

# Inspection of a good school: Chesnut Lodge Special School

Green Lane, Ditton, Widnes, Cheshire WA8 7HF

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Inspection dates: 19 and 20 April 2023

## **Outcome**

Chesnut Lodge Special School continues to be a good school.

## **What is it like to attend this school?**

Pupils arrive at school in the morning with big happy smiles that last all day. They love their school, the friends they make and the fun learning activities they get to enjoy. Pupils told inspectors that staff take good care of them. They said that they feel safe and secure in school.

This is a caring and welcoming school where every pupil, no matter what their needs, is valued. Staff ensure that all pupils take a full part in school life. Pupils enjoy learning. They achieve well and often exceed staff's high expectations.

Pupils are proud of their school. They have a voice and have influenced many improvements in school. For example, pupils renamed their classes after influential people with disabilities. They have been inspired by these successful people. It has raised their aspirations for their own future achievements. The school council helped to design the sensory garden and the new accessible playground. Both of these facilities are appreciated by all pupils.

The 'Rights Club' ambassadors play a key role in ensuring that rights, responsibilities and respect are at the heart of school life. Pupils behave well. They know how to be good friends. However, they also know that sometimes pupils can fall out. When this happens, staff help pupils to understand the impact of their words and actions. Leaders ensure that any bullying is dealt with well.

## **What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?**

Pupils experience a broad and exciting curriculum. Leaders have designed the curriculum to meet pupils' wide range of special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Pupils study a wide range of subjects. Teachers ensure that the education, health and care plan targets are woven into the curriculum. Pupils achieve their personal and academic targets.

Teachers are creative in their choice of resources and activities that immerse pupils in multi-sensory and purposeful learning. They ensure that all pupils have a quality learning experience. Teachers use assessment strategies well to check that pupils' learning is secure before they move to the next step in learning. Pupils told inspectors that they enjoy their academic subjects but that they also get to learn how to live and eat well.

Communication is a priority in school. Staff take the time to understand how children in the early years communicate with parents and carers. Over time, the use of song, rhyme and sign language supports children to develop their vocabulary and communicate with others. Pupils of all ages have personalised resources, including pictures, symbols, signs and technology to support their communication skills.

Staff immerse pupils in stories, poems, drama and songs. A well-designed phonics programme is in place to ensure that pupils learn the sounds that letters represent. This ensures that pupils develop the phonics knowledge they need to become confident readers. Pupils with complex needs enjoy listening to songs and stories. Teachers use fake snow, forest smells and sounds that relate to the class story to give pupils a holistic sensory experience.

Daily worship gives pupils some quiet time to reflect. Pupils also learn about other cultures and religions. Music, dance and drama are also used to transport pupils to other cultures.

Staff know every pupil extremely well. They understand the distinct needs of every pupil. This allows them to communicate effectively with all pupils. This knowledge also ensures that staff are quick to notice if a pupil may need a sensory or personal break. This proactive approach ensures that there is very little disruption to learning.

The curriculum prepares pupils well for their next stage of learning and adulthood. They learn how to keep themselves safe in school, in the community and online. They know about appropriate social interactions and what is acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. Pupils learn about different jobs and undertake work experience in school. They visit colleges and training providers. Staff work with pupils, parents and careers advisers to ensure that all pupils transfer successfully to their next stage of education.

The vast majority of staff feel that leaders are supportive and considerate of their workload and well-being. They feel that the school is a happy community where staff work well together.

Governors know the school well. They have the interests of pupils at the heart of any decisions that they make. Governors challenge leaders and the local authority to ensure the school continues to improve. However, they have relied too heavily on the local authority to update statutory policies and have not had a secure enough oversight as governors.

## Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

There is a strong culture of safeguarding in school. Leaders ensure that all staff are up to date with all national and local safeguarding information. Training is thorough and all staff know how to raise any concerns. The training and support for staff who undertake intimate care needs are thorough. Leaders ensure that pupils are treated with care and dignity.

Staff are quick to notice any sign in behaviour, appearance or emotions that may indicate a cause for concern. Leaders are quick to take effective action, including referrals to the local authority and are persistent in securing the right support for pupils and families.

## What does the school need to do to improve?

### (Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Governors have relied too heavily on the local authority to make sure that statutory policies are up to date. While this has not had a detrimental impact on pupils, there is the potential for key statutory information and updates to be missed. Governors should take full responsibility for statutory policies to ensure they reflect government guidelines.

## Background

When we have judged a school to be good, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. This is called an ungraded inspection and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection, which is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the second ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be good in November 2017.

## How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

## Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	111514
<b>Local authority</b>	Halton
<b>Inspection number</b>	10241846
<b>Type of school</b>	All-through Special
<b>School category</b>	Community special
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	2 to 16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	89
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair of governing body</b>	Michael Cunliffe
<b>Headteacher</b>	John Thompson
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.chesnutlodge.net/website">www.chesnutlodge.net/website</a>
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	18 July 2017, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

## Information about this school

- At the time of this inspection, the school has no two-year-olds on roll.
- Leaders do not use any alternative provision.
- Pupils at the school have a wide range of SEND. These include physical disability, severe learning difficulty, profound and multiple learning difficulty and moderate learning difficulty.
- Since the previous inspection, the school has a new headteacher.

## Information about this inspection

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher, senior leaders, subject leaders and governors, including the chair of governors.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in reading and communication, physical development, and personal, social and health education. For each deep dive, inspectors

discussed the curriculum with leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.

- Inspectors also spoke to leaders about the curriculum in some other subjects.
- During the inspection, inspectors reviewed a range of documentation, including that relating to safeguarding. They also spoke with leaders and staff about safeguarding.
- Inspectors took account of the views of parents expressed through Ofsted Parent View. They also considered responses to Ofsted's online survey for staff. There were no responses to Ofsted's online survey for pupils.

### **Inspection team**

Julie Bather, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Stephen Ruddy

Ofsted Inspector

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