accreditation, although these are still at an early stage of development.

Provision for pupils' care, guidance and support is outstanding. Throughout the school day and through extended day activities, staff support the development of pupils' creativity, physical stamina, emotional well-being, independence and readiness for the next stages in their lives. The school has used funding for its specialist status to enhance staffing to meet pupils' therapy and mobility needs and programmes are built into the day-to-day curriculum. School staff and the inclusion team work effectively with parents, other professionals and agencies. They ensure smooth transitions and opportunities for pupils to learn in other schools and support children back into school when they have been ill. Through its specialist outreach, the school provides advice and training to support teachers and pupils in other schools and settings and this service is highly regarded by schools and by parents and carers.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

Senior leaders and managers run the school with energy and enthusiasm. They are ensuring that teachers are using assessment effectively to track pupil progress and plan pupils' next steps. They have made arrangements to work with other similar schools to ensure the accuracy of their assessments and, as a result, assessment has improved since the last inspection. They have recognised the need to plan changes to the curriculum to match pupils' changing needs more effectively. These plans have recently been implemented in the primary department and at secondary phase, plans are at an early stage of development. Ideas for development are shared with staff, parents and carers and with pupils to ensure that all share a common purpose and commitment. They view the pupil voice as of paramount importance and seek ways to ensure all pupils can have their say in decisions for change. Staff are encouraged to develop a good range of skills and expertise through access to extensive professional

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development.

The governing body has undertaken a recent self-evaluation. It is very supportive of the school but recognises the need to become better informed to be able to contribute more effectively to monitoring and improving school performance. Safeguarding arrangements are good and all staff have a good understanding of child protection procedures. The school is proactive in its work with other agencies to ensure the protection of pupils and to recruit staff safely. The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination is outstanding. Equality of opportunity is at the heart of all its work. It knows pupils and their needs extremely well. It goes to great lengths to ensure that all pupils can be included in all aspects of school life and makes arrangements to provide alternative opportunities to meet individual needs and preferences if the school cannot do so. Leaders and managers continually review so that they recognise when changes need to be made to provision to meet changing needs.

The school promotes community cohesion well. It takes its role in the local community very seriously and is taking part in new initiatives to develop pupils' understanding of global concerns. Through its specialist school status and outreach, the school has developed outstanding partnerships with other schools and with a range of agencies which greatly enhance learning opportunities and welfare support for pupils. Good quality information keeps parents and carers updated on how well their children are progressing and the school is working hard to try and encourage parents to be more actively involved in their children's learning, as well as in their care. The school provides good value for money.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	3
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	1
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

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Early Years Foundation Stage

Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage are good, with a stimulating environment and a well planned curriculum for all groups of children attending. The Nursery admits children who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and also children who do not and this creates additional stimulation and rich experiences. The enhanced staffing ratios mean that all groups of children are well supported and make good progress. Provision is good and improving and has been enhanced by the creation of the new outdoor area to which children contributed their ideas and by the development of a sensory curriculum for children with more complex needs. Children are assessed when they have had a chance to settle, following admission. Targets are agreed with parents and carers and are monitored on a daily basis. These targets demonstrate that pupils make at least good progress and sometimes exceed their targets. Parents and carers are kept informed about their children's progress through learning journals, learning stories and home-school books. The welfare support for children is of the same excellent quality as in the rest of the school. The management of the Early Years Foundation Stage has undergone some change, with a number of staff who are new to the phase, but they are rapidly acquiring the knowledge and skills to meet the needs of both the 'mainstream' children and those with complex difficulties and disabilities.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2

Views of parents and carers

The response rate to the questionnaire for parents and carers was rather low but individual responses were overwhelmingly positive. Parents and carers are particularly appreciative of the way the school cares for and supports their children and inspection findings fully support this view. Parents and carers indicated that they feel the school provides them with appropriate information about their child's progress. One parent said 'Chesnut Lodge meets my child's needs above and beyond'. No concerns were expressed through the questionnaires and parents and carers indicated that they feel well supported by the school.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Chesnut Lodge Special School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 15 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 63 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	11	73	4	27	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	12	80	3	20	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	11	73	4	27	0	0	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	11	73	4	27	0	0	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	11	73	4	27	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	11	73	4	27	0	0	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	10	67	5	33	0	0	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	10	67	4	27	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	13	87	2	13	0	0	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	11	73	4	27	0	0	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	9	60	5	33	0	0	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	11	73	4	27	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	12	80	3	20	0	0	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
Type of school	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	58	36	4	2
Primary schools	8	43	40	9
Secondary schools	10	35	42	13
Sixth forms	13	39	45	3
Special schools	33	42	20	4
Pupil referral units	18	40	29	12
All schools	11	42	38	9

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 March 2010 and are the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn and spring terms 2009/10 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement. ■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils. ■ The quality of teaching. ■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships. ■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



24 September 2010

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Chesnut Lodge Special School, Widnes, WA8 7HF

Thank you for making the inspectors so welcome when we visited your school. We enjoyed meeting you around the school. We thought you were very happy and clearly enjoy school and you were very polite and extremely well behaved. You made a very good impression on us. We would like to tell you what else we found out while we were with you.

- Your teachers teach you well so that you make good progress. It is good to see that you all go on to extend your education when you leave school.
- The care, guidance and support you receive from all the staff is outstanding. You get the help you need in school and staff work with your parents and carers and other people to try to make sure all of your needs are met.
- Teachers make sure you can give your views about changes to what happens in the school.
- The school is thinking about the changes it needs to make to meet your needs and those of future pupils even better. It has already put some of those changes in place but we would like them to focus especially on improving the secondary department's curriculum and we know that school leaders agree with us.
- We have asked the school's governing body to be more closely involved in checking how well the school is doing.

We wish you well for the future and thank you again for being so welcoming.

Yours sincerely

Mrs Hilary Ward

Lead inspector

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