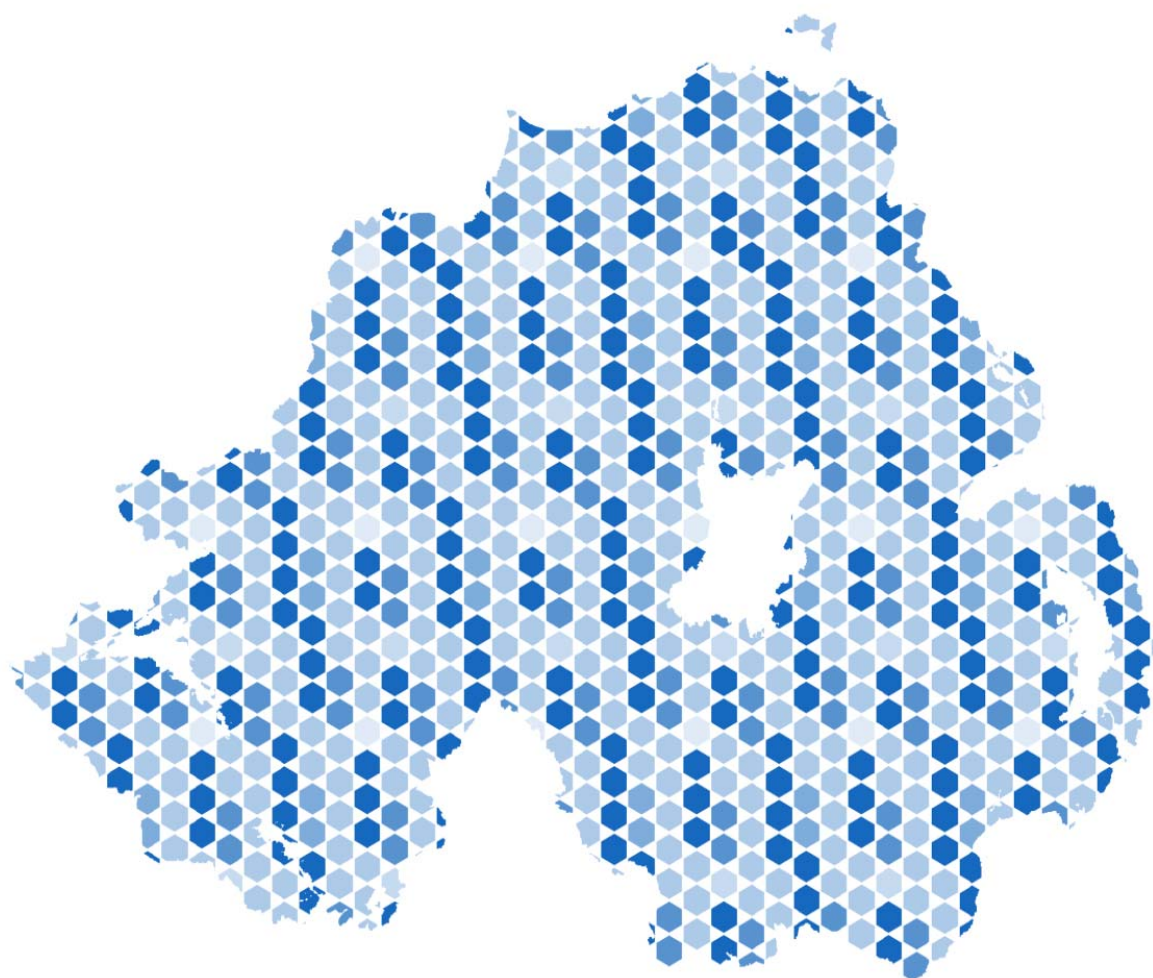


# SPECIAL INSPECTION



Education and Training  
Inspectorate

Oakwood School and  
Assessment Centre, Belfast

Report of an Inspection  
in April 2010

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In this report, proportions may be described as percentages, common fractions and in more general quantitative terms. Where more general terms are used, they should be interpreted as follows:

Almost/nearly all	-	more than 90%
Most	-	75%-90%
A majority	-	50%-74%
A significant minority	-	30%-49%
A minority	-	10%-29%
Very few/a small number	-	less than 10%

In assessing the various features of the provision, the Inspectorate relate their evaluations to six descriptors as set out below:

DESCRIPTOR
Outstanding
Very Good
Good
Satisfactory
Inadequate
Unsatisfactory

## STATISTICAL INFORMATION (SPECIAL SCHOOLS)

1.1 i. **School: Oakwood School & Assessment Centre, Belfast**      iii. **Date of Inspection: W/B 12/04/2010**

ii. **School Reference Number: 131-6582**      iv. **Nature of Inspection: Focused**

1.2

<b>School Year</b>	<b>2005/06</b>	<b>2006/07</b>	<b>2007/08</b>	<b>2008/09</b>	<b>2009/10</b>
Total Enrolment	97	86	92	94	96

The enrolment for the current year is the figure on the day of notification of inspection. For previous years it is the figure in the annual return to the Department of Education.

1.3 Number of Pupils in Outreach Programme: 750

1.4 Average Attendance for the Previous School Year: 88.6%

1.5 i. Number of Teachers in School: 17      on Outreach Programme: 8  
(including the Principal and p/t teachers)  
(f/t equivalent = 25 teaching hours)

ii. PTR (pupil/teacher ratio): 6

iii. Average Class Size: 9

iv. Number of Classroom Assistants: 14      General Assistants: 29

v. Ancillary Support:  
Number of Hours per week:

Clerical Support: 100

vi. Percentage of children in receipt of free school meals: 50%

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

1.1 Oakwood School is situated off Harberton Park in Belfast and provides education for 94 pupils with severe learning difficulties from nursery to year 4.

1.2 The arrangements for the inspection included the opportunity for the parents, the teaching and support staff to complete confidential questionnaires prior to the inspection, as well as a meeting with representatives from the Board of Governors (governors). Ninety four questionnaires were issued to parents; approximately 32% were returned to Inspection Services Branch of which 14 contained additional written comments. Nearly all of the responses indicated a high level of satisfaction with the school. In particular, the parents highlighted the caring and approachable staff and their skill in supporting the needs of the pupils. There were some concerns raised by a minority of parents suggesting that communication between the school and the parents could be improved. The responses from the teachers and support staff reported that the pastoral and educational needs of the pupils are met effectively and that they enjoy working with the pupils. A minority of the teachers and support staff who responded expressed concern about aspects of school leadership and management. The governors expressed their appreciation of the life and work of the school and of the hard work and dedication of the staff. They also indicated their commitment and support for the future development of the school.

1.3 The responses of the parents, the teachers, and the support staff have been shared with the Principal and the governors. The Reporting Inspector discussed with the Principal those issues which require action and which the inspection highlights as areas for improvement.

1.4 The focus of the inspection was on the standards achieved by the pupils, the quality of the provision for learning, the leadership and management of the school and the arrangements for child protection and pastoral care.<sup>1</sup>

## **2. ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS**

2.1 In this report, standards of achievement are judged in relation to the pupils' previous attainments, their individual abilities and their special educational needs.

2.2 Overall, the pupils of all abilities in the school make good progress and achieve well as a result of the good quality structured teaching and informed therapy support. The pupils have a good start in the school as play-based learning is well focused and encourages almost all of the pupils to develop their interest in learning. The vast majority of the pupils interact and respond well to one another in all lessons and throughout the school. All of the pupils are achieving and progressing in line with the appropriate targets set within their Individual Education Plans. On leaving school, the pupils have achieved a range of appropriate skills, particularly in communication, and in personal and social and physical development. They are making good progress commensurate with their abilities, developing confidence in numeracy and are beginning to read. A significant minority of the pupils read with fluency and a small number make significant progress in reading within the five years at the school. Simple handwriting skills remain a difficulty for almost all of the pupils, while talking and listening skills are developed effectively.

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<sup>1</sup> the outreach provision was not part of the inspection

2.3 The pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties (PMLD) experience considerable benefit from the daily routine curriculum activities; they demonstrate regularly a breadth of different responses over the school day, including smiling to communicate their enjoyment, turning toward agreeable sounds, relaxing to gentle massage, listening quietly to songs and vocalising to the familiar voices of their teacher and assistants. All of the pupils have settled well into the education programme and show progress in each aspect of the curriculum; their 'communication passports' detail accurately the capacity the pupils have to participate in the activities and enjoy their school day. Collaborative working with the therapy staff is excellent.

2.4 The school gives excellent attention to promoting health and well-being, including opportunities for healthy eating and physical activity.

2.5 The inspection findings indicate the following strengths in achievements and standards:

- the good progress in their learning made by the majority of the pupils;
- the appropriate and realistic targets achieved by the pupils;
- the progress made by the pupils in personal, social and health education;
- the progress made by a significant minority of pupils in their reading;
- the good progress made by the pupils through the physical education programme; and
- the excellent behaviour of the pupils throughout the school.

### **3. QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING**

3.1 The majority of the teaching was consistently good, and of outstanding quality in almost 25% of the lessons seen. Throughout the school, the teachers and support staff provide good quality experiences well suited to the individual needs of the pupils. The teachers are hard working, creative and dedicated to developing the pupils' learning, confidence, independence and self-esteem.

3.2 There is a broad, relevant curriculum with good quality individual teacher planning and resourcing. All the staff, including the classroom assistants and support staff, make an effective contribution towards multi-disciplinary teamwork in the school. In addition, the school works closely with the parents of the pre-school pupils to support their education and prepare them for school life.

3.3 The quality of teaching of the pupils (with PMLD) is very good and is particularly reflective of the caring attitude of the teachers and assistants and the thoroughness of their preparation and attention to the unique needs of each pupil. Very good use is made of the assessment for learning data of the Quest programme which enables the teachers to plan a child-centred programme and to track individual learning outcomes with accuracy. The staff work with confidence and competence and have a clear vision of the learning points for each pupil.

3.4 The school reading programme is an effective method of introducing reading to the pupils in a visual and interesting way and ensures they experience success. A significant minority of pupils by year 4 read clearly and fluently and with developing expression. Currently, assessment data is not collated to indicate the success or otherwise of this method; introducing a system to do so would inform the work and identify the overall level of achievement made by the pupils.

3.5 The Principal has allocated additional resources to prioritise specialist teaching in Physical Education; the staff's informal evaluation of the work demonstrates improvements in the pupil's self-esteem, physical ability, well-being and enjoyment of physical exercise. More systematic evaluation of the programme is needed to identify more clearly the strengths of the programme and the areas for further development.

3.6 The rigorous approach to supporting pupils with challenging behaviour is led by an experienced senior teacher who has developed high quality resources based in an attractive and welcoming classroom. The effective teaching techniques are continuously reinforced and are embedded in whole-school practice. The staff report that the pupils benefit greatly from this sustained intervention and as a result, the school has a calm and orderly atmosphere across the classrooms and corridors and as the pupils complete their daily timetable. Specific data relating to the progress the pupils achieve is not collated and the school does not have a system to inform practice and identify the positive impact of its work.

3.7 The quality of provision for pastoral care is outstanding. The staff work effectively to provide a nurturing and inclusive learning environment where all of the pupils are valued and respected. The working relationships between the pupils and the staff are excellent.

### 3.8 CHILD PROTECTION

The school has satisfactory arrangements in place for safeguarding the pupils. These arrangements broadly reflect the guidance issued by the Department of Education (DE) but the following areas need to be addressed:

- consultation with the parents in the review and updating of all policies and procedures, and
- training in child protection for the newly designated governors

### 3.9 HEALTHY EATING AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

The school gives very good attention to promoting healthy eating and physical activity through, for example, the provision for healthy breaks and the priority given to physical activity both indoors and outdoors.

3.10 The inspection findings indicate the following strengths in the quality of provision for learning:

- the high quality of the teaching;
- the very good provision made for pupils with PMLD;
- the effective use of the school-designed reading scheme;
- the effective multi-disciplinary co-operation;

- the comprehensive programme for physical education;
- the well-planned, whole-school behaviour support; and
- the outstanding quality of the pastoral care.

#### **4. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

4.1 The Principal and senior managers are strongly committed to the needs of all of the pupils. The school provides a stimulating learning environment and the staff's skills and expertise are utilised effectively.

4.2 There is a developing commitment to action planning. There are effective policies and programmes in place, to guide whole-school work, such as behaviour management and the teaching of reading.

4.3 There are a few good examples of highly effective role models providing curricular leadership for the school-based reading scheme, the physical movement programme and the behaviour management programme. These initiatives are not supported by effective management procedures, which could promote the work further.

4.4 The quality of the school's leadership in developing a self-evaluation process is a major area for improvement. There is a need to review the strategic leadership and management to ensure that the existing good examples of reflective practice are promoted sufficiently and that data is systematically collated and analysed to identify and monitor the impact of best practice in the school.

4.5 The main strengths of leadership are:

- the commitment of the Principal and the senior team;
- the effective deployment of staff; and
- the strong curricular leadership demonstrated by a few senior staff.

4.6 Areas for improvement include the need for the Principal supported by the senior team to:

- provide more effective overall strategic direction;
- develop a culture of self-evaluation across the school; and
- empower and encourage middle management structures to co-ordinate and develop curricular leadership on a more systematic whole-school basis.

#### **5. OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS**

5.1 Oakwood School and Assessment Centre is a good school, with excellent features which are reflected in the very good quality of the teaching and progress of the pupils. In addition, the school has gained wide recognition for its work in developing learning support for pupils on the autistic spectrum, supporting pupils whose behaviour can be challenging and for the school based literacy programme which encourages the pupil's interest in, and access to, formal reading.



5.2 However, information relating to those aspects of provision which are of a high quality is not strategically collated, analysed or used to inform improvement or celebrate success by the leadership in the school. The lack of development of an effective (middle) management structure, with clearly defined roles and responsibilities, is a deficiency in the current practice. The Principal needs to take a lead in addressing this matter in order to enhance the work of the senior management team, promote greater self-evaluation and enable staff with key responsibilities to demonstrate their leadership and management skills more effectively.

5.3 The overall effectiveness of the school shows strengths in many aspects of the areas inspected. The inspection has identified the following strengths:

- the very good quality of the teaching, which includes the structured support for pupils on the autistic spectrum and those with profound and multiple learning difficulties;
- the effectiveness of the specialist programme to address the pupils' behavioural difficulties;
- the effective and motivating school-designed reading programme;
- the outstanding quality of the pastoral care of the children;
- the well-established physical development programme; and
- the high quality of the home visiting service, the therapy support and the good collaborative working practices within the classes.

5.4 Areas for improvement include the need for the Principal, supported by her senior team, to:

- establish a whole-school self-evaluative process in order to promote continuous improvement and enable curricular leadership at a whole-school level; and
- provide more effective strategic leadership based on the collation and analysis of data to evaluate the impact of whole-school practices and to inform future planning.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

6.1 In the areas inspected, the quality of education provided by the school is good. The school has important strengths in most of its educational and pastoral provision. The inspection has identified areas for improvement which the school has demonstrated the capacity to address. The Education and Training Inspectorate will monitor the school's progress in addressing the areas for improvement.

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