

Inspection of The Avenue Special School

The Avenue Centre, Conwy Close, Tilehurst, Reading, Berkshire RG30 4BZ

Inspection dates: 16 and 17 May 2023

Overall effectiveness **Good**

The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Outstanding
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Sixth-form provision	Good
Previous inspection grade	Outstanding

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are happy to come to school. They are warmly greeted by staff, who know them well. This makes for a positive start to the day. Pupils are quick to settle into their daily routines. Their enjoyment in learning is clear to see.

Leaders work with determination to ensure pupils achieve their full potential. The school curriculum has been reviewed and carefully organised to meet the needs of the pupils. This helps pupils develop their confidence and persevere in their learning. Consequently, they thrive and are well prepared for their next steps.

Everyone shares the same high expectations for behaviour. Pupils try their best and behave exceptionally well. Staff use consistent routines and thoughtful approaches to understand each pupil. This helps pupils manage their own behaviour effectively and contributes to the calm atmosphere around the school.

A culture of warm, nurturing relationships lies at the heart of this friendly school. Staff know and understand the pupils exceptionally well. This means pupils feel safe and trust adults to listen to them. As one parent commented, 'I have nothing but praise for the school and for the support and educational achievements my child has made.'

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

Leaders have a clear and ambitious vision to provide all pupils with a broad and high-quality education. The cohesive curriculum is organised into pathways. This makes sure that pupils' different special educational needs and/or disabilities are met. Newly appointed curriculum leaders have worked to develop sequentially planned learning activities across core areas of learning. Knowledgeable teachers deliver these in an engaging way, so that pupils successfully consolidate their learning over time. Staff closely monitor pupils' learning using skilled questioning and observations. They check pupils' understanding, both in the moment and in the longer term. However, pupils' individually tailored targets are not systematically woven throughout all areas of learning. This means that there is not a sharp focus on the smaller steps of progress pupils make towards their more personalised outcomes.

Leaders have strengthened the teaching of reading since the previous inspection. The school's well-established phonics programme works well for those pupils who are ready to learn to read. Teachers use their expertise to adapt resources to support pupils learning. Older pupils' work illustrates their progress through the reading curriculum, as their knowledge and skills develop. There is also a determination for everyone to enjoy stories and reading. From the youngest to the oldest, pupils love to participate in sensory stories or to read their own books. They are creatively supported to enjoy and understand books. This helps pupils to discover their favourite books or authors.

Many pupils have difficulty with their communication. Staff do their best to support pupils to communicate effectively. However, not all staff have the expert knowledge required to skilfully facilitate pupils' communication. This means that, sometimes, pupils are not equipped with the necessary symbol support or resources to engage with the range of opportunities offered as fully and independently as they could.

Pupils' personal development is valued, and leaders thoughtfully enrich the curriculum. They provide an extensive range of activities, which help to develop pupils' understanding of the wider world. Through the school councils, pupils influence important aspects of school life. For example, they are proud to have improved menu choices to more closely represent the diverse cultural backgrounds of the school community.

Leaders have established a positive and proactive approach to supporting pupils to be ready to learn. This results in exceptional behaviour across the school. Where a few pupils exhibit more challenging behaviour, staff provide dedicated support. They take time to understand what each individual needs, and they use sensitive and effective strategies to support them.

Pupils in the sixth form enjoy a curriculum that prepares them well for adulthood. They study a variety of courses and learn how to look after themselves, so that they can be as independent as possible. One pupil remarked that, 'doing BTEC cookery has helped me to be less fussy and try different foods'. Pupils move on to a range of appropriate destinations.

Leaders have worked hard to drive improvements. Most staff enjoy working here. However, in some instances, staff feel that they would like further support in managing their workload. Leaders anticipate that the development of wider leadership roles, alongside other school support systems, will help to further improve this. Trustees care about the school. They are keen to engage with further training to support them to carry out their roles even more effectively.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

The systems and processes to support safeguarding are robust. Procedures to check adults before their employment are thorough. Record-keeping is well organised and safeguarding referrals are made quickly.

Teachers and leaders share information well. This means that help is given to pupils quickly. In personal, social, health and economic education, pupils are taught about keeping themselves safe. For example, pupils learn how to stay safe when using the internet.

Leaders work very effectively with other professional agencies and families. They manage complex situations with care and sensitivity. Their tenacity and rigour underpin a strong culture of safeguarding.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Leaders are still refining the personalisation of the curriculum to meet the individual needs of each pupil. This means that learning is not always broken down precisely into the smaller steps needed to support pupils to make progress in all areas of learning. Leaders should continue their work to integrate pupils' personalised targets into the wider curriculum and ensure systems for oversight are consistently robust.
- Teaching staff do not always possess the necessary knowledge and resources to be able to support pupils appropriately with their communication. This means that not all pupils are able to communicate as confidently and independently as they would like to. This sometimes limits their full involvement in the curriculum. Leaders should continue to ensure staff have the necessary knowledge and expertise through the school's training and development programme.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

School details

Unique reference number	137435
Local authority	Reading
Inspection number	10241020
Type of school	Special
School category	Academy special converter
Age range of pupils	2 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	214
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	31
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	James Michael Loftus
Headteacher	Symon Cooke
Website	www.avenue.reading.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	24 and 25 September 2019, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The Avenue is the only school in The Avenue School Special Needs Academy Trust.
- The school is a special school which caters for pupils from the ages of 2 to 19 years. At the time of inspection, a very small number in the early years foundation stage were on roll.
- The Avenue provides for pupils who have severe learning difficulties. Some pupils have profound and multiple learning difficulties. Many pupils have a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder. All pupils have an education, health and care plan.
- The school meets the requirements of the Baker Clause, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 7 to 13 with information about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.
- The school makes use of one unregistered provider of alternative education.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID 19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher, senior leaders, subject leaders, teachers, and teaching assistants.
- The lead inspector met with representatives from the board of trustees, including the vice chair.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics physical development, design technology and personal, social and health education. For each deep dive, inspectors met with subject leaders, looked at curriculum plans, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors looked at curriculum planning in a range of subjects.
- Inspectors also observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and during social times.
- Inspectors reviewed the arrangements for safeguarding by scrutinising safeguarding records and policies, speaking to staff and trustees and discussing this with pupils.
- The inspection team considered the views of parents shared through Ofsted Parent View. They gathered the views of pupils and staff through surveys and discussions conducted throughout the inspection.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of the school's documentation, including school improvement documentation and trust board minutes.

Inspection team

Jo Petch, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Nina Marabese

His Majesty's Inspector

Stephen Long

His Majesty's Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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