

# Avalon School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	123945
<b>Local Authority</b>	Somerset
<b>Inspection number</b>	359549
<b>Inspection dates</b>	4–5 July 2011
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Martyn Groucutt

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>	11–18
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	35
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	4
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Simon Harvey
<b>Headteacher</b>	Alison Murkin
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	19 March 2008
<b>School address</b>	Brooks Road Somerset BA16 0PS
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## Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one additional inspector. A total of eight lessons, taught by five different teachers, were observed. Meetings were held with members of the senior leadership team, the Chair of the Governing Body, pupils and the special educational needs consultant who has been working with the school. The inspector observed the school's work, and looked at pupils' work, teachers' planning and data on pupils' progress, together with procedures for safeguarding and protecting students and a range of documentation that covered the school's policies and procedures. A total of 12 parent and carer' questionnaires were scrutinised, together with 18 from staff and 17 from pupils.

The inspector reviewed many aspects of the school's work. He looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- How effective have developments in data collection been in supporting effective teaching and learning and helping individual pupils to reach their potential?
- What has been the impact of assessment for learning in helping pupils to raise their levels of achievement?
- To what degree is the senior leadership team maximising individual challenge and potential for pupils through embedding good practice in the school?

## Information about the school

Since its last inspection Avalon School has changed its age range and, although small, it now caters for pupils in Years 7 - 13 with a wide range of moderate and severe learning difficulties, and some with complex profound and multiple learning difficulties. Three quarters of its pupils are boys and all pupils have a statement of special educational needs. Virtually all are of White British heritage with none speaking English as an additional language. The percentage known to be eligible for free school meals is well above the national average. The school has attained Healthy Schools status.

The current headteacher was appointed in January 2010 and the previously acting deputy headteacher is now permanent. The senior management team was completed by the appointment of an assistant headteacher in April 2011.

**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?**

**2**

**The school's capacity for sustained improvement**

**2**

## Main findings

Avalon is a good and improving school where all pupils, irrespective of their individual learning difficulties, are able to make good progress and maximise their potential. The school has developed outstanding links with parents and carers, who are overwhelmingly supportive of the school and the outcomes it provides for their children. When necessary, the school acts as advocate on their behalf with other agencies and service providers. Very effective self-evaluation, a clear focus on school improvement and the commitment of staff to ensuring the success of the school provide a good capacity to sustain this improvement.

The very effective leadership of the headteacher, well supported by her deputy, has been a key factor in increasing effectiveness and raising pupils' achievement. The whole leadership team is focused on school improvement and since the last inspection there is an increased drive to ensure that all pupils do as well as possible. Much has been achieved since the arrival of the headteacher. The curriculum has expanded and there is now a greater range of external accreditation available for pupils although not all subject leaders have not yet been appointed. The sixth form provision is currently limited to pupils with complex needs and is meeting them effectively. The well-advanced plans to expand it to provide a greater range of accreditation and opportunities for two-way inclusion in conjunction with the local college have already resulted in increasing numbers being accepted for places. The curriculum is supported by a range of effective partnerships. Whether these are provided by colleagues such as physiotherapists or speech therapists, or by the good sporting, artistic and musical links, they all enhance pupils' learning experiences. Pupils really enjoy school and their behaviour is outstanding. They and their parents and carers feel that they are very safe and able to develop skills that will support them into adulthood. As a result of the success they achieve their self-esteem grows, and this is supported by the outstanding care, guidance and support they receive.

Enhanced use of a range of data has been a key area of improvement since the last inspection, and has developed the school's ability to track the progress of individual pupils. This is now being done to very good effect, and demonstrates that pupils make good and sometimes outstanding progress. Data analysis also shows that different groups of pupils have equal opportunities to succeed. A large majority of the teaching is good or better and when it is not yet reaching this standard, effective support is already improving the quality. In every class, excellent teamwork between teachers and teaching assistants enables pupils to make very good progress from their varied starting points because work is pitched at just the right level to provide effective challenge and they are given excellent support. Work is assessed regularly and evidence of progress is gathered from a range of sources, including photographs. Within the limits of their understanding, pupils are aware of their targets and the progress they are making towards meeting them. A very effective

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feature is the involvement of pupils in the assessment of their own work and that of their classmates.

## What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Strengthen the curriculum by completing the appointment of subject leaders to be responsible for the effective delivery of subjects.
- Ensure that the expansion of the sixth form is effective and inclusive in:
  - meeting the needs of a wider range of needs and abilities
  - providing enhanced opportunities to gain external accreditation
  - supporting two-way inclusion through strong links with the local college and other post-16 provision.

## Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Increasingly effective use is being made of nationally produced progression data for pupils with special educational needs to set challenging targets for every pupil. Progress is monitored carefully on a lesson-by-lesson basis and the whole class team is sharply focused on gathering evidence of individual achievement. Evidence of progress, or the mastery of a new skill, is recorded carefully and team meetings provide opportunities to collate all this information. As a result pupils' outcomes are constantly at the forefront of classroom practice, and this is reflected in the progress made over the year and the sheer enjoyment of pupils in lessons, as they clearly demonstrate their successes in learning. Such enjoyment is reflected in attendance well above the rate found in special schools nationally.

Much learning has a practical base, such as a mathematics lesson about selecting coins to buy items from a stall that the teacher had set up in the room. Some pupils selected items and had to select a 10p coin and then two 5p coins to make up the amount. More-able pupils had to make up 15p and 25p in three different ways. Because the teacher had a good understanding of each pupil's current level she was able to ensure that this would be a challenging yet eventually solvable task. Even though the school is now catering for pupils with far more complex needs, it is able to show that it is meeting their needs effectively. This was reflected in a lesson where those with the most profound difficulties were doing tasks to help their recognition of shapes, while the most able were undertaking a practical task of planning to maximise the use of space in designs for a refurbished classroom.

Pupils whose circumstances make them vulnerable feel well supported, as do their families. Many join the school with challenging behaviour, but their suitably detailed individual behaviour plans are particularly effective and as a result the behaviour observed in lessons and around the school was outstanding. Pupils understand how to lead healthy lifestyles, supported by a very good range of physical and recreational activities. They enjoy opportunities to support the life of the school and local community, such as participation in music festivals. The stress on promoting communication and life skills, together with good progress in developing literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) skills, supports pupils' future economic well-being well. Pupils' strong understanding of right and wrong, the development of social skills and

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opportunities to experience different cultures underpin their good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

*These are the grades for pupils' outcomes*

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

<sup>1</sup> 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 strength of the class teams and their constant focus on learning are major reasons why pupils' progress is so good. Pupils' very positive attitudes and commitment come about because they appreciate the efforts being made on their behalf and there is a strong mutual respect. Lessons are very well planned, fully taking into account the individual needs of pupils. There is good pace and a range of activities which keep pupils engaged and focused on learning. ICT is often used very effectively, for example when pupils use switches to communicate with adults and engage in learning. Individual progress is monitored carefully by class teams and as targets are met pupils move on, sustaining progress through the year.

The curriculum is suitably modified to meet the needs of groups and individuals as appropriate. However, the current lack of subject leaders to cover all subject areas is throwing additional responsibilities onto senior leaders and limiting ownership of some subject areas. This has resulted in curriculum development and progress not being as

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sharply focused as in other areas. That said, pupils are still gaining a rich experience which contributes well to their development and well-being. Cross-curricular opportunities add a breadth to learning opportunities and effective planning by teachers ensures that they meet individual needs and aspirations, sometimes supported by very good external partnerships. A range of enrichment opportunities includes outdoor education, opportunities to develop social and independence skills, and chances to participate in recreational and artistic events.

Outstanding care, guidance and support are key elements in the success of many pupils. Many are in circumstances which make them potentially vulnerable and personal welfare is seen as paramount. Case study evidence points to the care taken to ensure that individual needs are identified and met. This is also illustrated in the way in which pupils who have absences as a result of medical conditions are supported so that their educational progress is not adversely affected. Links with the Connexions service and an adult support worker underpin effective transition arrangements for the move on from school.

*These are the grades for the quality of provision*

<b>The quality of teaching</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
<b>The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness of care, guidance and support</b>	<b>1</b>

## How effective are leadership and management?

Since her appointment the main focus of the headteacher has been on improving the quality of teaching and learning. She has an excellent understanding of the strengths and areas for development of her staff, supported by regular monitoring of planning, work sampling and joint lesson observations undertaken with the special educational needs consultant who has been working with the school. The school's leaders have a clear vision for the success of the school and staff questionnaires show this is shared. One wrote, 'I am proud to be part of the children's lives and working for them.' The governing body meets all its statutory requirements, and is proactive in ensuring that there is equality of opportunity for all and that safeguarding is effective. No groups or individuals suffer discrimination. Child protection procedures are very strong, and supported by close and effective links with child welfare agencies. The governing body supports the school well, but the level of challenge it provides is not so strong. For example, it does not have well-established curriculum links and this is reflected in the current area of development around subject leadership. The promotion of community cohesion is currently satisfactory. Steps have already been taken to improve pupils' knowledge of wider national and international communities, most notably through the link that has just been made with a school in China.

The school's outstanding links with parents and carers are reflected in effective support provided through home visits, advocacy and the development of parent and carer groups.

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Joint working is greatly facilitated by the number of school staff who also provide after-school and weekend respite for parents and carers through their additional roles as Somerset Supporters.

*These are the grades for leadership and management*

<b>The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
<b>The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money</b>	<b>2</b>

## Sixth form

Sixth form provision currently caters for students with complex needs who wish to continue their education beyond Year 11. It is set to expand into new facilities, including a base in the local college, and to offer a wider range of accredited courses provided by the National Open College Network in a more inclusive setting for a wider range of academic ability and needs. This expansion is planned to take place in September 2011 under the direction of the very effective deputy headteacher, who is responsible for sixth form provision. The current provision is effective in meeting the needs of its small numbers of students, leading to good outcomes, and where appropriate, supporting a move on to further specialist courses.

*These are the grades for the sixth form*

<b>Overall effectiveness of the sixth form</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account: Outcomes for students in the sixth form	2
The quality of provision in the sixth form	2
Leadership and management of the sixth form	2



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## **Views of parents and carers**

Parents and carers show strong support for the school, and all agreed that the school is doing an effective job in terms of their children's enjoyment and safety, the promotion of healthy lifestyles and positive behaviour. The small number of individual concerns were investigated, but followed no particular pattern.

## Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Avalon 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 inspector received 12 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 35 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	8	67	4	33	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	9	75	3	25	0	0	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	9	75	2	17	1	8	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	6	50	5	42	1	8	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	6	50	5	42	1	8	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	5	42	5	42	2	17	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	5	42	7	58	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)	4	33	7	58	0	0	1	8
The school meets my child's particular needs	6	50	5	42	1	8	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	6	50	6	50	0	0	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	6	50	5	42	1	8	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	6	50	5	42	1	8	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	8	67	3	25	1	8	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	46	48	6	0
Primary schools	6	47	40	7
Secondary schools	12	39	38	11
Sixth forms	13	42	41	3
Special schools	28	49	19	4
Pupil referral units	14	45	31	10
All schools	10	46	37	7

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 2010 to 31 December 2010 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 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"><li>■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.</li><li>■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.</li><li>■ The quality of teaching.</li><li>■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.</li><li>■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.</li></ul>
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.**



6 July 2011

Dear Pupils

**Inspection of Avalon School, Street BA16 OPS**

Thank you for the very warm welcome you gave me when I recently visited your school. I am delighted to tell you that you go to a good school which helps you to do your best. As a result your achievement is good and it is clear that you enjoy school very much. You feel safe and your behaviour is excellent, even for those of you who find it hard to behave well all the time.

You like your teachers and teaching assistants a lot and they also think highly of you. Mrs Murkin and all the staff know you all very well and try to make sure that the work they ask you to do is at just about the right level to make sure you do your very best. Sometimes work is made more interesting by opportunities to take part in a range of activities such as sports or music, and for those of you who need additional help there are very good links with services such as physiotherapy and speech therapy. You enjoy chances to help out in school and to go out into the local community, and you are starting to get more chances to find out about the lives of people in different parts of the country and around the world. I enjoyed seeing the Chinese dragon in your assembly while I was in school and I heard that there is a new link starting with a school in China.

The numbers in the sixth form are about to get bigger and there will be better links with your local college. I have asked the school to make the most of this exciting opportunity by having more links with older pupils elsewhere, either at the college or at other schools, so you can learn from each other. I have also said that the different subjects that you study might be improved if some of your teachers took on the jobs of making sure that they are as interesting as possible and always meet your learning needs. This will make your school even better than it is already.

Remember to always do your best and this will help you to get the most out of school.

Yours sincerely

Martyn Groucutt

Lead inspector

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