

# Arbour Vale School

Farnham Road, Farnham Royal, Slough, Berkshire SL2 3AE

## Inspection dates

13–14 June 2017

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>Inadequate</b>
Effectiveness of leadership and management	<b>Inadequate</b>
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	<b>Requires improvement</b>
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	<b>Inadequate</b>
Outcomes for pupils	<b>Requires improvement</b>
Early years provision	<b>Inadequate</b>
16 to 19 study programmes	<b>Inadequate</b>
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is an inadequate school

- Safeguarding is ineffective. Leaders have not ensured that all adults are checked for their suitability to work with children.
- Neither the acting headteacher nor executive leadership partner have been in post long enough to make a positive difference to improving outcomes for pupils. Staffing arrangements are temporary and short-term and therefore capacity to improve is weak.
- Senior leaders, teaching and support staff are unclear of the school's key priorities. As a result, leaders and staff are not united in their efforts to improve. This has created a culture of uncertainty and doubt.
- Teachers' performance is not managed well enough. There are insufficient opportunities for teachers to develop their skills.
- The quality of teaching and learning is too variable. School assessment information is not used well enough to plan for pupils' next steps of learning.
- In the past, the school's spending of additional funding has not been accounted for closely enough. It is unclear what difference funding is making to meeting the needs of disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- Pupils' needs are not fully understood in some classes. As a result, pupils' progress is highly variable, including in the early years and the school's 16 to 19 provision. Some pupils do not make the progress of which they are capable.

### The school has the following strengths

- Relationships between pupils and teachers are warm. Pupils have a high level of respect for the adults who care for them.
- Most pupils attend school regularly. They enjoy the wide range of activities on offer. The school's curriculum affords a range of appropriate and interesting activities.
- New governors are beginning to take hold of school performance and offer a high level of challenge to school leaders.
- Pupils are keen to learn and are attentive in lessons.

## Full report

In accordance with section 44(1) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires special measures because it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school.

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

- Urgently review and sharpen safeguarding processes so that:
  - leaders and relevant staff fully understand safeguarding requirements and ensure that statutory processes are in place
  - appropriate employment checks are in place for everyone who works in the school, including temporary staff
  - safer recruitment processes are observed
  - all staff receive appropriate training and have oversight and understanding of the school's safeguarding policy
  - leaders retain sharp oversight of which alternative providers pupils attend
  - record-keeping, particularly that relating to child protection processes, is rigorous
  - fire regulations are met.
- Strengthen the quality of leadership and management and governance by making sure that:
  - a sustainable leadership and teaching structure is in place
  - all stakeholders are fully engaged in school improvement and their views fully considered
  - staff performance is regularly monitored and reviewed, and staff are held more firmly to account
  - staff training needs are acted upon in a timely manner
  - school policies are kept under regular review and shared with staff
  - school performance information is accurate, analysed regularly and used to inform school improvement planning more sharply
  - the school's finances are kept under watchful review and evaluated for value for money
  - the school's website meets requirements.
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning so that pupils, including those in the early years and 16 to 19 provision and those who are disadvantaged, make good progress in all aspects of learning, by:
  - developing the skills and expertise of staff, particularly with regard to supporting pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities

- ensuring that pupils have access to and benefit from required specialist therapies, including speech and language
- ensuring that pupils' individual learning plans are suitably challenging and build sufficiently well on prior learning
- making sure that transition times between activities are prompt and learning time is maximised.

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

## Inspection judgements

### Effectiveness of leadership and management

### Inadequate

- Over a protracted period of time the school has harboured a culture of inequality. Leaders have failed to implement appropriate policies and procedures to manage the performance of staff, including those who hold leadership positions, or make the required checks on newly appointed staff. They have not monitored the school's finances, or overseen the quality of teaching and learning sufficiently well. Consequently, staff, including those at the most senior level, have not been held to account. Despite new leaders' very recent efforts to establish elementary statutory policies and processes, staff morale remains low.
- Many parents expressed concern about the decline in the school's effectiveness over time. One parent encapsulated the views of others saying: 'The school does not seem to know which direction it is going in anymore which makes it a poor learning environment and not always a happy one.'
- Capacity for securing sustainable improvement is poor. The current strategic leadership structure is short-term and many teaching and support staff are in temporary positions or from agencies. Additionally, the leadership team is reliant on a significant level of external support, including from two local schools. Nevertheless, current leaders are wisely making a start and, for example, beginning to reduce the proportion of staff in temporary positions and improve staff attendance. Leaders rightly told inspectors that, 'Building capacity is a key area for development.'
- Monitoring of school performance is weak. Although new leaders have begun to establish higher expectations, they do not check rigorously enough that these expectations are implemented. As a result, mistakes occur, including when applying the school's safeguarding procedures. For example, during the inspection, although there is a new electronic signing-in system in place, visitors' identities were not checked before they gained entry to the building.
- Leaders do not monitor the quality of teaching on a regular basis. Checks are sporadic and findings are not shared widely. Due to insufficient training in the past, many leaders do not yet have sufficient skills to provide insightful feedback to staff on how to improve their skills and expertise. As a result, staff are not regularly receiving feedback on the quality of their work and are not clear enough about how to improve their practice.
- Senior leaders' oversight of school spending over time has been inadequate. Leaders have not evaluated in sufficient depth the difference that additional funding makes. This includes funding for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, pupil premium, and the Year 7 catch-up funding. The school is in a deficit financial position, which is likely to grow this year.
- The local authority was too slow to identify the serious decline in school performance. However, after identifying the concerns, Slough local authority issued a warning notice in January 2017 and officers rightly intensified their support. For example, the acting headteacher is now receiving support from an executive leadership partner as well as the recently formed governing body that includes strong local authority representation. It is too soon to see the difference that this is making.

- The acting headteacher and executive leadership partner have established a sensible starting point by identifying where some of the school's strengths and weaknesses lie. Together, they have used this information to produce the school's rapid-improvement plan. However, this is not making a tangible difference as the plan is not shared widely enough, including with other senior leaders and staff. Consequently, a culture of uncertainty persists and leaders' efforts to improve are too tentative. Interested parties, including staff and parents, do not know what the school's key priorities are. Greater transparency is required to fully engage all stakeholders on the journey of improvement.
- The school's website does not meet statutory requirements. Using external support, leaders have recently conducted a thorough audit and are aware of what is required. Some information is outdated, including the school's safeguarding policy.
- The school's curriculum meets the needs of pupils. Phase leaders make appropriate adaptations, particularly to accommodate the specific needs of pupils in their care. Sports funding is used well and pupils benefit from a range of activities, including some on an extra-curricular basis.
- Pupils are well prepared for life in the wider community and are gaining rich opportunities to experience British values in action, such as democracy. Pupils are able to debate issues that directly affect them. For example, pupils exercised their democratic rights by lobbying local councillors to make changes to the school car park.

## **Governance of the school**

- In March 2017, all members of the school's governing body resigned or did not return. At this time, the school and local authority acted swiftly to establish a small group of highly skilled governors who are beginning to overhaul the school's policies and procedures. However, the governing body is not yet fully representative of the whole school community as parent governors have not been elected. This means that governors are not yet fully considering all viewpoints when making decisions and holding leaders to account.
- The governing body has a strong sense of the scale of the task ahead. Because of their experience and expertise, they reflect candidly that they have 'established a starting point' but are very much 'at the beginning of the journey'. Nevertheless, helpful work has started. Governors are committed to improving the school rapidly and are already demonstrating very welcome expertise.
- Governors are intelligently beginning to establish new systems to ensure that their statutory duties are met. For example, they have ensured that all leaders are now subject to performance management procedures. They have set appropriate targets, and are ensuring that all are clear on their roles and responsibilities. However, work to improve the school is at an early stage.

## **Safeguarding**

- The arrangements for safeguarding are not effective.
- Over time, leaders and governors have failed to implement dependable safer recruitment procedures. As a result, at the point of employment, staff have not been

subject to the appropriate checks to ensure that they are safe to work with children.

- At the time of the inspection, the school's single central record was incomplete. New leaders and governors are trying hard to backtrack and make up for the lack of rigour in the past. Although some checks have now been completed retrospectively, the details for all staff, including all the required checks, are still not fully completed or transcribed to the school's single central record. Consequently, this aspect does not comply with current government guidance, and leaders are not assured that pupils are safe.
- School procedures are not followed closely enough. There are gaps between what is expected and what actually happens. Staff lack vigilance at key times during the day, and access to the school is not controlled well enough. Furthermore, some staff carry personal mobile phones despite leaders' expectations that these are locked away during the day.
- Leaders do not respond to health and safety advice with sufficient rigour. Recommendations made following the school's fire risk assessments in October 2016 have not been addressed with sufficient thoroughness. For example, leaders are aware that fire doors should be kept shut but during the inspection this was not always the case. Expectations in regard to safety are too low.
- Some staff have not had a sufficient level of training. Others are vague and have not retained sufficient understanding of what is expected. There is no system for keeping staff abreast of key safeguarding issues and current concerns. For example, some staff are unclear who to refer to if they were to suspect a case of female genital mutilation. The school's safeguarding policy has been under review for some time but at the point of inspection had not been shared with staff. During the inspection, staff expressed strong views, saying that they would like more support and, in particular, oversight of the school's safeguarding policies and procedures. Responding to these concerns is now a matter of urgency.
- Leaders work closely with professionals in social care. When necessary, referrals are made and meetings convened. However, leaders' record-keeping is not well organised. Some important records are not completed in sufficient detail. There is no clear chronology of actions taken. Further improvement is required in this aspect.
- Parents who expressed a view on safety are confident that the school keeps their children safe. However, they are worried that, because of the high level of staff turnover, staff do not always know their children's needs well enough.

### **Quality of teaching, learning and assessment**

### **Requires improvement**

- The quality of teaching is highly variable. Many staff, including support staff, are from agencies. As there is no regular cycle of monitoring, those who require additional support do not receive sufficient encouragement to improve their skills and expertise. However, work to support newly qualified teachers is up and running and their performance is supported more closely.
- Some staff, including support staff, do not have the required levels of skills and expertise to meet the individual needs of pupils in their care. Some staff expressed concern that, although they try hard, they feel that they lack sufficient understanding

to fully support the needs of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.

- School assessment information is sometimes inaccurate and not used sufficiently well to inform teachers' planning. This means that some planned activities do not build well enough on pupils' starting points. Some pupils told inspectors that their work was too easy.
- Teachers make consistently good use of a variety of appropriate communication strategies. For example, during transition from one lesson to another, one pupil responded enthusiastically to the object cue, a spoon, to indicate the next session was cookery. Also, in key stage 3, all adults join in with singing and using sign language, fully engaging all pupils in lessons.
- Adults, including support staff, engage positively with pupils. For example, in a key stage 4 lesson pupils were asked to identify different film genres. Because of skilled questioning and helpful adult support, pupils were able to match films confidently to the correct genre.
- In the best examples, teachers use questioning effectively to develop pupils' understanding. For example, in a primary lesson based on the theme of journeys, pupils were asked to begin to indicate which mode of transport is bigger or smaller. This enabled pupils to begin to make choices, accessing the language of comparison successfully.

## **Personal development, behaviour and welfare**

## **Inadequate**

### **Personal development and welfare**

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is inadequate.
- There is a lack of oversight as to who is teaching which pupils and when, including for pupils who attend local colleges. Although students experience success on their chosen courses, leaders with responsibility for the school's 16 to 19 provision do not monitor this aspect closely enough. Furthermore, senior leaders, including those with responsibility for phases, are unclear of the role of some staff within their departments. Greater clarity is required in order to ensure that pupils are safe and that staff are held to account for meeting their roles and responsibilities.
- Time is not always utilised productively. Pupils sometimes arrive late, and playtimes occasionally overrun, leading to delays in starting lessons. The management of transition times is too slapdash because senior leaders do not monitor the school's day-to-day activities closely enough.
- Pupils learn to stay healthy. They benefit from a range of physical activities and know the importance of eating well. During healthy eating week, some pupils were able to sort different types of food into those which are healthy and those that are not. The most able pupils were able to use words like 'carbohydrate' to describe food groups accurately.
- Pupils feel safe and express confidence in trusted adults. Warm relationships between staff and pupils pervade. Many parents commented on the dedication of teaching and support staff, noting their appreciation of the commitment of staff when caring for

their children.

- There are no incidents of bullying. Pupils have a growing awareness of how to stay safe, including when online. They know how to communicate with adults if they are worried about something. They say that adults sort out any problems.

## Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils have very positive attitudes to learning, behave well and try their best. In return, they derive a high level of satisfaction from attending school regularly and learning new skills. One pupil told an inspector that, 'My school is amazing!'
- Lunchtimes are sociable occasions and pupils understand the routines well. Staff involve pupils appropriately, supporting them effectively and encouraging conversation. In return, pupils talk sociably to adults and to each other.
- Pupils are able to self-regulate so that they are in a calm state of mind and ready to learn. This aspect has improved noticeably over time and the number of incidents involving the need for restraint has fallen significantly. Leaders have ensured that all pupils now have a positive handling plan that is updated annually. Occasionally, some less-experienced staff are not so effective in redirecting those pupils who have become disengaged.
- Many pupils join the school with highly complex behavioural needs. Leaders track the number of incidents carefully, helpfully identifying different types of incident. The school's behaviour mentor contributes particularly well to developing the skills of staff. Nevertheless, staff feel that support on a day-to-day basis from senior leaders is not always as forthcoming.
- Most pupils attend school regularly. From time to time, due to complex medical conditions, pupils experience bouts of absence, contributing to above-average persistent absence. Occasionally, pupils' attendance dips for other reasons. Leaders have set ambitious targets and are working with a local school to further improve this aspect.

### Outcomes for pupils

### Requires improvement

- Attainment is typically below that seen nationally. Pupils enter the school at different stages. All pupils have profound, severe and complex learning difficulties and learning needs. In addition, many are diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder. Classes are organised appropriately, with due consideration afforded to pupils' age group, peer group and need.
- A number of parents expressed concern about the level of progress that their child is making. Pupils are making insufficient progress in some key aspects of their learning, particularly in the development of speech and language skills. Parents are particularly concerned about the lack of speech and language therapy available to their children, despite this area being a key aspect of their child's individual education plan. Inspectors explored these concerns and found that the speech and language service, in part due to financial constraints, is struggling to fulfil its obligations. As a result, for



some pupils, their progress in acquiring and building upon their communication skills is too slow, including in the early years.

- Pupils' progress in English and mathematics is highly variable across the school. Some pupils' work shows that activities do not build well on previous learning. For example, in mathematics some pupils repeat work unnecessarily when learning about money. However, pupils make better progress when learning programmes are tailored precisely to match their needs, particularly in key stages 3 and 4. Most pupils in these phases meet or exceed their learning targets.
- Approximately one third of the school's pupils are disadvantaged and, due to their high level of need, it is not appropriate to consider their achievement in the context of national norms. Although their performance is variable, many disadvantaged pupils, including the most able, achieve as well as their peers. In other instances, however, pupils' individual targets do not build well enough on previous learning, and this slows their progress.
- The school offers a range of accreditations for older pupils, including the ASDAN (a curriculum development organisation and awarding body) transition challenge and the ASDAN pupil progress certificates. Pupils experience success, including at entry level in GCSE mathematics, GCSE English, GCSE science, GCSE information technology and GCSE personal, social, health and economic education. This year some pupils have completed GCSE mathematics, GCSE art and GCSE physical education.
- There are pockets in the school where outcomes are better. For example, although the teaching of phonics in the early years is at an early stage, children are responding well and showing aptitude when developing their early reading skills.

### Early years provision

### Inadequate

- The issues which affect the safeguarding of pupils also affect children in the early years. In particular, leaders have not ensured that disqualification by association checks are undertaken on all those who work in this phase of the school. On the day before the inspection, leaders sought to remedy this but did not gather the information required for all staff.
- The early years curriculum is followed by children both in the early years and in Years 1 and 2. Staff complete helpful baseline assessments across all seven areas of learning when children join. However, assessment information is not used well enough to personalise children's learning experiences. Moreover, sometimes staff miss moments when children achieve milestones in their personal development.
- Teachers' planning does not always build sufficiently well on children's starting points. Staff gather a wealth of information, including from parents, for children's learning journeys. However, the information accrued does not inform teachers' planning sharply enough.
- Children's progress, including for those who are disadvantaged, is highly variable. Records show that children make better progress in the areas of expressive arts and design, knowledge and understanding of the world, personal, social and emotional development and physical development.
- However, progress in the development of children's communication and language skills

is slower. Leaders have recently adapted the school's curriculum and are beginning to teach early reading skills. Early signs indicate that children are responding well, demonstrating abilities in listening to and then repeating sounds.

- Relationships between teachers and children are warm. Children's care needs are well managed, particularly for those children who experience physical difficulties. Staff encourage children to use picture exchange and symbols to make choices, including when using the outdoor area.
- Playtimes are well organised and happy occasions. There is a wide variety of choice, including moving toy vehicles, water-tray tasks, climbing activities and ball games. Adults structure activities well, promoting both enjoyment and independence successfully. Children behave well.
- The leader of the early years has an accurate understanding of the department's strengths and weaknesses. For example, she rightly cites that where teaching is weaker, staff do not always fully understand the specific needs of each child. Moreover, she also knows that when teaching is stronger, planned tasks cater well for each individual child's needs. With leadership support, there is capacity to improve within this department.
- Parents are involved in their children's learning and contribute well at this early stage. However, they are not fully involved in the wider life of the school, noting that communication is weak, particularly in regard to changes of staff.

## 16 to 19 study programmes

## Inadequate

- The issues which affect the safeguarding of pupils also affect students in this department. Leaders have not ensured that staff are recruited safely or that staff have the required level of training, knowledge and understanding to keep students safe. During the inspection, leaders were unclear which outside providers students currently attend.
- Leaders have developed their own system to track students' progress. However, assessment information is variable and leaders do not analyse the progress of key groups. Leaders told inspectors that the school's assessment system is not effective or meeting their needs sufficiently well. Consequently, there is a lack of clarity about how well students are learning.
- Leaders' self-evaluation is inaccurate. There is no clear overview of how well students are learning or the courses they are accessing. Leaders' action planning is not based on an accurate understanding of school assessment information.
- Although staff have a good awareness of students' individual needs, current information shows that too few students make good progress in developing their English and mathematics skills. This is because the quality of teaching and learning is too variable.
- A wide range of external work-experience placements are on offer and students are enthusiastic about the opportunities afforded, including visiting the café. All students leave school with an appropriate, planned onward route, generally continuing with their learning. Parents talk positively about their child's experience of transition visits to prepare for the next stage.

- Study programmes rightly focus on developing students' communication, social and life skills, such as with travel, shopping and awareness of stranger-danger. Students actively participate in a variety of activities, demonstrating positive attitudes to learning. For example, in a dance lesson students were able to organise themselves well, with some taking on the role of 'leader' very confidently. As part of a bronze arts award scheme, they are developing the skills necessary to 'teach' other students. Students demonstrate a high level of respect for adults and each other.

## School details

Unique reference number	110185
Local authority	Slough
Inspection number	10003754

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Special
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	2 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	289
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	53
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Clive Haines
Acting Headteacher	Mrs Tracey Bradshaw
Telephone number	01753 515560
Website	<a href="http://www.arbourvale.slough.sch.uk">www.arbourvale.slough.sch.uk</a>
Email address	<a href="mailto:office@arbourvaleschool.org">office@arbourvaleschool.org</a>
Date of previous inspection	14–15 March 2013

## Information about this school

- Since the previous inspection there have been significant changes to the school's leadership and governance arrangements. The previous headteacher, following a period of absence, resigned and left in April 2017. The school's deputy headteacher took up the post of acting headteacher in December 2016. This is a temporary arrangement. Many other senior leaders are either in temporary or interim roles, including two deputy headteachers and the head of post-16.
- The full governing body resigned or left in March 2017. In April 2017, several new governors, predominantly co-opted from the local authority, formed a small interim governing body, including two national leaders of governance.

- The acting headteacher is supported for two and half days per week by an executive leadership partner, brokered by the local authority and funded by the school.
- Arbour Vale School provides for pupils who have moderate or severe learning difficulties. Some pupils have profound and multiple learning difficulties and many have autistic spectrum disorder.
- All pupils have a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan. The school provides residential provision in the week, during term-time only, for up to 12 pupils.
- Some secondary-aged pupils attend alternative provision used by the school. During the inspection the school was not able to supply the precise details of these arrangements.
- A much higher proportion of pupils than the national average, approximately half of the school's pupils, speak English as an additional language.
- Approximately one third of those on the school's roll (a higher proportion than the national average) are supported by the pupil premium.
- The school does not meet requirements on the publication of information because some of the necessary information about the school's spending of pupil premium funding and reading schemes are missing from its website.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors met with the acting headteacher, the executive leadership partner and other leaders with significant responsibilities. The lead inspector also met with two governors, including the chair, and with two representatives from the local authority.
- Inspectors met with a social care regulatory inspector who was carrying out an aligned inspection of the school’s residential provision, Arbour House, at the same time as this inspection.
- Inspectors visited 20 lessons, including 17 jointly with senior staff.
- Inspectors listened to pupils read during sessions, looked at work in pupils’ books and discussed pupils’ progress and attainment with leaders.
- Inspectors spoke to pupils informally and also met with groups of pupils in the primary, secondary and post-16 provision.
- Parents’ views were taken into account through face-to-face informal discussions, the 11 responses to Ofsted’s online survey, Parent View, and one telephone call. An inspector also telephoned two external providers to seek their views of the school.
- Inspectors took account of 109 survey responses submitted by staff.
- Inspectors checked records and documentation relating to safeguarding, behaviour, attendance, staff appraisals and monitoring and improvement.
- Inspectors reviewed the checks made on staff about their suitability to work with children.

## Inspection team

Elizabeth Farr, lead inspector	Her Majesty’s Inspector
Jo Yates	Ofsted Inspector
Linda Jacobs	Ofsted Inspector
Catherine Davies	Ofsted Inspector

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