

Oak Lodge School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	101394
Local Authority	Barnet
Inspection number	307670
Inspection dates	10–11 October 2007
Reporting inspector	Mike Smith

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	163
6th form	34
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr A Flitton
Headteacher	Mrs L Walker
Date of previous school inspection	3 February 2003
School address	Heath View off East End Road East Finchley London N2 0QY
Telephone number	020 8444 6711
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Age group	11-19
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Oak Lodge is a larger than average special school providing for pupils who have statements of special educational needs for a wide range of difficulties. They include, moderate learning difficulties, speech and language difficulties, emotional and social communication difficulties and a large population of pupils with autistic spectrum conditions (ASC). Pupils come from diverse socio-economic backgrounds and currently around a third are eligible for free school meals. Around half of pupils are from a range of ethnic groups, the largest being from Black African or Asian family backgrounds. A small number of pupils are at an early stage of learning English and there are nearly three times as many boys as girls. The school offers support and advice to mainstream schools, particularly in the area of pupils with ASC. The school has held the Investor in People award for a number of years and since September 2007 has been designated a Specialist Special Education Needs School in Cognition and Learning.

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 with some outstanding features where leadership and management put pupils' well-being and achievement at the heart of all decisions. The experienced headteacher has a clear strategic vision for improvement, which is widely shared and supported by all staff. She is very effectively supported by a committed and well-organised deputy, and a clearly focused and motivated leadership team. With a dedicated staff and well-informed governors, they continue to improve the provision and learning opportunities for all pupils. A parent, reflecting the views of many, wrote, 'The school is well managed, safe, caring and happy. All staff deserve praise for their total dedication to the pupils'. There are excellent partnerships with external support agencies, schools, colleges and the community, that ensure pupils' needs and well-being are very well met. There are very effective processes for consultation and self-evaluation, and monitoring and review includes the whole school community. Development planning shows the school has a clear understanding of what needs to improve, and how to go about achieving success.

Pupils' standards vary widely, but overall are well below average. Given their starting points, and the nature of their learning difficulties, the achievement and progress of the great majority of pupils is good and occasionally it is excellent. Parents confirm that this success helps to develop their children's confidence and social development. Pupils are guided towards independent learning, making choices and working towards their individual challenging targets, which most successfully achieve. Pupils' outstanding personal development is due to their excellent attitudes to learning, their excellent relationships, outstanding care, support and guidance and the good teaching and excellent support they receive for their individual needs. Through its own thorough monitoring, the school is aware of where the very best practice is to be found and understands the need to share this practice more widely to ensure that the high standards of provision and pupil achievement are maintained. Pupils' progress is carefully monitored, recorded and analysed to help identify where additional support is needed to improve pupil achievement. The school knows that all teachers do not yet consistently use the information on pupils' progress enough in their planning and teaching. There is no significant difference in the achievement of different groups of pupils, including those whose first language is not English.

The curriculum is satisfactory and is well supported by a wide range of additional and interesting activities that motivate pupils to do their best. The school knows it can improve the relevancy and challenge within the curriculum in view of the increasing complexity of pupils' medical and learning needs. However, the curriculum does effectively support pupils' outstanding personal development and visits into the community, work in mainstream schools and visiting specialists effectively support their learning. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding as is their contribution to the community. Pupils show consideration and support for each other and their behaviour is generally very good. Parents consistently praise the school. One wrote, 'Good pastoral care and teaching has enabled my daughter to make good progress academically and in her personal development'. The school has made good progress since the last inspection through thorough development planning and subsequent action. The inspectors agree with a number of parents of children with ASC who are still concerned over the suitability and size of some of the classrooms for their children. Governors are well informed and take an active part in monitoring, self-evaluation and in the strategic management of the school. Leadership and management make a positive difference to the quality of provision, which is

enabling pupils to achieve and make continued good progress. The capacity to continually improve is good and the school's Specialist Status is proving of benefit to the pupils through the increased community partnership.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

Pupils make good progress and achieve well. The curriculum is currently satisfactory, but is developing well to ensure the relevancy and challenge of the changing needs of the pupils. Appropriately accredited courses are now being followed and there are carefully planned work-related programmes and excellent links with other schools and colleges. Teaching is good and pupils greatly enjoy their lessons. Outstanding progress is made in their personal development and they gain confidence and self-esteem through their successes. They are encouraged and guided to make the best choices for their future learning or vocational opportunities. Effective guidance, planning and support enables all pupils to make a smooth transition to further education.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure the very best practice in teaching and learning is effectively shared across the school and that data on pupils' progress is consistently used by teachers to plan and teach their lessons.
- Ensure the curriculum is developed and adapted to more effectively meet the increasingly complex needs of all pupils.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Standards are well below average due to the nature and complexity of pupils' learning difficulties. Despite these difficulties, their progress and achievement are good and sometimes outstanding in relation to their different starting points and challenging individual targets. The more able pupils can follow GCSE courses, which can lead to full or Entry Level awards. Pupils' needs are individually assessed and supported and this helps to ensure that no group or individual fares less well than any other. Information on progress could be used more consistently in the planning and teaching of lessons. Pupils' academic and social achievements are celebrated within the school and parents are sent a congratulatory post card, which provides a tangible reminder of the progress their child is making. The outstanding progress in pupils' personal development is something parents particularly appreciate. As pupils get older and improve these skills, they become more confident, independent and self-aware. School leavers from Years 11 and 13 successfully obtain college placements having gained skills that will help them in their transition into adulthood.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Pupils' personal development and well-being, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are outstanding. Pupils' behaviour is good and has greatly improved since new measures and support more effectively consider their individual needs. Pupils grow in confidence

and self esteem and they understand about keeping healthy, staying safe and the importance of taking regular exercise. They thoroughly enjoy their learning, which is reflected by very good attendance and their enthusiasm and involvement in various school activities, including sporting and musical events. Pupils' relationships with each other and staff are outstanding and enable them to discuss any concerns they may have. Parents say how well their children are developing. One wrote, 'My son has only been at the school for four weeks, but I am delighted with the progress he has made'. Another wrote, 'Our daughter has never been so happy; it's a dream come true'. Pupils make an outstanding contribution to their community through a variety of fund-raising events, enterprise projects, through the work of the school council, and by helping and supporting each other.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Teaching and learning are good overall, with some examples of outstanding practice where the wide and varied learning needs of the pupils are effectively met. This results in pupils making consistently good or better progress in lessons. Thorough monitoring enables the school to have an accurate view of the quality of teaching and learning, although the best practice is not yet shared sufficiently across the school, particularly in the area of pupil assessment and planning. The excellent relationships between staff and pupils ensures there is a very positive learning environment, where pupils gain confidence and are able to do their best. A parent said, 'In the very short time my son has been at school he has been helped to read and write when previously he was only given pencils to draw with'. Ongoing feedback and support in lessons by teachers and very effective teaching assistants makes it very clear to pupils how they might improve. Excellent teamwork and good use of resources ensures all pupils get the best out of their learning opportunities.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Due to the increasing complexity of pupils' learning and physical needs, and the large numbers of pupils with ASC, the school knows it has to develop and increase the relevancy and challenge of curriculum opportunities. The curriculum is currently satisfactory, but is well interpreted by teachers in offering a wide range of subjects to enthuse and interest pupils' learning in, academic, vocational and work-related activities. Personal, social, health and citizenship education plays an important part in supporting pupils' understanding of themselves, healthy living, and of the world around them. Support for pupils' personal development pervades all aspects of school life and enables them to increasingly take responsibility and improve their social skills in order to help prepare them for life after school. There are good opportunities for physical activities, including swimming, and for some pupils, taking part in lessons in mainstream schools. These include visits to the local arts centre, flights in aeroplanes and competing in the London Youth games. There is a wide range of out-of school activities some pupils refer to as 'amazing'.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The care, guidance and support of pupils are outstanding. Clearly understood practices and procedures ensure pupils are safe and secure to make the best of their learning opportunities and make outstanding personal development. There is excellent teamwork between teachers, teaching assistants, pastoral care manager and head of physical care. Together with the very effective partnership with external support agencies, the team ensures that there are consistent approaches and effective support for pupils in all departments. Pupils and parents know all staff have their best interests at heart. One parent, reflecting the views of many, wrote, 'There are fantastic parent/school links and I am included and involved in all decision making. My daughter is very happy in school and is making great progress'. Pupils' progress and personal development is monitored and recorded very effectively and they are clear what to do to improve. College placements are very carefully planned ensuring pupils are confident and well prepared for a smooth transition.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher gives excellent strategic guidance and encouragement to all staff who very effectively promote high quality care and education. High expectations are made of staff. Roles and responsibilities are clear, their work is valued and morale is high. The impact of everyone's work is clearly seen in the outstanding care, guidance and support for pupils, which in turn leads to their excellent personal development and good academic progress. The school's Foundation Trust, 'Hearts of Oak' involving governors and parents works effectively raising funds to improve school provision and the learning opportunities for all pupils. The school knows it needs to develop and improve the relevancy of learning experiences to meet the increasing complexity of pupils' academic and personal needs. Effective self-evaluation and consultation processes enable areas for improvement and strategies for action to be clearly identified. Relevant training and professional development is clearly based upon school improvement and the changing needs of the pupils. Teaching assistants have a range of responsibilities and very effectively contribute to pupils' achievement and well-being. A parent summed up the feelings of many when she said, 'The staff really do care about the pupils'. The support given to other schools and pupils is very highly regarded by the local authority and the schools themselves.

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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	16-19
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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	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

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

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	1

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	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	1
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	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

18 October 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Oak Lodge School, London, N2 0QY

Thank you for making our visit to your school such a happy one and a special thank you to the school council who met with us and spoke about the school and their experiences. We agree with you and your parents/carers; your school is a good school that effectively supports your individual needs, enabling you to make the best progress you can with your work and personal development. You know it is important to help each other get on and you must keep an eye on your targets so you know what you must do to make progress and be successful.

We particularly liked that:

- all staff care about your progress; they listen and treat you with respect
- relationships are excellent and you really enjoy your learning
- you know how to be safe and healthy and you feel secure while at school
- your spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent
- you get outstanding support and guidance and good teaching which helps to prepare you very well for when you leave the school
- the school puts your care and personal needs first and you are encouraged to achieve as well as you can
- the school works extremely well in partnership with the others to ensure your individual needs are well met
- the help the school gives to other schools is very well thought of
- the school knows how to make the school even better
- the school governors know you and the school very well.

The school knows it can improve even further by:

- ensuring the curriculum continually meets the individual needs of all pupils
- ensuring the very best teaching and learning in the school is shared more effectively to help you keep making the best progress you can.

Thank you once again for being so polite and welcoming and we wish you all every future success.

Best wishes

Mike Smith

Lead Inspector