

The Chiltern School

Beech Road, Dunstable, LU6 3LY

Inspection dates

11–12 October 2012

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils	Good	2	
Quality of teaching	Good	2	
Behaviour and safety of pupils	Good	2	
Leadership and management	Good	2	

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Pupils make good progress in communication (using signs, pictures, switches and words as appropriate), reading, writing, counting and weighing. This is because they are taught well. Work is set at the right level for pupils and this helps to speed up their progress.
- Resources, such as cutlery and wheelchairs, are adapted well to help pupils to do things for themselves. Within their capability pupils make rapid gains in becoming as independent as possible.
- Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage make rapid gains in sitting still; concentrating; and using signs and words to make choices.
- The sixth form is good. Students develop independent life skills. They shop, prepare a meal and manage money within their capability.
- Pupils are safe. Skilful behaviour management ensures most pupils engage successfully with learning.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. They gaze with amazement when in the sensory garden or experiencing the taste of foods from around the world for the first time.
- All leaders, including governors, are committed to removing any obstacles that get in the way of learning for pupils. Thorough checking of teaching contributes to good improvements for pupils.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- In a few lessons, in Key Stages 3 and 4, teachers do not always make enough use of their knowledge about where pupils are in their learning to plan the next small steps they need to take.
- Pupils' progress in Key Stages 3 and 4 is a little slower than in the rest of the school, particularly in reading.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors heard pupils read (using symbols, pictures, and text) and observed 20 lessons taught by 19 different teachers. Most of the lessons were observed jointly with a member of the senior leadership team.
- Meetings and discussions were held with staff, pupils, governors and a representative from the local authority.
- The inspectors looked at a sample of statements of special educational needs, feeding plans, intimate care plans, assessment information, the school’s plans for improvement, the school’s monitoring information, a range of policies including safeguarding policies and governing body documentation. The lead inspector examined 77 staff questionnaires.
- There were 36 responses to Parent View at the time of the inspection. These views were taken into account by inspectors, along with letters sent in to the school marked for the attention of the inspection team.

Inspection team

Jeffery Plumb, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Justine Ilochi	Additional Inspector
Hermione Horn	Additional Inspector

Information about this school

- In September 2012 this school was opened as a new all-age special school. It is designated as a school for pupils with complex needs. It is an amalgamation of two separate schools and is located on a split site (primary and secondary buildings) about five miles apart. The headteacher was previously the headteacher of the old special primary school and the chair of governors was formerly the chair at the old special primary school.
- All pupils have a statement of special educational needs. The school provides mostly for pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties (PMLD), severe learning difficulties (SLD) and those with autistic spectrum disorder (ASD). However, from September 2012 it has admitted a significant number of pupils with moderate learning difficulties (MLD) and additional needs, particularly into Key Stage 3. A few pupils have multi-sensory impairment (MSI).
- The pupil premium, which is extra funding from the government, is held centrally by the local authority. It is given to special schools through a formula for funding and targets pupils with exceptional needs. The proportion of pupils with exceptional needs is significantly above the national average.
- The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds is above the national average and these pupils are represented across all the different disability and special educational needs groups catered for by the school. The number from families where the home language is not English is below the national average.
- The school sends staff out to support mainstream schools throughout Central Bedfordshire in managing and educating pupils with ASD.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Speed up the rate of pupils' progress and raise attainment in Key Stages 3 and 4 by:
 - consistently setting reading targets based on where pupils are currently in their reading to speed up their progress
 - making better use of symbols to enable pupils to use computers with increased confidence to improve their reading
 - take every opportunity in all lessons to develop pupils' skills in solving mathematical problems.
- Improve the quality of teaching in Key Stages 3 and 4 so that it is consistently good or better by:
 - planning work so that it is set at the right level for pupils with a wide range of complex special needs in each class but is also adapted to challenge pupils with MLD and higher functioning pupils with ASD
 - giving pupils regular feedback in lessons so as to enable them to achieve their very best.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage with exceptionally complex needs. Their behaviour is very challenging because of the frustration of not being able to communicate. They cannot play together, finding it hard to take turns or share toys. They make rapid gains in making choices, often using pictorial schedules. A few use words, and as they make their needs known their behaviour improves very significantly.
- Sixth form students develop life skills exceptionally-well. In a cottage setting they: learn that a switch operates a washing machine; measure out the quantity of washing powder required; shop and prepare meals. Measured against their complex needs they make good progress. Their communication, reading and mathematical development in the context of managing an on-site cafe is good.
- Throughout Key Stages 1 and 2, pupils make at least good progress in reading, writing and mathematics. Some make outstanding progress in these areas. Pupils with PMLD anticipate what is going to happen as a book is held close to their face and gaze with their eyes; those with SLD show understanding of books as they point accurately at the correct symbol or picture when asked a question; and those higher functioning pupils with ASD read text independently.
- Writing for pupils with PMLD is difficult, but with hands massaged by their teaching assistants and with hand-over-hand support they make marks in a sand tray; those with SLD write words forming letters with a reasonable degree of accuracy; and some pupils with ASD write stories and label diagrams, for example of the human body, accurately using technical terms.
- Pupils' mathematical development builds step-by-step. In Year 1, they explore coins and by Year 6 they use real money in the school shop. All are included. For some this involves asking for the correct change, for others it is an experience of managing to queue up in a shop.
- Although it remains good overall, pupils' progress in English and mathematics slows in Key Stages 3 and 4, particularly in reading. This is because a few teachers on the secondary school site are not as consistent in using knowledge of pupils' previous learning to set appropriate, step-by-step targets as are their colleagues on the primary school site. Pupils with MLD and ASD on this site do not always consistently make the progress they are capable of.
- Throughout the school pupils make outstanding progress against the non-academic targets on their statements, such as improving their independence in feeding. Those with the cognitive and physical ability make rapid progress in operating switches to propel their own wheelchairs.
- Pupil premium funding is used effectively to accelerate learning for children looked after by the local authority and for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals (based on exceptional needs funding). Pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds are treated as individuals and receive appropriate help and support based on their special educational need. Their progress matches that of others.

The quality of teaching is good

- All teaching is of a good quality and some is outstanding on the primary school site and in the sixth form. In a few Key Stage 3 and 4 lessons teaching is less than good, but is beginning to improve. This is because of the feedback these teachers receive from the headteacher following

lesson observations and support through training.

- In good and outstanding lessons teachers skilfully use their knowledge of where pupils are in their learning to plan their next steps. They give pupils good quality activities to ensure that pupils achieve the targets they have set for them. In a magical mathematics lesson for pupils in Years 5 and 6, each pupil made outstanding progress; one with hand-on-hand support made rapid gains in counting; another sorted objects by colour; and yet another used a switch to operate a piece of equipment. All responded exceptionally well to the high level of challenge given to them.
- In a few Key Stage 3 and 4 lessons not enough use is made of symbols to help pupils to use computers and to speed up their development of reading and writing skills. Also in these lessons, pupils are not given enough encouragement to solve mathematical problems.
- On rare occasions in lessons the rate of progress made by different groups of pupils' is variable. In a Key Stage 3 science lesson, the expectations for pupils with PMLD were not as high as for pupils with SLD and ASD. Consequently, they did not learn as well as their peers. In a few Key Stage 3 and 4 lessons pupils are not given enough feedback on how to improve their work. For example, in a Key Stage 4 physical education lesson physically able students with MLD were not given enough feedback on how to improve their sprinting skills.
- In most lessons teaching assistants make a very valuable contribution to pupils' learning. This is a strong feature in reading and mathematics lessons in Key Stages 1 and 2. In these lessons teaching assistants engage in a wide range of suitable activities with pupils which successfully speed up their development of reading and mathematical skills.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Most pupils have very challenging behaviours associated with their complex range of disabilities and special educational needs. Staff are adept at managing these behaviours and removing obstacles to learning for pupils. Hence pupils engage well with learning.
- Careful positioning of pupils with PMLD and specially adapted equipment enables these pupils to adopt positive learning behaviour. Structured work stations and schedules produced in visual or picture form enable pupils with ASD to engage successfully with learning. Well-planned activities based on occupational and physiotherapist advice contribute to the good learning behaviours of pupils with physical disabilities.
- Students who speak using words say that they feel safe at school. They can talk about their worries with a trusted adult. Those with the most complex needs, through smiles and gesture, express who they want to meet their intimate care needs. Parents and carers agree that their children feel safe at school.
- Those pupils on the secondary school site who speak using words, say that some pupils swear from time-to-time and that very occasionally they have been hit by another pupil. But they go on to say that staff help them to sort out arguments and that there is no racism or bullying in the school.
- Within their capability, pupils have a good knowledge and understanding of different types of bullying. They know about the health risks associated with smoking and that drinking too much alcohol can damage the liver. They have a good sense of road safety. A few pupils with MLD in Key Stage 3 cycle to and from school, following focused support by the school on how to ride a

bike safely.

- Attendance is average. Absence is related to lengthy stays in hospital or off-site visits to specialist clinics.

The leadership and management are good

- The determination of the headteacher and chair of governors, in the short space of time this new school has been open, to improve the life-chances of pupils with complex needs is evident in all the actions taken by the school.
- The headteacher's excellent leadership and relentless drive to provide a high quality education for pupils' with complex needs by making teaching the best that it can be have had a very positive impact. Within a term of opening, the school is already providing a good education.
- Effective procedures for setting targets for teachers to work to have helped to establish good teaching quickly. Pupils' progress and the quality of teaching are checked robustly and effective staff training supports teachers to improve their skills and knowledge.
- The senior leadership and middle management team is new. Roles and responsibilities are clear. Within a term they are working as a successful team and already driving significant improvements. However, the skills of a few who lead on developing the Key Stage 3 and 4 curriculum are yet to be fully developed, particularly in the context of admitting pupils with MLD from September 2012. A good start has been made on developing a more challenging curriculum so as to enable these pupils to get the highest possible qualifications by the time they leave school, but it is too early to evaluate its impact.
- Self-evaluation is robust and decisive actions result from it. These have already had a positive effect on raising pupils' achievement. For example, evaluations of why some ASD pupils in Key Stages 3 and 4 did not always understand direction have led to the consistent use of visual schedules. These pupils now arrive on time to the correct classrooms. Positioning work stations in classrooms together with visual instructions has improved the focus of these students on learning. Consequently, their rate of progress is beginning to accelerate.
- The local authority has been totally supportive in establishing this new school and targeting funding appropriately. It very effectively monitors the quality of the outreach support this school provides for mainstream schools across Central Bedfordshire in providing a high quality education for pupils with a wide range of disabilities and special educational needs, particularly ASD.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - is outstanding
 - ensured that policies and procedures were in place so that this new school could hit the ground running on 01 September 2012. Governors worked with the headteacher over the summer holidays to get the school ready on time
 - is well informed by reports from the headteacher and other senior leaders which include detailed analysis of pupils' progress
 - ensures that all safeguarding arrangements meet requirements including risk assessments of specialist equipment such as hoists and slings
 - makes important financial decisions, including how the special funding, such as the pupil premium, is spent, based on a careful consideration of what works best in helping pupils to

achieve

- fulfils its duties effectively, and sets and reviews the headteacher’s targets
- keeps a laser sharp focus on the steps being taken to improve the teaching in Key Stages 3 and 4 so that the rate of progress pupils make in this part of the school matches that of the rest of the school.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	109746
Local authority	Central Bedfordshire
Inspection number	403784

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	3–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	151
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	24
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Rupert Groves
Headteacher	Shirley Crosbie
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01582 667106
Fax number	01582 696442
Email address	glenwood@deal.bedfordshire.gov.uk

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