

Avalon School

Brooks Road, Street BA16 0PS

Inspection dates 22–23 May 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The achievement of all groups of students, in English and mathematics, is good.
- Achievement is good in the sixth form where students gain qualifications that prepare them well for their futures.
- Students eligible for additional funding make similar progress to their peers, in English and mathematics, with some making better progress.
- Teaching is good, with some that is outstanding. On these occasions, students make rapid and sustained progress because they enjoy the exciting activities provided.
- Students' behaviour is outstanding. They have high levels of empathy with others, and regularly praise and clap their classmates for their achievements. Students feel very safe at school.
- The range of topics and subjects, including the annual residential visit for all year groups, promotes students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well.
- The headteacher and staff have worked together well over the past few years and have consolidated the school's previous good outcomes. There has been a strong focus on raising achievement through regular monitoring and high-quality staff training.
- The governing body is very supportive and, together with the local authority, has significantly improved the accommodation since the previous inspection.
- Governors have improved their own skills and now have an accurate view of the school's work. Members manage the budget well and make sure that students who receive additional funding fully benefit from it.
- The overall effectiveness of the sixth form is good.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- In a very few lessons, students do not achieve as well as they should. This is because too little is expected of them, and as a result, they do not complete enough work or know what they need to do next.
- It is too early to judge the full impact of the recently introduced programme for Year 14 students. Also, tasks are not always set at the right level.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed eight lessons, and visited one other session for a short time, most jointly with the senior leaders. In addition, the inspector listened to some students read.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, senior leaders, the Chair of the Governing Body and a representative from the local authority.
- The inspector observed the work of the school and looked at a number of documents, including the school's own information about pupils' progress, planning and monitoring documents, safeguarding information, and pupils' books and files.
- The inspector took account of the school's own parent questionnaires because there were too few responses to the online survey (Parent View). Inspectors also took account of 16 responses to the staff inspection questionnaire.

Inspection team

Denise Morris, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school caters for students with moderate, severe or profound learning difficulties, predominantly from the Mendip area of Somerset.
- Students sometimes enter the school at times other than in Year 7.
- All students have a statement of special educational needs. A high proportion of pupils also have a diagnosis of autism and a few have complex healthcare needs.
- Almost all students are White British. The proportion of students from minority ethnic backgrounds is very low, and there are no students new to speaking English. There are many more boys than girls.
- The proportion of students for whom the school receives the additional government funding, known as the pupil premium, is above average. This funding is for pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals and those in the care of the local authority.
- Additional funding is also received to help those in Year 7 catch-up.
- A new sixth form centre was recently built on the school site so that students can now spend three years in the sixth form, staying until Year 14. Sixth form pupils also attend Bridgwater and Strode Colleges to undertake work-related courses and training.
- The school usually enters students for early examinations in Information Technology, although there were no entries this year.
- The school provides outreach support to several local schools.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Enable all students to make the best possible progress by:
 - ensuring that expectations are always high enough so that students complete enough work
 - increasing the number of opportunities for students to make choices and decisions so that they become fully involved in their learning
 - embedding the new opportunities for the oldest students in the sixth form so that they make the very best use of their extra year, and ensuring that their tasks are always set at the right level.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Students' attainment on entry is well below average for their age because of their learning difficulties.
- Students settle quickly and achieve well because of high-quality support and effective use of signs, symbols and technology to support their learning.
- All groups make similarly good progress in English, mathematics and science, including those with autism, complex health needs and those supported by additional funding. Occasionally, students' progress dips because too little is expected of them. This is because they do not have enough opportunities to make decisions about their next steps.
- The most-able students make good progress in reading, because they know how to recognise the sounds letters make. This was evident when Year 7 students showed that they could identify the difference between long and short vowel sounds in words.
- Additional government funding provided for students in Year 7 is used effectively to help individual students to improve their communication and/or speaking skills. This enables any student falling behind the others to quickly make up lost ground and make good progress.
- Writing skills improve well at the school because of a good range of different approaches that are set at the right level. For example, they can write answers to questions conventionally or use symbols to express their thoughts. A few use tablets to share their ideas while others are able to eye-point to the words or pictures that they want to use.
- Students achieve well in mathematics because they enjoy the many practical tasks and the challenges set for them. Older students used their skills effectively to calculate how much money they needed to charge for items they have made for the annual school fair.
- Outstanding learning in science was evident in Years 8 and 9 where students showed high levels of knowledge and understanding about different food chains. They showed excellent understanding of the links between different animals because of the excellent evidence provided for them.
- The vast majority of students in the sixth form achieve well and benefit from their new accommodation which supports their learning well. Tasks for the oldest group in Year 14 are developing but are not yet fully effective in meeting their individual needs and abilities.
- Work-related courses at the local college and at a nearby farm provide good opportunities for students to learn work-related skills that prepare them well for their futures.
- Students supported by the pupil premium are catching up quickly, and now make at least similar progress in English and mathematics to their peers and sometimes better progress.
- Achievement is not outstanding because occasionally some students do not make the best possible progress as not enough is expected of them.

The quality of teaching is good

- Students across the school benefit from teaching that is almost always good, and some that is outstanding. As a result, they make good and sometimes outstanding progress. Teaching typically enables students to work together, share ideas and engage fully in learning.
- Literacy lessons are very well planned. High levels of additional support, often by teaching assistants, is carefully matched to individual needs so that activities are set at the right level.
- Students who find speaking or writing difficult are helped to express themselves by using communication aids, so that they are understood. This helps them to read and write simple sentences and enjoy stories.
- The teaching of reading and writing is well supported through the regular teaching of the sounds that letters make, resulting in the most-able pupils learning to recognise and read simple texts.

- Good teaching of mathematics ensures that there is a high focus on practical tasks that challenges almost all students. This is also true in science.
- The checking of students' progress is accurate and typically helpful, providing examples of how students can improve their work. This is particularly evident in English and mathematics.
- The quality of teaching in the sixth form is usually good and high staffing levels ensure individual support is available.
- The effectiveness of the off-site training is good because it provides additional experiences that prepare them well for their futures.
- Teaching is not outstanding because there are not enough opportunities for students to make choices and decisions so that they become fully involved in their learning.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- Students' behaviour in and around the school is outstanding. Students are polite and helpful, and regularly hold doors open for others. They listen carefully to each other's comments and are kind to each other, often waiting very patiently while another student attempts to communicate.
- Students say that they really enjoy school. This is evident in the way that their attendance has improved, and in the low rate of absences and lack of any exclusions.
- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is excellent. Older students told the inspectors that they feel really safe. They are fully aware of the importance of staying safe while using the internet and in the community.
- Students told the inspector that there is no bullying at the school of any kind. One commented, 'This is a small school so everyone knows each other well.' Observations of school records, and of students playing and working, showed this to be true. There are no incidences of racist behaviour or homophobic name-calling.
- Students' excellent behaviour is promoted well by the wide range of activities, the after-school clubs, and the trips and residential experiences for all year groups that the school provides.
- Very effective behaviour management ensures that students know and understand what is accepted, and what is not. This was especially evident in the daily 'wake and shake' in which students showed highly positive attitudes and worked very hard to keep fit. They were also extremely positive to those students who struggled to complete movements.
- The promotion of students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very effective and has improved in the past few years. Active links with a school in China have extended students' understanding of other lifestyles and cultures.

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher, ably supported by senior leaders, governors and staff, has high aspirations for the school. Together, they have built on the good outcomes of the previous inspection by making sure that the vast majority of students achieve well and develop as much independence as possible.
- Middle leaders work well together, and although some are new to their roles, they have made a good start, supporting other leaders well and helping to improve provision and outcomes.
- Leaders make effective use of the national standards for teaching to improve teachers' skills. There are several examples of staff at all levels progressing up the pay scales because of effective training which has helped them to improve students' progress.
- Leaders check students' progress regularly to make sure that they are making the progress expected of them. As a result, they are aware of any student falling behind and quickly put new measures in place to help them catch up.

- Information gathered over the past few years shows that the school is successfully improving students' results and is closing the gaps in achievement.
- Students eligible for additional government funding are now achieving equally as well as other students, and sometimes better.
- The school provides regular training for staff in aspects such as behaviour and safeguarding, ensuring consistent practice across the school.
- The local authority works well with the school by supporting leaders in checking the quality of teaching and learning, and by providing training for staff. Together with the governing body and school leaders, it has worked tirelessly to improve the accommodation and facilities at the school.
- There are many good partnerships with local schools and colleges, particularly through the school's well-respected outreach support. This provides help and guidance to mainstream staff, ensuring that they develop the skills that will benefit their own students.
- The good range of subjects and topics taught contributes well to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Additional residential and day visits provide well for the needs and abilities of students.
- Leadership and management are not yet outstanding because it is too early to judge the full impact of the new programme for Year 14 students. Also, activities for these students need to be more carefully matched to their needs and abilities.
- The school's own parent questionnaires show that leaders promote good relationships with parents and carers, who are pleased with the school.
- Through what they provide, leaders successfully eliminate discrimination and promote good relationships which make sure that all students have equal access to the experiences on offer.
- Leadership of the sixth form is good because it promotes the learning and personal development of most students well, and offers a good range of academic and work-related opportunities.
- Safeguarding procedures meet current requirements.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body is supportive and provides good challenge to leaders. Governors are fully involved in checking what the school offers students, and checking teaching and behaviour as well as students' achievements. They have a clear understanding of performance information, and how it compares with similar schools. Governors have improved their roles through high-quality training, resulting in their good knowledge of the quality of teaching and students' progress. They have a wide range of skills which they use to benefit the school. The governing body takes its safeguarding role seriously and complies with its duties for safeguarding children. Effective management of finances means that money is well spent to promote students' learning, including additional funding for those students who are eligible, enabling them to make the same progress as their classmates. Governors know about setting targets for teachers and work to ensure that the best teachers are rewarded through promotion. They rigorously tackle any underperformance.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	123045
Local authority	Somerset
Inspection number	439467

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community Special
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	38
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	14
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Justin Philcox
Headteacher	Alison Murkin
Date of previous school inspection	4–5 July 2011
Telephone number	01458 443081
Fax number	01458 443081
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