

# Oakdale School and Acorn Nursery

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	106281
<b>Local Authority</b>	Tameside
<b>Inspection number</b>	309083
<b>Inspection dates</b>	11–12 September 2007
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Rosemary Eaton

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Special
<b>School category</b>	Community special
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	2–12
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School	93
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mr Dennis Fogg
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mrs I Howard
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	6 May 2003
<b>School address</b>	Cheetham Hill Road Dukinfield Cheshire SK16 5LD
<b>Telephone number</b>	0161 3679299
<b>Fax number</b>	0161 3679685

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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

## Description of the school

This is a larger than average sized special school. It shares Acorn Nursery with an adjoining mainstream primary school. By the time they enter Reception at Oakdale, all pupils have a statement of special educational needs. There are almost equal numbers with severe learning difficulties, profound and multiple learning difficulties, and autistic spectrum disorders with severe or complex learning difficulties. Almost all pupils have communication difficulties. The nature of their difficulties means that pupils are working below national expectations. There are nearly four times as many boys as girls. The large majority of pupils are of White British heritage.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 1

This is an outstanding school. When asked if they like Oakdale, pupils' answer is a resounding 'Yes!' Their considerable enjoyment stems principally from the enthusiasm and expertise of the staff team. Parents typically describe the staff as 'dedicated' and 'always smiling'. Pupils' behaviour is excellent. Those who find it hard to meet the school's expectations receive consistent support and are helped to control their emotions and responses. Pupils become very confident learners, ready to take on challenges such as kayaking. Their positive attitudes contribute greatly to pupils' exceptional personal development. The outstanding curriculum plays a significant part in ensuring that pupils are well rounded individuals. Physical education is one of its many strengths. For example, pupils regularly enjoy exercising alongside others from mainstream schools, enhancing their social development and fitness. Weather permitting, most pupils regularly spend time outdoors, but the playgrounds are uninspiring compared to the classrooms and specialist teaching areas.

Attending the inclusive Acorn Nursery gets children's education off to a superb start. They make extremely good progress and this is maintained when children move on to Reception at Oakdale. This continuity ensures that achievement is outstanding throughout the Foundation Stage and during Key Stages 1 and 2, in line with the quality of teaching. Progress is especially rapid in learning to communicate. Teachers have particular expertise in this, a priority area for all pupils. Systems such as signing or using electronic devices are matched accurately to the needs of each one and teachers provide frequent and meaningful opportunities for pupils to develop their skills. Teaching assistants make a huge contribution to pupils' learning and personal development. The strength of the class teams means that new or less experienced staff are absorbed and developed without affecting the quality of education or care. Pupils report that staff are kind to them and parents have understandable confidence in the care provided for their children. The school leaves no stone unturned in its efforts to safeguard pupils and ensure that their personal and physical needs are met. The care, guidance and support provided are outstanding and mean, for example, that pupils can participate fully in lessons and activities, as relaxed and comfortable as possible.

This remarkable school is the product of first-rate leadership and management. The headteacher and deputy headteacher demand that all elements of the school are monitored and evaluated rigorously, to identify where improvement is possible.

Information from assessments of pupils' learning and their success in meeting targets is analysed extremely thoroughly. This leads directly to raising standards, because the actions devised to tackle relative weaknesses are invariably successful. For example, achievement in aspects of mathematics has improved significantly. Partnerships with the community are extremely strong. In particular, extraordinarily effective links with other schools mean that every pupil at Oakdale has regular opportunities to work alongside mainstream boys and girls. This programme is mutually beneficial. For example, it allows Oakdale's pupils to observe and copy skills, and teaches others ways of interacting with people with disabilities. The school demonstrates vividly an outstanding capacity for continued improvement.

## Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

### Grade: 1

In the Acorn Nursery, children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities spend part of their time within specialist provision matched to their particular needs, for example the needs arising from autistic spectrum disorder. For the remainder of the day, they work and play with mainstream children. This is an extremely successful combination, promoting outstanding learning and personal development. Transition to Reception is managed sensitively. Children settle rapidly into the Oakdale classes that best meet their needs and they continue to achieve exceptionally well. The Foundation Stage curriculum is adapted very carefully and has plenty of opportunities for learning through play and exploration. However, the outdoor accommodation does not provide sufficient stimulation for Nursery or Reception children.

### What the school should do to improve further

- Develop the school grounds so they provide more stimulating opportunities for outdoor learning and personal development.

## Achievement and standards

### Grade: 1

The school sets pupils very challenging targets in English, mathematics and personal, social and health education (PSHE). The Year 6 pupils who left in summer 2007 all met their end of Key Stage 2 targets. The levels pupils reach vary considerably according to their particular learning difficulties and/or disabilities, but their progress and achievement are equally outstanding. In Nursery and throughout the school, pupils show particularly good improvement in communication and PSHE. Learning in these areas is reinforced constantly during lessons and daily routines such as lunchtime. Pupils also tend to reach higher levels in numeracy. Progress in writing and the element of mathematics dealing with shape, space and measures has recently improved significantly following whole-school initiatives. Teaching and the curriculum take full account of the needs of the small number of girls, so they achieve equally as well as boys. Pupils from minority ethnic groups make progress at the same rates as White British pupils with similar learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

## Personal development and well-being

### Grade: 1

Pupils like lots of things about the school but mention snack time, visits and stories as particular favourites. They enjoy the company of friends, which include the staff and pupils from mainstream schools. Pupils are very aware of the components of healthy lifestyles and recently won a prestigious national competition to design and cook a healthy menu. Physical activities such as football and rebound therapy (using a trampoline) are extremely popular with all groups. Participation often involves huge efforts and determination, particularly on the part of pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties. Pupils contribute as much as possible to school life. They help to clear away after lunch, readily take on jobs such as 'meeting and greeting', and the school council is starting to make a difference, for example, to playground resources. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Pupils contribute to the wider community through fund-raising and by helping to raise awareness of people with disabilities. In every respect, pupils are extremely well equipped to meet the challenges of the next stage in their education.

## Quality of provision

### Teaching and learning

#### Grade: 1

Teachers are fully aware of each pupil's targets, right from the start of the school year. This is because systems to assess pupils' learning and identify the next step forward are extremely effective. Teachers carefully plan activities to promote progress in enjoyable ways, employing approaches to suit particular learning styles. For example, lessons for those with profound and multiple learning difficulties feature varied resources that stimulate all the senses and contrast noise and bustle with quiet times for pupils to process information and respond. Higher attaining pupils with severe learning difficulties are encouraged to move on more quickly. For example, in one lesson pupils graduated from using picture clues to help identify words to listening hard to the initial letter sounds. Staff teamwork is exceptional. Indications that a pupil is uncomfortable or losing concentration are picked up rapidly and instant action is taken, so lessons are uninterrupted. Signing is a notable skill among staff, who promote communication at every opportunity.

### Curriculum and other activities

#### Grade: 1

Classes are organised very effectively with the curriculum tailored carefully to meet the needs of those with severe or profound and multiple learning difficulties or autistic spectrum disorders. Throughout, there is a clear and highly relevant focus on communication and PSHE. Special weeks devoted to subjects such as science enable topics to be explored in detail and for sustained periods. The physical education curriculum is extremely wide ranging, enhanced significantly by therapists, specialist teaching and the use of community facilities for activities such as donkey riding. Enrichment activities are exciting and varied and enhance learning and personal development exceptionally well. For example, pupils are regularly out and about in the locality and further afield, including for residential visits. After-school clubs are changed regularly to provide something for everyone, including mainstream friends. The school is beginning to develop the outside environment. The playgrounds do not provide enough inspiration for learning and enjoyment.

### Care, guidance and support

#### Grade: 1

The arrangements to ensure pupils' safety are comprehensive and meticulous. For instance, staff training in child protection issues is thorough and frequent. Excellent relationships with therapists support the school's work. Staff are highly skilled in moving pupils, for instance from wheelchairs to standing frames. They treat pupils with the utmost respect. Emergency health problems are handled calmly, sensitively and knowledgeably. Pupils are accustomed to making choices and expressing their opinions, contributing to their personal safety. Pupils' individual targets are precise and subject to regular review. Successful strategies are shared with parents and other staff so approaches are consistent.

## Leadership and management

### Grade: 1

The headteacher and deputy headteacher have extremely high expectations and these are communicated successfully to all staff. All concerned with the school share a determination that all pupils will achieve their potential. Senior staff provide excellent examples to others, for instance in the quality of their teaching. Always seeking ways to improve, leaders' evaluation of the school is sometimes too cautious. For example, they judged its overall effectiveness to be good rather than outstanding. A very full programme of activities to monitor each aspect of the school provides a very accurate picture of strengths and areas where minor improvement is possible. Subject leaders and others with leadership roles contribute fully to plans for moving the school forward. The arrangements for leadership and management of the Nursery are very well organised and effective. Governors often find out about the school at first hand and they fulfil their responsibilities well. Parents have the utmost confidence in the school and are full of praise for its impact on their children.

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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?	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

### Achievement and standards

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

### Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1

### The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

<sup>1</sup> 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**

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1
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**

Inspection of Oakdale School and Acorn Nursery, Dukinfield, SK16 5LD

Thank you for being so helpful when I visited your school. I really enjoyed my short time with you. I know you find reading hard so your teachers will tell you about this letter.

I think your school is brilliant. I know you agree because some of you told me so. I could see that you are very happy and have lots of fun. I was surprised to hear that you ride donkeys! You behave very well indeed and always try your best. Well done!

You learn a lot because you have such good teachers. You told me that they are kind to you and I saw how well they look after you. I was very pleased that you have so many friends in other schools. This makes your school very special.

Your headteacher and the teachers are always finding ways to make the school better. I have asked them to make the playgrounds more exciting.

I want to send each one of you my very best wishes.