

Calder House School

Thickwood Lane, Colerne, Chippenham, Wiltshire SN14 8BN

Inspection dates

3–5 November 2015

Overall effectiveness

Outstanding

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Outstanding
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Outstanding
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Outstanding
Outcomes for pupils	Outstanding
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Outstanding

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school

- The excellent quality of education found at the last inspection has been sustained. Leaders and the proprietor have diligently ensured full compliance with Independent School Standards.
- Pupils make rapid progress from low starting points. They make up lost ground well and virtually all return to mainstream education successfully.
- When pupils leave the school their attainment is generally in line with that expected for their age and often above.
- The most-able pupils achieve exceptionally well to reach high levels of attainment.
- Outstanding teaching reflects not only the subject expertise of teachers but also their specialisms in teaching pupils with specific learning difficulties. Pupils form very strong relationships with staff, who have very high expectations of them.
- The safe environment helps pupils to grow in confidence. Their increasing academic success is reinforced by exemplary behaviour in lessons and throughout the school.
- Provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent. Most striking is how the school improves pupils' self-confidence and self-esteem.
- The school successfully promotes the values of modern British society. Effective leadership, including governance, is raising standards and enabling the highest possible outcomes for pupils.
- Leaders monitor the effectiveness of teaching carefully, holding teachers to account. Occasionally teachers do not plan lessons sufficiently to take account of pupils' individual needs.
- Leaders take care to ensure that the professional development and expertise of staff enable them to become very effective practitioners. However, they do not always seek and learn from best practice in other schools.
- Links with parents and placing local authorities are strong and positive. Effective collaboration supports a consistent approach between school and home. However, the otherwise detailed website lacks information for parents on the new special educational needs Code of Practice.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school meets the requirements of the schedule for the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2014, and associated requirements.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that teachers always plan lessons to address the specific learning needs of all pupils across the school.
- Widen teachers' professional development through sharing practice with other schools in order to learn from outstanding practice in other contexts.
- Develop the school's website to give greater prominence to the new special needs Code of Practice, so that parents are fully aware of its recommendations and requirements.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is outstanding

- The headteacher, bursar and proprietor work together closely to ensure that all independent school regulations are met. They have a very accurate picture of the school's performance. Detailed self-evaluation and improvement planning reflects a strong commitment to continual improvement.
- The new headteacher has continued the strong tradition of supporting pupils with specific learning difficulties exceptionally well. All pupils make rapid progress and re-engage with learning after experiencing difficulties in previous settings. The headteacher receives strong support from staff, parents and pupils and has a clear vision to ensure that pupils can maximise their full potential. Staff who were at the school at the time of the last inspection all say that it is now an even better place.
- Staff have high expectations. Pupils who enter the school with low self-esteem are supported to become successful and confident learners. This is reinforced by outstanding teaching and the desire of subject leaders to promote excellence.
- The successful focus on raising pupils' achievement in reading, writing, communication and mathematics is also developing their self-confidence exceptionally well. The wide range of subjects taught enables pupils to return successfully to mainstream schools. The school's balance between addressing specific learning difficulties, while promoting a broad and balanced focus on learning, is extremely successful.
- Trips, visits and guests to the school promote wider learning opportunities and are very much enjoyed by pupils. For example, during the inspection a presentation by the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, for parents as well as pupils, focused on safeguarding. This is one illustration of how the school works very hard to ensure the safety and well-being of its pupils. Throughout the school there is mutual respect and support and a strong commitment to equality of opportunity. The school's approach is reflected in the very clear policies to ensure the wider safety of pupils, including protecting them from the risks of radical or extreme views and opinions.
- The promotion of spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is a strong feature of school life. Pupils have opportunities to take part in a range of artistic events, but perhaps the most striking element is the way in which the school transforms pupils' personal skills and social awareness. Despite having joined the school with feelings of disappointment, and sometimes having become 'school refusers', pupils become increasingly confident and self-aware.
- The headteacher monitors teaching very effectively. Teachers are supported to plan and assess effectively, helping to maximise the progress of every pupil. This is being further developed to ensure that all planning is sharply focused on pupils' specific learning needs, which is not always the case currently.
- Formal lesson observations feed into a thorough process of appraisal, including opportunities for self-evaluation. Annual objectives for all staff are identified in detailed self-evaluation and school improvement planning. They also support staff in promoting their own expertise and inform professional development. However, opportunities are limited for staff to develop further by comparing their teaching and outcomes to other outstanding settings.
- Parents very much appreciate the strong links they have with school, as reflected in their extremely positive responses to the Ofsted Parent View survey, as well as in the school's own parental survey. The school's detailed website is a source of valuable information but at the moment does not provide enough information about the special educational needs Code of Practice.
- Links with other professionals and with the local authorities who place children at the school are extremely positive. A consultant occupational therapist visits on a weekly basis to inform the school's provision. The school also has a resident speech and language therapist. Together they play a major role in working with the school's leadership to identify and address pupils' individual needs. Links with the Local Safeguarding Children Board are in place and the school seeks to work in a proactive way to ensure the safety of its pupils. All child protection training for staff is fully in place and up to date.
- **The governance of the school**
 - The proprietor originally established the school and remains in very frequent contact. There are regular formal, recorded meetings, as well as more frequent informal contact with the headteacher and bursar/registrar. Close links mean that they know all staff well and are aware of their effectiveness in the classroom. They have a detailed view of the curriculum and continue to monitor the successful implementation of their wider vision for the school.
 - School leaders carry out their safeguarding responsibilities fully, including by employing staff in line with safer recruitment requirements.
 - As well as setting challenging objectives for the headteacher and, in the recent past, supporting the new headteacher through an induction programme, the proprietor receives detailed reports about the

performance management and professional development of all staff.

- Working closely with the bursar and auditors, the proprietor has a clear view of the financial situation of the school. They ensure financial probity and seek to direct the maximum amount of funding to the direct education of pupils.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is outstanding

- The trust that pupils develop in staff underpins their re-engagement with learning and is at the heart of the success enjoyed by the school. Teachers have extremely high expectations, supported by the detailed analysis of individual needs established when pupils first join the school.
- Meeting the learning needs of each pupil is seen as fundamental to the success of the school. At the same time, teachers appreciate that pupils will fail on occasion and the school helps pupils to realise that this is sometimes an everyday feature of learning. A positive rapport helps pupils respond to setbacks and try again, giving them a far greater resilience than had previously been the case.
- Pupils quickly re-engage with learning and enjoy their lessons very much. They experience success and become enthusiastic learners. The focus on learning means that behaviour in lessons is exemplary, with pupils focused on doing their best while also gaining great enjoyment and fulfilment from their studies.
- Teachers focus on overcoming pupils' learning difficulties in the core areas of reading, writing, spelling and mathematics. Sessions are delivered very effectively by the team of teachers' assistants and often feature programmes devised in conjunction with the school therapists. Reading is also supported by the effective teaching of phonics (letters and the sounds that they make). The impact of the school's work is reflected in the successful return to mainstream schools made by virtually all pupils, after an average of seven terms at Calder House.
- A feature of all lessons is effective questioning. This not only shows teachers that pupils understand a topic but it also provides opportunities for discussion, to which pupils respond enthusiastically, helping them to further develop their ideas.
- Marking is regular and thorough. All pupils understand their current levels of learning and have challenging targets to help them make rapid progress. Very helpful advice, both oral and written, supports pupils to achieve this. Pupils seize the opportunity to work in pairs to evaluate each other's work, reflecting their maturity.
- Staff gather pupils' progress information very regularly and identify quickly where a pupil is not making expected progress. They immediately take steps to enable progress to be resumed. Regular assessment throughout the year ensures that progress is sustained across all subjects.
- Homework is a regular feature, providing opportunities to embed learning undertaken in lessons. This is supported by the close collaboration that exists between school and home.
- There is no systematic programme to share the school's expertise or learn from other outstanding providers. As a result, the ability of staff to precisely refine their own practice or understand pupils' achievement from different contexts, especially the work of the most-able pupils, is limited.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare is outstanding

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- At the heart of the success of the school are the ways in which it encourages and supports pupils to develop their confidence and self-belief. A number of former pupils have gone on to higher education and to successful careers. The school transforms their personal development in a positive way and many former pupils keep in touch with the school for years after they have left.
- The pupils themselves, and often their parents, comment on the ways in which the school has totally changed their attitudes to learning and their ability to maximise the potential that had previously been thwarted. Local authorities who place pupils at the school are equally positive.
- Pupils accept that others will hold different, but equally valid, views to their own. Although virtually all pupils are White British, there is a good understanding of other faiths, communities and values. Pupils discuss their social attitudes in mature and thoughtful ways, respecting each other and the opinions of others. The school works hard to ensure that pupils value the fundamental principles of modern British democracy, helping them to become positive members of their wider community. The use of derogatory

or demeaning language is not tolerated and staff themselves always act as excellent role models.

- Pupils understand that the development of positive attitudes and behaviour will strongly support them as they go through school. This is part of the newfound attitudes they gain from coming to Calder House that will help equip them for wider success as they get older.
- The promotion of safety, through careful risk assessments and effective health and safety procedures, creates a safe environment. Pupils and their parents all agree that this is a very safe place. The regulations on first aid, fire safety and provision for pupils who are taken ill, are all met. Pupils are encouraged to adopt a positive attitude towards their own safety and that of others. The school takes care to ensure that there is no risk that visitors to the school could promote dangerous or extreme points of view.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding.
- The school seeks to instil positive attitudes from the outset, working hard to get pupils to think in positive ways about themselves. This is seen as part of the formula for re-engaging pupils in successful learning. There is a well-established, successful and consistently applied behaviour policy. It supports pupils to become confident and self-assured learners. Behaviour throughout the school is impeccable.
- Pupils insist there is no bullying. They compare the school to a big, very happy family. They know about bullying in its different forms, including cyber-bullying and bullying based on prejudice, because they have covered it in lessons. Pupils talk with a good level of understanding. They appreciate just how negative it can be in its effect on people, sometimes reflecting in a mature way about the personal impact it had once had on themselves.
- Lessons also cover issues relating to the safe use of the internet and of social networking sites. In discussion with pupils, it is clear that they adopt a very sensible and positive approach to the internet, using it well to support independent learning, while appreciating that there are dangers inherent in its misuse. Observation of a computing lesson gave first-hand evidence of the excellent understanding that pupils have of the positive use of information and communication technology.
- Pupils and staff get on together very well and positive attitudes are carefully promoted. This leads to a 'can-do' approach, with a wider impact on pupils' self-belief. Such attitudes are also supported by the very positive approach taken to spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- Pupils get huge enjoyment from school and their attendance is high. This represents a stark contrast with the often low levels of attendance prior to starting at the school, and a fear and dislike of school that had even led some pupils to become 'school refusers'. Pupils talk passionately about the ways in which the school has helped to transform the way they think of school, and therefore to become successful learners for the first time.

Outcomes for pupils

are outstanding

- From their low starting points when they join the school, pupils are exceptionally well supported to make outstanding progress. The rate of progress from their individual starting points is, in the large majority of cases, well above that found nationally. As a result, pupils quickly close the gap in attainment that had started to open up with their peers before they joined the school.
- The most-able pupils, in particular, catch up quickly and exceed age-related expectations of their academic achievement. Pupils who first joined the school having failed elsewhere, as result of transforming their ability to learn, go on to achieve academic success in secondary education, including gaining university places.
- Pupils' progress is measured regularly to ensure that work is stretching every individual, enabling any gap in attainment to be reduced as rapidly as possible. The individual targets given to every pupil are challenging, realistic and understood, and pupils respond to them very positively.
- The particular focus on helping pupils to develop the necessary effective skills in literacy and numeracy, has ensured that their attainment in these areas has risen quickly. Pupils are well aware of this rapid improvement and of the confidence they gain through becoming active and successful learners. Reading is promoted with vigour. Pupils who read to the inspector spoke with pride about the way in which their attitudes to reading have been changed dramatically because of the support they are given.
- Pupils generally are thoughtful, because they are encouraged to think about the difficulties they face in a positive way, and their views and attitudes are respected. They develop the ability to hold thoughtful

conversations with each other and with adults. This also reflects the transformation in their self-confidence as they start to experience success.

- All pupils have special educational needs. The skill and expertise of the school and its staff successfully enable all pupils to make at least good, and frequently outstanding, progress. This is true not only of academic, but also of social and emotional progress. Every pupil joins the school having to catch up and make up lost ground. The success of this is reflected in the fact that, by the time they leave, a good proportion have reading and spelling ages above their actual ages, despite their special educational needs.
- Pupils are exceptionally well prepared for their secondary education. They are given strong support to ensure that the transition goes well, but for the large majority their newfound ability to be successful learners is sustained in their new settings.

School details

Unique reference number	126542
Inspection number	10006321
DfE registration number	865/6024

This inspection was carried out under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Type of school	Special school for pupils with specific learning difficulties
School status	Independent school
Age range of pupils	5–12
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	48
Proprietor	Calder House Ltd
Headteacher	Karen Parsons
Annual fees (day pupils)	£16,200
Telephone number	01225 743566
Website	www.calderhouseschool.co.uk
Email address	office@calderhouseschool.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	22–23 May 2012

Information about this school

- Calder House is a school for up to 48 boys and girls between the ages of five and 12 who have specific learning difficulties, sometimes with associated learning difficulties.
- Six pupils have a statement of special educational needs, or an education, health and care plan.
- No students are disadvantaged, in that they are known to be eligible for free school meals or are in the care of their local authority.
- The large majority are of White British origin.
- The school does not make any alternative provision for its secondary-aged pupils, who leave before they take any external examinations.
- A new headteacher was appointed in September 2015.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection took place with one day's notice. Eight lessons were observed.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, the proprietor, the bursar/registrar, the director of studies, the occupational therapist, a parent, a representative of one of the placing authorities and the regional coordinator of the NSPCC school service, who was in school to meet parents and pupils.
- The views of parents were gathered from 11 responses to Ofsted's online Parent View survey, from the school's own parental survey, and from meeting parents in the course of the school day.
- The inspector spoke to pupils throughout the inspection and met formally with a group of pupils. Pupils' work was looked at in lessons and a sample was scrutinised in detail. The inspector also examined case studies to gain a picture of wider provision and support for pupils.
- The views of staff were gathered from their responses to the staff questionnaire and from conversations held throughout the inspection.
- The inspector checked for compliance with the independent school regulations. He looked at a range of documentation, including information on the progress of pupils, planning and assessment, the school's self-evaluation and improvement planning, and a range of policies and procedures, including those for safeguarding.

Inspection team

Martyn Groucutt, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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