

Bishopswood School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	123345
Local Authority	Oxfordshire
Inspection number	292637
Inspection dates	24–25 May 2007
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	2–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	38
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr J Trotman
Headteacher	Mrs J A Wager
Date of previous school inspection	1 July 2002
School address	Grove Road Sonning Common RG4 9RJ
Telephone number	01189 724311
Fax number	01189 242730

Age group	2–16
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This is a special school for pupils who have severe, profound and multiple learning difficulties. In the younger classes in particular, many pupils have additional needs such as autism; speech, language and communication difficulties; visual and hearing impairments; physical disabilities and medical needs. The school is co-located on the site of three separate mainstream schools. Children under five attend a fully integrated nursery at a primary school in Henley. Provision for primary-aged pupils, and the school's administrative base, is situated in purpose-built accommodation at a primary school in Sonning Common, a few miles outside Reading. Secondary-aged pupils are based within a nearby secondary school. One full-time and two part-time teachers, who provide outreach support to pupils with learning difficulties in mainstream schools, are managed by the headteacher of Bishopswood School. The school has gained the Healthy Schools award and Activemark.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school. Most parents are very appreciative of its work, saying that the school 'provides an ideal education'. They 'applaud the dedication and hard work of the staff and are pleased that provision of such good quality exists'.

Although pupils' learning difficulties and disabilities mean that standards are necessarily well below average, pupils achieve well. Children in the nursery benefit enormously from opportunities to learn in a setting where they receive a high level of support as well as being fully integrated with mainstream children. As a result, their achievement is outstanding. On all three sites, pupils benefit from outstanding opportunities to mix socially and academically with mainstream pupils, and higher attaining pupils in particular gain a great deal from being able to attend mainstream lessons.

Parents say that their children are very happy to attend school. Good quality care, support and guidance means that pupils' personal development and well-being are good. Their development is promoted especially well through joining in with activities, such as residential trips and other special events, alongside mainstream pupils.

Teaching is good and the school is staffed mostly by teachers highly experienced in working with pupils with learning difficulties. Information and communication technology (ICT) is used well in some classes although not all staff are sufficiently skilled in its use, especially in using interactive whiteboards. Information about what pupils can already do is used very well to provide challenging learning targets for individuals. The curriculum is matched well to the next steps in pupils' learning and to meeting the needs of those with additional difficulties. Most, but not all, pupils who need them have plans setting out how their behaviour is to be managed. Careful attention is paid to developing pupils' basic skills, and to promoting their personal, social and physical development. However, the day-to-day curriculum is not as creative as it could be, for example, through linking subjects to make learning more enjoyable.

The school is led and managed well. The headteacher provides good direction and is very committed to making the school as effective as possible. Senior managers are accurate in judging the school's overall strengths and weaknesses and there have been good improvements since the last inspection. However, being located on three sites presents a particular challenge in ensuring that the school operates as a coherent whole with similar expectations on each site. A senior manager is based at each site and managers are effective in identifying the next short-term steps needed to refine existing practice. As a result, the school runs smoothly from day to day, provides good value for money and is well placed to improve further. Strategic leadership by staff with responsibilities is more variable: there is not a clear shared vision across all three sites for how the school could be improved in the long term to build on existing good practice.

What the school should do to improve further

- Make greater use of ICT, especially interactive whiteboards, and increase opportunities for creativity within the day-to-day curriculum.
- Develop a clear long-term vision amongst managers and governors of how the school might improve further to build on existing good practice.
- Ensure that all the pupils who exhibit challenging behaviour have a plan that sets out how their behaviour is to be managed.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Children in the nursery make outstanding progress in communication, language and literacy, mathematical development and personal, social and emotional development. In the rest of the school, pupils make good progress overall in English, mathematics, science, personal, social and health education, physical development and ICT.

The school's own records show that some pupils at Key Stage 4 have made less progress towards their individual targets than those in the rest of the school, where progress has been consistently good. Improvements in the curriculum for older pupils means that they are now making good progress and most are likely to leave with some form of accreditation. The school does particularly well by its most able pupils, who have very good opportunities to follow courses alongside mainstream students. A small number at Key Stage 4 are following GCSE courses in mathematics, science and art. The most able pupils also take the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) Youth Award Scheme, whilst the majority follow ASDAN Transition Challenge.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils have good attitudes to school and respond well to the activities provided. They enjoy positive and trusting relationships with the staff and relate well to one another. Most pupils behave well and inappropriate behaviour is generally short lived. Attendance is good. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Links with special schools in Holland and Spain contribute significantly to pupils' awareness of other cultures and at the time of the inspection a group of pupils at Key Stage 3 were on a trip to Holland. Pupils make a positive contribution to the school community and older pupils take part in meaningful work experience. Many pupils know about healthy eating and they learn about the importance of keeping themselves as safe. They take part in a good variety of physical activities in addition to their physical education lessons, although opportunities for physical activity are limited at present on the secondary site. Pupils make good progress in basic skills and develop important personal qualities for the future. They make good progress overall in developing their independence but this is an area the school has identified for further development. It does well with the accommodation at its disposal but does not have the facilities to promote the full range of living skills for pupils in Key Stages 3 and 4.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The quality of teaching and learning is good, and it is outstanding in the nursery. Teachers are mostly experienced and long-serving. They are competent, organise their classrooms well and manage pupils' behaviour effectively. Lessons are purposeful and a good range of resources is used to capture pupils' interest. Teachers make good use of specialist programmes to support those pupils who need intensive support and promote pupils' communication effectively, particularly through signing and the use of symbols and pictures. They make good use of their teaching assistants, especially in supporting pupils' and meeting their personal needs.

The school has thorough systems in place for assessing pupils' attainment and teachers keep detailed records of their progress. This information is used well in lesson planning and in tracking the progress of classes and individuals.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good: it is matched well to the needs of the pupils. The co-location of the school on three mainstream school sites has afforded outstanding opportunities for pupils to go on visits, including a number of residential trips to this country and abroad, and to take part in activities alongside mainstream pupils. Great care is taken to provide exactly the right amount of inclusion, matched with the right level of support, for each pupil. In addition, within Bishopswood, good opportunities are provided for pupils to take part in clubs and other special events. The day-to-day curriculum does not provide as many opportunities as it should, however, for pupils to learn through creative and exciting activities that link subjects imaginatively and maximise their enjoyment. Display is satisfactory but it, too, does not provide as much stimulation as it could.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

In this small school, staff know the pupils well as individuals and show a high level of concern for their welfare. The school has good systems for ensuring that pupils are protected and safeguarded, and it works very closely with a range of therapists and specialist agencies in meeting pupils' needs. Most pupils move on to a three-year course at college and the school has very good systems for ensuring this transition is as smooth as possible. The learning needs of pupils are carefully identified and academic targets in individual education plans are specific and helpful. Most pupils who exhibit particularly challenging behaviour have a management plan which sets out exactly how staff should deal with them to manage and minimise such behaviour. However, behaviour management plans have not been produced for all the pupils who need them and a minority of teaching assistants lack skill in dealing with inappropriate behaviour. Otherwise, pupils are guided well in their personal and academic development. Older pupils in particular are involved in evaluating their work within the ASDAN courses. The school works closely in partnership with parents and keeps them very well informed.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

In her day-to-day management of the school, the headteacher receives good overall support from other staff with management responsibilities. This has enabled her to bring all aspects of the school's work up to a good level. The school has developed very positive links with the mainstream schools where it is co-located. The integrated nursery is managed very well, and schools that receive support through the outreach service are highly appreciative of the positive effect this has on their children's achievement.

The school has some good systems in place for monitoring its effectiveness, but paperwork is not as well-organised as it should be, making it unnecessarily difficult to check that the school's procedures are being implemented fully. This is compounded by Bishopswood being a small school on three sites, where staff carry several responsibilities. Most time is spent in managing

the school and edging forwards in development rather than in raising staff aspirations and clarifying a shared vision for moving the school forward. The governing body provides good support and challenge to the school. Governors are well informed about the school's work through detailed reports from staff and their own visits where they collect information about its effectiveness.

Very good facilities are provided at the integrated nursery, and the purpose-built accommodation that is used mainly by primary-aged pupils meets their needs well. The school has recently been successful in its bid for funding to develop a suitable outdoor area and sensory garden for secondary aged pupils: at present, no such space exists for them. The increasing complexity of pupils' difficulties means that the secondary accommodation, which consists of individual classrooms off a busy corridor, is not ideally suited to their needs.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

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

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

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

The quality of provision

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

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

Annex A

Leadership and management

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

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

7 June 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Bishopswood School, Sonning Common, RG4 9RJ

Thank you for making me feel welcome when I visited your school. I enjoyed my visit and now I am writing to let you know what I found out about the school.

This is a good school and I can see why many of your parents are so pleased with the way it helps you. Those of you in the nursery are doing especially well and it was lovely to see you working and playing with the other children there. Those of you on the secondary site who are taking GCSE courses are also doing really well and I enjoyed looking through your ASDAN folders. The rest of you are making good progress with your work, and you benefit a great deal from the chance to learn and mix with mainstream pupils. This helps you to get on with a lot of people and it also helps the mainstream pupils to understand and get on with you.

Your parents say that you are very happy to attend school and I could see that you are well cared for. The teachers understand your needs well and they match work well to the next steps in your learning.

The school is led well and the headteacher is very keen to make the school even better for you. To help them to improve things for you, I have asked the headteacher, teachers and teaching assistants to use computers more often in lessons and to make learning as exciting as possible, and also to make sure that all of you who need one have a plan to help you to manage your behaviour.

Yours sincerely

M J Goodchild

Lead Inspector