

Inspection report

Avalon School

Independent school

DfES ref no: 344/6016

Inspection under Section 162A of the Education Act 2002

Dates of inspection:

16 – 19 October 2006

INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY

Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out by the Office for Standards in Education under Section 162A of the Education Act 2002 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

Avalon School is an independent primary day school for boys and girls aged 4 to 11 years. It is accommodated in an attractive Victorian house built in 1890 and was converted into a school in 1929. The school is situated close to Caldby Village on the Wirral Peninsula. At present, there are 14 full-time pupils in the Reception class and 124 pupils in Key Stages 1 and 2. The nursery, for children aged 2 to 4 years, was inspected by the Early Years' Inspectorate in January 2006. No pupils have a statement of special educational needs or require support for English as an additional language. The school is non-selective. The school's main aim is to achieve '*the highest academic standards and the pursuit of excellence in all aspects of Education*'

Summary of main findings

Avalon School is a good school where staff are committed to the academic and personal progress of the pupils. The small numbers of pupils in each class ensure all are valued as individuals. The quality of teaching is good with some outstanding features, and this inspires pupils to achieve well. The curriculum is broad and interesting so that pupils enjoy learning. Pupils have very good attitudes to their learning. Teachers provide good role models which promotes the school's positive ethos. The school meets all of the regulations required for continued registration. The school is successful in meeting its aims.

What the school does well:

- it prepares the pupils successfully for the next stage of their education;
- it provides a broad and relevant curriculum which is planned well;
- it promotes excellent relationships throughout the school community;
- it ensures the pupils' very good behaviour;
- it cares for its pupils conscientiously; and
- it encourages and facilitates the pupils' healthy life styles.

What the school must do in order to comply with the regulations:

The school meets all of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended January 2005.

Next Steps

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

- raise the quality of satisfactory teaching to that found in the best lessons;
- ensure that data resulting from tests at the end of Key Stage 1 are analysed to identify any areas that may require attention; and
- make better use of plenary sessions to assess pupils' learning in lessons.

COMPLIANCE WITH THE REGULATIONS FOR REGISTRATION

1. The quality of education provided by the school

The quality of the curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is good and reflects the school's aims. It focuses on motivating pupils to engage in learning so that they achieve their potential. The curriculum successfully equips pupils with the necessary skills and knowledge for the next stage of their learning.

The curriculum policy is well thought out and it is supported effectively by detailed schemes of work. The provision in music, art and science is outstanding, due to challenging activities, specialised teaching and accommodation and high quality resources. The curriculum for the Reception class is good. It follows the national guidelines for this age group. It is implemented well. For pupils in Key Stages 1 and 2, there is a broad and balanced curriculum. All subjects of the National Curriculum are taught. These are augmented by the inclusion of Spanish.

As part of the curriculum for physical education, pupils in Years 5 and 6 attend a local pool for swimming lessons. Citizenship is planned efficiently within the personal, social, and health education (PSHE) provision. In addition, many aspects are taught in other subjects as well as through the literacy and pastoral provision. There is an extensive programme of activities outside lessons which includes a wide and diverse range of activities for enjoyment and educational purposes. The school actively encourages pupils to engage in sports and to learn to play musical instruments. Tuition is arranged for piano, recorder, violin, guitar and woodwind (including flute).

Great emphasis is placed on visits to places connected to the curriculum. To extend their studies, pupils visit many diverse locations such as the Everyman Playhouse in Liverpool and the Martin Mere Bird Sanctuary between Ormskirk and Southport.

Provision for the pupils identified as having special educational needs is good. Individual education plans provide targets to enable pupils to make progress. Pupils who need some extra support in lessons are helped effectively by the special educational needs co-ordinator and classroom assistants.

The quality of teaching and assessment

The quality of teaching is good. It is good or better in the large majority of lessons. This enables pupils to make at least good progress. A small proportion of satisfactory lessons are predominately, but not exclusively, in Key Stage 1. No unsatisfactory teaching was seen. There is some outstanding teaching of science, music and art. In these lessons, teaching is often particularly stimulating and maintains the pupils' high level of interest. Teachers communicate enthusiasm for their subject to the pupils. Activities are planned that are exciting and challenging and pupils make excellent progress. Teachers have good subject knowledge and know how to teach lessons which capture pupils' imagination. This ensures that the

pupils are actively involved at every stage and there is an air of excitement in their learning. Teachers encourage pupils to engage in dialogue and ask questions.

Most good lessons are conducted at a brisk pace and teachers manage pupils well. As a result, pupils listen, co-operate and persevere with their tasks. In most lessons where teaching is at least good, planned work is well matched to pupils' abilities, for example, in mathematics, when pupils make at least good progress. This is not always the case such as when all pupils are given the same task to complete. In a minority of lessons, this is one reason why pupils only make satisfactory progress. Elsewhere satisfactory teaching includes less challenging tasks and lessons which are conducted at too leisurely a pace.

Daily planning is good overall, although what the pupils are to learn and what they should achieve in a lesson are not always shared clearly (?explicitly) with them. Sometimes, plenary sessions at the end of lessons are not used to full advantage to assess what the pupils have learned in the lesson. The school uses appropriate strategies called WALT – 'what we are learning today' and WILF – 'what I am looking for' written out for each lesson. These are only effective if time is allowed to return to them for discussion at the end of the lesson. In some lessons, the strategies are used well and enable teachers to assess the pupils' knowledge and understanding.

Teachers often use effective questioning to link pupils' prior learning with current learning. This allows pupils to make relevant connections. For example, in an English lesson on story structure in Year 3, the class teacher referred to the previous lessons and pupils had good recall of what they had learned.

The teachers value what pupils have to say. They encourage pupils to listen to, and respect, the views of others. Good relationships with pupils are fostered throughout the school. Teachers have high expectations of both behaviour and achievement and pupils respond well.

Procedures for the assessment of pupils' progress are satisfactory overall, with some good practice found in Reception and Key Stage 2. In Key Stage 1, formal assessments only take place at the end of the key stage. The results are not compared rigorously with national averages or analysed to check pupils' progress in every subject. Throughout the school, there is continuous assessment based on teachers' good knowledge of their pupils' abilities. In Reception, staff conscientiously record individual pupil's progress in the Foundation Stage Profiles as recommended by national guidance. In Key Stage 2, formal assessments are supported effectively by standardised tests in reading, English, mathematics and verbal reasoning. The quality of marking throughout the school is good. It is comprehensive, regular and often informs pupils of how to improve their work. Most teachers give pupils immediate feedback on their work, which is both instructive and encouraging.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes

2. The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

The school makes good provision for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of its pupils. There is a very strong and pleasant family atmosphere. Pupils enjoy coming to school and speak openly about it. Relationships in the school between adults and pupils are excellent. Strong emphasis is placed on pupils' social development. The school promotes learning and caring as paramount. Pupils are encouraged to value each other's individuality and to help each other. Pupils clearly know right from wrong, and have a strong sense of fairness. This leads to their very good behaviour. The extra-curricular experiences and clubs, attended by a very high proportion of pupils, are a testimony to their enjoyment and developing self-confidence. An active School Council promotes a mature sense of caring for the school community. Pupils' spiritual awareness is good and is raised through assemblies and religious education lessons. There is a strong emphasis on supporting charities, both near and far, such as the support which enabled the school to support the local Charles Thompson mission in Birkenhead and to help to "send a cow to Africa". Pupils are encouraged to appreciate cultural diversity and to respect the beliefs and values of others. The school has a small multi-ethnic population and there are good relationships and mutual respect between ethnic groups and the larger school community. The curriculum contains a good range of planned opportunities for the appreciation of other cultures, especially in humanities and art.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes

3. The welfare, health and safety of the pupils

All staff ensure that pupils are safe and well protected. Careful consideration has been given to policies and practices so that health and safety risks to pupils are minimised. Policies are comprehensive and include procedures for child protection, anti-bullying, behaviour, health and safety, fire safety, and educational visits. Fire safety precautions are carried out regularly and recorded systematically. Log books for incidents, sanctions and merits are well kept. Staff have a clear understanding of school policies and they implement them sensibly and sensitively.

The school ensures that pupils are provided with a well-cooked, healthy meal using fresh food at lunchtime. Lunchtimes are good social occasions and contribute to the overall well-being of pupils.

Pupils are very clear about the consequences of breaking the school's health and safety rules such as avoiding boisterous behaviour in the playground or thinking of others when on the climbing frame. Pupils are very well supervised at all times in the building and outside in the grounds. Exclusions are used, but only rarely and have not been used in the last two years.

Arrangements for the registration of admissions and daily attendance meet the requirements fully.

The school has a comprehensive policy which fulfils its duty under the Disability Discrimination Act (2002).

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

4. The suitability of the proprietor and staff

The school takes all possible steps to ensure the suitability of staff before confirming appointments. All identities, qualifications and health records are verified before appointments are made. Clearance from the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) is obtained.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

5. The suitability of the premises and accommodation

The premises and accommodation are fit for purpose. Classrooms are adequate in size for the numbers on roll. The original stable block now provides a classroom, and a science laboratory. A well-planned high quality extension provides a spacious hall which is used for dining, assemblies, music, physical education and games activities. Food is cooked on the premises in a hygienic kitchen.

A spacious, attractive garden includes lawns and shrubs and a soft-surfaced area complete with a climbing frame. The hard surfaced playground is used for break times and games. A sports field enables pupils to enjoy a number of team games. An interesting Adventure walk has been developed around the perimeter of the grounds. It encourages pupils to play observation games. Classes are timetabled to use the facility. It is used for science and art work. The school has planning permission to build two further classrooms with toilet facilities, an office and a science laboratory as useful additions to the school's accommodation. Good use is made of local swimming pool.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

6. The quality of information for parents and other partners

The school provides parents and prospective parents with comprehensive and useful information through its prospectus and parents' information pack. These documents contain full details of key school policies including child protection, admissions, discipline, exclusions and details of the school's curriculum provision. The school informs parents of the range of policies that they may request to see.

Two consultation evenings for parents are held each academic year. The school also provides parents with two informative written reports on their children's progress. Parents are given a précis of the academic work to be covered by their child in the following term. The great majority of parents feel well informed about their children's progress in school. A vigorous Parent Teacher Association meets about three times a term to discuss matters of general educational interest.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

7. The effectiveness of the school's procedures for handling complaints

The school has a detailed and comprehensive complaints procedure that is clearly outlined in an informative policy document. All parents are provided with a copy when pupils are admitted and the school makes further copies available on request. The complaints procedure includes clear time-scales for the informal and formal stages of a complaint. The appeal stage is clearly outlined with a panel that includes appropriate representatives.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes

SCHOOL DETAILS

Name of school:	Avalon School
DfES Number:	344/6016
Type of school:	Primary day school
Status:	Independent
Age range of pupils:	4 – 11 years
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
Number on roll (full-time pupils):	Boys: 72 Girls: 66 Total: 138
Annual fees (day pupils):	Key Stage 1: £4356 Key Stage 2 : £4665
Address of school:	Caldy Road West Kirby Wirral CH48 2HE
Telephone number:	0151 625 6993
Fax number:	0151 625 0332
Email address:	schooloffice@avalon-school.co.uk
Headteacher:	Dr Brian Scott
Proprietor:	Avalon School Educational Trust
Reporting Inspector:	Mrs Cecile Corfield
Date of inspection:	16 – 19 October 2006

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