

# Inspection of a good school: Avalon School

Brooks Road, Street, Somerset BA16 0PS

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Inspection dates: 18 and 19 July 2023

## **Outcome**

Avalon School continues to be a good school.

## **What is it like to attend this school?**

Pupils at Avalon School are known and celebrated as individuals. They are treated with sensitivity and care by staff. Staff know pupils and their special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) well. Parents value this.

Pupils are challenged to be their best. They demonstrate tolerance and respect for each other's needs and differences. Pupils know how to behave well. They are taught how to recognise success in others as well as themselves. Pupils say they have friends in school because people are kind. Pupils feel safe in school and know what to do if they have a worry. Pupils are empowered to express their likes and dislikes successfully.

The school's nurture breakfast supports and celebrates pupils' personal development well. It provides a calm and purposeful start to the day. Pupils enjoy school and like to learn. They value the wide range of enrichment experiences, such as sensory rugby and the Duke of Edinburgh's award.

Opportunities for pupils to rehearse important life skills are carefully planned. For example, pupils bake for the tuck shop, ride and fix bicycles and grow food in the school's garden. Sixth-form students recognise how the school's 'learning for life' curriculum helps them to prepare for adulthood.

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

Over the past two years, leaders including governors, have improved the quality of education, behaviour and safeguarding arrangements at the school. Staff and parents recognise the significant amount of work and improvement that has taken place. Staff are proud to work at the school. They talk positively about the changes and the support from leaders to manage their workload and well-being. Leaders demonstrate a commitment to sustaining and building on these improvements.

Leaders have designed a new curriculum. It is coherent and carefully sequenced. Ambitious communication and personal development learning activities are woven through the curriculum. Pupils study a curriculum pathway based on accurately identified strengths and needs. As experiential, exploratory and investigative learners, pupils have individual plans that map out their education, health and care (EHC) plan and curriculum goals. Whichever curriculum pathway pupils are on, leaders' expectations are high.

Leaders are working with staff to ensure they have a consistently secure subject knowledge across all subjects. Where staff do not have secure subject knowledge, learning activities do not provide pupils with opportunities to secure and deepen their knowledge sufficiently well. Leaders support staff to ensure they understand pupils' EHC plan targets and adapt pupils' learning appropriately. For example, pupils' mathematics books show a personalised, well-sequenced curriculum. Functional mathematics skills are applied to everyday examples, such as using money in the local café. Some staff are trialling ways in which they can better support and capture pupils' learning and curriculum progress.

The school's curriculum prepares pupils well for the next stage of education or employment. Staff work with parents to ensure students leave school with appropriate functional and vocational knowledge and qualifications to succeed as adults. Self-care routines such as cleaning teeth and keeping fit with swimming and bike riding are well established. The careers curriculum, including work experience, ensures students have high aspirations for themselves. Staff help learners to become independent and resilient young people.

Leaders are passionate and determined that pupils will secure strong communication skills. Leaders have created a system to identify and check pupils' small steps to success. When staff use a multi-sensory teaching and learning approach effectively, pupils' communication skills develop well. Every pupil has a communication plan that clearly sets out their individual targets linked to their EHC plans. Leaders aim to embed the communication plans into practice next year.

Through the consistent teaching of the school's phonic programme and the use of well-matched reading books, most pupils develop secure phonic knowledge. All pupils demonstrate a love of books through their responses to well-known stories, use of the school library or discussions of texts.

Leaders have worked relentlessly to embed routines and raise expectations for pupils' learning behaviour. This can be seen in the calm and purposeful learning environments. Pupils' behaviour and attendance have significantly improved over the past two years. Leaders now work in partnership with individual families and external services to overcome barriers preventing their children from attending school. This work is successful.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

All safer recruitment checks are completed before staff and volunteers begin working at the school. Governors check recruitment records to assure themselves they are accurate. Essential safeguarding training is completed before staff are allowed to work with pupils.

Staff receive specific training to keep pupils with complex needs safe. Appropriate safeguarding checks are made before and during a student's learning time at alternative provisions.

Leaders seek advice from external agencies and value their input to secure support for pupils and their families. Leaders provide early help in school, for example drama therapy or food bank vouchers.

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

### **(Information for the school and appropriate authority)**

- The curriculum is new. Staff do not have secure subject knowledge across some subject curriculums. Consequently, learning activities do not always provide pupils with opportunities to secure and deepen their knowledge sufficiently well. Leaders need to support staff to improve their subject knowledge in these subjects to ensure pupils know more, can do more and remember more over time.

## **Background**

When we have judged a school to be good, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. This is called an ungraded inspection, and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection, which is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the second ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be good in May 2014.

## **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

<b>Unique reference number</b>	123945
<b>Local authority</b>	Somerset
<b>Inspection number</b>	10268758
<b>Type of school</b>	Special
<b>School category</b>	Community special
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11 to 19
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	56
<b>Of which, number on roll in the sixth form</b>	10
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair of governing body</b>	David Purcell
<b>Executive Headteacher</b>	Helen Farnell
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.avalonschool.org.uk">www.avalonschool.org.uk</a>
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	9 January 2018, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

## Information about this school

- Avalon School is a community special school for pupils with complex needs. All pupils have EHC plans.
- The executive headteacher was commissioned to work with the school by Somerset local authority in April 2020.
- Avalon School federated with Polden Bower school in September 2021.
- The interim head of school and assistant headteacher were appointed in May 2023.
- The school uses four registered alternative providers.

## Information about this inspection

- 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.
- The inspectors met with the executive headteacher, head of school, assistant headteacher, staff, pupils and governors, including the chair of the governing body.
- The lead inspector spoke with a representative from the local authority, the school's improvement partner and two alternative providers.
- The inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: reading, mathematics, physical education and personal, social and health education. For each deep dive, the inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, looked at curriculum plans, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- The inspectors also observed pupils during social times, looked at pupils' work and spoke with pupils and leaders about opportunities for pupils' personal development.
- The inspectors reviewed the school's safeguarding documentation, including records of safeguarding checks carried out on staff working at the school. They considered how well the designated safeguarding lead acts on concerns about pupils' safety and welfare. The inspectors spoke to pupils, staff and governors about safeguarding practices.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of school documents, including policies and record-keeping for alternative provision, behaviour management, suspensions and attendance.
- The lead inspector considered the responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View. She also took into consideration the responses to the survey for staff.

## Inspection team

Marie Thomas, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Faye Bertham

Ofsted Inspector

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