

Inspection report

Chrysalis School

Independent special school

DfES ref no: 919/6257

Inspection under Section 162A of the Education Act 2002

Dates of inspection: 7 – 9 August 2006

INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY

Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out by the Office for Standards in Education under Section 162A of the Education Act 2002 in order to advise the Secretary of State for Education and Skills about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Information about the school

Chrysalis School is a very small day school in Codicote, Hertfordshire. It provides education for up to five boys and girls between the ages of four and 11 who are diagnosed as autistic. It was opened by two sets of parents in 2005 and is owned and managed as a charity. It is temporarily housed in the parish hall adjacent to the local church. The curriculum and teaching methods used are based on the principles of Applied Behavioural Analysis (ABA). Pupils are taught on a one-to-one ratio. The school is led and managed by the headteacher and pupils are taught by teachers trained in the ABA approach.

Currently two boys aged 10 attend. Both have severe communication difficulties, sensory and co-ordination difficulties and some display challenging behaviour associated with their autism. They have had a variety of previous educational provision, including special schooling and/or home tuition. Some of the pupils admitted to the school have received ABA education within their own homes. Due to the severe difficulties their levels of attainment on entry to the school are well below those expected of pupils of a similar age. Pupils are funded by their local authority and some attend the school as the result of parental choice and a tribunal ruling.

Summary of main findings

The school provides a good education. The curriculum is broad, well planned and modified to meet the differing needs of the pupils. Teaching is good. Along with the excellent and consistently used assessment procedures and high levels of staffing, this enables pupils to make good progress. The school provides a calm learning environment where routines and expectations are clearly communicated to pupils. They become calmer, respond more positively to activities, and increase their ability to understand and communicate. As a result of this, pupils make good progress in their personal development. They develop an awareness of themselves and other people, as well as becoming aware of what behaviour is unacceptable. Pupils are safe and secure and their well-being is given paramount importance. A weakness in the provision is the small scale and the temporary nature of the accommodation. It is only through very good organisation that it provides adequate space for pupils to be taught and assessed on a one-to-one basis.

What the school does well:

- it has excellent assessment systems in place which staff use very effectively to monitor pupil's progress and plan the next stages of learning;

- it provides a broad curriculum which is implemented well through using the ABA approach;
- it enables pupils to make good progress, especially in their ability to communicate;
- it manages and improves pupils' behaviour;
- it provides high quality and very regular communication to parents; and
- there are very high levels of staffing and effective teamwork.

What the school must do in order to comply with the regulations:

- update the child protection policy to comply with Department for Education and Skills (DfES) guidance;
- provide separate toilet facilities for girls and adequate facilities for the changing of pupils; and
- provide appropriate facilities for pupils when they are ill.

What the school must do to comply with the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 2002

In order to comply with the requirements of the DDA, the school should:

- devise a three-year plan to improve the accessibility of the premises.

Next Steps

Whilst not required by the regulations, the school might wish to consider the following point for development:

- acquire more appropriate permanent accommodation.

COMPLIANCE WITH THE REGULATIONS FOR REGISTRATION

1. The quality of education provided by the school

The quality of the curriculum

The school appropriately focuses on the priority needs of the pupils, which include developing the skills of communication, behaviour and interaction with others. In order to achieve this, the school has adopted the ABA approach to learning. This is a scientific method of understanding, analysing and changing behaviour. The principles include providing intense, highly structured one-to-one education using individual learning targets derived from continuous assessment. The targets form the basis of all lessons, and there is agreed positive reinforcement for pupils' correct responses. Around these principles the school has developed a good curriculum. It includes programmes of study from all subjects of the National Curriculum for reception and primary-aged pupils. It pays particular attention to basic literacy and numeracy skills. All subjects are modified so that they are taught at the academic level of the pupils and at the same time help them to achieve their agreed learning targets.

The school places great emphasis on improving communication and social skills. This emphasis is a strength of the school and is well supported by the provision for speech and language therapy. The Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS) is used consistently by pupils and staff. As a result, pupils begin to make sense of people's intentions and can communicate their needs and desires. Pupils make good progress in this area and those who have been in the school the longest can use it very effectively, for example to ask for a drink or to choose a specific book.

The focus on personal, social and health education is part of every moment of every day for each pupil. The development of pupils' self-care and awareness of their personal needs is a high priority. Targets for each pupil are set, again based on assessment. As their communication and understanding improve, the pupils successfully meet these targets and expectations are raised further. Good emphasis is placed on physical exercise during each week and the school uses outside venues to provide this. Pupils have access to horse riding, sailing and swimming. In addition to this, the school ensures that pupils have experiences that bring them into contact with the world outside the classroom. Visits are made to locations connected with the curriculum, such as places of worship, wild-life parks, supermarkets and theatres. These support the school's aims for increasing pupils' sociability.

The quality of teaching and assessment

The quality of teaching is good. The staff are extremely committed to providing meaningful and well-planned learning experiences in all sessions. There is at least one teacher with every pupil in every session. Some pupils receive support from two teachers in every session, which means that one member of staff can concentrate on observing and assessing the pupil's responses. Staff are well trained in the use of ABA as a teaching and planning method and use it consistently. They are very aware of pupils' targets for each session; all use the same terminology and language structure, as well as a consistent approach to rewards and incentives. Staff have

similar expectations for each pupil's behaviour based on an agreed whole-school approach and a sharing of observations. Staff are aware of how each pupil may react in different situations and they are adept in introducing 'diversion tasks' when behaviour becomes difficult and then returning to the learning target. Communication with pupils is clear and direct. PECS is used to help pupils indicate their needs and in the best lessons to make sense of what is expected of them. This leads to pupils becoming able to show excitement in respect of an anticipated activity such as swimming.

The assessment of pupils is outstanding. Those who have received ABA education within their own homes come to the school with a wealth of information and targets. Others start the school with little information except that their previous placements have not met their needs. The school conducts a wide range of base-line assessments specific to pupils with autism. These provide a clear picture of what pupils can do and understand and how they will respond to given situations. This profile is supplemented by reports and assessments from all the therapists involved with each pupil. Assessment is integral to every session and provides the next targets for the pupil to achieve. The information from the observations is converted into numerical data so that success rates can be measured, analysed and reported on.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

2. The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

The school provides well for pupils' personal development. Pupils are educated in a peaceful and calm atmosphere where they learn to relate to others. Throughout all sessions, including breaks and lunchtimes, they are constantly made aware of their own achievements and successes. All this develops their self-awareness and their awareness of other people. It also helps them cope with changes in their routines. Through the consistent application of the behaviour policy, staff help pupils to identify what is acceptable or not acceptable behaviour, and thus help them to begin to be morally aware. There are shared guidelines as to how staff should respond to individual difficulties.

The school tries hard to show pupils how they can contribute to the community in which they live and learn, and to develop the skills of relating to others positively. In so far as possible, the school organises group activities taking into consideration that some pupils display anxieties about being with other people. When they are able to, pupils take part in and enjoy activities outside school, such as swimming, sailing, horse riding and trips connected with the curriculum. This supports their social and cultural development. The school has a firm commitment to promoting equality of opportunity and racial harmony.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

3. The welfare, health and safety of the pupils

Pupils are cared for well. This is achieved through an expert understanding of their needs and by the consistent application of the school's procedures designed to support their safety and well-being. Some pupils' behaviour can often be unpredictable and challenging, but an effective policy for managing behaviour and the skilled approaches of the staff in responding to incidents ensures that behaviour is good. A record is kept of any unacceptable behaviour. It is monitored by the school, and if a point is reached where additional help may be needed, parents and governors become involved. However, the high level of supervision of pupils throughout the day means that incidents are kept to a minimum and are dealt with very effectively. The pupils' special dietary needs are of utmost importance and the school makes sure that pupils are not given any foods to which they are intolerant. The depth of understanding of pupils' autism contributes significantly to the school's positive ethos by which pupils are valued and respected.

The steps taken to protect pupils are satisfactory. Sufficient care is taken to ensure that pupils are safe during the variety of activities which regularly take place away from school. Staff are alert to the signs that would give cause for concern. However, while the school has a policy and procedures for child protection these are not based on the latest guidance. The name of the person responsible for child protection is not stated explicitly in the policy and the policy is reviewed every other year rather than annually. Furthermore, the training required for the responsible person and all the staff is not up-to-date.

Some steps have been taken to improve access for pupils and others who might have physical disabilities, such as providing a ramp for wheelchairs and a disabled toilet. However, the school has yet to liaise with the church which owns the building and write an access plan in order to comply with the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

No.

What does the school need to do to comply with the regulations?

In order to comply with the Independent Schools Standards Regulations 2003 the school should:

- *improve and implement the child protection policy in compliance with DfES guidance "Safeguarding Children in Education" (paragraph 3(2)(b)).*

What does the school need to do to comply with the DDA?

In order to comply with the requirements of the DDA the school should:

- *devise a three-year plan to improve the accessibility of the premises.*

4. The suitability of the proprietor and staff

There are effective procedures in place for checking the qualifications, health and suitability of all potential new staff prior to confirmation of appointment, including checks with the Criminal Records Bureau.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

5. The suitability of the premises and accommodation

The accommodation is satisfactory for the very small number of pupils currently on roll. It has been adapted to suit the needs of the pupils, for example by creating uncluttered space within each classroom. The rooms provide separate large and small spaces that support a good variety of activities. The fact that the premises are on occasion used by other groups means that these cannot become permanent classrooms or be further developed as learning environments. The playground is small but adequate for the few pupils on roll but would be less than adequate for a full complement of pupils.

The amount of available space, however, is not adequate for maximum number for which the school is registered, especially if all pupils displayed behaviour which required that they be taught on their own. The admission of girls (for which the school is registered) is problematic as there is no separate toilet facility for them. The arrangements for pupils who become ill are, from necessity, makeshift as there is no room that could be designated as a medical room. With a full roll it is less likely there would be a discreet and appropriate space, as there is at the moment, for an ill pupil. In the longer term the school aims to find alternative premises with greater scope for development.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

No.

What does the school need to do to comply with the regulations?

In order to comply with the Independent Schools Standards Regulations 2003 the school should:

- *provide separate toilet facilities for girls and adequate facilities for changing pupils (paragraph 5(k)); and*
- *provide appropriate facilities for pupils who are ill (paragraph 5(l)).*

6. The quality of information for parents and other partners

There is an excellent range of information for parents or carers and for placing authorities. The prospectus covers all aspects of the educational provision while additional information is also available, especially on the school's very good web

site. There is a wide range of policies, some of which are included in the prospectus, while others are available for anyone requiring copies.

The amount and regularity of information made available on each pupil's academic and personal achievements and progress is outstanding. Information about the targets that have been set and whether they have been achieved are provided on a fortnightly basis. These show the rate of progress made. End of year reports are very well constructed and report on levels of attainment using nationally recognised performance level indicators. The school has begun to hold regular review meetings to which all supporting parties and professionals involved are invited and to which they may contribute.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

7. The effectiveness of the school's procedures for handling complaints

The school has a comprehensive complaints procedure. It has clear time-scales for the informal and formal stages of a complaint and includes an appeal stage involving a panel.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

SCHOOL DETAILS

Name of school:	Chrysalis School
DfES Number:	919/6257
Type of school:	Special day school for autistic children
Status:	Independent
Age range of pupils:	4 – 11 years
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
Number on roll (full-time pupils):	Boys: 2 Girls: 0 Total: 2
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need:	Boys: 2 Girls: 0 Total: 2
Annual fees:	£35,000
Address of school:	St Giles Parish Centre Bury Lane Codicote Hertfordshire SG4 8XX
Telephone number:	07816 484940
Fax number:	01727 760677
Email address:	sue.chrysalisschool@ntlworld.com
Headteacher:	Mrs S King
Proprietor:	The Chrysalis School for Autism (Ltd)
Reporting Inspector:	Mrs F D Gander
Date of inspection:	7 – 9 August 2006

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