

The Avenue School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	110179
Local Authority	Reading
Inspection number	310212
Inspection dates	7–8 May 2008
Reporting inspector	Stuart Charlton

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	74
6th form	11
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Sheila Tibbenham
Headteacher	Mrs Sue Bourne
Date of previous school inspection	18 April 2005
School address	Basingstoke Road Reading RG2 0EN
Telephone number	0118 9015554
Fax number	0118 9015558

Age group	2–19
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

The Avenue is a special school catering for pupils aged 2 to 19 years with profound multiple learning difficulties (PMLD), severe learning difficulties (SLD) and autism. An increasing number of younger pupils with complex autism are being enrolled. There is a group of pupils in Year 11 who have moderate learning difficulties (MLD). Most students in the sixth form have PMLD or severe learning difficulties (SLD). All pupils have a statement of special educational need. Pupils come mainly from the Reading area and are from a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds, but the number of pupils who are eligible for a free school meal is well below the national average. Since 2007, the school has held specialist status for dance, music and drama and the Healthy Schools Award. It is presently applying for Artsmark status. The school will move into a new building in September 2008.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

The Avenue is an outstanding school. Since the last inspection, strong and determined leadership and management have enabled the school to move forward rapidly by ensuring that staff develop new skills to meet the changing needs of the school's population. The enthusiasm, drive and determination of the headteacher form the basis on which these improvements are being built. The achievement of the majority of pupils is excellent and the achievements of the rest are at least good. Pupils' personal development is excellent based on the support and guidance that all staff give to this aspect of learning. The school is held in high esteem by pupils and their parents. As one parent commented, 'It is a wonderful school, the staff are so caring and supportive and my child would happily go there every day of the week'.

The headteacher has a very clear vision of how the provision should develop. She is ably supported by her senior leadership team and governors. They have established a caring and supportive ethos that contributes significantly to raising pupils' self-esteem and confidence. There are strong systems to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the provision so that managers are fully aware of its strengths and weaknesses and have drawn up a comprehensive development plan. There are excellent systems to monitor and develop teaching and learning. Across the school, teachers' planning now has a clear focus on the needs of individuals, based on the challenging targets that are set for pupils' personal development. Challenging targets are also set to help pupils identify what they need to do to improve in their academic subjects. These targets are used extremely well by all staff in the primary classes, including those in the Foundation Stage, but this practice is not as strong in the secondary and post-16 classes. The professionalism and commitment of the support staff play a significant part in helping all pupils to achieve of their best. The curriculum is excellent with a very wide range of opportunities for pupils to develop their skills, particularly through out-of-school activities. The school uses its specialism extremely well to provide much appreciated dance, drama and music activities for its pupils. It is also very actively involved in helping teachers and pupils in local mainstream schools to develop these activities. Pupils' behaviour is excellent and most pupils attend well and have excellent attitudes to learning. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness is excellent.

A significant feature in the success of the school is the strong teamwork and sense of purpose, which the headteacher and senior managers have established. This is the cornerstone for the excellent relationships that have been established with other agencies such as the psychological service and social services as well as with other schools and colleges. Middle managers are well supported and now have the confidence to move their areas forward. The governing body is very strong. It supports the school well and acts very effectively as its critical friend. The arrangements for safeguarding pupils and ensuring their safety are robust. At the time of the last inspection, there were concerns about the possible closure of the school. It is now about to move into a new building, which will also house a range of Local Authority (LA) teams. This clearly demonstrates that the school has excellent capacity to improve. The ethos, which has been established, enables the school to look forward to the future with confidence.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 1

The profile of students' needs in the sixth form is changing significantly and the provision is currently undergoing review to ensure that it meets these changing needs. The achievement

of the present students is at least good with many who achieve very highly. This is based on excellent teaching and learning. The curriculum and accreditation arrangements are very well matched to the needs of students so that all are prepared well for life after school. The sixth form is very well managed with excellent support from the headteacher and senior leadership team. As a result, the review of provision is moving forward very effectively.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

The vast majority of children in the Foundation Stage are on the autistic spectrum. The school has invested considerable time, effort and resource in ensuring that all staff have the skills needed to develop the learning of these children. Consequently, children's achievements are outstanding based on excellent teaching. They settle very quickly and develop the daily routines and independence that are the cornerstones for their future learning and are very much appreciated by parents. The leadership of the Foundation Stage is very effective.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that the challenging targets that are set for pupils are used consistently across the school.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The majority of pupils in the primary classes, including those children in the Foundation Stage, make excellent progress and achieve very highly. The achievements of secondary pupils and those in post-16 are not as high, but are still outstanding overall. The school has rigorous and robust systems to track pupils' progress across the school. These are used extremely well to show the small steps in learning which are critical in demonstrating the achievements of many learners across the school. Like many special schools, it is not easy for The Avenue to find other schools with which to compare itself and consequently has to rely on its own historical data. Given the changing needs of its population, it is cautious in making such comparisons. Using the information that is available, rigorous and challenging targets are set for all pupils relating to both their personal and academic development, which all achieve and many exceed.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Across the school, a significant proportion of pupils have complex medical needs. Staff are highly conscientious and respect each pupil's dignity to ensure that the personal development of all pupils is outstanding. All pupils thoroughly enjoy coming to school and well over half have attendance rates better than 95% so that overall attendance is good. Behaviour in classrooms and round the school is exemplary and this is based on the consistent application of the behaviour policy by all staff and the excellent example they set. Pupils are very aware of the need for a healthy lifestyle and the take-up at lunchtime of sporting activities such as football, cricket and basketball for both boys and girls is very high. Also the school's specialism in dance and drama ensures that these good habits are fully endorsed in lessons. Many of the older pupils act as mentors and advocates for their younger peers. In all their activities, pupils

pay particular attentions to acting safely. There are excellent opportunities through college links and work placements for those pupils, where appropriate, to develop work-based skills which prepare them extremely well for life after school.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The school has invested considerable resources to ensure that staff have the skills they need to deal with the changing needs of its population. This is reflected in thorough planning for all lessons that focuses on the needs of individuals and how these will be met. The bedrock of the very successful learning that results is the excellent relationships developed between staff and students. Teachers are particularly well supported by the teaching assistants and this ensures that all pupils quickly develop their self-esteem and confidence. The ethos, which is established ensures, that in the words of one of the older pupils, 'this place rocks'.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The curriculum provides excellent opportunities for all pupils to develop the skills they will need in the future. A very wide range of accreditation is available and the school provision is very effectively supplemented by opportunities at the local college and through work experience and placements. The dance, drama and music activities along with physical education (PE) are a significant aspect of the provision and are highly valued by pupils. An outstanding example of the school's commitment to raising the profile of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities within its community is the leading role taken by pupils in a recent production with partner mainstream schools at a local theatre.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The care, guidance and support the school gives to promoting students' personal development are outstanding. This excellent provision is based on the commitment and time that all staff devote to the personal mentoring system which is such a strong feature. This establishes a safe and secure environment in which all pupils can successfully address the challenges of school life. The school is a very harmonious community with no instances of bullying or exclusions. Safeguarding procedures fully meet requirements. A particular feature of this area of the school's work is how quickly all newcomers, particularly those in the primary classes, settle into routines which are crucial to their future success.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The leadership and vision of the headteacher has been the critical factor in changing the fortunes of the school since the last inspection. Her energy and enthusiasm have ensured that the school has developed rapidly and has not been distracted from its main purpose during the planning and development of the new school building. In this, she has been extremely well supported by the senior leadership team and by the governing body. Considerable time and effort has been put into developing staff skills and this has paid dividends in the ethos that has been established. The school now plays a leading role in helping other schools to manage pupils with challenging behaviour in a mainstream setting. This very strong track record of improvement since the last inspection shows that the school has excellent capacity to improve.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	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?	1	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	1
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	1	
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1	1

Achievement and standards

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

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	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
How well learners enjoy their education	1	
The attendance of learners	2	
The behaviour of learners	1	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	1	1
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?	1	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1	
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

16 May 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of The Avenue School, Reading, RG2 0EN

Thank you for all the help you gave me when I visited your school on 7 and 8 May. When I talked to the School Council they told me that you thoroughly enjoyed all the exciting activities which are provided, such as swimming, dance, drama and sports clubs. When I talked to you individually, you told me that all staff looked after you very well and also that lessons were enjoyable and exciting! I agree with you that these things are what makes the Avenue an excellent school. As one of you said 'this place rocks'.

You are all very excited about moving into the new building in September. So that things get even better I have asked the staff to make sure that in all lessons they use the targets you have been set.

Yours sincerely

Stuart Charlton

Lead Inspector