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Mrs Alison Murkin
Headteacher
Avalon School
Brooks Road
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Dear Mrs Murkin

Short inspection of Avalon School

Following my visit to the school on 9 January 2018 with Ofsted Inspector Jen Edwards, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. The visit was the first short inspection carried out since the school was judged to be good in May 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You have tackled all of the areas identified as needing improvement at the previous inspection with rigour. For example, you have raised the expectations of staff and pupils of what pupils can achieve and ensure that pupils understand what they need to do next to improve their work. Consequently, pupils make good progress.

Your passion, drive and enthusiasm to ensure that the pupils receive the best quality of care and education are demonstrable. Your deputy headteacher replicates these same qualities. Together, you work seamlessly and share the same vision and aspirations to provide outstanding provision for each pupil. Staff demonstrate a strong and unwavering commitment and clearly understand the needs of the pupils, all of whom have varied and complex needs. Indeed, governors commented to inspectors how, 'It is a privilege to be in this school as governors; every visit we find something inspirational.'

You and your staff have created a warm and welcoming school where pupils enjoy their school experience. The dedication of your team was summed up articulately in the following comments made by parents: 'Avalon has been amazing for my child' and 'We feel part of the Avalon family, our child is well supported and is making brilliant progress.'

Pupils, irrespective of their special educational needs, disability or background, make good progress as they move through the school. This is because of good

teaching, with some excellent practice. Teachers and support staff know their pupils well. Combined with strong subject knowledge, teachers plan interesting and stimulating work which motivates and engages pupils. As a result, pupils demonstrate positive attitudes to their learning and enjoy the activities they undertake. Pupils describe how they are confident 'learning is adapted to meet our needs' and that they have the right resources in place to help them.

At the beginning of the inspection, we agreed on the key lines of enquiry to be considered during the day. These included: how the school ensures that pupils are safe; the impact of leaders in ensuring that pupils receive an effective education; how leaders have driven forward improvements in teaching and learning, especially post-16; how effectively pupils are prepared for their future destinations; and how leaders ensure that staff are well supported in their role working with pupils with varied and complex needs. These key lines of enquiry are considered below under 'safeguarding' and 'inspection findings'.

Safeguarding is effective.

The safety and well-being of every pupil lie at the heart of all that the school does. The nature of your school means that all pupils are vulnerable in a variety of ways. As a result, you have made sure that there is a strong culture of safeguarding in the school. Leaders have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Records are detailed and of high quality. Governors have a robust approach to monitoring the culture of safeguarding to ensure that it remains strong. For example, they regularly monitor the single central record to ensure that it is accurate and contains the information required. Such checks help to minimise risk to pupils.

There is a shared understanding by staff of the need to protect each pupil from every possible risk. Staff, irrespective of their role, receive high-quality training and receive the very latest guidance on all aspects of keeping pupils safe. Staff new to the school have this as part of their induction. This ensures that staff are quickly able to spot concerns and take rapid action with confidence.

The school works closely with other agencies and services to ensure the safety of those in their care. Leaders are confident in the implementation of safeguarding procedures. They would not hesitate to challenge other agencies and escalate concerns if they suspected that the safeguarding of a pupil was being compromised.

Pupils are extremely well supervised throughout the day. Handovers between parents, escorts and staff at the start and end of each day are carefully planned to minimise pupils' anxiety. Staff foster positive and trusting relationships with pupils. As a result, pupils explain how they are happy to come to school, commenting that 'Every member of staff is welcoming, which makes us feel like we want to come to school.' Pupils' enjoyment of school is reflected in their regular attendance.

Pupils describe how they feel safe in school and are well looked after. They are confident that a member of staff is always available should they have any worries or

concerns. Pupils comment how behaviour is good in school. This is because staff are strong role models and have high expectations of their own and pupils' behaviour. Through discussion, it is evident that pupils demonstrate empathy and understanding of each other's complex needs: 'We try to help and understand our friends and we don't make judgements.'

Parents and carers are confident about the safety of their children in school. Parents who responded to the Ofsted survey state that their child is happy at school, is safe and is well looked after. 'Avalon are teaching my child the skills they need for a safer and independent life' is one of the supportive statements made by parents.

Inspection findings

- You and your deputy headteacher are inspirational leaders who have high expectations of yourselves and your staff. Together, you work tirelessly to deliver the best quality of care and education, carefully tailored to the needs of each pupil. The school's determination to be outstanding is palpable and your motivation and commitment to achieve this and drive forward improvements are discernible.
- Your self-evaluation of the school's strengths and weaknesses is accurate. You are aware of the improvements needed to ensure that pupils achieve the very best outcomes. For example, secure plans are in place to further develop the role of middle leaders. This is to ensure that leadership is distributed appropriately within the school in order that monitoring and accountability remain effective, to enable pupils, especially the most able, to achieve their full potential. In addition, you are working constantly to ensure that pupils and students have access to a full range of accreditations to reflect their interests and aspirations. You have a shared determination to equip them for their future training, education or employment, but are aware that further work is needed, especially for those pupils and students who are the most able.
- Governors work closely with leaders to ensure that the needs of each pupil are met well. While there are a number of new governors, they demonstrate a good range of skills and expertise. They provide strong support and challenge to leaders. They do not rely on information provided by the headteacher but gather first-hand evidence for themselves through visits and conversations with staff and pupils.
- You and your deputy headteacher track the learning and progress of pupils carefully. You undertake a wide range of monitoring activities which include lesson observations and checking on pupils' progress in their work. You provide effective staff development which includes coaching and mentoring. As a result, staff are highly skilled and the quality of teaching is good, with some that is excellent, which secures good pupil progress.
- The core skills of reading, writing and mathematics are carefully threaded across a wide range of subjects. There is a strong focus on developing pupils' real-life skills. For example, pupils in key stage 3 were eager to plan the type of sandwich they wished to make, write their shopping lists and use money to purchase the necessary ingredients. Through this activity, they learned effectively about the

importance of nutrition and eating healthily, alongside those crucial life skills such as communication and independence when out in the community.

- Students in the sixth form receive a good range of learning experiences to prepare for their futures well. As a result of good teaching, students make good progress. Students have the opportunity to use their knowledge and understanding of reading, writing and mathematics effectively in developing their entrepreneurial skills. For example, at Christmas time they planned, produced, marketed and sold handmade Christmas cards. Pupils and students relish these opportunities, which increase their self-esteem and independence and bring real-life meaning to their learning. This prepares pupils and students well for their future destinations and as a result they successfully transfer to further education, training or employment. There are a small number of students with the most complex needs who move into social care provision.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that they:

- further extend the suite of accreditation gained especially by the most able pupils and students, to enable them to achieve their full potential
- continue to develop the impact of middle leadership across the school so that monitoring and accountability remain effective in securing rapid progress for pupils and students.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Somerset. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Jen Southall
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors met with you and your deputy headteacher. Together, we talked about the improvements which have been made since the previous inspection. We viewed learning across the school with leaders. We also held discussions with governors, middle leaders and staff. Phone calls were held with the Somerset education partner and a school improvement partner. Inspectors met with pupils and spoke informally to them during the inspection.

A wide range of documentation was looked at, including the school's evaluation of its own performance and information relating to pupils' current achievement and progress. Inspectors also checked the effectiveness of the safeguarding arrangements.

We spoke to parents during the day and took into account the 11 responses to the online survey, 'Parent View', and considered additional comments received from parents via the free-text message service and other correspondence. Inspectors also considered the 14 responses received in the staff questionnaire.