

Avalon School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	123945
Local Authority	Somerset
Inspection number	314763
Inspection date	19 March 2008
Reporting inspector	Rowena Onions

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	3-16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	48
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Simon Harvey
Headteacher	Neil Galloway
Date of previous school inspection	1 July 2004
School address	Brooks Road Street BA16 0PS
Telephone number	01458 443081
Fax number	01458 447381

Age group	3-16
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Avalon School provides for pupils who have statements of special educational need for a range of difficulties. These include moderate and severe learning difficulties, profound and multiple learning difficulties and pupils with autistic spectrum disorder (ASD). Pupils' attainment on entry is significantly below expectations because of the nature of their learning difficulties. Five pupils have dual placements, spending some days each week at a local secondary school. Seventy per cent of the pupils are male and 30% female. The vast majority of pupils are of White British heritage. A higher than average proportion of children is in the care of the local authority. The school has achieved the Healthy School award, a SportsMark and has Investor in People status.

Also inspected was Acorn Nursery, which caters for children aged three to five. These children enter the nursery at the expected level and do not enter Avalon School after their time there. They too are mainly of White British heritage. The Acorn Nursery is located on the same site as Avalon School. At the time of the inspection, it was led and managed by the headteacher of Avalon School and overseen by the school's governors.

Both facilities are in a period of change. Acorn Nursery is due to close two weeks after the inspection and to be relocated at a new local children's centre where it would be under new management. As part of a local authority reorganisation, from September 2009, pupils between four and eleven will cease to be educated at Avalon, which will become a secondary only school.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Avalon is a good school. It has some outstanding aspects. Pupils are extremely well cared for; consequently, they become happy, relaxed and self-confident. They are very successfully helped to gain an understanding of how to keep themselves healthy and safe. Pupils like school very much. The celebration of their achievements very effectively raises pupils' self-esteem. Pupils are very keen to do well and try really hard to meet the academic and personal targets set for them. The attached Acorn Nursery also provides good quality education.

In relation to their starting points, the achievement and progress of most pupils in the main school is good. Good teaching means most achieve the targets set for them. By the time they leave the school, all are successful in gaining some external accreditation for their efforts. Academic guidance is strong. Rigorous assessment and tracking ensure that the targets set for pupils are appropriately challenging and pupils are, wherever possible, encouraged to contribute to setting and assessing their own targets so that they know how to improve. The achievement of some pupils with severe learning difficulties is, however, only satisfactory, because systems for helping them to gain early skills in communication, although improving, are not yet consistent throughout the school.

Very positive relationships ensure that lessons are conducted in a positive atmosphere that helps pupils learn. Work provided is mostly well planned and is made relevant and interesting. However, on occasions planning does not focus sufficiently on learning outcomes and this slows the rate of progress made. Teaching assistants' skills are used well to provide individualised attention that greatly benefits the pupils. The good curriculum provision ensures that most pupils have access to appropriate levels of work and motivating activities during each unit of work. However, curriculum planning does not always ensure that there are sufficient opportunities throughout the school for all pupils with severe learning difficulties to acquire early communication skills. The extended and enriching experiences provided through the regular opportunities pupils have to work with their peers in local schools and colleges are a particularly strong aspect of the curriculum. The placements for older pupils prepare them well for their future well-being, particularly in giving them self-confidence. They speak about how, although they would be sad to leave the school, they look forward to commencing college.

There is good leadership and management. The leadership team has a clear vision for developing provision and pupils' achievement. Effective self-evaluation provides a clear understanding of what needs to be improved. Senior staff play a significant part in this and this has resulted in accelerated progress, for example, in science and aspects of mathematics. The headteacher provides outstanding leadership and has had a hugely positive impact on the school's performance. Under his leadership the school has been particularly effective in enhancing the personal well-being of the pupils at Avalon and, through its outreach work, the well-being of pupils with complex difficulties in local primary and secondary schools. Governors play their part well in providing support and in holding the school to account. Parents and carers have very positive views about the school.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

The success of the good provision in Acorn Nursery is seen in the good quality of the learning environment and the good progress children make. Children achieve well. They are looked after

well; consequently, they are happy and feel secure. Parents are very pleased with the nursery provision. One parent who wrote, 'My child loves coming to nursery, is learning and enjoying every moment', summed up parental opinion.

The children's personal development and well-being are good and they quickly develop positive attitudes to learning. Behaviour is good. The children make good progress in developing social skills. Most willingly share resources, for instance, when making play-dough cakes or when using scooters and tricycles. Relationships are excellent and the positive examples staff provide make a significant contribution to the children's personal and social development.

The quality of teaching is good. Planning is thorough and linked closely to the nationally recommended curriculum. Parents commented favourably on the wide range of activities provided. Many of these have a creative element and are successful in sustaining interest and motivation. Children are involved in making choices about the content of some activities and this makes a significant contribution to developing their independence and thinking skills. Staff know the children very well. A considerable amount of information is gathered about each child and presented in very good quality profiles. These are used well to enable teaching to be based soundly on previous learning.

The leadership and management of the nursery are good. The headteacher and teaching staff work well as a team to sustain and improve the quality of the provision. Reception age children in the main school are catered for well and make good progress.

What the school should do to improve further

- Provide more opportunities across the curriculum to ensure that where necessary pupils acquire early communication skills.
- Ensure that planning always makes clear what individual pupils are expected to learn in each lesson.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

The nature of the pupils' learning difficulties and/or disabilities means that standards are well below average. However, pupils achieve well and make good progress, in their core subjects and in the acquisition of key skills. They also make good progress towards appropriately challenging targets in their individual education plans. The progress and attainment of the oldest pupils are demonstrated by the wide range of accreditation gained, including entry level GCSE by the higher attainers. Some pupils with severe learning difficulties make only satisfactory progress because of insufficient opportunities to acquire early communication skills. In all other cases pupils with different types of primary need, including those with autistic spectrum disorder, profound and multiple learning difficulties and moderate learning difficulties, all achieve well. Parents and pupils are happy with the progress made. The school is very careful to ensure that children in the care of the local authority make good progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Relationships between staff and pupils are excellent and the high levels of trust the pupils have for the adults in the school mean they take an increasingly confident approach to dealing with new situations. Pupils are helped to eat more healthily, for example by extending the range of foods they have to eat. They are very keen to do this, and to take exercise. The school council,

for example, has had a key role in introducing trampolining as a playtime activity. Pupils clearly enjoy lessons a great deal, and most are highly motivated and behave exceptionally well. They show a very good awareness of their own safety and that of those around them. Those with more challenging behaviour very successfully learn to exercise increasing self-control. The attendance of most pupils is good. Pupils get on very well together and develop strong friendships with each other as well as very productive working relationships with adults. Pupils of all ages carry out enthusiastically any responsibility they are given, for example being a school council representative. Pupils are very well prepared for the next stage of their education through the confidence their placements in mainstream schools and colleges give them. Pupils develop a very good understanding of what living in a community means, both through these links and through the support they very willingly give each other.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teachers try very hard to interest pupils. Work is thoughtfully and carefully planned, taking into account an assessment of previous learning. Activities are practical and ensure that pupils play an active part in lessons. The resources used are carefully chosen to reflect the age of the pupils as well as their interests. Good use is made of technology, for example interactive whiteboards, to bring work alive as well as to provide access for pupils with visual or physical disabilities. Teachers plan work that links subjects together well, for example using information and communication technology to teach pupils how to research to find out more about their home towns. This increases the relevance of the work and boosts pupils' enthusiasm. On occasions planning does not make learning outcomes sufficiently clear and this slows pupils' progress. Parents are provided with good levels of information so that they are able to support their children at home more effectively.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Careful planning ensures that the curriculum caters well for most individual needs. It does not, however, provide sufficient opportunities for some pupils with severe learning difficulties to acquire early communication skills. Otherwise, there is an appropriate emphasis on the development of key skills, such as skills in thinking, study and personal care, as well as on literacy and numeracy. Other subjects are well represented and statutory requirements met. The curriculum recognises the importance of pupils learning to be healthy and undertaking exercise as well as developing a wider understanding of community responsibility through work on topics such as recycling. Partnerships with mainstream schools offer very valuable opportunities for almost all pupils to extend their personal and educational experiences. Other activities outside school, such as residential experiences, further promote this and are greatly enjoyed by the pupils.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

There is high quality personal care given to pupils. Close relationships with other professionals and a multi-agency approach ensure success in meeting pupils' physical, medical and emotional needs. Robust procedures ensure pupils' safety. The importance placed on relationships with

parents and carers means that there are close links between home and school that help pupils to gain the most from both environments. The meeting of pupils' emotional needs, for example through play therapists, is a key factor in helping pupils deal with any issues that arise so that they can become as relaxed and happy as possible. Wherever possible, pupils are provided with the skills to be assertive and thus to be proactive in making decisions and in keeping themselves safe. The emphasis on the importance of self-esteem and self-confidence enables the oldest pupils to make very successful transfers to the next phase of education. The main school has rigorous systems to track pupils' academic and personal achievements and uses these to set appropriately challenging targets. Wherever possible, pupils play a full part in this and know what they need to do to meet their targets.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher is determined to ensure that all pupils reach their full potential. He has successfully led many improvements made over recent years, including helping develop the extremely effective outreach work that supports teachers in local primary and secondary schools who have pupils with complex needs in their classes. Accurate self-evaluation, including robust checking of the school's work, promotes prompt action to develop the provision, showing that the school has good capacity to further improve. For example, the lack of sufficient opportunities for some pupils to acquire early communication skills had been identified prior to the inspection and action to improve this already begun. Subject leaders perform an effective monitoring role within the constraints of the time available to check on the quality of teaching of their subjects. The school acknowledges that more time is needed for this role in order to ensure greater consistency, for example in the planning of lessons. Governance is good. The governors have worked hard alongside the headteacher to ensure that school effectiveness and staff morale have remained positive during the uncertainties that have accompanied the planned reorganisation of special education in the town.

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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
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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
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	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
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?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	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
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	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

I would like to thank you all for looking after me so well when I came to visit your school, which is giving you a good education. I really enjoyed talking to you and looking at your work. This is what I thought about you and your school.

- You learn to be self-confident young people who are a pleasure to talk to and who know how to behave.
- You like school and you try very hard to do well.
- Most of you in the main school and in Acorn Nursery make good progress.
- A few of you could make better progress in learning to communicate.
- Adults in your school take extremely good care of you.
- There are very good opportunities for you to work with pupils in other schools.
- You are taught well, but in some lessons you could be doing better if what you were learning was made clearer.
- Adults in your school work very hard to make things even better.
- Your headteacher needs a big pat on the back for the work he has done in your school.

I have asked your headteacher and the staff to make your school even better by doing three things:

- Help some of you make better progress in learning to communicate.
- Make sure that it is clear what you are expected to learn in each lesson.

I know you will help by continuing to try hard to succeed.



20 March 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Avalon School, Street, BA16 0PS

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Yours truly

Rowena Onions
Lead inspector