



# Oak Bank School

## Inspection Report

**Unique Reference Number** 109747  
**LEA** BEDFORDSHIRE LEA  
**Inspection number** 294315  
**Inspection dates** 11 July 2006 to 12 July 2006  
**Reporting inspector** Ms. Sue Morris-King HMI

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 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 5 inspection under the same Act.

<b>Type of school</b>	Special	<b>School address</b>	Sandy Lane
<b>School category</b>	Community		LU7 3BE
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11 to 16		
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed	<b>Telephone number</b>	01525 374559
<b>Number on roll</b>	37	<b>Fax number</b>	01525 374559
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body	<b>Chair of governors</b>	Mr. Ian Raisbeck
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	21 September 2004	<b>Headteacher</b>	Mr. Peter Cohen

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
11 to 16	11 July 2006 - 12 July 2006	294315

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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors of Schools (HMI).

## Description of the school

When Oak Bank School was inspected in September 2004 it was judged to be providing an unsatisfactory standard of education, and therefore to require special measures. The school was subsequently visited on four occasions by HMI prior to this inspection to monitor its progress. Oak Bank School caters for pupils who have a statement of special educational need for social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. The pupils have often had a history of disrupted education. The school is the only one of its type in the local authority so many pupils have long journeys to reach it. The pupils are predominantly White British; six are from minority ethnic groups and none speaks English as an additional language. Seven pupils are Looked After. A quarter of the pupils are eligible for free school meals. Only two girls are currently on roll. At the time of the previous inspection there were two joint headteachers. Since then, one has left and the other has been appointed as substantive headteacher.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 3

In accordance with section 13 (4) of the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures. Oak Bank School provides a satisfactory standard of education, and it is poised to be a good school. Improvement since the previous inspection has been good. At the time of the previous inspection leadership was unsatisfactory, standards were low in too many subjects, pupils were not making enough progress and attitudes, behaviour and attendance were not good enough. Since then, greatly improved monitoring and evaluation have given the headteacher and the senior leadership team a realistic understanding of the school's strengths and the areas which needed development. This rigorous process has led to a series of carefully targeted actions which have improved all aspects of the school's work. Leadership and management are good overall: the headteacher's leadership is particularly good, and leadership from other staff is increasingly strong. Excellent governance has provided support and challenge throughout the process of improvement, and continues to do so. Oak Bank is now a calm school in which pupils have developed good relationships with staff and each other. When pupils join the school they have often been excluded from previous schools for periods of time, or attended poorly. Consequently, they have sometimes missed aspects of their schooling, and many lack confidence and are disaffected with education. Standards are generally below those which are expected of their age group: levels of attainment are often adversely affected by the pupils' social, emotional, behavioural or other learning difficulties and by their previously disrupted education. However, better planning and teaching combined with a much improved ethos and more effective management of behaviour mean that most pupils' progress is now satisfactory and sometimes better, and standards are rising accordingly. Teaching is now satisfactory and an increasing proportion is good. Lessons are generally well planned and interesting; pupils particularly enjoy the practical activities which are often built into science, information communication technology (ICT) and food technology lessons. The school has rightly identified the need to further extend the staff's expertise in using a range of teaching strategies. Sound systems for tracking the pupils' progress have enabled the leadership team to gain a good understanding of the progress which pupils are making. The school is aware that this information now needs to be used by all staff to ensure that lessons always build on what the pupils can already do. Provision for pupils who have literacy difficulties has begun to improve but they still do not receive sufficiently well structured or regular support to meet their needs. Relationships between staff and pupils are positive. Expectations of pupils' behaviour are clear, and pupils are sensitively helped and supported by staff to meet these expectations. The number of exclusions has reduced gradually over the last year and fallen sharply this term. This reflects the pupils' better behaviour as well as the school's improved capabilities. Pupils are taking an increasing amount of responsibility: they have improved the environment significantly, building a pond, creating flowerbeds at the front of the school, and designing new teaching areas. As a result, many pupils take a pride in their school. Pupils are generally co-operative with each other both in lessons and around school.

The rate and impact of recent improvement indicate that the school's capacity to improve is good. The school provides satisfactory value for money.

### **What the school should do to improve further**

- Include regular, structured, small group or individual teaching of basic literacy skills in the timetable of each pupil who has significant difficulties with reading and writing.
- Further develop the staff's confidence and skills in planning lessons to meet each pupil's individual needs and using a wide range of teaching strategies.
- Use assessment and tracking data to check whether pupils are making good progress and take swift action if they are not.

## **Achievement and standards**

### **Grade: 3**

Pupils' achievement is satisfactory overall. Progress is most consistent at Key Stage 3 and for those pupils with good levels of attendance. Most pupils are now making good progress with their social, emotional and behavioural skills. Standards have been below average for a number of years but are rising. More pupils are now reaching the levels expected for their age. In 2005 results in English in the national Key Stage 3 tests were poor. Mathematics and science results were much better than English, but too few pupils achieved well. Provisional results for 2006 indicate that there has been significant improvement in all subjects, particularly in mathematics and science. Nearly half the pupils gained a Level 5, the expected level for their age, in mathematics. Pupils' work in English has also improved: most pupils are making satisfactory or better progress and more are reaching average standards. Work in pupils' books and folders indicate that progress is generally satisfactory in the other subjects. In 2005, nine of the ten pupils who were entered for GCSE mathematics gained a grade; of these, three pupils gained a Grade C or above. Given the pupils' prior attainment these results represented good achievement. Three pupils gained a GCSE in English. In 2006, pupils were entered for a wider range of qualifications including GCSEs in English, mathematics, science, ICT and physical education (PE). Three pupils who attended college part-time gained vocational qualifications such as City and Guilds. Although pupils with literacy difficulties make progress in some curriculum areas they do not make sufficient progress with their reading and writing. The progress of Looked After Children is very variable and relates directly to their attendance. Those who attend school regularly achieve well. Others progress well through work and college placements. The few Looked After pupils who do not attend sufficiently make inadequate progress. Other pupils who have previously found it difficult to attend the school full-time are now making at least satisfactory and often good progress through their individual curricula.

## **Personal development and well-being**

### **Grade: 3**

The pupils' personal development is satisfactory and improving fast. Pupils' behaviour and attitudes are satisfactory, and sometimes good. Extreme outbursts from a few

pupils remain a challenge for the school, although these have decreased. Many pupils are well motivated and co-operative. The extent to which they are able to work together as a team varies, although almost all make progress with this skill through opportunities the school builds into lessons such as food technology, science and physical education. Pupils are positive about being at school; the orderly environment and vigilant and caring staff ensure that they feel safe. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory. Pupils are given valuable chances to reflect on their behaviour, including in some excellent assemblies, which has a positive impact on their ability and willingness to take responsibility for their actions. Pupils respond well to the opportunities they have to make a positive contribution to their school, for example by carrying out lunchtime duties, improving the school site and helping at parents' evenings. Pupils gain success at their work experience placements during Years 10 and 11, and, through their personal, social and health education (PSHE) lessons, learn crucial life skills such as managing money and self-organisation. Pupils generally understand the need to eat healthily and many appreciate the recent improvements to their school lunches. Overall attendance remains below the school's target and below average. This is largely because of a number of older pupils who are on the school's roll but whose attendance is very poor; many joined the school during Key Stage 4. Pupils in Key Stage 3 generally attend very well.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

#### **Grade: 3**

Teaching and learning are satisfactory, although an increasing number of lessons are good. Pupils' learning skills are developing well and they enjoy many of their lessons. Lessons begin promptly and the pace is usually maintained until the end, which makes the best use of the available time. The school has introduced a wider range of teaching strategies, for example teachers provide structured opportunities for pupils to develop their skills of discussion and debate, which in turn help them to interact positively with each other. The leadership team is rightly keen to extend the range further. Planning for most pupils is sound; the school is aware that it needs to be improved for pupils with literacy difficulties. Assessment has begun to be better used by teachers, although this needs further development. Some marking includes a positive comment and a target for improvement but this is inconsistent. Teaching assistants provide pupils with valuable support; many are skilled at encouraging pupils to keep working and not to give up. The school environment celebrates success and encourages learning. Good quality displays include pupils' work and photographs of them taking part in various activities. ICT is well used by teachers in many subjects and pupils find that it helps and motivates them in their learning.

## **Curriculum and other activities**

### **Grade: 3**

The curriculum is satisfactory, but recent developments are good. The well-established Year 7 transition group spends most of their time with one teacher. This helps pupils to settle quickly into the school and to build good relationships. The additions of music and German to the Key Stage 3 curriculum in September will broaden pupils' experiences; music is also available as an option for pupils in Year 10. The school has worked tirelessly over the past year to develop a broader and more motivating curriculum for Key Stage 4 pupils. Pupils already benefit from a range of work experience and college placements. From September pupils will be able to study accredited construction and interior design and decoration courses at school. Pupils have been involved in planning the accommodation, including measuring out the site for the new building: as a consequence they are highly motivated and looking forward to their time in Key Stage 4. The school has recognised the need to adapt the curriculum for some pupils who find it exceptionally difficult to succeed through conventional approaches: this is having increasing success. These pupils enjoy a project-based approach to their learning: they have recently built a garden bench, planted a vegetable garden and built a pair of speakers for a sound system. Several pupils' attendance has improved significantly. At lunchtimes pupils are able to choose from activities which include team games. Enrichment opportunities such as a recent science visit to Woburn Safari Park are well linked to the pupils' learning in lessons. Other activities such as a fishing trip, rock climbing and a 'high level ropes experience' enhance the pupils' personal development and help them to work as a team. Outside speakers and visits to local places of interest support the pupils' personal and social development well.

## **Care, guidance and support**

### **Grade: 2**

Care, guidance and support are good. Careful attention is paid to the pupils' emotional needs; for example when they arrive at school after a long journey they are welcomed at the door by staff and any problems are swiftly dealt with. Systems help pupils to avoid potential conflicts: pupils hand in valuable items to the safekeeping of staff as soon as they arrive; break times and lesson changeover times are well supervised; and staff are well trained in methods of diffusing possible confrontations. Where pupils' attendance is very low, the school does all it can to remain in close constant contact with pupils' families and support workers to try to ensure that they attend or that appropriate alternatives are arranged. A highly effective home-school liaison officer organises an individual programme of support for each these pupils and thoroughly monitors their progress. Support for Looked After Children is good. Procedures for safeguarding pupils, including child protection and risk assessments are thorough and well organised. Good links have been made with a variety of agencies, including social services, Connexions and the Youth Offending Team. Pupils receive good guidance about drugs, alcohol and sexual health through PSHE lessons as well as the involvement of outside speakers. Improved assessment has enabled the school to give pupils more

thorough guidance about their academic achievement. Recent tracking of pupils' emotional, social and behavioural skills is a very positive development.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 2**

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher provides the school with good, firm leadership and clear direction. He has a suitably ambitious vision for the school's future, which he has communicated well to staff and to pupils. He has a positive presence around the school: his manner with the pupils is calm but authoritative and the pupils respond well to him. He receives good support from the leadership team. The acting deputy headteacher has been influential in improving aspects of the school's work, such as the development of pupils' learning skills. Assessment practices have been improved by the assistant headteacher. A new system of line management has been well implemented by the leadership team. This is rigorous and is having an evident impact on improving the accountability of the staff and the support that is offered to them. Monitoring and evaluation of planning, teaching and learning are effective. The leadership of other staff is also developing well and they are taking more responsibility for improvement, with good results. A range of training opportunities is provided for staff, which has increased the school's capacity to improve further. Parents' views of the school are very positive. Governance is outstanding. The skilled and dedicated governing body spend a considerable amount of time and energy providing excellent support and challenge to the headteacher and the school. Their involvement in setting up the school council, attending leadership team meetings, helping to plan the new curriculum and advising on financial matters have been highly effective and much appreciated by the school. They have been pivotal in the school's improvement.



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## Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	<b>School Overall</b>	<b>16-19</b>
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### Overall effectiveness

<b>How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?</b>	3	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	NA
The quality and standards in foundation stage	NA	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	NA
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	NA
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	NA

### Achievement and standards

<b>How well do learners achieve?</b>	3	NA
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	3	NA
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	NA
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3	NA

### Personal development and well-being

<b>How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	3	NA
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3	NA
The behaviour of learners	3	NA
The attendance of learners	4	NA
How well learners enjoy their education	3	NA
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3	NA
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3	NA
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3	NA
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3	NA

### The quality of provision

<b>How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?</b>	3	NA
<b>How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?</b>	3	NA
<b>How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?</b>	2	NA

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

**Leadership and management**

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	2	NA
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	NA
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	2	NA
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3	NA
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	3	NA
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1	NA
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	NA

<b>The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy</b>	
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse	Yes
Learners are educated about sexual health	Yes
<b>The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe</b>	
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements	Yes
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them	Yes
<b>The extent to which learners make a positive contribution</b>	
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them	Yes
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community	Yes
<b>The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being</b>	
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills	Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams	Yes
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form	Yes
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	Yes

**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

Thank you for welcoming me to Oak Bank again this week. As you know, I have been visiting your school every term for almost two years. This was because your school had a number of difficulties and needed to improve. However, everyone - Mr Cohen, the staff, pupils and governors - have been working really hard to put this right, and you have all been successful. The Oak Bank which I saw on this visit was radically different to the one I saw the first time I visited the school. You now benefit from interesting lessons which help you to improve your skills. The staff arrange enjoyable activities for you, such as the science visit to Woburn Safari Park, the sports day, and the fishing trip for Year 10. The plans for music, German, construction and interior design and decorating course will make the curriculum even better. Mr Clair's assembly really summed up the improvements perfectly. On this visit I saw a school of settled, hard working pupils who are making progress with both their work in lessons and with their social, emotional and behavioural skills. You wear your uniform well, you co-operate with each other and with your teachers, and you usually enjoy being at school. Obviously, some of you still have difficulties with your behaviour at times, but what is so important is that you are now able to find better ways to react to people or situations. Clearly, you are taking a pride in your school: the pond, the garden outside the front of the school, the dining room and the displays are all very impressive. Your staff have worked hard to get the school to this point in its development, and of course so have you. I do not need to visit the school any more because Mr Cohen and the staff, with your help, can continue to develop the school. I have asked the school to concentrate on three particular things: - making sure that those pupils who have difficulties with reading and writing get plenty of help, every day, so that they can improve their skills, - giving you a wide range of different ways of learning, including plenty of discussion, group work and independent work to help you to make really good progress, - checking frequently how well you are doing (with your academic work and your social, emotional and behavioural development) so that if you need any extra support it can quickly be provided. Mr Clair talked in assembly about 'continuous improvement' and that is exactly what is needed now to make Oak Bank a really good school. The staff cannot do it without your hard work and co-operation. You need to think about what you can contribute to this improvement, how you can take responsibility, how you can help and support the staff every day so that they can teach you well, and how you can help and support each other. I wish you the very best for the future.

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