

Oak Bank School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	109747
Local Authority	Central Bedfordshire
Inspection number	356614
Inspection dates	12–13 October 2010
Reporting inspector	Margaret Goodchild

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	9–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	54
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ian Raisbeck
Headteacher	Peter Cohen
Date of previous school inspection	11 July 2008
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. Nine lessons were observed and nine teachers were seen. Meetings were held with staff, representatives of the governing body and a group of pupils. Inspectors observed the school's work, and looked at information about pupils' progress, behavioural records, monitoring and self-evaluation, a variety of the school's policies and safeguarding documentation. In addition, they analysed the one parental questionnaire that was returned, together with 34 from members of staff and 11 from pupils.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following.

- What do performance data, tracking records and lesson observations show about pupils' attainment, learning and progress?
- To what extent does the school transform pupils' attitudes and behaviour to enable them to succeed?
- How rigorously do leaders at all levels and the governing body use data analysis, monitoring and self-evaluation to drive school improvement?

Information about the school

Oak Bank is of a similar size to most other schools of its type. It provides for pupils who have statements of special educational needs associated with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. Most pupils are from White British backgrounds with a few from minority ethnic groups. A very few pupils are from Traveller families. Seven pupils are cared for by the local authority. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is double that found nationally. The number of boys far exceeds that of girls. Since the last inspection, the school has lowered the age that pupils can be admitted to the school to Year 5. It has very recently achieved designation as a specialist school for technology.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?**2****The school's capacity for sustained improvement****2**

Main findings

This is a good school that has sustained and built on the strengths found at the last inspection. Pupils describe how teachers help them to make progress and to improve their behaviour and attendance. One pupil summed up the views of others, saying, 'This is the best school I have ever been to because teachers treat you as an individual and help you to move on to college.'

The school enables pupils to make good progress and reach broadly average standards by the time they leave. There has been marked improvement since the last inspection in the range of courses provided, with many additional vocational options. This has given pupils the opportunity to develop skills that reflect their needs and interests and has led to an increase in the number of qualifications they gain. The development of vocational facilities and courses has done much to develop pupils' work-related learning skills and enabled almost all to go on to further education or training when they leave school.

The school's examination results have shown systematic improvement in recent years and pupils usually make good progress in lessons. Assessment records indicate that pupils who have spent a significant amount of time in the school, for instance, over a whole key stage, have made outstanding progress in science and information and communication technology, and good progress in mathematics. As a result of staffing difficulties, they have had fewer opportunities to gain accreditation in English, particularly at GCSE level. The school has partially resolved this issue and pupils are making at least satisfactory progress in English. Many of those who receive intensive support for their literacy difficulties have made good progress in reading.

Pupils' good achievement and personal development are founded on good quality teaching and thorough systems for their care, guidance and support. Comprehensive arrangements for managing pupils' behaviour ensure that they learn in an environment that is orderly and where they feel safe. Teachers generally have good subject knowledge and link learning to targets in pupils' individual education plans, though not so consistently to the prior attainment of different groups.

The headteacher is passionate about making the school as good as possible and, together with other senior leaders and members of the governing body, provides a strong drive for improvement. The school has been successful in gaining specialist status and a number of other positive developments since the last inspection indicate that it has good capacity for further improvement. Staff in key leadership roles regularly check the school's work and gather a wide range of data about pupils' progress and personal development. They make good use of the school's bespoke software package to track and analyse the achievement of individuals and to set challenging targets. Nevertheless, they have only just begun to use data to identify patterns in performance, and the findings from monitoring are not

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always recorded or analysed as clearly as they could be to inform the drive for continuous improvement.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise achievement and improve the quality of learning by:
 - extending opportunities for pupils to gain accreditation in English
 - ensuring teachers make full use of assessment information to match activities and their expectations in lessons precisely to the prior attainment of different groups of pupils.
- Strengthen the drive for continuous school improvement by:
 - making greater use of existing data to identify patterns in the performance of different groups of pupils
 - consistently recording strategic points about the school's strengths and areas for development from informal as well as formal monitoring
 - regularly distilling the findings from data analysis and monitoring to identify exactly what is working well and what could be refined.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Many pupils join the school with a fractured educational history and low prior attainment. Pupils achieve well, therefore, to reach broadly average standards by the end of Year 11, where an increasing proportion gain a number of GCSE passes as well as a range of other qualifications. The school's success in examinations and the number of pupils receiving academic and vocational accreditation have both improved since the last inspection. Pupils' outcomes indicate that there is no marked difference between the achievement of boys and girls, those of minority ethnic heritage, from Traveller backgrounds or who are looked after by the local authority.

Pupils say that they enjoy school, and lesson observation shows that they make good progress. Improvements in their behaviour and attitudes enable pupils to settle down to work and apply themselves well in most lessons. For example, in a science lesson in Year 11 where pupils discussed differences between viruses and bacteria, they demonstrated a clear understanding of how viral and bacterial infections are treated and produced work which reflected their predicted A* to C grades at GCSE. Although tasks are not always matched closely enough to the needs of different groups of pupils, those who need it benefit from a high level of adult support. This was evident in an English lesson in Year 10, where some pupils worked closely with the teacher or teaching assistant while others worked independently on the same task and produced a substantial amount of written work.

Pupils say that they feel safe in school and they understand the importance of exercise. Most make healthy choices and there is a high take-up of physical activities.

Pupils make a good contribution to the school community and, through their improved behaviour and effort, earn the privilege to move up to 'level two' where they are given additional responsibilities around the school. They contribute well to the local community through various projects, for instance, repairing a playground train for a local primary

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school, designing and constructing a patio for the community sports centre and building a garden wall for a local resident. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good, and pupils develop an increasing awareness of how to relate to others and manage their own difficulties. They are well prepared for leaving school through an effective careers and work-related learning programme, together with a wide range of relevant examination courses, which enable them to secure places in the workplace or in colleges of further education.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

How effective is the provision?

Teachers are very aware of the personal and behavioural needs of individual pupils and use this information skilfully to manage their behaviour. Most lessons are fast paced, tightly structured and based on appropriately high expectations. Strong relationships between staff and pupils underpin the emphasis on learning, and a good balance between encouragement and challenge keeps pupils on task most of the time. Assessment information is used well to track the progress of individual pupils and to set challenging targets which are revised if they make faster progress than anticipated. In the best lessons, teachers provide pupils with exceptionally clear guidance about how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve. Occasionally, teachers organise activities where pupils are passive for too much of the time, and they do not consistently use information about pupils' prior attainment as well as they should to match activities to the

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learning of different groups. The curriculum, however, is matched very well to individual needs and does much to motivate pupils. This is particularly true of the increased vocational opportunities available on the school site. These include an animal care and horticulture centre, as well as facilities linked to the school's specialist status. Interior design and construction courses, supported through partnerships with a number of local businesses, enable pupils to learn trade skills such as bricklaying and decorating. A range of special events and celebrations enhances pupils' learning and they have extensive opportunities to take part in sporting activities both within and beyond the school day. These include outdoor pursuits, boxing, horse-riding, cross country and fitness, and almost three quarters of them take up these opportunities.

The school has comprehensive structures in place to manage pupils' behaviour and promote their personal development. Pupils respect the system of rewards and the school has been successful in significantly reducing the number of fixed-term exclusions over the last two years. It is seeking increasingly innovative methods to raise its attendance rate and has seen a gradual improvement in this since the last inspection. The personal, social and health education curriculum ensures pupils receive clear guidance about the dangers of drug abuse, smoking and alcohol. An effective programme is provided for pupils who have literacy difficulties and the additional support provided for the youngest pupils, in Year 5, meets their needs well. The school has some outstanding links with external agencies that enhance the support it is able to provide for individuals. Its involvement in a pilot project, which involves a number of agencies working together, is currently providing valuable support for several pupils and their families, though the future of this is uncertain.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

Since the last inspection, strengthening of the senior leadership team and increased involvement of middle leaders have enhanced significantly the drive for school improvement. Despite some ongoing staffing difficulties, teamwork is strong, staff morale is high, and the whole school has come together behind the successful bid for specialist status. Good opportunities for professional development and careful support for less experienced staff have contributed effectively to improvements in teaching and learning. The school engages well with parents and carers, regularly gathering their views, and the findings of a recent parental survey conducted by the school indicate that Oak Bank enjoys a high level of support from them. The governing body has been highly influential in working with the headteacher to shape the strategic vision for the school and shows determination in challenging senior leaders to bring about necessary improvements. Its

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members contribute valuable expertise and are very well informed about the school's work, although they do not systematically record the findings of their monitoring visits. The governing body discharges its statutory duties satisfactorily in ensuring that school policies and documentation are kept up to date and reflect national requirements.

All pupils are included in the school community. They are given equal opportunities and discrimination is actively tackled. The school is closely involved with the local community and has a number of global links, though connections with contrasting parts of the United Kingdom are more limited. Good partnerships with businesses and other organisations extend the opportunities the school provides for pupils. Although it is too early for the school's technology status to have had any clear impact on pupils' outcomes, it has already led to some good developments in the range of courses and accreditation available and an increase in the school's links with other schools and with local firms. In addition, it has increased the ways in which the school works with its community.

The school promotes safeguarding well. Systems for ensuring the welfare and safety of pupils are considerably enhanced by high levels of staff vigilance, and a particular strength is the support provided for pupils whose circumstances make them vulnerable. For instance, through its operation of an out-of-hours telephone support service for parents, the school ensures that a member of staff can be contacted at any time should a crisis occur.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Views of parents and carers

There was a very low response to the parental questionnaire. Inspection findings endorse the views of the only questionnaire returned, which expressed satisfaction with the school's work.

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In addition to the response to the inspection questionnaire, the findings from a very recent survey conducted by the school were taken into account in gauging parents' and carers' views. This indicates that they are very satisfied with the provision the school makes for their children.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Oak Bank School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school. The inspection team received one completed questionnaire by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 54 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	1	100	0	0	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	1	100	0	0	0	0	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	1	100	0	0	0	0	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	1	100	0	0	0	0	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	1	100	0	0	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	1	100	0	0	0	0	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	1	100	0	0	0	0	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	1	100	0	0	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	1	100	0	0	0	0	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	1	100	0	0	0	0	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	1	100	0	0	0	0	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	1	100	0	0	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	1	100	0	0	0	0	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
Type of school	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	58	36	4	2
Primary schools	8	43	40	9
Secondary schools	10	35	42	13
Sixth forms	13	39	45	3
Special schools	33	42	20	4
Pupil referral units	18	40	29	12
All schools	11	42	38	9

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 March 2010 and are the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn and spring terms 2009/10 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



14 October 2010

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Oak Bank School, Leighton Buzzard, LU7 3BE

Thank you for making us feel welcome when we came to inspect your school. We enjoyed our time with you and were pleased to hear that you enjoy school and feel safe there. You told us that the teachers treat you as individuals, help you to make good progress, to improve your behaviour and attendance, and to go to college. We agree that these are some of the most important things that make Oak Bank a good school. We also found that teaching is good and the school provides you with many interesting activities, including all the different sports you can take part in. The wide range of courses enables you to gain several qualifications and learn vocational skills, like animal care, building and decorating. These are very useful in preparing you for employment, training or further education when you leave school. The staff provide you with lots of support and encouragement, and the school helps you to gain many important personal skills that will help you in the future.

Your headteacher and the other people who lead the school do a good job and want to make the school as good as possible for you. We want to help them with this and so we have asked them to:

- give you more opportunities to take examinations in English
- make sure teachers always use information about what you can already do and what you need to learn next when they plan your lessons
- look carefully at all the information they collect about the school to see exactly what is working well and what could be improved.

You can help them to make the school even better by doing your best in all your lessons, behaving well and always attending regularly. We wish you well in the future.

Yours sincerely

Margaret Goodchild

Lead inspector

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