

Avon House School

Independent school inspection report

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Reporting inspector Sue Frater HMI

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Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out by Ofsted under Section 162A¹ of the Education Act 2002, as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005², the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Information about the school

Avon House School in Woodford Green, in Essex, is a co-educational independent school for pupils of all abilities aged from 3 to 11 years. Currently 162 pupils are on its roll. Pupils come from a range of ethnic backgrounds, although very few are at an early stage of learning English. A very small minority of pupils have special educational needs or difficulties, mainly specific learning difficulty (dyslexia), and very few have statements of special educational needs. The school manages the Avon House Dyslexia Centre on the same site. The centre provides support for pupils from Avon House School who have dyslexia and also provides tuition and support for around 40 pupils from other schools. The school provides childcare for children from the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage to the age of eleven. Almost all (45) of the 49 children in the Early Years Foundation Stage are partly funded by the government. The children are taught in two classes: Foundation 1 (for children aged three to four years) and Foundation 2 (for children aged four to five years).

The school aims to provide a 'happy, secure environment [where] the emphasis is placed on each pupil being recognised as a valued individual'. In this way the school aims to develop each individual pupil's 'self-esteem, respect for oneself and respect for others'. It also aims to develop pupils' 'full potential in both academic and non-academic fields with a strong moral understanding of truth, equality and humanity' and to give pupils 'life-enhancing strategies to build on as they progress towards the adult world'.

The school opened in 1969 and was last inspected on 31 January to 1 February 2007.

Evaluation of the school

Avon House School provides a good quality of education and meets its aims. The curriculum is good and, together with good teaching and assessment, promotes pupils' good progress. The dyslexia centre provides excellent support for pupils with specific learning difficulty. Pupils' behaviour and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are outstanding. Provision for their welfare, health and safety is good and safeguarding procedures are robust. The school has improved significantly

¹ www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2002/ukpga_20020032_en_14#pt10-ch1-pb4-l1g162

² www.opsi.gov.uk/ACTS/acts2005/ukpga_20050018_en_15#sch8

since its last inspection and now meets all of the regulations for independent schools. The overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage is good, although staff have not yet undertaken training in paediatric first aid.

Quality of education

The overall quality of education, including the curriculum, is good, as is the provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Good curricular breadth and balance are achieved through covering the National Curriculum and extending it effectively by a wide variety of enrichment activities and school visits. Pupils study a good range of subjects. Personal, social, health and citizenship education is provided appropriately through 'circle time', science, assemblies and visitors. There is a good focus on developing literacy and ICT skills to support dyslexic pupils, including very effective specialist support for individual pupils from staff in the dyslexia centre. The new special educational needs coordinator, together with staff from the centre, prepares high-quality individual education plans to help pupils in transferring the skills they learn in the centre to their work in lessons. Appropriate adaptations are made for pupils with statements of special educational needs, such as a writing slope and effective support from teaching assistants.

The curriculum helps pupils to become well-rounded individuals who are knowledgeable about a wide range of issues, and able to develop and pursue new interests. It is enhanced by piano and recorder lessons, a choir, drama productions and opportunities to attend dance classes. The extensive range of educational visits includes museums, art galleries and residential trips. Visitors make a positive contribution, for example to personal safety. The wide-ranging extra-curricular clubs have a good take-up and are enjoyed by most pupils. The curriculum policy is supported by appropriate schemes of work that follow a common format for planning. The schemes have yet to be reviewed to ensure they provide for pupils' progress throughout the school, particularly the progress of more-able pupils. Pupils are prepared well for the next stage in their education and many pass 7-plus and 11-plus examinations and enter local all-age independent schools or grammar schools.

Teaching and assessment are good, including in the Early Years Foundation Stage, and there are examples of outstanding practice. They have improved since the last inspection due to the introduction of an effective system for staff appraisal. Strengths in the most successful lessons include excellent planning; engaging use of visual, auditory and kinaesthetic activities; a brisk pace of learning; and regular feedback from pupils. Other strengths include the positive management of pupils' behaviour, good subject knowledge, and effective use of resources and teaching strategies, such as modelling the skills to be mastered and asking probing questions. This leads to pupils being able to apply skills independently, as in measuring, researching information and asking questions in role play. In some lessons there is insufficient pace and challenge for more-able pupils. The school tracks pupils' progress through National Curriculum sub-levels. However, the tracking system does not identify target levels to help teachers to plan for the range of ability, particularly

for more-able pupils. While teachers mark pupils' work regularly, they do not always indicate the 'next steps' to help them to improve their work.

Pupils make good progress in most lessons, as do children in the Early Years Foundation Stage, and in some lessons they make rapid progress because the work is matched very closely to their needs. Pupils with special educational needs or those who speak English as an additional language make good and often better progress due to effective support from teaching assistants and very clear targets and learning strategies in their individual education plans. In some lessons, more-able pupils are insufficiently challenged to reach the higher levels because the whole class works at the same pace.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding, including in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Pupils learn to value each other's religions, ethnicity and cultures through the curriculum, assemblies and celebrations. For example, during the inspection a parent contributed to a Year 2 lesson on Diwali that extended the pupils' understanding through story, music, divas (lights), costume and food. The children, parents and staff enjoyed the celebration immensely. Pupils have a strong sense of right and wrong. They discuss moral issues avidly in 'circle time' and make a very positive contribution to maintaining their 'eco school' through collecting litter, recycling waste and maintaining the garden. They get on exceptionally well together and support each other in lessons and at play, including through the school council. They also make a very positive contribution to the community by raising funds for charities and singing to local elderly residents. They participate enthusiastically in a range of cultural visits such as trips to the theatre and art galleries and in school musical and dramatic productions including 'Cats' and 'Pepys' Show'. They learn about public institutions and services, for example through visits from the police, fire service and nurse.

In their questionnaires, the large majority of pupils agreed that behaviour is good, although a small minority of pupils disagreed. Inspectors found pupils' behaviour to be outstanding. They are courteous, proud of their school and they encourage each other to behave well. Pupils enjoy school very much as shown in their good attendance and willingness to participate in lessons and in the broad range of school activities. In developing good skills in speaking, literacy, numeracy and ICT, pupils grow in confidence and self-esteem, particularly pupils with dyslexia. These skills, together with pupils' excellent social skills, help to prepare them well for their future education.

Welfare, health and safety of the pupils

The welfare, health and safety of all pupils, and children in the Early Years Foundation Stage, are good and there are exemplary features. Pupils say that they feel very safe in school. The school monitors this well through annual surveys of their

views. Pupils claim that there is little bullying and that they would talk to their teachers if they had any concerns. A pupil said that the school 'feels like one big family and we all get on together'. Another pupil said, 'We are all friends and no-one is left out.' The pupils are clearly happy to be in school and this contributes to their positive attitudes to learning.

Pupils have developed a very good awareness of keeping healthy through the curriculum, in participating in the many opportunities for sport, and in choosing healthy options in the dining hall. The school provides a very good level of care. It implements robust policies and procedures, for example with regard to safeguarding. A good level of supervision is provided at all times, including at breaks, at lunchtime and on school trips. Admission and attendance registers are maintained appropriately and any absence is followed up. A sufficient number of staff are trained in first aid. The school fulfils its duties under the Disability Discrimination Act 2002 and provides a suitable three-year plan, although the curriculum does not yet meet in each respect the needs of all pupils with physical disability.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

The school has improved its procedures since the last inspection and, as a result, all of the regulations are now met. Checks on the suitability of staff to work with children are robust and they are recorded appropriately.

School's premises and accommodation

All of the regulations are met and the school's premises and accommodation are now satisfactory, being safe and conducive to effective learning. Since the previous inspection, the school has acquired an additional building next door to the original school and this, together with a reduction in the number of pupils on roll, has eased congestion in some areas. There is a suitable range of specialist rooms, including a library, music room, play therapy room, an ICT suite and rooms for cookery and science. The science room has been equipped appropriately with a sink and running water. Classrooms are of adequate size, with smaller rooms being used for specialist group work. There are now sufficient washrooms for staff and pupils, including separate washrooms for boys and girls. Medical and kitchen facilities are suitable and hygienic. Classrooms and grounds are well maintained and in good decorative order.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

The provision of information for parents, carers and others has improved since the last inspection and is now good. It meets all of the regulations. The website and prospectus are of good quality and make available all required policies and information. The school keeps parents and carers well informed about its work through regular newsletters and emails, and also by inviting them to assemblies. Questionnaires were returned by 66 parents and the large majority are happy with all aspects of the school's work. A parent commented that the school has given her

daughter, 'much confidence, good manners, all manner of sporting opportunities and the perfect grounding for secondary school'. While adequate arrangements are made to inform parents and carers about their children's progress, a few parents commented that they would like more regular information on progress. Annual accounts are submitted appropriately to local authorities who fund pupils with statements of special educational needs and suitable arrangements are made to involve them in annual reviews of the statements.

Procedures for handling complaints

Since the previous inspection, all of the regulations have been met regarding the school's procedures for handling complaints. The policy is made available on the website. There were no complaints in the previous 12 months.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

The overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage is good and promotes good outcomes for the children. Children make good progress in their learning and personal development, enjoy their learning experiences and are caring of each other. They develop a good awareness and understanding of how to stay safe and keep healthy, as shown in the way they use equipment, routinely wash their hands, choose healthy food and participate enthusiastically in physical exercise. They develop positive attitudes to learning and good skills in speaking and listening, and in working together, to support the next stage in their learning.

The quality of provision is good. Teaching is effective and makes particularly good use of questioning to develop children's enquiry skills. Planning covers the six areas of learning well and provides a good balance of activities directed by the teacher and those initiated by children. Children's work is assessed appropriately through a range of observations. However, the school does not make baseline assessments when the children enter school, or evaluate the results of the national Foundation Stage Profile to demonstrate children's achievement or to ensure all are achieving as well as they can. The learning environment both indoors and outside provides a wide range of stimulating activities that are well resourced, but the outside areas are not covered for use in wet weather. Teachers and teaching assistants act effectively as key people to safeguard and promote the welfare and safety of different groups of children, although staff have not yet undertaken training in paediatric first aid.

Leadership and management are good and have ensured the maintenance of children's progress and continuity in their learning in Foundation 2 class during the long-term sick leave of the teacher.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school meets all of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended ('the Regulations').

In order to comply with the welfare requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage, the school must:

- provide paediatric first aid training for staff.

What the school could do to improve further

While not required by regulations, the school might wish to consider the following points for development:

- Raise attainment by:
 - improving the challenge and pace of learning for more-able pupils in lessons
 - including target levels in the system for tracking pupils' progress to help teachers to plan for the range of abilities, particularly for more-able pupils.
- Improve the use of assessment in the Early Years Foundation Stage by:
 - carrying out baseline assessments when the children enter school and evaluating their performance overall in the Foundation Stage Profile in order to measure achievement in the whole Early Years Foundation Stage
 - evaluating assessment data more rigorously to identify the needs of individual children and match the planned activities more closely to their needs.
- As identified in the school improvement plan, provide covered areas for the outdoor environment in the Early Years Foundation Stage.

Inspection judgement recording form

outstanding	good	satisfactory	inadequate
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The quality of education

Overall quality of education		✓		
How well the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of pupils		✓		
How effective teaching and assessment are in meeting the full range of pupils' needs		✓		
How well pupils make progress in their learning		✓		

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

Quality of provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	✓			
The behaviour of pupils	✓			

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

The overall welfare, health and safety of pupils		✓		
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The quality of the Early Years Foundation Stage provision

How good are the outcomes for children in the EYFS?		✓		
What is the quality of provision in the EYFS?		✓		
How effectively is the EYFS led and managed?		✓		
Overall effectiveness: how well does the school meet the needs of children in the EYFS?		✓		

School details

Name of school	Avon House School		
DCSF number	317/6059		
Unique reference number	102872		
Type of school	Preparatory school		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	1969		
Age range of pupils	3–11		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 91	Girls: 71	Total: 162
Number on roll (part-time pupils)	Boys: 0	Girls: 0	Total: 0
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need	Boys: 2	Girls: 0	Total: 2
Annual fees (day pupils)	£5,910–£7,080		
Address of school	490 High Road Woodford Green Essex IG8 0PN		
Telephone number	020 8504 1749		
Fax number	020 8505 5337		
Email address	avonhouseschool@msn.com		
Headteacher	Mr Simon Ireland		
Proprietor	Mrs Sheila Ferrari		
Reporting inspector	Sue Frater HMI		
Dates of inspection	14–15 October 2009		