

Arbour Vale School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	110185
Local Authority	Slough
Inspection number	288594
Inspection dates	14–15 June 2007
Reporting inspector	Melvyn Blackband

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	2–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	228
6th form	48
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Jan Garnet
Headteacher	Mrs Debbie Richards
Date of previous school inspection	18 November 2002
School address	Stoke Road Slough SL2 5AY
Telephone number	01753 525113
Fax number	01753 691415

Age group	2–19
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Arbour Vale special school provides for pupils with moderate (MLD) severe (SLD) and Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties (PMLD). In addition a significant minority of pupils have autistic spectrum conditions. About twenty percent of pupils are in the post-16 provision. There are an above average number of pupils who receive free school meals and almost half of the pupils do not have English as their first language. The school has been a designated Sports College since 2001 and was designated as a high performing school in March 2006. The pupils and staff are due to move to newly built accommodation in September 2007.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Arbour Vale has accurately evaluated itself as a good school with some outstanding features. Because of their learning difficulties the standards reached by most pupils are very low but all pupils do well in their studies and make good progress. The pupils love coming to school and parents are very happy for their children to attend. One parent commented, 'Families have benefited, knowing their children are safe, secure, happy and appreciated for the special people they are'.

All the pupils make excellent progress in their personal development. The school's monitoring and tracking of the pupils' overall achievement is good. Senior staff are well aware that recently introduced assessment methods are not yet consistently applied across the whole school. They are developing appropriate strategies to improve procedures. The standard of teaching is good although teachers do not always accurately record each small step in pupils' learning. The teaching of pupils with autistic spectrum conditions is outstanding. Pupils work hard throughout the school because they are challenged to do their best by a curriculum which is very well adapted to their needs. The curriculum is significantly enriched by the quality of partnerships with other schools and providers and by the excellent use of off-site visits. There is good provision for pupils in the Foundation Stage as well as in post-16 provision. Those pupils for whom English is not their first language make good progress because of the good quality of teaching and support which they receive. The pupils thrive within the caring and supportive ethos. Children who are underachieving are very quickly identified and supported. There is a strong emphasis on personal, social and health education (PHSE), which promotes the pupils' emotional and behavioural development. The pupils are involved where possible in decisions about their welfare and progress and older pupils benefit from outstanding work experience programmes.

The school's leadership and management are good. The headteacher provides outstanding leadership with excellent support from very able deputies. Together they have ensured that the staff work as a close knit team and share a common vision for the school. The school evaluates its work very well. Each aspect of provision is rigorously monitored and where necessary improved. The governing body is supportive and has plans to ensure that its newer members will quickly gain a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. The school has made continual improvements over recent years, for example in gaining many national awards such as the Activemark Gold and the Inclusion Quality Mark. Because of the strengths in the leadership and management and the enthusiasm found throughout the staff team, there is an outstanding capacity to improve further.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 2

Pupils make outstanding progress in their personal development because there are excellent procedures to develop their experience of adult life. The pupils are encouraged to become as independent as possible. They are able to choose from a range of optional courses and they benefit from the emphasis on their learning of basic skills. The staff effectively promote the pupils' mature behaviour through well judged guidance and support. There are very good procedures for supporting pupils when they leave school to go to college. The school has developed excellent programmes in work related learning and for work experience, to which the pupils respond with enthusiasm.

The pupils are able to reach their potential through a range of nationally accredited courses, which enable pupils of all abilities to achieve success. Most pupils make good progress and some higher ability pupils make exceptional progress in attaining GCSE art. The department is well led and managed.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure teachers use the school's assessment system more consistently to capture the small steps in pupils' progress and to enable them to plan more precisely for the next stage in learning.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Although standards when compared to those nationally are low, pupils make good progress and those with autism make outstanding progress. Pupils in the Foundation Stage make a good start to their education while results in post-16 provision show pupils are challenged to gain a range of nationally recognised qualifications. There is no underachievement by any group or individual. Those pupils whose first language is not English make good progress through sensitive teaching and support. Pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties (PMLD) benefit from their inclusion in classes with less disabled pupils and from the effective emphasis on the sensory aspects of their learning programmes. All the pupils make good progress in literacy and numeracy. They reach a high percentage of their IEP targets. The tracking and assessment procedures are relatively new. They are not yet fully established and there are slight inconsistencies in their use. Teachers do not always record each small gain in progress. This has an impact on the pupils' achievement because teachers do not always plan precisely enough for the next stages in pupils' learning.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The pupils' excellent progress in personal development reflects the school's strong management of behaviour and the outstanding level of care and guidance which pupils receive. The pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is exemplary and is embedded in every aspect of this inclusive and multi cultural school.

Pupils quickly settle into school and develop positive attitudes to learning. The attendance of most pupils is good. They respond well to the many opportunities to make choices and to take responsibility for their own learning. The pupils enjoy school. They report no bullying or unfriendliness; they learn how to keep themselves safe and how to eat healthily. Most pupils during the inspection were involved in a 'healthy eating day' where they learned about the value of eating 'five fruits a day'. Pupils with autism are gradually and sensitively helped to eat a wider range of foods than they would otherwise accept. The pupils benefit from the excellent provision in sports and recreation such as in well organised lunchtime activities and an after school club. They develop their social skills through many communal activities. Older pupils, for example, help the community by doing work experience in a local primary school and organise and run the school tuck shop. Members of the school council are proud of their role and readily make suggestions to improve the school. They told inspectors that the staff are kind and help

them to learn. This view is shared by parents, one of whom commented, 'He is helped as much as he needs but is encouraged to be as independent as possible'.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Teachers know their pupils well. They do not however, always effectively record each small gain in pupils' learning. There are very good relationships between classroom teams. The competent teaching assistants support pupils very effectively and give each pupil a high degree of personal tuition. The pupils like their teachers and helpers and they respond by doing their best. For instance, pupils of all abilities, during the inspection, were observed to be gaining a good understanding of the importance of healthy eating through patient individual support.

There is good teaching in the Foundation Stage and teaching in the autistic provision is outstanding. The progress of pupils with autism is recorded in an exemplary way and this gives teachers clear direction in helping pupils achieve further.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The curriculum has been very carefully adapted to the pupils' needs. As a result, pupils of all abilities are successfully taught together in an inclusive ethos. The curriculum is rigorously monitored for its effectiveness. There is an appropriate emphasis on the teaching of basic skills and the curriculum is made more accessible through the excellent use of augmentative communication aids. The curriculum has been very creatively personalised in post 16 and for pupils aged 14-16 and pupils are able to choose their own 'tailor made' courses. There are exceptionally good programmes for work experience and work related learning. Programmes in PHSE underpin much of the school's work and these have a significant impact on the pupils' progress in learning personal skills. There is a wide range of activities, including residential opportunities, to take pupils out of the classroom, showing them that new things can be learned everywhere. The school has gained an impressive list of awards for aspects of the curriculum. There are exemplary links with other schools and organisations.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

There is a high standard of care and support for pupils. Child protection procedures are in place. There are very good procedures for risk assessment and the necessary checks on staff are in place. The good staffing levels give pupils many opportunities to speak with adults. Pupils say they feel safe and would naturally turn to a member of staff for support. The quality of interactions between pupils and adults is excellent. The school has developed very good procedures to quickly identify pupils at risk so positive intervention may take place.

Most pupils have some understanding of how well they are making progress and they construct their own weekly targets with their teacher to help them do better. The older pupils have many

opportunities to select optional learning courses and to sample a range of college provision. The pupils receive very good advice and support as they leave school. There are outstanding links with parents who feel valued and consulted about their child's education. For example, the level of attendance by parents at Annual Reviews has increased from a relatively low level to over 90% during recent years.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The head teacher displays outstanding leadership through her success in creating effective staff teams, in raising standards and in ensuring all staff subscribe to the school's vision of continual improvement. The senior team gives excellent direction to the school. Although the middle managers of specific areas of the school are relatively inexperienced they are becoming more effective in gaining an overview of standards. The management of the provision for autism is outstanding.

A developing strength of the school lies in the way managers at all levels monitor, evaluate and improve on each aspect of the school's performance. For instance, the senior team is well aware of the inconsistencies in teachers' assessments and has specific action plans to improve this aspect.

Communication within the school is excellent. Staff feel fully informed and consulted. There is outstanding provision for the performance management of all staff. The high quality of support and professional development which stems from this has a significant beneficial effect on the pupils' achievement.

The governing body gives good support to the school and has plans to develop the quality of strategic management and challenge it gives to the school's leadership. Relationships with parents are good because communication from school is well organised and parents are actively encouraged to be involved in their child's education. There are productive links with many outside agencies and other professionals.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	1
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	2	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	1
The behaviour of learners	1	1
The attendance of learners	2	2
How well learners enjoy their education	1	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1	1

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	1

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	2
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	2	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

27 June 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Arbour Vale School, Slough, SL2 5AY

Not long ago Mrs Kirkwood and I came to the school to see how you were getting on and whether we could suggest anything to make the school better. You made us very welcome and we enjoyed meeting some of you in the classroom and at the school council. Thank you and well done.

We were with you for two days. That was long enough for us to realise that Arbour Vale is a good school. One of the reasons is that you all enjoy school so much. There were lots of other things that we liked. Here are a few.

- You work hard and make good progress.
- The many different people at the school do their very best to look after you.
- You are helped to be as independent as possible and to make as many choices for yourselves as you can.

There is one thing which I think would make the school better and which all your teachers are already working towards.

- Teachers should continue to improve the way they write about the progress you have made in your learning so they can help you to get even better.

Please thank your parents for the many very helpful comments they made on the questionnaires.

Best wishes and good luck,

Yours sincerely,

Melvyn Blackband

Lead Inspector