



ISI Independent
Schools
Inspectorate

Focused Compliance and Educational Quality Inspection Report

Avalon School

November 2022

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School's Details

School	Avalon School			
DfE number	344/6016			
Registered charity number	1088050			
Address	Avalon School Caldy Road West Kirby Wirral CH48 2HE			
Telephone number	0151 6256993			
Email address	schooloffice@avalon-school.co.uk			
Headteacher	Mrs Joanna Callaway			
Chair of governors	Dr Catherine Kidd			
Age range	2 to 11			
Number of pupils on roll	137			
	EYFS	41	Infant and Juniors	96
Inspection dates	8 to 10 November 2022			

1. Background Information

About the school

- 1.1 Avalon School is a non-selective, independent day school. It was founded in 1907 and moved to its current location in 1932. In 2001, the school became a charitable trust overseen by a board of governors. The school comprises three sections: the nursery for children aged 2 to 4; infants for pupils in Reception to Year 2; and juniors for pupils in Years 3 to 6. Since the previous inspection, the school has continued to develop its leadership structure and a further two governors have been appointed.

What the school seeks to do

- 1.2 The school aims to provide the best opportunity for every child to learn, grow and develop in a stimulating and supportive environment. It seeks to develop successful learners who are confident, inquisitive and independent and so acquire a high standard of academic knowledge and skills. It endeavours to give pupils understanding and respect for others, practical, social and emotional life skills, a sense of responsibility and self-belief, and promote their willingness to support each other.

About the pupils

- 1.3 Pupils predominantly come from a range of professional families living within a 10-mile radius of the school and reflect the ethnic mix of the surrounding area. Nationally standardised test data provided by the school indicate the ability of the pupils is above average for those taking the same tests. The school has identified 22 pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), which include dyslexia and dyspraxia, all of whom receive additional support. Four pupils have an education, health and care plan and are funded by the local authority. English is an additional language for 11 pupils, whose needs are met by their classroom teachers. The curriculum is modified for the more able pupils in the school's population.

2. Regulatory Compliance Inspection

Preface

The Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) is approved by the Secretary of State to inspect schools which are, or whose heads are, in membership of the associations which form the Independent Schools Council (ISC) and report on the extent to which they meet the Independent School Standards ('the standards') in the Schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014. Additionally, inspections report on the school's accessibility plan under Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010 and the ban on corporal punishment under section 548 of the Education Act 1996. Inspections also comment on the progress made to meet any compliance action points set out in the school's most recent statutory inspection.

ISI inspections are also carried out under the arrangements of the ISC Associations for the maintenance and improvement of the quality of their membership.

This is a FOCUSED COMPLIANCE INSPECTION which was combined with an inspection of EDUCATIONAL QUALITY. The FOCUSED COMPLIANCE inspection reports only on the school's compliance with the standards. The standards represent minimum requirements and judgements are given either as **met** or as **not met**. All schools are required to meet all the standards applicable to them. Where the minimum requirements are not met, this is clearly indicated in the relevant section of the report and the school is required to take the actions specified. In this focused compliance inspection, key standards have been inspected in detail. These are the standards on safeguarding; measures to guard against bullying; arrangements for pupils' health and safety; arrangements to check the suitability of staff; the provision of information; the handling of parents' complaints; and other related aspects of leadership and management. The remaining standards and requirements are deemed to continue to be met unless evidence to the contrary has been found.

Inspections do not include matters that are outside of the regulatory framework described above, such as: an exhaustive health and safety audit; compliance with data protection requirements; an in-depth examination of the structural condition of the school, its services or other physical features; contractual arrangements with parents; an investigation of the financial viability of the school or its accounting procedures.

Inspectors may be aware of individual safeguarding concerns, allegations and complaints as part of the inspection process. Such matters will not usually be referred to specifically in published reports in this document but will have been considered by the team in reaching its judgements.

Links to the standards and requirements can be found here: [The Education \(Independent School Standards\) Regulations 2014](#), [Early Years Foundation Stage Statutory Framework](#).

Key findings

- 2.1 The school meets the standards in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 and relevant requirements of the statutory framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage, and associated requirements, and no further action is required as a result of this inspection.**

PART 1 – Quality of education provided

- 2.2 The school's own framework for assessment confirms that teaching enables pupils to make good progress in the context of Part 1 paragraph 3(a).
- 2.3 The curriculum is documented, supported by appropriate plans and schemes of work for the pupils and covers the required breadth of material. The teaching enables pupils to make good progress, encompasses effective behaviour management and is supported by suitable resources. A suitable framework for the assessment of pupils' performance is in place.
- 2.4 Pupils receive relationships education. The school has consulted parents and published a written statement of its policy which has regard to the relevant statutory guidance.
- 2.5 The standards relating to the quality of education [paragraphs 1–4] are met.**

PART 2 – Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

- 2.6 Principles and values are actively promoted which facilitate the personal development of pupils as responsible, tolerant, law-abiding citizens.
- 2.7 The standard relating to spiritual, moral, social and cultural development [paragraph 5] is met.**

PART 3 – Welfare, health and safety of pupils

- 2.8 Arrangements are made to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils by means that pay due regard to current statutory guidance; good behaviour is promoted; bullying is prevented so far as reasonably practicable; health and safety requirements are met, including those relating to fire safety; provision is made for first aid. Pupils are properly supervised; admission and attendance registers are maintained, as required, and there is a strategic approach to risk assessment. A disability access plan is in place.
- 2.9 The standards relating to welfare, health and safety [paragraphs 6–16], the requirement of Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010, and the ban on corporal punishment under section 548 of the Education Act 1996 are met.**

PART 4 – Suitability of staff, supply staff, and proprietors

- 2.10 The school makes appropriate checks to ensure the suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors, and a register is kept as required.
- 2.11 The standards relating to the suitability of those in contact with pupils at the school [paragraphs 17–21] are met.**

PART 5 – Premises of and accommodation at schools

- 2.12 Suitable toilet and changing facilities, and showering facilities where required by the standard, and appropriate accommodation for pupils' medical and therapy needs are provided. The premises are maintained to a standard commensurate with health and safety; acoustics and lighting are

appropriate; water provision is adequate. Suitable outdoor space is provided for physical education and outdoor play.

2.13 The standards relating to the premises and accommodation [paragraphs 22–31] are met.

PART 6 – Provision of information

2.14 A range of information is published, provided or made available to parents, inspectors and the Department for Education. This includes details about the proprietor, the ethos of the school and the curriculum, and of the school's arrangements for admission, behaviour and exclusions, bullying, health and safety, first aid, details of the complaints procedure, and the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year, and the provision for any with education, health and care plans or English as an additional language. It also includes particulars of the school's academic performance during the preceding school year, inspection reports and (for parents only) a report at least annually of their own child's progress. The safeguarding policy is posted on the school's website.

2.15 The standard relating to the provision of information [paragraph 32] is met.

PART 7 – Manner in which complaints are handled

2.16 Parental complaints, if any, are handled effectively through a three-stage process, (informal, formal and a hearing before a panel of three, one of whom is independent of the school). Each stage has clear time scales, and at the third stage the panel can make findings and recommendations which are communicated to the complainant. Records are kept appropriately, including of any action taken, whether or not a complaint is successful.

2.17 The standard relating to the handling of complaints [paragraph 33] is met.

PART 8 – Quality of leadership in and management of schools

2.18 The proprietor ensures that the leadership and management demonstrate good skills and knowledge, and fulfil their responsibilities effectively, so that the other standards are consistently met, and they actively promote the well-being of the pupils.

2.19 The standard relating to leadership and management of the school [paragraph 34] is met.

3. Educational Quality Inspection

Preface

The **EDUCATIONAL QUALITY** inspection reports on the quality of the school's work. It focuses on the two key outcomes:

- The achievement of the pupils, including their academic development, and
- The personal development of the pupils.

The headline judgements apply one of the ISI descriptors 'excellent', 'good', 'sound' or 'unsatisfactory'.

Where necessary, National Curriculum nomenclature is used to refer to year groups in the school.

Key findings

- 3.1 The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements is excellent.
- Pupils make excellent progress in English and mathematics lessons.
 - Pupils demonstrate excellent attitudes to learning.
 - From an early age, pupils demonstrate excellent communication skills; they are articulate and confident public speakers.
 - Pupils demonstrate competent skills in information and communication technology (ICT) but have insufficient opportunities to develop these further.
- 3.2 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.
- Pupils demonstrate a very good understanding of their own strengths and weaknesses.
 - Pupils have an excellent understanding of the importance of inclusivity and diversity.
 - Pupils have a strong moral code and understand the need for rules in a variety of contexts.
 - Pupils know how to keep themselves healthy and stay safe.
 - Pupils' skills of resilience are good.

Recommendations

- 3.3 The school is advised to make the following improvement.
- Develop further pupils' ICT skills.

The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements

- 3.4 The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements is excellent.
- 3.5 Pupils of all ages make better than expected progress overall over time. Pupils from the EYFS onwards make excellent progress from a range of starting points with almost all of the youngest children achieving the expected level of development by the time they leave the EYFS setting. All pupils, including those of lower and higher abilities and SEND, have their needs met by regular assessment and analysis of data which helps teachers to plan appropriately for their needs. Teachers have a secure knowledge of the pupils' strengths and weaknesses, and levels of attainment improve as pupils move through the school. The vast majority of pupils achieve excellent results in entrance examinations to senior schools. In response to the pre-inspection questionnaire, all parents agreed that the range of subjects, including for online learning, is suitable for their children and all agreed that teaching enables

their children to make progress. Pupils stated in discussions that they are confident about how well they are doing. They know how to improve from written and oral feedback, comments from reports and parents' evenings. The vast majority of parents agreed that they receive helpful and regular information on their children's performance, which addresses a previous inspection recommendation.

- 3.6 Pupils develop excellent knowledge, skills and understanding across the curriculum thus meeting the school's aim of giving the best opportunity for every child to learn, grow and develop in a stimulating and supportive environment. Pupils expect to start the day in a thoughtful manner from an early age. The early morning 'start of the day' activity creates a positive working culture. In the early years, children engage enthusiastically in their learning and work happily together as dedicated staff include their personal interests when planning the curriculum. For example, children demonstrated strong imaginative skills as they created a café's menu, offering a choice of types of cupcakes to the adults in the setting. Pupils stated that they found the performing arts and art inspirational, reflecting when they created pictures of animals in an aboriginal style or imitated the work of Frida Kahlo. Pupils' human and social skills are developed through religious studies, humanities and personal, social, cultural, health and economic education (PSCHEE) lessons, where they are actively encouraged to reflect on prior knowledge as well as empathise how others may feel.
- 3.7 Younger pupils demonstrate their increasing proficiency in literacy through well-planned, focused lessons with clear learning objectives and outcomes. They could identify digraphs, split-digraphs and recognise rhyming words in the sentence 'I fly my kite up high'. Where a lesson had a less well-defined learning objective, pupils were not able to make identifiable progress and opportunities were wasted to develop skills and understanding. In a science lesson, the task of matching terms with their definitions lacked challenge. The pupils are able to consolidate their learning within subjects through starting from what they know, as shown in history lessons about the Second World War, and across subjects through strong thematic links. For example, in discussion pupils were able to relate their understanding of the Second World War to the study of *The Diary of Anne Frank* in English. In physical education (PE), pupils demonstrated the development of ball skills and increasingly understood techniques as a direct result of the well-planned and structured teaching. Pupils acquire enhanced knowledge and skills through a small range of extra-curricular activities, such as construction club, and the wide-ranging programme of trips and visits offered to them, as well as their use of the local environment. For example, in learning how to use compasses in mathematics, pupils visited the beach to enhance their understanding.
- 3.8 Pupils at all ages demonstrate excellent communication skills which they apply effectively to all areas of learning. The children in EYFS listen carefully to the teacher, answer questions and use their knowledge of letters and sounds to build simple words. Pupils contribute orally with confidence, and written work develops with focused practice, as observed in Year 1 where pupils practised 'igh' words and subsequently were able to recognise them in a sentence and read the words with increasing fluency. Listening skills were required in many of the lessons observed where pupils analysed instructions, as well as when they read aloud to each other. In a religious studies lesson in Year 3, different pupils read sentences from the bible story of the annunciation with great clarity. Older pupils are confident in using a range of communication methods and their writing skills are strong. In the work scrutiny, the more able pupils wrote at length with sophistication when continuing the story of *The Highwayman*.
- 3.9 Pupils' numeracy skills are excellent as a result of a cohesive whole-school curriculum plan supported by detailed lesson planning. Children in EYFS quickly develop numerical skills through a range of well-planned play-based activities that focus on individual needs. They chose their own materials to work out the alternative ways to make five and were supported to differing degrees when recording their findings. Pupils understand different ways of solving problems and many enjoy the challenges provided by teachers to enhance their mathematical skills. For example, when lining up decimal points correctly a few pupils had a eureka moment when they comprehended the concept. Pupils of all abilities speak about mathematics in theoretical ways but can also apply numerical concepts

effectively. This is supported by their reasoning lessons, where they explain their logic using mathematical terminology. They also recognise they are able to apply their mathematical skills to other areas of the curriculum. For example, in discussion they explained recording the experiment to measure heart rates and graphing their results.

- 3.10 Pupils demonstrate an understanding of a range of ICT techniques and clearly enjoyed using ICT during remote learning. All pupils stated they enjoyed their ICT lessons and pupils in Years 3 and 4 spoke proudly about coding and manipulating images. In lessons, some pupils access portable devices when other tasks were complete, but few examples of pupils using technology other than in discrete ICT lessons were observed. Pupils spoke about opportunities for research activities, for example pupils in Year 6 described choosing and creating fact sheets for significant people during Black History month. This was limited to the humanities and the more able pupils were not challenged to develop their skills. Technology, such as interactive whiteboards, are used as teaching aids, but opportunities to involve pupils in their use to support their learning were missed.
- 3.11 From an early age, pupils demonstrate excellent study skills. Children in EYFS begin to apply problem-solving and thinking skills to real-life situations as seen when they inferred imaginatively how a leaf came to be indoors whilst waiting in line for playtime. Older pupils continue to develop this skill, such as when asked to suggest the theme of a new book, they described their ideas about the book *How to Wash a Woolly Mammoth*. The oldest pupils demonstrate excellent higher-order skills of analysis and judgement whilst discussing the feelings of evacuees in The Second World War in an English lesson. In reasoning lessons, pupils were able to rationalise their thinking through a variety of methods of solution such as elimination, whilst in a mathematics lesson pupils demonstrated adept conceptualisation skills as they interpreted time-travel graphs correctly. Pupils of all abilities are expected to perform to different levels of outcome. They are provided with appropriately graded materials and are supported very effectively by both the teachers and the teaching assistants.
- 3.12 Pupils are very proud of their excellent academic and other achievements. They speak enthusiastically about individuals in their cohort who have achieved highly in a specific arena, such as chess, gymnastics or sailing. They grow in confidence through regular participation in school productions and concerts; for example, the annual spring arts concert which involves everyone from Reception to Year 6 and showcases a variety of performing arts. Senior management ensure that pupils' successes outside the classroom, for example in speech and drama, rugby or cricket, are warmly celebrated by the school community.
- 3.13 Pupils of all ages and abilities have very positive attitudes to learning. Children in the early years setting select tasks from the wide range available to them and are happy in both the indoor and outdoor learning environments. Pupils work individually, in pairs or small groups and thrive on the opportunities provided for collaboration with their peers. For example, pupils worked effectively with their partners to read part of the story of *Superworm* before describing the characteristics of Wizard Lizard. They show a range of emotions from the genuinely excited to eager anticipation when responding to the teacher's requests. For example, pupils in Year 5 could not wait to start practising songs for the upcoming production. In response to the pre-inspection questionnaire, all the pupils who responded agreed with a large majority of the statements and, in their written responses, clearly stated their enjoyment of being a member of Avalon School.

The quality of the pupils' personal development

- 3.14 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.
- 3.15 Pupils demonstrate confidence and the ability to self-reflect. As they progress through the school they grow in self-esteem as they become more aware of their own strengths and areas for development. Where tasks are seen to have a level of challenge, pupils show resilience and push themselves to achieve. In a PE lesson, they were encouraged to enhance their performance through reflection of their practice in a game situation. Senior pupils stated in discussions they felt well-prepared for the

next stage in their schooling through the activities provided such as leading house events or public speaking. In the face of difficulties, some pupils are still developing the skill of controlling their own emotions and behaviour, needing staff support to help them manage themselves appropriately. In the EYFS, children take responsibility for self-care and can make choices as soon as they are ready. Pupils know and have a clear understanding that the decisions they make will have a direct impact on their own performance and welfare, as well as the impact of their actions on others. For example, in PSCHEE lessons, Reception children reflected on how 'bad words' could make you feel 'bad inside' through the use of a damaged apple. Pupils spoke in positive terms about the support offered by the school. Staff offer regular reinforcement and praise when good choices are made, and this instils a confident, positive attitude to work and raises pupils' self-esteem. Equally, the chance to reflect on poor choices of behaviour encourages the development of self-understanding.

- 3.16 Pupils of all ages develop a strong awareness of spirituality. The youngest children greatly appreciate the beauty of the outdoor environment during their regular lessons outdoors. For example, they showed great pleasure when using their senses as they explored the sights, smells and sounds of their wooded area near the sea. Infant pupils in their assembly demonstrated enjoyment and appreciation of different styles of music being played in preparation for the Remembrance Day assembly. Through the eco-council, pupils prove their care for the environment and spoke enthusiastically about litter-picking. In discussions, pupils spoke about the different art forms they study and their enjoyment of the creativeness of Aboriginal art and their pride in the displays of their work. In religious studies lessons, pupils appreciated that some people believed in the Christian story of advent, and they could identify the awe and wonder that Mary must have felt when an angel visited her in the bible story of the annunciation.
- 3.17 Pupils of all ages have a strong moral code which enables them to distinguish right from wrong. Children in the EYFS understand clear codes of behaviour which help them work effectively together. For example, in their outdoor play they waited patiently for their turn to create footprints or to use the brushes to sweep up leaves. Older pupils understand the 'ladder of sanctions', confidently explaining the process and reasoning behind the need for rules. Consequently, the behaviour around the school is well-managed and pupils are fully aware of their personal responsibility for good behaviour and the need to show respect towards others. They question appropriately when unkindness is shown towards them or their peers. The themed programme of assemblies and special events, such as anti-bullying week, ensure that positive behaviour is regularly reinforced and celebrated.
- 3.18 Pupils collaborate well and support each other in communal tasks and happily work towards common outcomes. Senior leaders ensure pupils have good opportunities for social development and ensure pastoral care is at the heart of the school. The sense of belonging is palpable in the performing arts, seen when older pupils eagerly participated in early preparations for the school production. They speak warmly and with pride about their involvement in the productions, concerts and the house system. It enables pupils to work successfully within and across year groups. This strong social responsibility is also reflected in their charitable work. They decide for whom and how to fundraise, for example supporting a local farm project and raising money for a disabled child in Nepal. As such, pupils feel immensely proud of their school community and their commitment to making a positive contribution to society. In their meetings with the inspection team, pupils justified their commitment to fund-raising as 'it makes them feel good'. In the school council meeting, they discussed the upcoming anti-bullying week, maturely commenting upon its importance and the impact bullying can have on school life. They fulfil the responsibilities of being members of the council and eco-committee with pride and a desire to give of their best.
- 3.19 Pupils show positive respect for those with different faiths, backgrounds and traditions. Within a school culture of respect and tolerance, pupils are very accepting of each other and genuinely see no difference between themselves and the small number of pupils from other racial backgrounds. Pupils could not even understand why the issue was being raised. They enjoy assemblies, PSCHEE and

religious education, while those of other faiths and backgrounds share their experiences at home such as preparing for Diwali. Pupils learn to appreciate and reflect on the diversity in their community and across the world through school-led events such as the European Day of Languages.

- 3.20 Pupils of all ages are aware of how to stay safe, fit and healthy, both physically and mentally. Children in the EYFS consistently follow simple rules embedded in their daily routines which enable them to stay safe, such as taking the stairs one step at a time. Pupils know what constitutes a healthy diet and make informed food choices at lunchtimes. The younger pupils justify why exercise is important to stay healthy and they can explain the need to warm up muscles. Older pupils recount the many ways in which they are able to keep active and fit. They appreciated the advice offered to them during lockdown of how to stay healthy by taking time away from the computer screens to undertake physical exercise. They show a high level of awareness of the dangers that can arise from technology, including cyber bullying, which is regularly reinforced in ICT and PSCH EE lessons, and they know how to take precautionary steps to protect themselves, such as having strong passwords. Pupils are confident they know how to report concerns to a trusted adult, and all of those who responded to the questionnaire felt that the school is a safe place. A large majority of parents agreed that the school is governed, led and managed effectively, and in comments praised the school's pastoral care. Individual pupils' needs, both academic and pastoral, are successfully met as a direct result of the intimate knowledge of each child and the excellent management systems that exist within and between the different parts of the school.

4. Inspection Evidence

- 4.1 The inspectors observed lessons, had discussions with pupils and examined samples of pupils' work. They held discussions with members of staff and with the chair of governors, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended an assembly and council meeting. Inspectors visited the facilities for the youngest pupils, together with the learning support and educational resource areas. Inspectors considered the responses of parents, staff and pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires. The inspectors examined curriculum and other documentation made available by the school.

Inspectors

Mrs Louise Robinson	Reporting inspector
Mr Stuart Williams	Compliance team inspector (Senior teacher, HMC school)
Mr Stephen Challoner	Team inspector (Former senior teacher, HMC school)