

# Avon Park School

St John's Avenue, Rugby, Warwickshire CV22 5HR

## Inspection dates

31 January – 2 February 2018

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>Inadequate</b>
Effectiveness of leadership and management	<b>Inadequate</b>
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	<b>Good</b>
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	<b>Inadequate</b>
Outcomes for pupils	<b>Good</b>
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is an inadequate school

- Leaders and the proprietor have not ensured that all of the independent school standards are met. The unmet standards relate directly to the welfare and safety of pupils. The school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils give serious cause for concern.
- Since the last inspection, there has been instability in leadership and management and high staff turnover. This has had an impact on the safety of pupils and has compromised the school's ability to establish a culture where staff feel well supported.
- Middle leaders do not have sufficient opportunities to monitor, evaluate and improve provision within their areas of responsibility.
- A high number of complaints have been made in relation to serious concerns about the safety of pupils, high numbers of physical intervention and injuries to pupils and staff. The school has taken action to help staff manage challenging behaviour. However, while the majority of staff feel that this support has improved their behaviour management skills, some staff still lack the skills and confidence to de-escalate incidents.
- Pupils state that bullying occurs within the school. The school's information shows that for some pupils, incidents are repeated. While staff address a number of issues, some pupils continue to be bullied.

### The school has the following strengths

- Teaching and learning is good. Teachers use information from the pupils' previous schools and their own assessments to plan activities which meet pupils' learning needs. As a result, pupils make good progress.
- Academic outcomes for pupils are good. Pupils arrive at the school having experienced significant gaps in their learning, which the school addresses well.

### Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school must take action to meet the requirements of the schedule to The Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements. The details are listed in the full report.

## Full report

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

- Improve leadership and management by:
  - ensuring that the independent school standards are consistently met
  - establishing a secure leadership team to drive school improvement and embed a positive culture where staff feel valued and supported
  - developing a stable staff team
  - providing opportunities for middle leaders to monitor and evaluate intervention work with pupils, and to better utilise their expertise.
- Take urgent action to safeguard and protect the welfare of pupils by ensuring that:
  - all information relating to safeguarding is accurately reported and acted upon quickly
  - more is done to raise the confidence of staff and pupils that their safety and well-being are effectively protected
  - the school's behaviour management strategy is consistently implemented
  - the number of incidents, including those that involve the use of restraint, are reduced
  - all pupils are helped to effectively self-regulate their own emotions
  - there is effective implementation of the bullying policy so that the number of incidents of bullying substantially reduce.

## Inspection judgements

### Effectiveness of leadership and management

### Inadequate

- Leadership and management are inadequate. Important aspects of the school's provision, including arrangements for safeguarding pupils, have declined since the last inspection.
- There have been a significant number of complaints over time from a variety of sources, including professionals and parents and carers. The complaints relate to a high number of physical interventions and a high number of accidents and injuries to pupils and staff. Some of the reported incidents have resulted in injuries to pupils and staff which have required medical attention.
- While some staff have confidence in the new leadership team, in contrast over a third of the staff are anxious that instabilities in leadership and management and staff shortages have led to an unsettled and unsafe school environment. Some staff do not have confidence that these issues are being addressed by the proprietor quickly enough.
- The school has been supported by the proprietor's wider organisation in embedding a positive approach to behaviour management. This has involved training the staff to provide them with the skills to de-escalate situations. While the majority of staff feel that this has been effective, a significant minority raised concerns during the inspection in relation to the effectiveness of the safety of the school and pupils and the consequent well-being of members of the school community.
- There is a high turnover of staff. Seven staff have left since September 2017 and 12 staff left in the last academic year. Since the last inspection, there has been fragility in leadership and management, resulting in an unsettled climate for pupils and staff. A high number of staff who responded to the surveys said that they were unsure of the school's focus and direction, and many also commented that pupils' behaviour had become unsettled throughout this time. Alongside this, there have also been high levels of staff absence.
- While new leaders have started to have a positive impact, they recognise that a change in culture will take time to embed in order to move away from legacy issues. They also recognise that it will take time to develop a strong and consistent staff team. Aspects of leadership are not yet fully developed. For example, opportunities for middle leaders to monitor provision within their areas of responsibility are limited. This reduces their capacity to have a positive impact on further improving pupils' outcomes.
- School leaders have been supported by the regional director of the Witherslack Group (the proprietor) throughout this transitional period. The regional director has a realistic view and a secure understanding of the position of the school and knows what the school needs to do to further improve.
- The wider organisation has provided multi-faceted support for the school. This includes increasing staffing levels and deploying staff from other areas of the organisation with relevant expertise in behaviour support and school improvement. The majority of staff recognise this as a positive step towards improving the school.
- Leaders have worked with the wider organisation to develop an assessment system to measure pupils' progress across the curriculum. This ensures a consistent approach across the group of schools, recognising that some pupils may transfer to other schools

within the organisation to better meet their needs. The assessment system is understood by pupils, who, in the majority of cases, know what they need to do to improve.

- Senior leaders have a clear and accurate understanding of the quality of teaching based on lesson observations, scrutiny of pupils' work and pupils' views. In cases where teachers have needed additional support, this has been well planned and specific, resulting in improved practices. This has led to improved aspects of teaching, including the use of effective questioning and better pupil engagement through using information to plan lessons to meet pupils' needs. Processes for managing teacher performance are effective. Targets for teachers are appropriate and based on incisive feedback from leaders.
- Leaders have provided valuable opportunities for pupils to develop spiritually, morally, socially and culturally through a programme of personal, health and social education (PHSE). This enables pupils to learn about relationships, families and experiences growing up in multicultural Britain. Pupils learn about different cultures and religions, including Sikhism, Judaism and Christianity, as well as celebrating Black History month. Pupils say that they enjoy 'gold trips' that happen weekly to celebrate success.
- The school has engaged well with the local community and, as a result, has created opportunities for pupils to take part in sporting activities and competitions with other local schools. Alongside developing their confidence and ability in playing sports, pupils also develop social skills and learn how to work in teams.

## **Governance**

- Governance of the school is inadequate. The proprietor and those responsible for governance have not ensured that all of the independent school standards are met. The unmet standards relate directly to the safety of pupils.
- The school is supported by a wider governance group, consisting of the chair of governors, the operations director and the regional director. The group meet half-termly and provide support and challenge. There has been an organisational focus on the school due to instabilities in staffing and an increased number of behaviour incidents. However, this work has not had a rapid impact in securing stability in staffing and reducing behavioural incidents.
- Effective quality assurance has resulted in improvements in teaching, learning and assessment. The school's information shows that teachers know their pupils and are planning to meet the needs of individual pupils effectively. This has had a positive impact on the progress that pupils make.

## **Safeguarding**

- The arrangements for safeguarding are not effective.
- A high number of complaints have been received that relate directly to the safety of pupils. The school's information shows that there have been many physical interventions during the current academic year. These are largely related to incidents of unsafe behaviour, altercations with others and assaults on staff, which in some cases have led to injuries to other pupils and staff members. Leaders routinely analyse information and work on techniques and strategies to support pupils to help them self-regulate their

emotions. While for some pupils these strategies have been effective and reduced incidents, the school's information shows that this has not been the case for all pupils.

- Behaviour incidents are recorded and monitored on the school's system. Leaders routinely analyse this information and report to governors and the board on the effectiveness of behaviour management strategies. Their analysis is used to plan techniques intended to help pupils in self-regulating their behaviour and equip staff with de-escalation skills. While the actions taken have been effective for some pupils, this is not yet the case for all. Additionally, some staff expressed concerns that not all incidents were reported or recorded accurately.
- The school's safeguarding policy meets requirements and it is published on the school's website.
- Staff are appropriately trained. They are skilled in identifying the indicators of neglect, radicalisation and exploitation.

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

**Good**

- There is an effective process in place to identify pupils' needs, including their academic needs, when they join the school. This is also in place for pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities. Teachers usually use this information well to plan lessons that engage and motivate pupils. Teachers are quick to identify pupils who are at risk of falling behind and reshape tasks with additional adult support to help them to catch up. As a result, the majority of pupils make good progress.
- Clinical and therapeutic information is used to inform the way learning is planned. This is particularly effective where staff work with the speech and language therapists to develop pupils' communication skills.
- Pupils who need additional support in transitioning from primary to secondary school, due to either learning needs or anxiety-related issues, can access the 'Hub' area of the school. This is a nurture-based learning environment for a small number of pupils. Pupils thrive in this setting due to high levels of staff support and individualised learning, planned well to meet their needs. Classroom work is supplemented with regular school trips, including to a local equine facility where pupils engage fully in a variety of outdoor activities.
- Teachers have created stimulating learning environments in the primary classes. These pupils engage well in planned tasks. Teachers take into account the individual, academic, social, emotional and behavioural needs of pupils and ensure that all benefit from positive learning experiences. In secondary classes, teachers use prior information and knowledge about the pupils to plan engaging tasks, for example using football-related texts to develop comprehension skills and inference and strengthen examination technique.
- Literacy and communication are promoted well throughout the curriculum. Pupils learn new words and are encouraged to extend their vocabulary and use of language. Pupils engage fully in debates. They contribute their own ideas and value the opinions of others. Pupils read widely and often, read aloud confidently and use their skills to work out unfamiliar words. Pupils say that their reading has improved since starting at the school.
- Teachers have secure subject knowledge. They use skilful questioning to promote deeper thinking and encourage pupils to solve problems, and promote pupils' understanding. Teachers give pupils time to apply their learning. The majority of pupils' responses show

that they have developed new skills and understanding. For example, in science, pupils learned about the properties of magnets and were able to develop their learning using a range of practical experiments. In project sessions, pupils carefully considered the uses of artefacts from the Sikh religion, using prior knowledge and higher-level thinking skills.

- The majority of teachers give pupils feedback in line with the school's assessment policy. As a result, pupils develop the capacity to learn from mistakes. Over time, pupils' vocabulary has improved, and their writing has developed in confidence, fluency and sophistication.
- On rare occasions, across both primary and secondary, teachers do not match the learning activities to pupils' abilities. In these cases, this impacts on pupils' attitudes to learning and negatively impacts on pupils' progress. However, this is rare and for the majority, lessons are well matched and engage pupils well. The school's information shows that the vast majority of pupils have made good progress in English and mathematics.

## Personal development, behaviour and welfare

## Inadequate

### Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is inadequate.
- There have been a high number of complaints in relation to bullying. Pupils say that bullying, including name-calling and physical bullying, does occur. The bullying log shows repeated incidents around particular pupils, and some cases where pupils show little or no remorse for their actions towards others. While the majority of pupils say that staff manage this well, others did not agree. A large proportion of staff state that cases of bullying are not always dealt with effectively and quickly enough.
- On rare occasions, pupils choose not to attend lessons. This results in a small number of pupils completing little work and missing learning. Staff support these pupils outside the classrooms by discussing their concerns and encouraging them to make the right choices. For some pupils, this is successful; however, others need further support in developing self-regulation strategies.
- Pupils have access to 'quiet rooms'. The rooms are furnished and decorated minimally and one of the rooms is very cold. Leaders advised that they were not fully used and were a 'work in progress'. However, pupils and staff stated that the rooms were currently used by pupils.
- While attendance for some pupils is low, the school uses attendance information well to identify pupils who may be at risk of regularly being absent from school. Staff work with parents and the local authority to improve the attendance of these pupils. For many pupils, this work has been effective, resulting in increased attendance over time.
- A small number of pupils access vocational learning opportunities through external providers. Although these providers are on an authority-approved list, not all are registered providers. While the school has thorough risk assessments in place and procedures for checking attendance and engagement, more needs to be done to ensure the safety of the pupils when they are not present at the school site.
- Pupils are well supported by a clinical and therapeutic team, including speech and

language therapists and a counsellor. The school's information shows that where this support has been accessed, it has had a positive impact on school attendance or re-engagement in learning. Staff prepare pupils well for the next stage of their education or employment and training. Pupils are also well supported by a careers adviser who works with all pupils from Year 8 onwards. Pupils engage in Prince's Trust programmes, including enterprise, personal development, and teamworking and planning personal projects.

## Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is inadequate. A large number of staff state that leaders are not yet doing enough to manage the behaviour of pupils.
- There are inconsistencies in behaviour and attitudes to learning expected by different staff. The school's information shows that the vast majority of behavioural incidents occur outside of lessons and during unstructured times of the school day. On rare occasions in lessons, there is low-level disruption and off-task behaviour that teachers manage effectively, and pupils respond quickly to their requests. This is especially so where positive relationships exist between staff and pupils. As a result, this does not have a negative impact upon learning. In other cases, where this is not managed as swiftly, pupils lose focus and become distracted from tasks.
- The school's information shows that a small number of pupils are responsible for a vast number of behavioural incidents over time. A number of strategies and interventions were put in place to support these pupils to manage their behaviour. Where these have been successful, there has been a reduction in incidents. In the isolated incidents where these strategies did not have an impact to improve behaviour, a small number of pupils were permanently excluded. A large number of staff say that this has had a positive impact on the overall behaviour and engagement of pupils, as this small group of pupils would often interrupt the learning of others.

## Outcomes for pupils

**Good**

- Academic outcomes for pupils are good.
- The vast majority of pupils join the school having experienced disruption to their education. Some pupils join the school late into their education. This has resulted in pupils with considerably low starting points and significant gaps in their learning.
- The provision for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is good. The leader of SEN works in partnership with the educational psychologist to review previous information about pupils. They carry out baseline testing to determine if pupils require additional support. A range of interventions are provided, including one-to-one work and speech and language support. Staff use tests on a termly basis to check pupils' progress. The school's information shows that these pupils make good progress. For the small number of pupils who do not make expected progress, a specific six-weekly period of intervention is put into place to focus on their individual areas of difficulty. Teachers use this information well to inform their planning to help pupils make progress.
- Given their low starting points, the vast majority of pupils make good progress across the curriculum. Most pupils make progress across series of lessons and their responses

demonstrate gains in their learning. In addition to this, pupils also make progress socially and emotionally. This has resulted in improvements in their attendance and attitudes to learning.

- The school's assessment information and work in pupils' books show that the vast majority of pupils make good or better progress in English and mathematics. For example, in mathematics, pupils solve problems of increasing difficulty and attempt higher-level challenging questions.
- Progress in science has been slower due to staff turnover which has impacted on consistency of teaching. However, this is now resolved and work in books shows that pupils are catching up, and in some cases making good progress.
- The school is supporting its first cohort of Year 11 pupils. The broad curriculum has enabled these pupils to access GCSE courses in a variety of subjects, including English, mathematics and science. Pupils also have opportunities to complete Prince's Trust programmes.



## School details

Unique reference number	140354
DfE registration number	937/6008
Inspection number	10038848

This inspection was carried out under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Type of school	Other independent special school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	6 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	50
Number of part-time pupils	2
Proprietor	Witherslack Group
Chair	Mike Barrow
Headteacher	Emily Hopkins-Hayes
Annual fees (day pupils)	£53,479–£91,053 depending on individual needs
Telephone number	01788 524448
Website	<a href="https://witherslackgroup.co.uk/avon-park-school/">https://witherslackgroup.co.uk/avon-park-school/</a>
Email address	<a href="mailto:admin@avonparkschool.co.uk">admin@avonparkschool.co.uk</a>
Date of previous inspection	7–9 October 2014

## Information about this school

- Avon Park is a day school that is part of the Witherslack Group.
- There are 50 pupils on roll, 45 boys and five girls across key stages 1 to 4. This is the first year that the school has worked with a key stage 4 cohort.
- The school is registered to admit up to 70 pupils between the ages of six and 16 years old.
- The school uses a range of alternative providers, including vocational learning providers

and work-related learning organisations. Some of these providers are not registered.

- The school caters for pupils with a range of complex learning difficulties, communication difficulties and challenging behaviours. A significant number have been diagnosed as having autistic spectrum disorders. All have a statement of SEN or an education, health and care plan.
- A new leadership team has been recently appointed, including middle leaders who have been in post since the start of the academic year.
- The headteacher was not in school during the inspection.
- The school was first registered with the Department for Education in October 2013 and admitted its first pupils in November 2013. The last inspection took place in October 2014 and the school was judged to be good in all areas.

## Information about this inspection

- This was a standard inspection. However, the inspection was carried out without prior notice because of a significant number of complaints being raised about the school.
- Inspectors met representatives of the Witherslack Group: two regional directors, the operations director, the quality assurance director and the chair of governors, who is also one of the directors. Inspectors also met senior leaders, including those responsible for safeguarding and teaching, as well as support staff and pupils.
- Inspectors observed lessons in English, mathematics, science and PSHE in all year groups. The inspectors also reviewed the work in pupils' books across all subjects.
- Inspectors toured the premises of the school and examined key policies, including those related to safeguarding, the curriculum, behaviour, complaints and anti-bullying.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of documents, including the attendance and admissions registers, the school's information on pupils' achievements and behaviour, complaints logs, records of physical interventions and procedures for recording incidents of bullying.
- The inspectors reviewed the parental feedback received through Parent View, Ofsted's online survey. A total of seven responses were received.
- The inspectors took into account 41 responses to the staff questionnaire.

## Inspection team

Melanie Callaghan-Lewis, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Adam Hewett

Her Majesty's Inspector

## **Annex. Compliance with regulatory requirements**

### **The school must meet the following independent school standards**

#### **Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils**

- 7 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that
  - 7(a) arrangements are made to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils at the school
  - 7(b) such arrangements have regard to any guidance issued by the Secretary of State.
- 9 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor promotes good behaviour amongst pupils by ensuring that:
  - 9(b) the policy is implemented effectively.
- 10 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that bullying at the school is prevented in so far as reasonably practicable, by the drawing up and implementation of an effective anti-bullying strategy.

#### **Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools**

- 34(1) The standard about the quality of leadership and management is met if the proprietor ensures that persons with leadership and management responsibilities at the school:
  - 34(1)(a) demonstrate good skills and knowledge appropriate to their role so that the independent school standards are met consistently
  - 34(1)(b) fulfil their responsibilities effectively so that the independent school standards are met consistently
  - 34(1)(c) actively promote the well-being of pupils.

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