



Avon House School

Independent School

Inspection report

**Better
education
and care**

DfES Registration Number 317/6059
Unique Reference Number 102872
Inspection number 296774
Inspection dates 31 January – 1 February 2007
Reporting inspector Mrs Judith Charlesworth

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 162A of the Education Act 2002 (as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005).

| | | |
|-------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Age group 2-11 | Published 26 February 2007 | Reference no. 296774 |
|-------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------|

© Crown copyright 2007

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out by Ofsted under section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005, in order to advise the Secretary of State for Education and Skills about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Information about the school

Avon House is a co-educational independent school providing for pupils aged two and a half to eleven years of age. There are four departments in the school: nursery (two to three years), foundation (four to five years), pre-preparatory (five to seven years) and preparatory (seven to eleven years). The school also runs the Avon House Dyslexia Centre on the same site. This provides support for Avon House pupils who have specific learning difficulties and sessional tuition and support for around 80 pupils from other schools. A number of self-employed therapists, such as education, play and speech and language therapists work out of the Dyslexia Centre, and also work with some Avon House pupils. The school is situated in Woodford Green in the London borough of Redbridge. It occupies four buildings, two of which are large converted houses. The proprietor has just purchased an adjoining house to extend the school's facilities. Avon House aims to provide a happy, disciplined environment where emphasis is placed on the development of each child as an individual.

Evaluation of the school

Avon House provides a satisfactory quality of education and level of support, care and guidance for its pupils, and they make satisfactory progress. Their personal development is good and their behaviour excellent due to the school's emphasis on these aspects of pupils' development. The work of the Dyslexia Centre is very good, and pupils make very good progress in overcoming their difficulties. However, the school does not meet a number of regulatory requirements.

Quality of education

The curriculum is satisfactory. A good range of well planned, interesting and challenging activities is provided for the children in the foundation department. Activities are based on the national Foundation Stage curriculum and build up children's skills, knowledge and understanding systematically and enjoyably. On one occasion, for example, children were exploring their night-time worries with maturity during a whole-class discussion. The nursery curriculum, however, lacks this level of challenge and interest and children do not learn sufficiently

through play and investigation. Planning and record keeping are insufficiently robust.

The curriculum for pupils in the pre-preparatory and preparatory departments is broad and enriched by good sporting and creative activities such as ballet, swimming, chess and drama. However, there is no programme for personal, social and health education, and there tends to be insufficient focus on investigation and research, problem solving and practical work. Consequently, although almost all pupils reach levels expected of their age in English, mathematics and science by the time they leave the school, not enough reach levels higher than this as they have not had enough opportunity to use and apply their skills creatively. There are three main reasons for these curriculum weaknesses. Firstly, plans and schemes of work are not written to any given format and are therefore variable in quality. Secondly, there is no overall long term plan in most subjects to ensure pupils' skills are challenged and built up systematically. Finally, the quality of the curriculum, teaching and learning in each subject is not monitored which means their quality is not assured.

Teaching is satisfactory and pupils make satisfactory progress overall, although there are variations. Pupils with specific learning difficulties make very good progress in relation to the targets set on their individual education plans (IEPs) due to good assessment procedures and high quality support from staff and therapists in the Dyslexia Centre. However, teachers do not make sufficient use of the information and strategies outlined in the IEPs in everyday lessons. Children in the foundation classes make good progress generally, and pupils throughout the school make good progress in gaining reading, writing, spelling and numeracy skills because of the school's focus on these aspects.

Where teaching is effective, lessons have a brisk pace and provide real challenge and interest for the pupils because activities closely match pupils' needs. This was demonstrated in a mathematics lesson where groups of pupils were tested on different multiplication tables according to their attainment, whilst the pupils not being tested were busy completing class work. When teaching is less effective, it is sometimes too teacher-directed with insufficient input from pupils, and at other times too book-based with little teacher involvement to assess pupils' understanding and provide challenge. Pupils' English and mathematical abilities are frequently tested to determine specific difficulties and demonstrate progress. However, there is no framework to regularly assess attainment in the subjects of the National Curriculum so that information can be used to plan teaching, set targets and provide greater challenge.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good and their behaviour is outstanding. The school places a very strong emphasis on building up pupils' self esteem, and achieves this very successfully. Weekly awards are given for qualities such as organisation and punctuality and celebrated in assemblies. Pupils reflect thoughtfully on those less fortunate than themselves and support them through various activities, such as raising money for UNICEF. Pupils and parents are overwhelmingly clear that pupils enjoy school. Attendance and punctuality are good and pupils take great pride in their work and its presentation. They are polite and respectfully friendly.

Pupils' moral development is outstanding. They are genuinely considerate to one another, for example lending each other equipment unasked. They clearly know right from wrong; for example one pupil was publicly praised for handing in a five pound note he had found outside. Pupils' social development is good. They abide by the school rules and show a growing awareness of how to contribute to community life by taking part in activities and taking responsibility for themselves and others. Pupils become prepared for economic well-being by learning the skills they need to be fully literate and numerate, but need more opportunity to use their initiative. Their cultural development is good. Pupils demonstrate a commitment to racial equality, supported by the school's multi-cultural population and positive ethos. Cultural activities such as theatre trips are included in the curriculum.

Welfare, health and safety of the pupils

The school's concern for pupils' well-being is central to its work. This contributes very successfully to their good personal development. However, the overall provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety is only satisfactory because some practices are insufficiently robust, and some requirements in relation to policies and their implementation are not met. The anti-bullying policy does not include sufficient information, and attendance registers and records of sanctions are not kept according to requirements. The behaviour management policy, however, underpins pupils' excellent behaviour and is well understood by both staff and pupils. There is an appropriate health and safety policy and a good reporting system for minor maintenance issues. Risk assessments and fire safety are suitably managed, while First Aid and child protection procedures meet requirements.

Relationships between staff and pupils and the pupils themselves are good and help pupils learn to stay and feel safe. Each pupil has an annual one-to-one talk with a teacher to discuss pastoral issues which they value and enjoy. Intimidating behaviour is rare and pupils know they can turn to an adult if they

need to. One pupil said: *'I'm happy to talk to any teacher, they're all nice.'* The school encourages pupils to follow active and healthy lifestyles. Sport plays a big part in the curriculum, and pupils have free access to water during lessons, school lunches are improving and pupils are encouraged to bring healthy snacks from home.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

Procedures have very recently been put into place to ensure that new applicants are fully checked for their suitability to work with children before their appointment is confirmed. The school is in the process of compiling a single central record of all staff checks, which is later than required. The process has revealed some gaps in the information carried on some of the long-serving staff. The school is currently taking steps to deal with this.

School's premises and accommodation

The premises and accommodation are of a satisfactory standard. They are well maintained and in good decorative order. However, the accommodation is restricted. The playgrounds are small for the number of pupils although the nearby green is used to extend play opportunities at times. The youngest children have suitable dedicated play facilities. Sports facilities are limited but very good use is made of local facilities and the school does well in local swimming and sporting competitions. There are specialist rooms for science and information and communication technology, but the science room does not have running water which restricts practical activities. Class sizes in the foundation and pre-preparatory departments are particularly large which restricts the space available to the pupils, and two classrooms in the preparatory school are too small. Toilets for older pupils are shared by girls and boys which does not meet regulatory requirements.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

The provision of information is variable and it fails to meet a number of requirements. Parents of pupils in the pre-preparatory and preparatory departments receive two reports on their children's progress in each subject taught each year. These provide satisfactory information but parents feel that they would like more opportunity to discuss progress with school staff as there are currently no formal parents' meetings to enable them to do this. Several parents report that they are not happy with communication with the school in general. The reports for children in the foundation department are in a format that does not correlate with the department's record keeping system and does not include all the areas of learning. These reports, therefore, are not sufficiently informative. However, parents of these younger children are kept better informed of school business than those of the older pupils by means of

meetings, both formal and informal, and regular newsletters. The school has an attractive prospectus and website but some of the required information is not included in either and parents are not made aware that other information is available on request. The school does not provide the required financial information to funding authorities.

Procedures for handling complaints

Parents have expressed concern about the school's procedures for receiving and handling complaints. This is being addressed by a newly drafted complaints policy and a helpful procedural flowchart. However, these do not yet meet several of the regulatory requirements.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school meets all of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended January 2005, with the exception of those listed below.

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the curriculum (standard 1) and must:

- establish and implement appropriate plans and schemes of work in each subject to support the curriculum policy (paragraph 1(2))
- provide a programme of personal, social and health education (paragraph 1(2)(f))
- devise and implement a framework to assess pupils' work regularly and thoroughly and use the information to plan teaching so that pupils can make progress (paragraph 1(3)(g)).

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety (standard 3) and must:

- develop the school's anti-bullying policy and procedures to ensure that they include all the required elements (paragraph 3(2)(a))
- keep written records of sanctions imposed upon pupils for serious disciplinary offences (paragraph 3(8))

-
- maintain attendance registers in accordance with requirements (paragraph 3(9)).

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of suitability of proprietor and staff (standard 4) and must:

- prior to the confirmation of staff appointments, carry out appropriate checks to confirm: identity, medical fitness, previous employment history, character references, qualifications and professional references; check applicants' suitability to work with children with the Criminal Records Bureau, and summarise the results of all these checks in a single central record (paragraphs 4(b) and 4(c)).

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the premises and accommodation (standard 5) and must:

- ensure that the number of pupils deployed to the smallest classrooms allows adequate space (paragraph 5(j))
- ensure that boys and girls over the age of eight years have separate and sufficient toilet facilities (paragraph 5(k)).

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the provision of information for parents, carers and others (standard 6) and must:

- provide particulars of its policies on and arrangements for discipline and exclusions (paragraph 6(2)(e))
- provide particulars of the educational and welfare provision for pupils with statements and for whom English is an additional language (paragraph 6(2)(f))
- ensure that parents are aware they can request particulars of the school's policies on bullying, child protection, health and safety, the promotion of good behaviour and sanctions adopted in the event of pupils misbehaving (paragraph 6(2)(h))
- provide, or ensure parents are aware they can request particulars of: academic performance during the preceding school year including the results of any public examinations, details of the school's complaints procedure and the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year and a summary of the

qualifications of the staff employed at the school (paragraphs 6(2)(i), 6(2)(j) and 6(2)(k))

- provide to each local authority who funds or part-funds pupils an annual account of income received and expenditure incurred (paragraph 6(7)).

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of procedures for handling complaints (standard 7) and must:

- ensure that parents are made aware of the school's complaints procedure (paragraph 7(b))
- ensure that the complaints procedure includes clear time scales for each stage (paragraph 7(c))
- ensure that the procedure includes the establishment of a suitable panel to hear complaints, provision for parents to attend these panel hearings, accompanied if they wish and for a copy of the findings and recommendations of the panel to be given to the relevant people (paragraphs 7(f), 7(g), 7(h) and 7(i))
- make provision for suitable written records to be kept of all complaints indicating whether they were resolved at the preliminary stage or whether they proceeded to a panel hearing (paragraph 7(j))
- indicate how all correspondence, statements and records relating to any complaints will be kept confidential (paragraph 7(k)).

In order to comply with the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 2002 the school should devise a three-year accessibility plan.

School details

| | | | |
|---|--|------------|------------|
| Name of school | Avon House School | | |
| DfES number | 317/6059 | | |
| Unique reference number | 102872 | | |
| Type of school | Nursery and preparatory school | | |
| Status | Independent | | |
| Date school opened | 1954 | | |
| Age range of pupils | 2-11 | | |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed | | |
| Number on roll | Boys: 111 | Girls: 100 | Total: 211 |
| Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need | Boys: 1 | Girls: 0 | Total: 1 |
| Annual fees | £5,520 - £6,645 | | |
| Address of school | Avon House School 490/492 High Road Woodford Green Essex IG8 0PN | | |
| Telephone number | 0208 5041749 | | |
| Email address | info@avonhouse.org | | |
| Headteacher | Mrs Sheila Ferrari | | |
| Proprietor | Avon House School Ltd. | | |
| Reporting inspector | Mrs Judith Charlesworth | | |
| Dates of inspection | 31 January – 1 February 2007 | | |