

# Bessels Leigh School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	123341
<b>Local Authority</b>	Oxfordshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	327883
<b>Inspection date</b>	4 February 2009
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Charalambos Loizou

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

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**Boarding provision**  
**Social care URN**  
**Social care inspector**

The inspection of social care was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000.

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<b>Type of school</b>	Special
<b>School category</b>	Non-maintained special
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Boys
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School (total)	11
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mr Paul Easterbrook
<b>Principal</b>	Mrs Sarah Scanlon (acting)
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	11 May 2006
<b>School address</b>	Bessels Leigh Abingdon OX13 5QB
<b>Telephone number</b>	01865 390436
<b>Fax number</b>	01865 390688

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<b>Age group</b>	11–16
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## Introduction

The inspection of the school was carried out by an Additional Inspector and the boarding provision was inspected by a Social Care Inspector.

## Description of the school

Bessels Leigh is a special school for 11-16-year-old boys who have severe emotional, behavioural and social difficulties. Students are admitted at any time during Key Stages 3 or 4 from mainstream schools in various local authorities. All the boys are admitted because they are not able to attend mainstream education for a number of reasons, and this is usually due to permanent exclusion from other schools. All the students have statements of their special educational needs. The school provides for boarders as well as day students. The inspection of both provisions was integrated. Boarding provision is referred to in this document, although it is reported fully separately. In the last year, there has been a marked reduction in the number of students on roll, and a high turnover of senior staff and full-time care and education staff, as well as governors. All senior staff are in temporary posts, including the principal, head of education and head of care. There has been an acting principal in post since the start of the school year in September and the current acting principal and head of education started in January 2009. The school is being reorganised as a result of a national charitable trust taking over the governance and management of the school and its boarding provision. The reorganisation is due for completion by the end of March 2009.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 3

Bessels Leigh provides a satisfactory education for its students. Despite the recent disruption to leadership, the school has made satisfactory progress since its last inspection, addressing all the issues identified for improvement. The staff work well as a dedicated team and ensure that students of all abilities make satisfactory progress in both their academic and personal development. The last year has been challenging, but the strong resolve of successive acting principals and the efforts of the whole staff team have managed to deal with most of the difficulties facing the school. There is satisfactory capacity for further improvement, and there are clear signs that both the governors and leadership teams involved in the care and education of day and boarding students are prepared for reorganisation. Effective transitional arrangements, building up to the school's reorganisation, have restored confidence in students, parents and staff, with clear signs of improvement and a rise in student numbers. The school is determined to continue increasing student numbers, although assessments of new arrivals are not robust enough. As a consequence, their integration sometimes disrupts the education of others already in the school.

All the parents responding to the inspection questionnaire were pleased with the school. One parent wrote that, 'After many problems in mainstream schools, my son has settled down and is progressing very well. I feel the school and staff have made this possible.' The students have good opportunities to reflect on their experiences, and in a recent questionnaire one wrote, 'This is a great school,' reflecting how much the students appreciate the efforts of the staff team. Many students see their experience as offering them, as one stated, 'a second chance' at success.

Despite low standards in English and mathematics by the end of Key Stages 3 and 4, students make satisfactory rates of progress in relation to what are typically low starting points. Teaching, learning and the curriculum are satisfactory. There is enough good teaching to ensure that activities have a positive effect on students' satisfactory academic and personal development. The staff are good at listening to the students with the patience and understanding necessary in order to keep lessons as productive as possible. This was seen to good effect during a Year 11 English lesson, which was successful in improving the students' understanding of persuasive texts. There are, however, missed opportunities for students to apply their reading, writing and mathematics skills to independent research or problem solving. Teachers are very good at improving students' self-confidence, although sometimes at the expense of allowing enough time for students to explore for themselves, and this slows their progress. The use of part-time specialist staff, for example in music and technology, helps to enhance learning and provides broader experiences for students, such as playing musical instruments or composing using synthesiser technology. Information and communication technology (ICT) is used to enhance students' learning, for example in editing and producing independent writing, or in the use of spreadsheets in mathematics. However, limited access to ICT resources results in patchy provision that does not maximise learning opportunities. A good start has been made recently in increasing resources, but there are still insufficient sustained opportunities for students to use and develop their ICT skills.

Students have a good understanding of healthy living through stimulating topics in subjects such as food technology, as well as the opportunities for them to participate in outdoor learning and adventurous activities in physical education. The lack of a subject specialist in science resulted in disruption to provision and weaker standards. A science teacher has recently been

appointed but there are still shortcomings in the science curriculum, particularly in Key Stage 4. The curriculum provides a balanced programme of personal, social and health education. There are satisfactory opportunities for students to study workplace skills when attending a local college. Outdoor learning is given a high priority, with activities such as raft-building and challenging team building tasks that add variety to students' experiences. The school prepares the students adequately for the next stage of their lives or, in some cases, for work and college. However, weaknesses in literacy and mathematical skills hamper their progress towards national accredited qualifications. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory. Visits to the local community, including a visit to an Islamic centre in Oxford, help to broaden their understanding of cultures, faiths and customs. The staff ensure that students are safe and secure at all times. During the inspection, an electrical fire alert led to a 'real' fire drill for the first time. This was carried out efficiently and calmly, demonstrating how well the staff are equipped, trained and prepared, and always place the students' safety and welfare at the heart of the school's aims and purposes. Fire officers attending the scene commented on the staff's excellent response and actions.

Students are encouraged to take responsibility, and staff continually seek their views. This is evident in the good systems in place for students to assess their own learning. The school council is active in working with the leadership team to improve things. They organise charitable fund raising and choose worthy causes. The school promotes community cohesion satisfactorily. Students are involved in the local community through visits and the use of visitors. There are increasing opportunities for students to experience life skills that prepare them for the world of work. This is currently a priority in the school's improvement plan as the staff are developing more links with local organisations, colleges and schools.

The leadership and management of the school are satisfactory. Transitional arrangements are effective in ensuring that changes during reorganisation minimise disruption to students' education, welfare and care. Governors support the school's direction and fulfil their statutory duties. They acted decisively when dealing with the temporary changes to the management of both the school and its boarding provision. An appropriately funded and well-devised recovery and improvement plan has helped to guide the work of staff and leaders. The staff use self-evaluation satisfactorily to identify core priorities for improvement during this difficult period of transition. Changes to the leadership of the school in the last year have led to some inaccurate and sometimes ambitious assessments of the school's effectiveness and outcomes. However, the acting principal and her management team have reassessed the school's work accurately. Together with the transitional manager, who was appointed by the trustees and who was the former acting principal, the leadership team have ensured that priorities for improvement are back on course following the unavoidable delays caused by senior staff leaving. All staff and governors have a clear, well-articulated vision for the school, and the acting head of the residential provision is also playing an important part in supporting the work of other managers.

## **Effectiveness of boarding provision**

### **Grade: 3**

The boarding provision was judged to be satisfactory, and most of the key national minimum standards were met. A report on this provision is available on application to Ofsted.

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

- Increase opportunities for students to apply their reading, writing and mathematics skills to independent research, investigation and problem-solving tasks.
- Raise achievement and standards in science, particularly in Key Stage 4, and in information and communication technology in all year groups.
- Secure permanent management responsibilities to ensure continuity in the strategic leadership of the school.
- Revise admission arrangements to include robust assessments of students who join, in order to minimise any disruption to the learning and development of other students.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

## **Achievement and standards**

### **Grade: 3**

Although standards are low by the end of Key Stages 3 and 4, all students make satisfactory progress in relation to their starting points. The attainment on entry of students varies considerably, because all have experienced disruption to their mainstream education. Students usually join the school with basic reading, writing and mathematics skills that are well below those expected for their age. Records show that the students make satisfactory rates of progress in English and mathematics, but do not learn to apply these skills sufficiently in other subjects. The staff tailor work carefully to match the needs of all students, whatever their abilities. However, the lack of specialist teaching in science, particularly in Years 10 and 11, and the inconsistent deployment of ICT resources, mean that students are not always doing as well as they should in both science and ICT. Students make satisfactory progress in some elements of ICT, for example, when combining music and technology, which helps them to improve skills such as retrieving electronic files and mixing different sounds using synthesiser technology.

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

### **Grade: 3**

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory. Many enter the school distressed or disaffected because of their previous experiences. However, they increasingly become sociable and motivated, and develop satisfactory attitudes to learning. Both the residential and day boys benefit from daily tutor group meetings with their key workers where they can relax and feel less pressured when given time to talk through their anxieties. Students appreciate that they must abide by school rules and work towards compliance with society's moral code. For some, this is a challenging but also rewarding experience, so that incidents of bullying or racism are rare. Behaviour is satisfactory. Challenging behaviour that interferes with learning diminishes because students often come round after becoming too anxious. This anxiety is sometimes a factor when new arrivals join the school, but the staff are always on hand to deal with conflict, and students increasingly learn to resolve issues themselves. The school council helps students to develop confidence when volunteering to support others or when working in the community. Attendance and students' enjoyment of school are satisfactory. They feel safe and secure because the staff provide a complete contrast to their mainstream experiences. One student said that he always looked forward to coming back to school the next day. Students enjoy cultural celebrations, art and music. They have a good understanding of

how to choose healthy options during food technology, and this is reflected in the school attaining the national Healthy School award. They also thrive on the opportunities to keep fit when participating in a range of indoor and outdoor sports.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

#### **Grade: 3**

There is a consistent and calm approach to supporting students' behaviour and communication skills. This helps to foster a positive climate for learning in lessons. Staff know each individual very well, and work is closely matched to students' needs and abilities. In the core subjects of English and mathematics, assessment is used well to devise and tailor appropriate tasks for each individual. This is less secure in science because the school does not have the necessary teaching expertise. Challenging targets are set out in the students' individual education plans, and they understand these. The students assess their own learning and understand their targets, because there are opportunities for them to reflect and discuss their learning with adults. Lessons sometimes miss opportunities to extend students' thinking by requiring them to work independently. In addition, students are not always required to extend their reading, writing or mathematics skills, which limits their progress. Adults work well together, and teaching assistants are skilled in supporting learning and behaviour.

### **Curriculum and other activities**

#### **Grade: 3**

The quality of the curriculum varies across subjects and depends on the range of staff expertise and resources. Core subjects such as English and mathematics include good arrangements to group students by ability. This helps them to work towards accredited qualifications at different levels. Increasingly, subjects are incorporated into special projects or topics, for example, when using geography, history and physical education skills during outdoor visits and activities. There is a good range of creative subjects that include art, design and technology, music and drama. Some subjects are also linked to elements of ICT so that the students broaden their experience across subjects. The lack of specialist science teaching has hampered the school's work in helping students to acquire national qualifications at Key Stage 4. The use of ICT in music suits students' needs very much and is successful in improving their interest in learning. New ICT resources are aimed at improving provision further but, up to now, the development of ICT skills has been inconsistent due to the lack of suitable resources. Curriculum development has been ongoing since the last inspection, but has been hampered by the disruption to staffing. The curriculum for the 11-14-year-olds is broad and balanced, and provides good opportunities for students to link skills acquired from different subjects. The curriculum for 14-16-year-olds includes further aspects such as work-related learning, where good use is made of a nearby college and local businesses.

### **Care, guidance and support**

#### **Grade: 3**

There are good pastoral arrangements in place for the care of students. The staff are effective in dealing with students who are vulnerable and who have lost confidence in themselves. They are particularly skilled at addressing the emotional, behavioural and communication difficulties that affect students' learning. The school works effectively to keep students safe and healthy.

Well-devised individual education plans are written, so that it is clear to the students what steps they need to take to reach their learning and behavioural targets. These plans are monitored closely, although the period between review dates is sometimes too long. This makes it difficult to intervene if students are falling short of their targets. In addition, if students manage to achieve a particular objective, as set out in their individual plan, the lack of regular review misses opportunities to extend students' learning further. The staff provide students with regular opportunities to assess their own work. There are effective practices in place to safeguard the health and welfare of the students. Senior leaders have already rectified some minor shortcomings in the way enhanced checks on staff are filed in line with statutory guidance. Partnerships with parents and carers are satisfactory. Partnerships with other schools and organisations are satisfactory, although, in a short time since being appointed, the acting principal has already improved these further by expanding links with the local and wider communities, and their associated services, organisations and businesses.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 3**

The loss of senior managers affected the pace of change and improvement, as well as staff morale. This hampered the school's work and led to a loss of confidence from some local authorities in referring students to the school, which accounts for the fall in student numbers. However, management appointments since September 2008 have been successful in reversing the fortunes of the school. The governors and trustees have acted decisively to reorganise the school from the end of March this year. Transitional leadership has been carefully planned so that the handover of acting principals was carried out smoothly at the end of last term. The transitional manager (the previous acting principal) appointed the acting head of care, and the current principal has strengthened leadership further by appointing the acting head of education. This has brought stability to the school and to its boarding provision, and has raised staff morale. The number of students on roll is rising, and includes boarders and day students; governors are actively seeking to sustain this by promoting the school's work to a range of local authorities. The recovery improvement plan sets out clear and systematic priorities to minimise further disruption and, at the same time, ensure that students receive sound education and welfare. Priorities for improvement are realistic and cost effective, and are aimed at securing permanent leadership and management responsibilities. The delays in making permanent appointments are beyond the control of the governors and trustees, and depend on the resolution of current proceedings related to senior staff that have left. Despite this, the acting principal, governors and senior staff are now moving the school forward again, and demonstrate that the capacity for further improvement is satisfactory.



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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?	3
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?	3
The effectiveness of boarding provision	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

### Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	3

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<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.

## Personal development and well-being

<b>How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	3
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	3
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3

## The quality of provision

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

## Leadership and management

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	3
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	3
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
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

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

13 February 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Bessels Leigh School, Abingdon, OX13 5QB

Thank you very much for welcoming me into school last week. I came to your school to see how it was working and how you were all doing. I also worked closely with another inspector who spent two days looking at the provision made for boarding students. Bessels Leigh is a satisfactory school, and I was pleased to see that parents are also happy with your school and what it provides. The other inspector found that boarding provision is satisfactory.

It was an exciting day, especially when we all had to evacuate the building because of an electrical fault. You all behaved really well during the evacuation, and the boarding inspector and I were very pleased that the staff carried this out efficiently and safely. I know, like you, that the school has experienced some recent difficulties and, as a result, some key staff have left and the number of students on roll has dropped. However, your acting principal and her staff have recovered the situation well, and are working very hard to ensure that you continue to have a sound education and that you are well cared for. I was impressed with the way you work with each other, and with the relationships you have with the staff team. Keep this up, because it is really helping the school to improve and recover to the strong position that it was in the last time a school inspection took place in 2006.

I have asked the governors, leaders and managers to improve four things:

- to provide you with more opportunities to use your reading, writing and mathematics skills independently
- to improve and develop science teaching and the ICT curriculum
- to secure permanent managers and leaders, including the position of principal, so that the school has long-term stability and can carry on improving for your benefit
- to improve the checks made on students who are being admitted to the school, so that you all can do as well as you can without any disruption to your learning.

Well done to you and your teachers for keeping things going - please keep this up to continue moving forward.

Yours faithfully

Charalambos Loizou

Lead Inspector