

Heritage House School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	110582
Local Authority	Buckinghamshire
Inspection number	310353
Inspection dates	22–23 November 2007
Reporting inspector	Lily Evans

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	2–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	68
6th form	19
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Barry Bennett
Headteacher	Ms Suzanne Pennington
Date of previous school inspection	14 June 2004
School address	Cameron Road Chesham HP5 3BP
Telephone number	01494 771445
Fax number	01494 775892

Age group	2–19
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

The school provides for pupils and students who have statements of special educational needs. Most have complex needs. More than a third of all pupils have autism and a third have profound and multiple difficulties. Some have severe learning difficulties. A few have behavioural, moderate learning, physical difficulties or visual impairment. The school is on two sites close to each other. Students in extended education from Year 10 upwards have separate accommodation. The school is trialling a shared outreach placement with the private sector for pupils with physical difficulties and cerebral palsy.

From September, there has been a new headteacher, deputy head and chair of governors. The school has gained Healthy Schools status, the SWAN Award for community links, an Activemark and Investors in People Award. It is a county centre for professional development.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Parents agree with the inspector that this is a good school. They attribute the happiness and progress of their children to 'the care, love and support of all the staff'. The recently appointed headteacher brings a fresh approach and clear vision for the future direction of the school. She has created an ethos of mutual support and community spirit.

Students' achievement is at the heart of all decision making. Systematic procedures are being refined to recognise how the best outcomes can be achieved for each individual, whatever their need. Since the last inspection, the school has remained committed to the 'Skills for Life' curriculum, which is highly relevant to pupils' needs. The school recognises that closer links should be made to the National Curriculum, and the contexts it provides for planning pupils' learning opportunities. Since the last inspection, the dramatic increase in autistic students has been addressed effectively by changes to curriculum planning. Now the increase in students with profound and multiple disabilities is demanding curricular changes in the extended education department. The school is aware of the limitations of the current curriculum, recognising that the breadth of opportunities can be enriched and extended.

Throughout the school and extended education department, the quality of care is excellent. All pupils have access to the therapies they require. They are extremely well cared for personally and in support for their learning. Teachers are adept at identifying small steps in learning and their pleasure in pupils' achievement is shared through the whole school. A good example of this was observed when a severely autistic pupil, for the first time, initiated striking an instrument during a Taiko drumming session. Music therapy is a real strength of the school. It has a very positive effect on stimulating listening, responding and enjoyment. It has been effective in identifying pupils who have musical talent and providing lessons to develop these skills. The emphasis on healthy living through nutrition and exercise helps students stay well and adds to their enjoyment of school.

Progress towards targets is very well reported and recorded. Wherever possible, students are involved in assessing their own achievement. Teachers plan learning well, make it fun and use resources effectively. At times, however, they have given insufficient thought to making the best use of teaching support assistants, resulting in opportunities for learning being missed.

The headteacher is passionate about driving forward the work of the school, backed by a committed whole school team and a recently appointed deputy headteacher. The school and governors have a good capacity to make necessary improvements.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

Post-16 students follow the 'Towards Independence' and 'Transition Challenge' modules that help develop their social, community, independence and life skills, which will support them when they leave school. They make good progress in their communication skills and gain confidence and self-esteem through their successes. This is because of the good relationships, exceptional care and support they receive for their individual needs. About half of all students enjoy work experience. In order to meet the changing needs of students, the school recognises that the planned curriculum could provide a wider range of learning activities, including practical skills, in order to further develop independence skills.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children make good progress in relation to their complex needs and extremely low starting points. This is because they are managed effectively, and have high quality care and support, including the services of specialists such as the speech and language therapist. Based on the school's 'Skills for Life' curriculum, planning links well with the Early Learning Goals at the appropriate levels for each individual.

What the school should do to improve further

- Increase pupils and students learning opportunities and experiences by ensuring 'Skills for Life' planning is more closely linked to the National Curriculum.
- Ensure learning assistants' time is fully used to support, extend and reinforce the learning of pupils, enabling them to make the best progress possible.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Standards are well below average because of the severity of pupils' and students' learning difficulties. Despite these difficulties their progress and achievement is good in relation to their individual targets in their six skills areas. These are communication, personal and social development, physical fitness, problem solving, practical and independence skills, leisure, sports and creative arts. Students do particularly well in communication and leisure, sports and creative arts. They have successes in their externally accredited courses in which they learn to be more independent and self-aware.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Pupils' and students' personal development is good because it is embedded in the school curriculum. Unauthorised absences are very low and attendance is satisfactory. They are aware of themselves, others and the environment, and become increasingly independent through good support and opportunities. They believe the emphasis on healthy eating and exercise to be strengths of the school. Their slogan 'Learning together, achieving together' describes the culture of the school which applauds the achievement of both staff and students and promotes enjoyment well. In assembly, the students showed a good sense of community by their spontaneous applause for those staff and students who received special mention for their achievement. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Students make good contributions to the community through fund raising, joint ventures with other schools, work experience, and music and sporting groups. Students feel safe. They acquire useful skills through residential visits at home and abroad, including Holland and Japan. Students in extended education enjoy the responsibility of running the school snack shop and recycling waste. About half of all students appreciate and enjoy opportunities for work experience, which helps them make good progress in social communication. One student described his time as grounds man at the local church as one of his best times in school. Elected members of the school council

have the opportunity of discussing issues that are important to the school, and the satisfaction of knowing their views are seriously considered.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Teachers and support staff use many strategies for communicating effectively in lessons. In addition to speaking, they use signing, electronic switches and picture symbol systems. This ensures all pupils and students, whatever their needs, are enabled to communicate and to be included. There is good emphasis on stimulating all the senses and teachers use resources effectively, such as interactive whiteboards and objects of reference. In one class, a teacher, dressed as a witch and used toys from a story box to bring alive the story of the 'Room for a Broom', thus intriguing pupils and holding their interest. Teaching assistants support pupils effectively in lessons when they are well directed by the teacher. At times, this is not the case and opportunities for communicating and learning, such as practising counting, are lost. Teachers use opportunities for information and communication technology (ICT) well. They plan learning with clear learning intentions and measure progress routinely at the end of each session against pupils' learning targets. Where teaching and learning is less successful, lessons lack dynamism and energy with the result that students are less focused on their learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

The curriculum, based on 'Skills for Life' offers a satisfactory range of experiences. Planning tends to be narrow in relation to the range of the National Curriculum, but in themed weeks, planning includes a much wider range of subjects. There is good physical education, art and drama, as well as clubs for older students. Music is outstanding because of the enjoyment created and its promotion of good communication. This was evident in the excellent responses in lessons. It has enabled a few pupils to realise their special talents in music. Throughout, there are good opportunities for visitors and visits, such as to concerts. There are regular, drama projects with another school, enabling pupils and students to work alongside mainstream pupils. The curriculum for autistic pupils is well planned within clearly defined specialist techniques. In the Foundation Stage and in Years 1 and 2 planning addresses the Early Learning Goals well. The curriculum for extended curriculum students lacks breadth, which limits the range of students' achievements and experiences.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The pastoral care guidance and support of pupils and students is outstanding. The physical care and safety of pupils and students is of a very high order. Pupils and students enjoy specialist support from physiotherapy, hydrotherapy, speech and language therapy and the support of a specialist teacher of visually impaired pupils. Pupils and students are efficiently and sensitively cared for so that they are happy, well fed and comfortable at all times. The recording of

achievement towards targets is fully embedded into practice. The reporting of these achievements is excellent, showing photographs where appropriate to illustrate the achievement of targets. More able students review their own progress and when possible record their views.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Management changes have been from within the school. This has given the new leadership of the school a head start in redefining roles and responsibilities. There is a greatly increased focus on monitoring of all aspects of the school's work, such as the review of the curriculum. It is recognised that work on adapting the curriculum has to be ongoing because of the shifting nature of pupils and students' needs. The school is poised to build on its successful themed weeks, to link into the National Curriculum without compromising skills' development. Other work that has begun is refining the use of the analysis of progress of groups and individuals. This is leading to reviewing target setting and intervention strategies, to ensure all pupils make the best progress possible by having the right amount of challenge. Governors give strong support to the work of the school.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	2
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	2	
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
How well learners enjoy their education	2	
The attendance of learners	3	
The behaviour of learners	2	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	1

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

3 December 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Heritage House School, Chesham, HP5 3BP

Thank you for welcoming me to your school and helping me when I was there. It was lovely to talk with you and I promised to let you know what I thought of your school. I agree with you that it is a good school and I was pleased to see you enjoying lessons.

The best things about your school are.

- The ways the staff and students all support each other.
- The staff care for you very well.
- Your enjoyment of music.
- Your awareness of the importance of eating healthy foods and keeping fit.

The things I have asked your school to improve are:

- to make sure that your learning assistants know what to do to help you through all your lessons
- to plan your learning in more subjects, just like in themed weeks.

I wish you all a very happy Christmas.

Lily Evans

Lead Inspector