

The Chrysalis School for Autism

Independent Special School

Inspection report

DCSF Registration Number	919/6257
Unique Reference Number	127633
Inspection number	334291
Inspection dates	10–11 June 2009
Reporting inspector	Pauline Allison HMI

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended.

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Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out by Ofsted under Section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Information about the school

The Chrysalis School for Autism is a small school in a rural setting in Codicote, Hertfordshire and is located in a parish centre in the grounds of the local church. The school opened in December 2005 and makes provision for up to five pupils aged between five and fourteen years of age. There are currently two full time pupils and one part time pupil aged between seven and 13 years of age attending the school, all of whom have a statement of special educational needs to meet their autistic spectrum disorders and associated learning difficulties. The two full time pupils are funded by their local authorities; the part time pupil is funded privately and attends for two days a week. The school aims to meet pupils' individual complex needs and provide life skills training within a supportive, structured and nurturing environment. It was last inspected in August 2006.

Evaluation of the school

The Chrysalis School provides a good quality of education and the care taken to promote the welfare, health and safety of the pupils is outstanding. The clarity of, and adherence to, the school's policies and procedures is notable. All those involved with the school have high expectations of themselves and the pupils. The strong leadership of the dedicated staff team, together with the close and effective partnership with governors and parents, ensures good outcomes for the pupils. It is clear that the school is part of, and enjoys the support of, the local community. The school is successful in meeting its aims and meets all of the regulations.

Quality of education

The school provides a good quality of education. It operates effectively on the principles of Applied Behavioural Analysis (ABA), a highly organised and intensive approach to teaching skills in small steps. This approach uses positive reinforcement to promote success and good motivation. It applies this to ensure consistency in curriculum provision and teaching. The headteacher and head of ABA plan in a highly individualised and detailed way and work with the tutors to deliver a good curriculum which is well matched to pupils' needs as identified in their statements of special educational needs. The curriculum is varied and interesting and includes good attention to preparing the pupils for later life. This is seen in the integrated approach to teaching basic skills, as well as developing pupils' behaviour, social skills and communication throughout the school day. Subjects such as history and geography

are taught in blocks of time and the personal, social and health education curriculum is a particular strength. The intended trip to Luton Airport is an example of how staff make the curriculum interesting. The school makes good use of programmes devised by speech and language and occupational therapists and builds these into each pupil's daily activities. There is a good range of resources available to support learning and effective use is made of communication aids, symbols and signs. The school's ability to offer a broad curriculum for pupils of all ages is supported by making good use of facilities in other local schools for physical education and for cooking. In the case of the pupil who is in Key Stage 3, the school is planning well for his subsequent needs, including careers guidance. A significant strength of the curriculum is the way in which staff plan for it to be extended and reinforced by parents.

The quality of teaching and assessment is good, with assessment being exceptionally good. Lessons are well planned and organised and the highly specific individual programmes are provided with at least one-to-one support from staff. Areas of strength include the consistent and positive approach by staff and the frequent changes of activity which keep the pupils interested and keen and sustains the good pace of learning. Staff pay attention to pupils' individual aptitudes, for example by developing a pupil's interest in addition. Occasionally, the large number of staff present during an activity can reduce the effectiveness and clarity of communication. Staff work hard to apply the principles of ABA and to ensure pupils achieve success without compromising their independence. However, choices are sometimes a little too limited and the promotion of independent skills is less successful.

The school has in place an excellent framework for assessment. It carries out exceptionally detailed and rigorous assessment to track the small steps pupils make in P levels¹ and links this to a language and social skills assessment programme. Data collection is a strength and takes many forms, including graphs, photographs and observations. As a result of the consistently good teaching, including that of social and communication skills, pupils make good, and sometimes very good, progress in a wide range of areas. They develop and demonstrate a good understanding of daily routines. Records show the successful reduction of unwanted behaviours in a former pupil. Further evidence of good progress is seen in the parents' testimonies of how their children have generalised the learning from school to activities at home, such as family outings, thus making these trips enjoyable and possible for the whole family.

¹ These are used to record attainment for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities working below Level 1 of the National Curriculum.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

The provision for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils is good. The school rightly focuses on helping the pupils to consider their own feelings and explore, as appropriate, their relationship to those closest to them. Pupils grow in self-confidence within the happy and nurturing environment of the school. The school has a clear and structured approach, linked to positive reinforcement and there is a clear code of conduct for pupils which staff promote well. Within this framework the school has high expectations for how pupils behave. It successfully helps them to be tolerant of the behaviour of others. As a result of this clarity the pupils' behaviour is good and is managed well by staff.

There is a good balance of activities throughout the year which give pupils opportunities to interact with their peers through games and shared experiences. They have good relationships with staff. Opportunities to extend their social development are an integral part of the school's planning. They are helped to develop social skills such as tidying up, and share snack and lunchtimes within school. Pupils are also able to extend their social skills through a wide range of enjoyable outings including to farms, museums and art galleries. They learn about public life by visiting the fire and ambulance station and by meeting a school crossing patrol man. The developing and carefully adapted religious education curriculum is allowing some consideration of a range of beliefs. However, this has not yet included the opportunity to meet those from a range of faiths and the school does not make best use of local opportunities for pupils to encounter and experience diversity and multicultural events.

Welfare, health and safety of the pupils

The provision for the welfare, health and safety of the pupils is outstanding. There is a comprehensive and detailed range of policies and the school's procedures for reviewing them and for ensuring staff have a full understanding of them are exemplary. All appropriate fire checks are made and records show that staff receive regular updated training in all key area of welfare, health and safety. Policies take good account of the specific nature of the pupils' needs. Staff supervise the pupils closely at all times and parents are confident that the school takes very good care of their children. The school ensures that all staff have regular child protection training and that there are sufficient staff trained in first aid. Risk assessments for individuals and for outings are extremely well prepared. The school shows good attention to helping pupils develop an understanding of safe and unsafe behaviour using practical examples, such as when on trips to shops. Pupils are happy, relate well to staff and are not upset by other pupils in any way. They take regular exercise and the school successfully manages the need for achieving a healthy balance when pupils choose food rewards which motivate them. Very good promotion of being healthy and of self-care skills is seen in activities linked to a history topic about medical care. The school has a three year plan which fully meets the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 2002.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

The school takes very good steps to ensure the suitability of staff. It carries out thorough checks and keeps careful records.

School's premises and accommodation

The school makes the best possible use of the premises which are well maintained and decorated and enjoys a good relationship with the church. It is clearly a disadvantage to have to pack resources away regularly and it requires careful planning to ensure they are readily available. There is a small and safe garden for pupils to play in and the quiet and attractive location provides good access to a local park and the countryside.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

The school provides very clear and well presented information for parents and others, including through an attractive website. There is very good contact with parents on a daily basis; they receive a report each half term and there is a thorough report made for the annual review of pupils' statements of special educational needs. Parents are very pleased with the quality of information and contact with the school. Records of annual reviews indicate that placing authorities are pleased with the provision made.

Procedures for handling complaints

The school has a clear complaints policy which fully meets the regulations.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school meets all of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended ("the Regulations").

What the school could do to improve further

While not required by regulations, the school might wish to consider the following points for development.

- Develop the local opportunities for pupils to encounter and experience greater diversity among people and increase the range of multicultural themes explored.

- Provide more opportunities in the daily timetable for pupils to make wider choices and to take greater responsibility for their learning particularly within Key Stage 3 and, potentially, beyond.

Inspection Judgement Recording Form

outstanding	good	satisfactory	inadequate
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The quality of education

Overall quality of education		✓		
How well the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of pupils		✓		
How effective teaching and assessment are in meeting the full range of pupils' needs		✓		
How well pupils make progress in their learning		✓		

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

Quality of provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development		✓		
The behaviour of pupils		✓		

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

The overall welfare, health and safety of pupils	✓			
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School details

Name of school	The Chrysalis School for Autism		
DCSF number	919/6257		
Unique reference number	127633		
Type of school	Special		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	5 December 2005		
Age range of pupils	5–14		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 2	Girls: 0	Total: 2
Number on roll (part-time pupils)	Boys: 1	Girls: 0	Total: 1
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need	Boys: 3	Girls: 0	Total: 3
Annual fees (day pupils)	£45,000		
Address of school	St. Giles Parish Centre Bury Lane Codicote Hertfordshire SG4 8XX		
Telephone number	07816 484940		
Email address	info@chrysalisschool.org		
Headteacher	Mrs Elizabeth Dun		
Proprietor	The Chrysalis School for Autism		
Reporting inspector	Pauline Allison HMI		
Dates of inspection	10–11 June 2009		