# Cheshire School bestchance

## ANNUAL REPORT 2024

**Stepping Stones to Success** 

Cheshire School is a leading independent special assistance primary school, dedicated to supporting students with social, emotional, and complex behavioural presentations. The school's model of practice integrates trauma-informed care, neuro-affirming approaches, and evidence-based pedagogy to create a safe, inclusive, and empowering learning environment for all students.

A foundational element of our approach is the recognition that a strong, collaborative partnership between the school, families, and therapeutic services is critical to student success. Our team works closely with families to provide targeted, intervention-focused support. Through this evidence-informed model, students are supported to build the skills, confidence, and resilience needed to re-engage with learning and successfully transition back into mainstream educational settings.



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#### **Acknowledgement of Country**

Cheshire School acknowledges the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as Australia's First People and Traditional Custodians of the land.

We also acknowledge in a special way the Wurundjeri and Bunurong Peoples of the Kulin Nation for it is on their land that we are proud and fortunate to live and learn as the Cheshire School community today.

As we share our knowledge and help our young people grow, we pay our respects to the Elders – past, present and emerging, as it is their knowledge and experiences that hold the key to the success of future generations.

As we live and learn together, may our journey remain forever committed to a spirit of respect, mutual understanding and reconciliation.



#### **Contact Details**

ADDRESS	16 Woodlea Drive, Glen Waverley, VIC, 3150
HEAD OF SCHOOL	Kevin Browning
GOVERNING AUTHORITY	bestchance - Child and Family Care Services  Mr Chris Chronis, Chief Executive Officer
TELEPHONE	(03) 9132 6320
EMAIL	kbrowning@bestchance.org.au
WEBSITE	www.bestchance.org.au/cheshire-school/

#### **Minimum Standards Attestation**

I, Kevin Browning, attest that Cheshire School is compliant with:

- All of the requirements for the minimum standards and other requirements for the registration
  of schools as specified in the Education and Training Reform Act 2006 (Vic) and the Education
  and Training Reform Regulations 2017 (Vic), except where the school has been granted an
  exemption from any of these requirements by the Victorian Registration and Qualifications
  Authority (VRQA);
- Expenditure and commitment of funds being used solely to support educational outcomes and operational needs;
- Australian Government accountability requirements related to the 2024 school year under the Australian Education Act 2013 (Cth) and the Australian Education Regulations 2013 (Cth); and
- The Child Safe Standards prescribed in Ministerial Order No.1359 Child Safe Standards,
   Managing Risk of Child Abuse in School

June 2025

#### Statement from the Head of School

Neurodiversity may be every bit as crucial for the human race as biodiversity is for life in general.

Who can say what form of wiring will prove best at any given moment? (Harvey Blume)





It is with great pride that I reflect on the 2024 school year at Cheshire School, a year marked by growth, innovation, and deepened connection across our learning community. At the heart of our work remains a commitment to providing a trauma-informed, neuro-affirming, and individualised educational experience for each student, and 2024 has been a powerful testament to that mission in action.

#### **Celebrating Our Students**

Over the course of 2024, 12 students successfully graduated from Cheshire School. Each of these graduations is an extraordinary achievement—representing not only the efforts of the students themselves, but also the unwavering support of their families, allied

health teams, and our dedicated staff. These transitions highlight the core purpose of our work and the collective determination that defines our school community.

We also welcomed eight new enrolments, expanding our reach and continuing to offer high-impact intervention for children who benefit from our specialised approach.

#### **Strengthening Our Service Delivery**

A significant milestone in 2024 was the formalisation of a whole school timetable. This new structure better prioritises the core elements of our service delivery—such as literacy, numeracy, and social-emotional learning—while also creating more predictable and frequent break times to support student regulation and wellbeing.

To further enhance learning, we introduced two key programs:

- **Read Write Inc.** A whole-school approach to literacy grounded in explicit instruction, tailored to each student's point of need.
- Moozoom A digital platform supporting our Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)
  curriculum, aligning closely with our intervention goals and enabling more targeted, studentcentred SEL support.

#### **Learning Beyond the Classroom**

A broad range of excursions and incursions added richness to the curriculum and provided valuable opportunities for students to connect learning with real-world experiences. Highlights included:

- **Physical and wellbeing programs**: Gymnastics and Martial Arts (Proactivity), Bounce excursions.
- **Community safety and respectful relationships**: Victoria Police Incursion, Feeling Safe Together (SECASA).
- Creative and scientific engagement: Harmonica Workshop (Harps a Breeze), Body Investigators (Drama Toolbox), Tim Credible the Magician.

 Cultural and recreational enrichment: Silent Disco (Supreme Incursions), AFL Roadshow (SEDA Activate).

Our school-based events continued to build school culture and community spirit, with celebrations including NAIDOC Week, Book Week, and National Simultaneous Storytime, each offering a unique way to honour identity, creativity, and connection.

#### **Creating Playful Spaces: A New Lunchtime Approach**

Recognising that playgrounds can be complex environments for many of our students, we launched the Creating Playful Spaces initiative in 2024. The playground is more than just a recreational area—it is a dynamic learning environment where social skills, conflict resolution, independence, and physical development are nurtured.

To make playtime more predictable and supportive, staff introduced structured activities across active and quiet zones. Weekly active options included:

- Totem Tennis
- Badminton
- Basketball
- Pickleball
- Soccer with net goals

The guiet zone offered alternatives such as:

- Giant Jenga and Jumbo Connect Four
- · Chalk art and colouring
- Word puzzles, mazes, and quoits

This initiative has already led to a noticeable increase in positive interactions and self-regulation during lunch breaks.

#### **Staff Wellbeing**

This year also saw the introduction of an explicit staff wellbeing strategy, with professional learning and engagement through Benny Button. Prioritising staff wellbeing is essential to sustaining the energy, empathy, and skill required in our work, and this investment has been an important step toward long-term cultural and professional sustainability.

In closing, 2024 has been a year of meaningful progress and purpose. Every achievement—whether large or small—reflects the collective strength of the Cheshire School community. I extend my heartfelt thanks to our students, families, staff, and allied health partners for your continued trust, collaboration, and belief in what is possible for every child.

I look forward to all that we will continue to learn and achieve together in the year ahead.

Sincerely

Kevin Browning Head of School

## bestchance

bestchance Child and Family Care is an independent not-for-profit organisation that has been providing support to children and families since 1895 in the eastern metropolitan region of Victoria. bestchance adopts an innovative and holistic approach to provide flexible, comprehensive and integrated services, within available resources, based on identified needs.

Cheshire School is one of the programs run by *bestchance*, and focuses on delivering an intervention program that facilitates the future development and learning of children with social, emotional and behavioural challenges. Its service to students and families is an integral component of *bestchance* and complementary to the other key priorities of early years, family support, children's therapy services and training opportunities.

#### bestchance Philosophy

The early years are the building blocks for later life. We recognise that children develop in the context of their families and that this needs to be the starting point for service delivery.

We provide an integrated environment that combines the elements of care, learning and laughter within childcare, kindergarten, early childhood intervention, primary education, child and family support and volunteer programs.

This philosophy is reflected in the following goals of Cheshire School:

- Each child is provided with an individualised program that is based on their needs, interests and wants.
- Each child is provided with positive and consistent guidance that promotes their self-esteem and confidence.
- The School is a safe, caring environment free from hazards.
- Children with additional needs are fully included in all programs.
- Diversity is embraced and celebrated.
- Educators treat all children and families equally and fairly.
- Educators not only identify any additional needs or barriers that children and/or their families may be facing but assist them in seeking support from other programs within bestchance or in the community.
- Families are encouraged to participate in their child's program and experiences.
- Educators work as a team, knowing and respecting each other's skills and strengths in order to provide the best care for each other.
- Educators are affirmed and encouraged to pursue professional development and further qualifications in order to continually improve the quality of the programs offered to children in their care.

#### **Cheshire School Mission**

By using contemporary research, evidence-informed practice and our team's expertise, we strive to fulfil every student's potential in a physically and emotionally safe learning environment. Through our program, students are empowered in their learning and transition back to the mainstream school system with renewed confidence.

## **Cheshire School Vision**

Our vision is to be the leading provider in the specialist educational setting. We aim to be a centre of excellence committed to evidence-informed best practice in teaching students with social, emotional and complex behavioural presentations, leveraging contemporary research to have a positive impact on families.

#### Our Aim: Why we exist?

To fulfil every student's potential so they can successfully transition back to a mainstream educational setting.

#### **Our Values**

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We see the potential in every student.	<ul> <li>Each student has an Individual Education Plan with clear learning and behavioural goals.</li> <li>We have high expectations for every student. After every session students reflect on their engagement and receive positive feedback and guidance for improvement.</li> <li>A Student Support Plan is designed for each student. It details tailored strategies to ensure that they are able to engage in their learning.</li> <li>Rigorous initial assessment of each student's needs begins with observations in their current setting.</li> </ul>
We believe every student deserves to experience joy in their learning.	<ul> <li>We provide an engaging and innovative learning experience, based on the Victorian Curriculum.</li> <li>Students participate in a range of extra-curricular activities that help them to self-regulate.</li> <li>Regular excursions and incursions linked to the Victorian Curriculum take our students beyond the core academic curriculum and further encourage each student to make deeper links with their learning.</li> <li>We have a high staff to student ratio and so learning is modelled, scaffolded and supported.</li> </ul>
We invest in caring and trusting partnerships.	<ul> <li>Our thorough intake process ensures we are the right program for families.</li> <li>Our focus is building strong rapport when a student first starts at our School.</li> <li>Our enrolment process clearly sets out the expectations for parents and carers and how we can support them during their child's journey.</li> <li>To ensure the success of every student, we insist on all stakeholders being involved throughout the student's time at our School.</li> <li>We hold regular parent and carer opportunities for collaboration throughout the term (formal and informal) to strengthen the parent/school partnership and improve student outcomes.</li> </ul>

#### **School Overview**

Cheshire School is a small, independent specialist school committed to helping every student become the best version of themselves. Located on the main campus of bestchance in Glen Waverley, we are uniquely positioned to collaborate closely with allied health clinicians who may be engaged to work with individuals one-on-one. This connection strengthens our transdisciplinary, "team around the child" model, ensuring that each student's developmental, social, emotional, and behavioural needs are supported holistically.

As an interim specialist setting, our mission is to reimagine the school experience for students who have faced challenges in mainstream environments. We focus on equipping them with the strategies, confidence, and mindset needed to navigate their world more positively and successfully—both in learning and in life. Our ultimate goal is to support a smooth and sustained reintegration into mainstream schooling when students are ready.

For many children and families, Cheshire School offers a circuit breaker—a chance to step away from patterns of disengagement, misunderstanding, and school-based trauma. Here, students are met with understanding and care, often for the first time, and are supported to rebuild their sense of self-worth, confidence, and identity as capable learners.

Our dedicated team brings deep expertise, compassion, and a shared commitment to trauma-informed, evidence-based practice. We take the time to truly know each student, working in close partnership with families to build strong, respectful relationships that are foundational to each child's growth and success.

At Cheshire School, children are at the heart of everything we do. We provide a unique and nurturing learning environment—one that values the individual, supports the whole family, and celebrates progress in all its forms. By offering a safe, respectful, and supportive space, we aim to be a powerful stepping stone for every child on their journey to thriving.

## **Democratic Principles**

The programs and teaching at Cheshire School support and promote the principles and practice of Australian Democracy, including a commitment to:

- Elected government
- The rule of law
- Equal rights for all before the law
- Freedom of religion
- Freedom of speech and association
- The values of openness and tolerance



#### **Learning and Teaching at Cheshire School - 2024**

At Cheshire School, we provide an engaging and individualised learning experience that supports each student to re-engage with their education in a meaningful way. Guided by the Victorian Curriculum, our teaching and learning program enables rich, integrated learning opportunities across subject areas, designed to spark curiosity and build connections between ideas.

Our approach to teaching is grounded in evidence-based practice. Through explicit instruction, thoughtful scaffolding, and timely, targeted feedback, students are supported to make consistent progress. Small wins are celebrated, and over time, students begin to see themselves as capable, confident learners—developing the habits and mindsets that lay the foundation for long-term success.

Every student has an Individual Education Plan (IEP), developed in close collaboration with families. These plans, reviewed twice a year, identify clear, achievable learning goals tailored to each child's needs and strengths. As students grow in resilience, motivation, and self-belief, they also develop vital social and emotional skills that enable them to form positive relationships, work collaboratively, and prepare for a successful transition back to mainstream education.

Throughout the year, students participate in a wide range of enrichment activities including soccer, gymnastics, dance and movement, swimming, and music. Digital technologies are purposefully integrated across the curriculum to enhance learning, engagement, and creativity.

Small class sizes—capped at 10 students—ensure each child receives personalised support. Every class is led by a teacher and supported by two Education Support Officers, creating a high staff-to-student ratio that allows for deep, meaningful connections and responsive teaching.

At Cheshire School, relationships are at the core of everything we do. We work closely with parents and carers to foster strong partnerships that accelerate student growth and build trust. By nurturing each child's strengths, celebrating their progress, and empowering them to contribute meaningfully to their communities, Cheshire School provides a pathway for students to rediscover the joy of learning and the confidence to thrive.

#### **Standardised Assessments**

All eligible students in Years 3 and 5 are provided the opportunity to undertake the annual NAPLAN assessments as per their entitlement.

#### **Student Progress**

At Cheshire School, student progress is at the heart of our work. Every child has an Individual Education Plan (IEP), carefully developed to reflect their unique learning needs, strengths, and goals. These personalised plans outline targeted strategies, supports, and interventions designed to help each student experience success.

Collaboration is central to this process. Parents and carers, allied health professionals, and school staff work together to set priorities and co-design learning goals that are meaningful and achievable. Student Support Group (SSG) meetings are held in Terms 1 and 3 to formally review progress and refine each student's plan as needed.

Throughout the year, teachers continuously monitor student development using a combination of formative and summative assessment tools. These include classroom observations, analysis of student work, and standardised assessments that provide data on academic growth. This ongoing

cycle of assessment ensures we are responsive to each student's progress and can adjust teaching approaches accordingly.

Formal reports are issued twice yearly, providing families with clear, comprehensive insights into their child's achievements and growth. These reports highlight progress in relation to the Victorian Curriculum and the student's personalised learning goals.

Cheshire School is committed to ensuring families understand where their child is on their learning journey. Our reporting framework helps communicate:

- Each child's position on the learning continuum;
- Their progress in relation to expected achievement standards and individual goals;
- Areas for further growth, and the next steps in their learning journey.

By maintaining open communication and a shared commitment to progress, we ensure every student at Cheshire School is supported to thrive—academically, socially, and emotionally.

#### **Student Attendance**

The rate of attendance for the 2024 year as per the annual student attendance data was:

Prep	N/A
Year 1	57%
Year 2	79%
Year 3	78%
Year 4	87%
Year 5	85%
Year 6	85%

Cheshire School is committed to supporting regular school attendance, in line with the *Australian Education Act (2013)*, which requires school-aged children to attend full-time unless valid and reasonable circumstances apply.

We work in partnership with families to ensure all students attend school regularly and are supported in doing so. Consistent attendance plays a vital role in student wellbeing, learning, and progress.

#### **Key Attendance Expectations:**

- All enrolled students are expected to attend school every day, unless there are valid reasons for absence.
- Illness or other exceptional circumstances are considered reasonable grounds for absence.
- Parents and carers are responsible for ensuring their child attends school and for notifying the school promptly if they are unwell or unable to attend.
- Absences must be explained by a written note, email, or phone call to the school.
- Student attendance is recorded twice daily—morning and afternoon—by classroom teachers.
- Unexplained absences are followed up by our School Support Officer as soon as practicable on the same day.
- Student attendance records are maintained carefully and may be requested by relevant government departments or during enrolment audits.

We understand that attendance can be a complex issue for some families, particularly given the challenges our students may face. Our team works proactively to support families in navigating these challenges, ensuring that students feel safe, welcomed, and ready to learn each day.





TEACHER QUALIFICATIONS		
Doctorate	0%	
Masters	20%	
Graduate	0%	
Graduate Certificate	40%	
Bachelor Degree	40%	
Advanced Diploma	0%	
No Qualifications Listed	0%	

STAFF COMPOSITION			
Head of School (Headcount)	1		
Teaching Staff (Headcount)	5		
Teaching Staff (FTE)	4.5		
Non-Teaching Staff (Headcount)	10		
Non-Teaching Staff (FTE)	8.98		
Indigenous Teaching Staff (Headcount)	0		

### **Staff Participation in Professional Development**

In 2024, Cheshire School staff continued to demonstrate a strong commitment to professional growth and continuous improvement. Across the year, all team members engaged in a wide range of professional learning opportunities designed to deepen their knowledge, strengthen their practice, and respond to emerging needs within our school community.

Professional development was aligned with staff roles and responsibilities, as well as the school's priorities around student wellbeing, safety, inclusive education, and trauma-informed practice. Key areas of professional learning included:

#### **Child Safety and Student Protection**

- Understanding the Child Safe Standards
- Mandatory Reporting and the Reportable Conduct Scheme
- Updates to Victoria's Reportable Conduct Scheme
- School Community Safety Order Scheme (eLearning)
- Protecting Children: Mandatory Reporting (eLearning modules)

#### Health, Wellbeing and First Aid

- CPR and First Aid in Educational and Early Years Settings
- Anaphylaxis Management, including:
  - o Use of Adrenaline Injector Devices
  - o Anaphylaxis Advice Line (Royal Children's Hospital)

- Mental Health First Aid Training
- Student Stress Investigation
- Staff Wellbeing Workshops, including:
  - Stress Mastery
  - Mindful Action
  - o Balancing Burnout

#### **Teaching, Learning and Inclusion**

- Read Write Inc. Literacy Training
- Berry Street Education Model Training
- Strategies to Support Students with ADHD
- The Occasional Counsellor Training
- Lego-Based Therapy Facilitator Training
- NCCD for School Leaders (eLearning)
- Case Notes and Record-Keeping
- Disability Standards for Education for Primary Schools Parts 1 & 2

#### **Emergency Management and Compliance**

- Chief Warden Training
- School Emergency Management Planning Briefing

This broad spectrum of professional learning reflects the diverse and complex needs of our student cohort, and reinforces our team's shared commitment to providing a safe, responsive, and high-quality learning environment for all.





#### **Child Safety**

Cheshire School takes a zero-tolerance approach to child abuse and is fully committed to ensuring that its strategies, policies, procedures and practices meet all Child Safety Standards as specified in Ministerial Order No. 1359 (2022).

In 2024, Child Safety remained a central priority for Cheshire School. Our efforts focused on building sustainable and inclusive systems that promote the safety and wellbeing of all students.

#### **Key areas of focus included:**

- Ongoing development and implementation of sustainable child safety practices across the School;
- Ensuring that all students, parents, staff, volunteers, and contractors received appropriate support and information relating to child safety;
- Strengthening an inclusive, child-centred safety culture; and
- Actively monitoring and supporting the implementation of relevant policies, procedures, and practices.

#### 2024 Achievements:

- Staff actively engaged in the development and enactment of the School's Child Safety strategy;
- All child safety policies and procedures reviewed and updated to reflect the current standards and principles;
- Proactive implementation of safety measures to ensure a secure and protective environment for all students;
- Child Safety embedded as a standing item in staff meeting agendas to promote regular discussion and reflection;
- Regular communication to families through newsletters to reinforce the shared responsibility of child safety;
- Risk management systems, including the risk register, maintained and strengthened;
- A draft Statement of Public Commitment to the Safety of Aboriginal Children developed to further support culturally safe practices;
- Student safety education delivered through multiple avenues, including sessions facilitated by Victoria Police and external workshops by SECASA focused on respectful relationships, personal boundaries, consent, and protective behaviours;
- Daily whole-school Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) program strengthened through integrated curriculum drawing from *My Wellbeing Journal, Moozoom, Bounce Back,* and the *Resilience, Rights and Respectful Relationships* (RRRR) program, with specific child safety concepts addressed such as:
  - Understanding emotions and self-regulation;
  - Building respectful and safe relationships;
  - Recognising unsafe situations and seeking help;
  - Developing resilience, empathy, and inclusion;
  - o Rights, responsibilities, and ethical decision-making;
  - o Identifying trusted adults and personal networks of safety.

## To further support staff capacity and commitment, professional learning sessions were delivered with a focus on:

- Legislative requirements under the Child Safe Standards;
- Mandatory reporting obligations;
- Reportable Conduct Scheme responsibilities;
- Cultivating a school-wide culture of zero tolerance to child abuse; and
- Safeguarding considerations for children with disability.

Cheshire School remains committed to continuous improvement and transparency in all aspects of child safety, working in partnership with our school community to ensure the wellbeing of every child in our care.

#### **Child Safe Commitment**

Cheshire School is unwavering in its commitment to creating and maintaining a child-safe environment where all children and young people feel secure, respected, and empowered to speak up about matters that affect them.

We place the best interests of children at the centre of every decision and action. The safety, wellbeing, and voice of every child are paramount. Cheshire School is fully committed to meeting its obligations under child protection laws and regulations, and we proactively allocate the necessary resources to uphold these standards.

Our school has robust child safety policies and procedures in place to guide practice, support staff, and embed a culture where child safety is everyone's responsibility. These frameworks are regularly reviewed and updated to reflect legislative changes, best practice, and the needs of our school community.

Every member of the Cheshire School community—staff, volunteers, families, and visitors—has a shared responsibility to understand their role in protecting children. Through active engagement, ongoing training, and a collective commitment to safeguarding, we ensure that child safety is not just a policy, but a lived value in everything we do.

#### **Zero Tolerance to Child Abuse**

At Cheshire School, we maintain an uncompromising policy of zero tolerance for child abuse in any form. We are acutely aware that children with complex social, emotional, and behavioural needs may be particularly vulnerable, and we are committed to protecting, empowering, and advocating for every child in our care.

We recognise that children express themselves in many ways, and we are dedicated to listening deeply—understanding that behaviour is often a form of communication. Our team actively supports students to express their needs, and we are committed to involving them in decisions that impact their safety and wellbeing.

Cheshire School responds promptly and sensitively to all concerns relating to child abuse. We are committed to supporting any student who discloses harm or is linked to suspected abuse, and we act in accordance with all legal and moral obligations to protect children.

We proudly promote diversity, inclusion, and respect across our school community. We welcome families from all cultural, linguistic, and religious backgrounds, and we are committed to providing a safe, inclusive environment for all children. Specifically, we:

- Promote the cultural safety, identity, and empowerment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children;
- Support the cultural safety, inclusion, and expression of children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds;
- Ensure children with disabilities are respected, included, and able to participate equally in all aspects of school life.

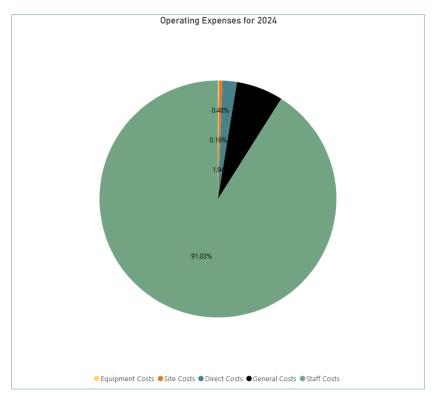
Our commitment to child safety extends to our families, who are provided with clear, accessible information about child safety practices. We support parents and carers to recognise, discuss, and respond to child safety concerns in partnership with the school.

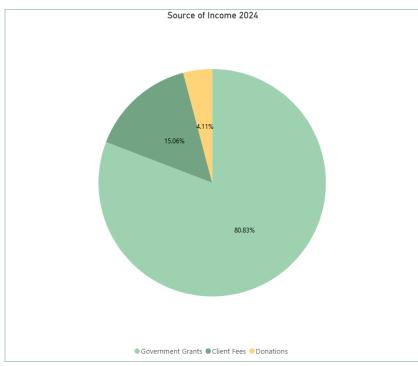
Cheshire School also holds a firm zero-tolerance policy toward racism, gender bias, religious discrimination, and disability discrimination. Any incidents of such behaviour are taken seriously and addressed in accordance with our values and policies.

Child safety is everyone's responsibility—and together, we are building a school community where every child feels safe, heard, and valued.

## **Financial Operating Revenue and Expenses for Year Ending 2024**

NOTE: The School's financial performance information has been provided to the Australian Charities and Not-for-Profits Commission (ACNC) and will be available for the community to access from their website at <a href="https://www.acnc.gov.au">www.acnc.gov.au</a>.





#### **Contact Information**

Head of School: Kevin Browning Telephone: (03) 9132 6320

cheshireschool@bestchance.org.au

## **Company Information**

Cheshire School Reg. No: 1743 16 Woodlea Drive, Glen Waverley, VIC 3150 Tel 03 9132 6320 www.bestchance.org.au