

The Avenue School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	110179
Local Authority	Reading
Inspection number	356692
Inspection dates	10–11 March 2011
Reporting inspector	Sarah Mascall

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	2–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	103
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	2
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Isobel Ballsdon
Headteacher	Sue Bourne
Date of previous school inspection	7 May 2008
School address	Conwy Close Reading RG30 4BZ
Telephone number	01189375554
Fax number	0118 937 5558
Email address	admin.theavenue@reading.gov.uk

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Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester
M2 7LA

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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 17 lessons and observed 16 teachers and specialist staff. Meetings were held with the Chair and vice chair of the Governing Body, staff and pupils. Pupils' work, information on progress, safeguarding policies and other documents were evaluated. Questionnaires from 37 parents and carers, 56 staff and 44 students were scrutinised.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- Whether the targets set for pupils are sufficiently challenging.
- How well the school uses its data on pupil progress to ensure all pupils make the progress they should.
- How effectively staff are involved in monitoring their subjects and areas of responsibility.
- How successful the school has been in meeting its specialist status targets and those within development planning.

Information about the school

The Avenue caters predominantly for pupils with severe and complex learning disabilities. An increasing number of pupils have autistic spectrum disorders and others have additional needs associated with physical disabilities and medical conditions. All have a statement of special educational needs. A very small number of pupils are in the care of the local authority.

There are ten children in the Early Years Foundation Stage and a small number of these are educated in classes other than in the nursery class. Many of the classes are mixed-age range and also cross key stages.

The school has been awarded specialist status for performing arts. It has achieved a number of awards in recognition of its work including Healthy School's award, Artsmark Gold, and International School award.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

1

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

1

Main findings

The Avenue is an excellent school which enables pupils to make considerable gains in their confidence and independence. As a result, they develop into confident young people well prepared for life when they leave school. The school achieves this through an excellent curriculum that is underpinned throughout by the outstanding provision for performing arts. As one member of staff rightly said the performing arts 'is the heartbeat of the school'. This is evident through the high quality accommodation, resources and the very positive ethos that exists throughout the school. Staff expertise and use of specialist staff ensures that pupils make excellent progress in their skills in drama, dance, music, art and personal development. Pupils' enjoyment of the work in all these areas is very evident. Their smiling faces and enthusiasm to join in all that is offered ensures that there is a constant buzz of activity around the school. Pupils' welfare and well-being are central to the work of staff who ensure that pupils are extremely well looked after. Very strong links with parents, carers and other agencies do much to support pupils both in their learning and their personal development. Pupils' behaviour is exemplary and they have an excellent understanding of how to stay healthy and keep safe.

Pupils' achievements are good overall. For the very small number of students in the sixth form, progress is excellent. Children make an exceptional start in the nursery because of very good teaching. As they move through the school, pupils make good progress. They benefit from good and, on occasions, outstanding teaching. Many teachers use targets for learning very well to ensure the work they set supports each pupil's learning. However, very occasionally the individual targets set for pupils are not always challenging enough or used effectively to ensure pupils are making the progress they should. The relationships between staff and pupils are excellent and do much to enhance learning and pupils' outstanding enjoyment of school.

The outstanding leadership of the headteacher, supported by her very committed and enthusiastic senior managers, has enabled the school to continually move forward and improve. They have built extremely well upon the school's previous very good practice to develop provision even further, ensuring any targets for improvement are effectively met. Staff are supported by an effective governing body which has been very proactive in helping the school gain specialist status. Systems for tracking pupils' progress are very effective, giving senior leaders a very good understanding of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. All of these factors contribute to the school's excellent capacity for sustained improvement. Information about pupil progress provided to the governing body does not always enable members to provide sufficient challenge about the progress of the different groups of pupils within the school.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure the setting of targets and their use to challenge and support learning is consistent across the school.
- Ensure that the governing body has a wider range of information on pupils' progress so that it is more able to challenge the school to improve even further.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

1

All pupils, including those with particularly complex needs, make good progress in their learning and achieve well. There is no evidence of any group of pupils achieving less well than their peers. The performing arts curriculum provides excellent opportunities for pupils to develop their skills in many aspects of their learning and as a result, their achievements are excellent in art, dance, drama and music. In an outstanding core-skills session that involved the whole school, pupils chose from a wide range of activities and extended their skills in balance and movement. In discussions they showed a very good understanding about the purpose of all the activities. For example, one pupil explained that the activity he was doing was helping improve his hand and eye co-ordination. In many lessons pupils learn through practical activities. In an excellent science lesson for example, pupils with complex needs learnt about different temperatures, responding well to a range of stimuli to recognise hot and cold objects. They clearly enjoyed the role play that involved music and poetry.

Pupils are very positive about school and enthusiastically describe how they learn about counting in mathematics and writing and studying poetry in literacy. Pupils' excellent awareness of healthy lifestyles and their obvious enjoyment and pride in participating in a range of activities does much to support their personal and social skills. They show considerable care for each other and work very well together. As a result, behaviour in and around the school is excellent and pupils say that they feel safe. Pupils' awareness of different cultures is excellent. They participate in a great many performances which support their understanding of life in different countries. For example, following a week's work based on the Bollywood theme, pupils performed a delightful show in which they displayed their skills in Indian dancing and music. Pupils are very much involved in the local community and benefit from the excellent links the school has established both locally and beyond. Pupils' gains in independence are very evident particularly among those with autistic spectrum disorders. They use symbols with great confidence indicating choices and also what activities they plan to be involved with. Attendance is broadly average. For some pupils it is adversely affected by ill health. Nevertheless pupils' excellent progress in personal and social skills, together with the great confidence they develop and their good achievements, prepares them well for the next stage of learning.

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These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account:	*
Pupils' attainment ¹	
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	1
Pupils' behaviour	1
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	1
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account:	3
Pupils' attendance ¹	
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

* In some special schools inspectors do not make a judgement about attainment in relation to expectations of the pupils' age.

How effective is the provision?

The many strengths in teaching result in many examples of good and outstanding practice. A strong feature is the very good team work evident in all lessons. All staff are clear about their roles and how to support pupils. In many lessons teachers provide an excellent range of activities that support pupils' learning well. This was very evident for example in an outstanding mathematics lesson on symmetry. The range of experiences was excellent and supported by very good resources. Each member of staff worked with one or two pupils showing a clear understanding of their targets for learning and interacting extremely well with each individual. As a result, pupils made excellent progress in their learning. This was very evident at the end of the lesson when pupils could identify lines of symmetry and one pupil used the term 'symmetrical' in his description. There is excellent practice in all classes in noting any achievements made and ensuring that this is recorded in pupils' records. However not all teachers ensure that pupils' targets are sufficiently challenging and are used effectively to enable pupils to make the progress of which they are capable. In a very few lessons all pupils do the same tasks and work is not matched to their wide range of needs. The quality of verbal feedback to pupils is often of very high quality. A teaching assistant for example, explained to a pupil that she would note that he found the topic quite hard but that he had worked very well in the session. In

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the vast majority of cases the marking of work is very detailed and well annotated but the school is reviewing its marking policy to ensure better consistency and closer identification of the progress pupils are making.

The exceptional curriculum benefits from the excellent use of performing arts to support pupils' learning in a wide range of activities. Planning is of a very high quality, providing pupils with many memorable opportunities. Lessons are often lively and practical, making full use of the excellent facilities within the school. All pupils have equality of opportunity in all that goes on and this is reflected in the school's achievement of the Inclusion Quality Mark. The community is used very well and learning supported by an excellent range of off-site experiences. The use of specialists for example, in teaching drama, enhances the curriculum and pupils' opportunities further.

The care, guidance and support of pupils are outstanding. The excellent use of multi-agency professionals ensures that any concerns about pupils are identified and addressed quickly. The high level of training and collaboration between staff ensures that pupils are very well cared for and their intimate care needs addressed in a manner that ensures their dignity. Individual education plans are generally of good quality and in the vast majority of cases used very effectively to support pupils' academic and social progress. The excellent links with parents and carers including support and training for them in meeting their children's needs is much appreciated by parents and carers. This is reflected in their very positive responses to the Ofsted questionnaire.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	1
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

Very effective leadership has been instrumental in driving forward developments and in managing change. A newly structured leadership team is ensuring that this is a school that will continue to improve. Subject managers have developed their roles well and are improving their skills in analysing data about pupils' progress. Senior leaders are clear about what needs to be done to develop the school further. Targets set for improvement including those linked to specialist status in performing arts have been met. Processes for gathering and analysing data have been improved and data is monitored closely. This together with regular meetings concerning pupils' progress ensures that there is no discrimination and pupils' equality of opportunity is assured. The school is developing its systems even further to link more closely with national criteria and raise expectations even higher. Data is now presented in a very accessible format but it does not always provide sufficient detail to enable governors to challenge senior leaders more effectively about the progress of the different groups within the school. The governing body is very well led and

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governors are clearly very committed to the school. They are very vigilant in ensuring pupils' safety and, as a result, safeguarding procedures are excellent. The school places great importance in establishing links both locally and internationally. As a result, community cohesion is outstanding. The school, for example, has established a very close link with a school in the Caribbean that does much to help pupils understand life and culture in a different country. Very strong links with the local community including local schools benefit all those involved and has done much to raise the profile of the school and its pupils.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	1
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	1
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	1
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	1
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	1
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	1

Early Years Foundation Stage

Thorough planning ensures children receive a very wide range of experiences that support individual learning needs extremely well. As a result, they make good and often excellent progress in nearly all the areas of learning. A focus for attention is, at present, in the areas of calculations and writing which have, in the past, not been as strong. Assessment is very effective in ensuring that the needs of each child, whether cognitive, nutritional or medical, are met. Planning for what is to be taught is very well focussed on the needs of each child. The environment is stimulating and activities and routines very well structured. There is complete respect for the individuals in the class and endless patience is used when offering choices and waiting for a response. For example, children had to choose the colours of the patches to make an Elmer collage and decide how many patches they wanted. Teachers prompted children well with visual cues and encouraged independence in letting the children stick the patches on. Excellent attention is paid to health and safety and safeguarding.

Strong leadership and management is ensuring that provision develops at a very good rate. There is excellent teamwork between staff and very good systems for monitoring

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each child's progress. Links with parents, carers and outside agencies are very strong and ensure that each child is very well supported to learn and develop. Staff are clearly dedicated to the needs of the children and this has resulted in outstanding provision which is very well placed to continue to improve and develop.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	1

Sixth form

Students benefit from very good teaching that enables them to make excellent progress. The excellent curriculum is planned on an individual basis, giving students a wide range of opportunities to extend their levels of independence. The curriculum is rich and varied and makes excellent use of the local community. Students attend college once a week and enjoy a range of opportunities including taking ceramics, cookery and art classes. Full use is made of the excellent facilities within school particularly in accessing the performing arts. Students have opportunities to gain accreditation through ASDAN (Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network). Teaching is very good and excellent use is made of a wide range of resources. For example in one lesson music, lighting and sensory materials were used effectively to support a student's appreciation different poems. Students' needs are very complex and they receive a very high level of care. It is very evident that they feel safe and secure. The excellent relationships with staff are reflected in students' increasing responses to adults. There are excellent links with other agencies and parents and carers that support students very well. The sixth form is very well led. Monitoring is very effective in ensuring that leadership has a clear understanding of what needs to be improved. At present, for example, the good quality targets in individual education plans are being developed so that they can be reviewed and updated on a more regular basis.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	1
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	1
The quality of provision in the sixth form	1
Leadership and management of the sixth form	1

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Views of parents and carers

The Ofsted questionnaire return was broadly average as a percentage of pupils on roll. Parents and carers were overwhelming in their support of the school. ♦ Several referred to the dedication of staff and many commented on the sense of being part of a family. One parent for example commented that, 'my husband and I feel the staff are a part of our extended family' while another stated that the school 'is a vital part of our family's support network'. Parents' and carers' comments can best be summarised by one parent who wrote, 'I couldn't ask for a better school for my child to be in. He makes progress continuously. We have a brilliant head and a brilliant staff who all give 100 per cent to the children.'

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at The Avenue School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The delete as appropriate: inspection team received 37 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 103 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	29	78	8	22	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	32	86	5	14	0	0	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	33	83	4	11	0	0	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	23	62	13	35	0	0	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	32	86	5	14	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	27	73	8	22	1	3	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	25	68	11	30	0	0	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	23	62	11	30	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	28	76	9	24	0	0	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	24	65	12	32	1	3	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	24	65	12	32	0	0	1	3
The school is led and managed effectively	24	65	12	32	1	3	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	29	78	8	22	0	0	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	59	35	3	3
Primary schools	9	44	39	7
Secondary schools	13	36	41	11
Sixth forms	15	39	43	3
Special schools	35	43	17	5
Pupil referral units	21	42	29	9
All schools	13	43	37	8

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 August 2010 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2009/10 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



12 March 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of The Avenue School, Tilehurst. RG30 4BZ

Thank you so much for being so friendly and helpful when we came to visit your school recently. We very much enjoyed meeting you all and a special thank you to those of you who went to the meeting and talked to Arthur. Thank you too, to all of you who completed the questionnaire for us, it was great to see that so many of you like school and feel safe.

We think your school is excellent. You clearly enjoy all the different things you can do in lessons and it was good to see how confident you become through all the drama, dance, music and art that you do. ♦ Arthur and I very much enjoyed watching the recordings of some of your performances.

We know that you work very hard in lessons and because of this you do well in your learning. It was good to see how happy you are in school and that you feel safe. The school is very good at making sure you are well cared for. We were very impressed at how much you know about keeping healthy and it was good to hear about all the different sports and activities you are involved in. Your teachers know you very well and help you learn a lot of things.

The school is very well led by the headteacher and all the staff work very hard to make sure you do well. Because the school wants to be even better, we have asked them to make sure that governors have more information about how you are doing so that they can ask the staff about how they are making things even better for you. We have also asked teachers to make better use of your targets for learning so that you always learn as much as possible.

We wish you well for the future and hope you continue with all your hard work in the community.

Yours sincerely

Sarah

Sarah J Mascal Lead inspector

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