

Avalon School

Independent School

Inspection Report

DCSF Registration Number	344/6016
Unique Reference Number	105122
URN for registered childcare	EY298338
Inspection number	331349
Inspection dates	14 May 2009
Reporting inspector	John Coleman HMI

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). The inspection of childcare was conducted under Section 49(2) of the Childcare Act 2006.

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.

Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London WC2B 6SE
T 08456 404040

www.ofsted.gov.uk



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 Children, Schools and Families about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

The inspection of registered provision¹ was conducted under Section 49(2) of the Childcare Act 2006.

Information about the school

Avalon school was established in 1907 and has occupied the present site since 1929. It is non-selective and caters for boys and girls aged between two and 11 years. Most pupils live in the local area and many of their parents attended the school as pupils themselves. The school became a non-profit making registered trust in 2001. The policy of the school is to allow all pupils to sit the 11+ entrance examination for local grammar schools. Most pupils are White British. No pupils have a statement of special educational needs although a very small number are identified as having learning difficulties. The school provides day care for children aged between two and three years, Nursery classes for children aged between three and four years and the main school caters for five to 11-year-olds in single aged classes, which are never larger than 24 pupils. Additionally, there is a crèche provision before and after school. The school was last inspected in October 2006. The Early Years Foundation Stage and childcare was last inspected in January 2006.

The school aims '...at the highest academic standards and the pursuit of excellence in all aspects of education. We hold to the old-fashioned belief that, ultimately, there are no substitutes for good teachers, hard work and sound learning to provide the foundation for future schooling...'

Evaluation of the school

Avalon is a good school with some outstanding features. Pupils make outstanding progress because of the good curriculum, good teaching and procedures for assessment, and as a result of their outstanding behaviour and exemplary attitudes to learning. Provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development; for pupils' welfare, health and safety and the effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage, is outstanding. Due to the effectiveness of the school's leadership, good improvement has been made since the last inspection. The school meets all the regulations required for registration as an independent school.

¹ Schools which provide childcare for children from birth until the term in which they reach their third birthday must register this provision separately with Ofsted.

Quality of education

The overall quality of education is good. The curriculum and other activities are good in meeting the range of needs and interests of pupils. It provides extremely well in preparing the oldest pupils for selective entrance examinations to secondary education. Parents are very appreciative of this particular provision. In the Early Years Foundation Stage the curriculum follows the statutory guidelines. In the infant classes (Years 1 and 2/Key Stage 1) the National Curriculum is fully implemented and there is a strong emphasis on pupils acquiring basic literacy and numeracy skills as a firm foundation for future learning. Classes are taught mainly by form teachers but specialist teachers deliver the curriculum for physical education (PE), information and communication technology (ICT), music and Spanish. During the first year in the Junior school (Years 3 to 6/Key Stage 2) this practice continues. In classes II, III and IV (Years 4 to 6), the curriculum includes much of the National Curriculum and broadens further to include biological science. An increasing part of the curriculum is delivered by specialist teachers in these age groups including art, music, PE, mathematics, English, science and ICT. Pupils have the opportunity to learn a musical instrument, there is a school choir and pupils have regular opportunities to perform in public. Pupils in the Junior school have regular swimming lessons. Resources are generally good, but in the core subjects of English and mathematics there is often a reliance on commercial texts and the associated worksheets, which narrows the curriculum and restricts the style of pupils' learning. Some trips are available to extend and enrich the curriculum but these are infrequent and make only a small contribution to pupils' learning and experience. Similarly, visitors to school such as the local vicar and the emergency services give occasional first-hand knowledge to pupils. A wide variety of extra-curricular activities is provided including ballet, drama, chess, netball, soccer and cricket. These are well attended by a good many pupils who enjoy these opportunities.

The effectiveness of teaching and assessment in meeting the full range of pupils' needs is good. The quality of teaching ranges from satisfactory to outstanding. In the satisfactory lessons too much emphasis is placed on pupils completing commercial texts and the pace of learning is limited as a result. Lessons are characterised by excellent relationships between pupils and with their teachers. There is a wide variety in the style of teaching, from the formal traditional approach, to methods which encourage pupils to discuss, collaborate and enquire through practical tasks and activities. Teachers with specific subject specialisms are particularly effective because of their enthusiasm and expertise and pupils speak highly of these lessons. All teachers know their pupils well and they use this very effectively to provide pupils with individual support and guidance which enhance their learning and progress. Teachers' expectations of pupils are very high and pupils have high expectations of themselves, the result of which is that they get the very best out of the opportunities provided in lessons. A wide variety of classroom environments exist. Most are bright and quite spacious given the small numbers in classes, but there are some relatively small areas which limit the style of teaching and learning.

The school prepares pupils intensively for the 11+ and selective examinations. Standardised tests are used from Year 1. Weekly school tests are monitored well by the specialist teachers especially in Years 5 and 6. These teachers are very knowledgeable about each pupil's attainment. As a result of the assessments the teachers are able to guide pupils and parents regarding the choices they wish to make for secondary education. Although each pupil has individual assessments collected throughout the school, and in Years 5 and 6 tests results are kept in the teacher's book, there is no whole school tracking process to show how pupils progress against the assessment measures in a systematic way. This limits the school's ability to monitor the progress of cohorts of pupils over time and in the performance of pupils in different subjects, and thereby restricts the school's identification of areas to improve. Teachers give very good feedback to pupils about their work in an individual and mostly verbal way but the marking of pupils' written work varies in its effectiveness to help pupils improve.

Pupils make outstanding progress in their personal development and in their academic learning. The school's own assessments at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage show that the vast majority of children achieve at least in line with the age related expectations in this country. Around a third of children achieve significantly above these expectations. The results of standardised tests and National Curriculum assessments in Year 6 show sustained and consistent attainment which is well above average. Indeed the school's data show almost every pupil in the last decade has achieved at least in line with the national average in English, mathematics and science and around 90% of pupils achieve above the average. This represents outstanding progress and is the result of good teaching, a well matched curriculum and the exemplary attitudes to learning of pupils who want to succeed and make the best of themselves. Parent questionnaires returned to the inspection team are very supportive of the school's work. A small number raised concerns about the school's provision for pupils with learning difficulties. The inspection finds that the school has an appropriate policy for pupils with special educational needs, and individual education plans are in place to support pupils with learning difficulties.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

The quality of provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. The school successfully promotes pupils' self-esteem and confidence providing a happy, caring family atmosphere in which staff treat pupils with respect and consideration. They develop exemplary good manners and polite attitudes. The curriculum provides well for pupils' personal, social and health education giving opportunities for pupils to discuss and learn about healthy lifestyles and about the dangers of drugs and alcohol. Pupils are enabled to take on responsibilities by taking part in the choir, public speaking, the school council and in assemblies. Pupils are also able to become librarians, buddy-bench monitors, house captains, path police, prefects and lunchtime helpers. They become increasingly independent and inspectors were very impressed with pupils' ability to articulate what they feel and think about school.

They overwhelmingly love school and enjoy what is on offer. This is reflected in their excellent attendance and is seen in their happy and smiling participation in school activities.

Pupils attain very high standards in the basic skills and this prepares them well for both the next stage of education and for their adult economic well-being. They learn about other faiths and beliefs, about British institutions and about cultural tolerance and harmony through the curriculum. The school does not make maximum use of the local and regional opportunities for pupils to experience first hand the British diversity of culture and ethnicity.

Safeguarding pupils' welfare, health and safety

The overall welfare, health and safety of pupils are outstanding. The school has all the required checks and procedures in place to safeguard pupils including Criminal Records Bureau checks for all staff. Appropriate risk assessments are in place for fire safety, for trips and visits and for the premises. Procedures for child protection and first aid are suitable and staff are trained to the appropriate level. The school has an up-to-date plan for providing equal accessibility to the curriculum and to the premises. Staff provide vigilant supervision in the school buildings and around the attractive and extensive outdoor areas. PE and sport are given a high priority and the school applies rigorous health and safety considerations to each of the activities it provides.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

The overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage, including the quality of childcare is outstanding. The outstanding provision ensures that children make at least good progress in all areas of learning. Statutory requirements for children's learning and development are all met. The Nursery is welcoming, children are happy and the caring staff communicate well with parents. Children achieve outstandingly well because of the high quality of teaching and learning, the provision of motivating and stimulating environments and the warm, secure relationships between staff and children.

Children make outstanding progress so that by the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage every child achieves at least as well as the age related national expectations and a significant number achieve well above these expectations.

Staff support learning exceptionally well and have consistently high expectations of children's social skills and behaviour, which are outstanding. Regular observation and assessment maximise children's achievement and progress. Play is very purposeful and there is a good balance of activities guided by adults and those initiated by the children. The Nursery meets all the welfare requirements. The provision for children's personal development and well-being is outstanding. Children show a very high level of enjoyment and fully engage in the many interesting and stimulating activities.

They learn routines quickly, such as washing hands and tidying away. Children become inquisitive learners and they communicate well with each other in groups and with the adults who care for them. Outstanding leadership and management are provided by the Nursery manager.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

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

The school's registered provision for childcare meets the requirements of the Childcare Act 2006.

What the school could do to improve further

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

- Implement a whole school system to track and measure pupils progress
- Evaluate the features of good and outstanding lessons to improve the few instances of satisfactory teaching so all lessons are to the standard of the best.

Inspection Judgement Recording Form

outstanding	good	satisfactory	inadequate
-------------	------	--------------	------------

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	✓			
--	---	--	--	--

The quality of the Early Years Foundation Stage provision

How effectively are children in the Early Years Foundation Stage helped to learn and develop?	✓			
How well do children achieve in the Early Years Foundation Stage relative to their starting points and capabilities?	✓			
How good are the personal development and well-being of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage?	✓			
What is the quality of welfare, health and safety of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage?	✓			
How effectively is the provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage led and managed?	✓			
What is the overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage including, where relevant, the quality of childcare?	✓			

School details

Name of school	Avalon School		
DCSF number	344/6016		
Unique reference number	105122		
EY URN	EY298338		
Type of school	Co-educational		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	1907		
Age range of pupils	2-11		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 59	Girls: 62	Total: 121
Number on roll (part-time pupils)	Boys: 37	Girls: 27	Total: 64
Number of pupils aged 0-3 in registered childcare provision	Boys:23	Girls:15	Total:38
Annual fees (day pupils)	£5,205		
Annual fees (childcare)	£4,785		
Address of school	Caldy Road West Kirby Wirral Merseyside CH48 2HE		
Telephone number	01516 256993		
Fax number	01516 250332		
Email address	drscott@avalon-school.co.uk		
Headteacher	Dr B Scott		
Proprietor	Avalon School Educational Trust		
Reporting inspector	John Coleman HMI		
Dates of inspection	14 May 2009		