



**Office for Standards  
in Education**

# **Inspection report**

## **Bessels Leigh School**

### **Oxfordshire**

Dates of inspection: 29-30 March 2004

This inspection was carried out under section 3 of the School Inspections Act 1996 and was deemed a section 10 inspection under the same Act

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## Basic information about the school

Name of school:	Bessels Leigh School
Type of school:	Special
Status:	Independent
Age range of pupils:	10 to 17 years
Headteacher:	Mr J Boulton
Address of school:	Bessels Leigh Abingdon Oxfordshire OX13 5QB
Telephone:	01865 390436
Name and address of appropriate authority:	Chair of trustees, address as above
Chair of Trustees:	Mr M Edwards
Local education authority area:	Oxfordshire
Unique reference number:	123341
Name of reporting inspector:	Ms A Berger HMI
Dates of inspection:	29-30 March 2004

## Introduction

1. Bessels Leigh School is situated in Abingdon. It is an independent residential school for pupils with social emotional and behavioural difficulties. There are 29 pupils on roll placed by local education authorities from all over the country. All the pupils have a Statement of Special Educational Need and six pupils live at the school for 52 weeks each year. A few pupils come from minority ethnic backgrounds, but none has English as an additional language. Many pupils come from disadvantaged circumstances and their families are themselves experiencing difficulties. Many also have had significant periods out of school with no educational placements and, though they are of average ability, they have significant difficulties in acquiring basic skills. The pupils' attainment on entry to the school is therefore below average.

2. The school was inspected in May 2002. The inspection was critical of many aspects of the work of the school and the school was made subject to special measures because it was failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education.

3. The governors drew up an action plan to address the key issues from the inspection of May 2002. The school was visited by Her Majesty's Inspectors of Schools (HMI) on four occasions to monitor the progress being made.

4. In March 2004 one HMI and one Additional Inspector inspected the school, assessing the standard of education provided and the progress the school has made, in particular in relation to the main findings and key issues in the inspection report of May 2002.

## Main findings

5. In accordance with section 14 of the School Inspections Act 1996, I am of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures, since it is now providing an acceptable standard of education for its pupils. The main findings of the inspection are:

- standards in most subjects are rising steadily for the majority of pupils. Although most pupils start in the school achieving well below their potential, many make up significant ground, especially in English, mathematics, science and information and communication technology (ICT);
- the pupils are making good progress in literacy as a result of the improved teaching of English. The specialist teaching of reading is having a very positive impact on standards, the pupils' self-esteem and their confidence;
- most pupils make satisfactory progress in their speaking and listening skills as a result of the suitable opportunities in lessons for debate and discussion;
- standards of numeracy are also improving. The pupils manipulate numbers confidently and they use computers effectively to solve mathematical problems;

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- the standards pupils achieve in ICT have improved significantly. The pupils use computers with assurance within most subjects and many use word processing, spreadsheets and databases to support their work;
  - the pupils' behaviour is satisfactory overall. The system for managing behaviour effectively rewards good conduct both in the home and school settings. Care staff and teachers are beginning to work with greater cohesion for the benefit of the pupils overall. However, there are still some instances of inappropriate behaviour and insufficient attention is paid to supporting the pupils' emotional needs through a range of suitable therapies;
  - the pupils' spiritual, moral and social development is satisfactory. The provision for their cultural development is satisfactory though there are too few opportunities for pupils to appreciate music and performance;
  - the quality of teaching was very good in two lessons, good in six, satisfactory in seven and unsatisfactory in one. The proportion of good teaching has increased since May 2002 and recent improvements have been maintained. In the unsatisfactory lesson the teacher had insufficient knowledge of the needs of the pupils and planned unsuitable tasks;
  - the pupils' learning is assessed well and the marking of pupils' work is very good;
  - the curriculum is broad and balanced and covers most subjects effectively. However the planning is not sufficiently well co-ordinated to ensure that the separate subjects form a relevant programme of study for pupils;
  - the leadership and management of the school are satisfactory. The trustees are well led and have a clear view of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. The principal has worked closely with the trustees to develop a clear sense of direction for the school. The curriculum and assessment are well co-ordinated by the assistant headteacher and head of science. The head of care continues to play a vital role in the senior team.

## Key issues

6. In order to improve the pupils' quality of education further, the trustees, headteacher, senior managers and staff need to:

- develop further strategies to improve the behaviour of pupils;
  - meet the pupils' emotional needs more fully by providing a wider range of therapeutic support;
  - continue to improve the consistency of the teaching across all subjects;
  - extend the curriculum to increase the provision for music and the performing arts.
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## Inspection findings

### Standards achieved by the pupils

7. Standards in most subjects are rising steadily for the majority of pupils. Although most pupils start in the school achieving well below their potential, many make up significant ground, especially in English, mathematics, science and ICT. Challenging targets have been set in all subjects and many of the pupils are making good progress towards meeting them.

8. The standards of literacy are rising as a result of the improved teaching of English. In addition to the English lessons some pupils have benefited from individual specialist tuition in reading. A number of pupils have made considerable gains in their reading over the last four months. Resulting improvements in the pupils' self-esteem and confidence are beginning to raise on their performance in other subjects. All the pupils in Years 10 and 11 this year are successfully following courses in GCSE entry-level certificate of achievement, as well as City and Guilds communication skills.

9. Most pupils make satisfactory progress in their speaking and listening skills as a result of the suitable opportunities in lessons for debate and discussion. For example, during a form period, the pupils talked about the principles of propulsion which had been investigated overnight by one pupil who had shared his interest and enthusiasm with his class. The ensuing debate engaged the whole group and the pupils used a good range of vocabulary to express their ideas. Some pupils are beginning to describe their feelings rather than acting them out inappropriately, though there is still work to be done to improve the pupils' communication skills.

10. Standards of numeracy are also improving. The pupils manipulate numbers confidently and they use computers effectively to solve mathematical problems. In Year 10, the lower attaining pupils used spreadsheets to draw graphs and began to analyse simple data. The higher attaining pupils in Year 11 used line graphs and more sophisticated methods to interpret findings as part of their GCSE course.

11. The standards pupils achieve in ICT have improved considerably and many make good progress. Many use word processing, spreadsheets and databases effectively as a tool to support their work in different subjects. Improvements in ICT have resulted from better teaching and a more suitable curriculum which has been adapted to match the pupils' interests and needs. For example, in Year 11, the pupils were designing their own websites and were able to write basic programs to change the structure of their site. They were motivated to complete the tasks, which were planned to take into account their previous knowledge and interests.

12. In art and physical education the pupils make satisfactory progress. Those who are motivated produce some good art work and are successful in their GCSE course, though occasionally the pupils lose interest in the lessons and their behaviour can become disrespectful. Even though a permanent physical education teacher has not been available this term, the pupils have engaged in a reasonable range of sports and enjoyed swimming, basket ball and horse riding during the week of the visit. In geography the pupils make unsatisfactory progress because the lessons are insufficiently challenging for the more able

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and the texts presented are unsuitable for the less able pupils. In some lessons the behaviour of some pupils interrupts their learning and holds back the progress they and others might make.

### **The pupils' attitudes, values and personal development**

13. The pupils' behaviour is satisfactory overall. The pupils usually settle to work quickly and respond well to the teachers' expectations and generally enjoy their studies. The system for managing behaviour effectively rewards good conduct both in the home and school settings and the pupils are proud of their efforts and achievements. However, there is insufficient provision to support the pupils' emotional needs through a range of suitable therapies and there are still some incidents of rudeness which are not always challenged effectively.

14. The pupils' spiritual, moral and social development is satisfactory. Daily routines in the residential and school setting are well established. Evening activities are carefully planned to provide pupils with an enjoyable social life. Meal times are pleasant social occasions and pupils move responsibly around the grounds. Generally pupils are keen to celebrate the success of their peers. Relationships throughout the school are largely good and the pupils respect each other and enjoy each other's company. Nonetheless, there are still one or two boys who struggle to keep their thoughts to themselves and respond appropriately during social occasions.

15. Provision for the pupils' cultural development is satisfactory. Work is planned in art, English and humanities lessons to support this aspect of the pupils' development though there are too few opportunities for the pupils to appreciate music and the performing arts.

16. Some effort has been made to involve the pupils more with the plans for improvements within the school. The school council has met and made suggestions for further development of the reward systems though there is still work to do to include the pupils fully in important decisions within the community.

### **The quality of education**

17. The quality of teaching was very good in two lessons, good in six, satisfactory in seven and unsatisfactory in one. The proportion of good teaching has increased since May 2002 and recent improvements have been maintained. Most lessons are well prepared and based on secure knowledge of what the pupils can already do. For example, in a Year 11 English lesson, the teachers explained new ideas well and made certain that pupils fully understood the tasks set. The pupils were praised and encouraged and the teacher made very good use of the pupils' ideas to ensure everyone was participating fully. In a Year 9 science lesson the teacher made excellent use of the pupils' observations to develop the learning and used well-chosen questions to assess the pupils' understanding; the teacher's enthusiasm for the subject clearly transferred to the pupils. In a few lessons, where the teaching was in other respects satisfactory, the pace slowed at times and the pupils lost concentration. In the unsatisfactory lesson the teacher had insufficient knowledge of the needs of the pupils and planned unsuitable tasks.



18. The marking of pupils' work is very good. The assessment of the pupils' learning needs is accurate and teachers use this information appropriately to plan their lessons. The assessment policy is implemented effectively and this aspect of school management is well co-ordinated, rigorous and systematically monitored.

19. The curriculum is broad and generally balanced, but there is too little emphasis in Key Stage 3 on music and performance. A helpful overview shows what is being studied in each area so that staff can make links across subjects. In Key Stage 4, reasonable steps have been taken to extend the opportunities available, though standards for some pupils in Key Stage 4 are limited by the restricted range of practical and vocational options. However, from Easter pupils will be involved in the young enterprise scheme and the Duke of Edinburgh awards, and other vocational courses are planned for September. There remains work to do to develop the curriculum so that the separate subjects form a coherent and relevant programme of study for these pupils.

### **Leadership and management**

20. The leadership and management are satisfactory. The trustees have a clear view of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. They have appointed a consultant who has been very effective in improving the strategic planning, and a good start has been made to ensuring that all staff are involved with development plans for the school. The morale of staff has improved and they have a clearer view of how they can contribute to initiatives. The principal has worked closely with the trustees to set a suitable focus and educational direction for the school and has managed complex staffing difficulties well.

21. The curriculum and assessment are well led and a proposed new staffing structure should build further on the strengths within the staff team. The head of care plays a vital role in the senior team and this ensures cohesion between the care and teaching staff. Recent joint meetings have broken down traditional barriers and care staff are more fully involved in the pupils' learning though there is further work to do in this area.

22. Adequate systems have been introduced to ensure that teaching and learning are monitored regularly, and there have been useful opportunities for staff to discuss their work and improve their planning and their assessment of pupils. The induction arrangements for new staff are satisfactory and supply staff are welcomed and well supported.

23. The co-ordination of subjects has continued to improve. Most subjects are guided by suitable schemes of work and these have contributed to the general improvements in lesson planning.

### **Implementation of the action plan**

24. The inspection report of May 2002 required the school to address six key issues. These principally related to: improving the leadership and management; eradicating weaknesses in teaching; raising standards; restructuring the curriculum; improving assessment arrangements; and providing better for the pupils' spiritual and cultural development. Reasonable progress has been made.

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25. The senior team is effective in planning developments and leading new initiatives. The partnership between the trustees and the school is effective and relationships have improved considerably. The proportion of good teaching is greater than it was in 2002, and the monitoring of teaching identifies any weaknesses and these are then addressed. The improvements in the curriculum and teaching have resulted in standards rising in the core subjects particularly, and accurate assessments are used to monitor and challenge the progress the pupils make. Assemblies include times for reflection and recent work on restorative justice has provided some pupils with greater opportunities to take responsibility for their own behaviour. Care staff and teachers are beginning to work with greater cohesion for the benefit of the pupils overall, and a wider range of cultural opportunities is planned, though further work is still required in both these areas.

## **Appendix – Information about the inspection**

Bessels Leigh School was inspected under section 10 in May 2002. The inspection was critical of many aspects of the work of the school and, in accordance with that Act, the school was made subject to special measures because it was failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education.

The school was visited by HMI in November 2002, and in March, June and October 2003 to assess the progress it was making to implement its action plan and address the key issues in the inspection report of May 2002.

In March 2004, one HMI and one Additional Inspector returned to inspect the school for two days. The inspection was carried out under section 3 of the School Inspections Act 1996, which gives Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools the authority to cause any school to be inspected. The inspection was also deemed a section 10 inspection under the same Act.

Sixteen lessons or parts of lessons and two registration sessions were inspected. The pupils were observed at break and lunch times and samples of their work were inspected. Meetings were held with the headteacher, senior staff, the chair of the trustees and the external management consultant to the school. Informal discussions were held with other staff and pupils. A wide range of the school's documentation was scrutinised. Account was also taken of the evidence from previous monitoring inspections.

The inspection assessed the quality of education provided and the progress the school has made, in particular in relation to the main findings and key issues in the inspection report of May 2002 and the action plan prepared by the governing body to address those key issues.

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**Notes**



