

Inspection of Arbour Vale School

Farnham Road, Farnham Royal, Slough SL2 3AE

Inspection dates: 10 and 11 January 2023

Overall effectiveness	Good
The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Early years provision	Good
Sixth-form provision	Good
Previous inspection grade	Not previously inspected under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

What is it like to attend this school?

Staff know pupils very well. They provide pupils with the help, care and support they need to become confident, independent and successful citizens. Pupils are resoundingly clear that their school is a 'friendly, happy, welcoming and safe place'. They rise to leaders' high expectations and show positive attitudes to learning.

Pupils are polite and thoughtful. They hold doors open for others. Around school, pupils share a warm smile with their friends and with staff as they go about their day. On the occasions when pupils find it difficult to manage their behaviour, staff respond sensitively and carefully to help pupils regulate their feelings. Pupils take 'time out' to relax in the sensory garden. They practise yoga, meditation and mindfulness. Pupils look after their environment by planting flowers around school. They revel in their responsibilities, for example as librarians, sports mentors or members of the school council.

Pupils enjoy the after-school clubs, such as dancing, multisports and crafts. They proudly showcase their singing talents by performing at local and national events. Pupils say that bullying is rare. They trust staff, who quickly help pupils resolve any worries or problems they have.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

Leaders and governors have high aspirations for all staff and pupils. They ensure that staff know pupils' individual education, health and care (EHC) plans and pastoral needs well. Leaders work effectively with a range of external specialists, such as multidisciplinary professionals. This ensures that all pupils, including those who have significant medical and life-limiting conditions, are well supported. A wide range of specialist interventions, including physiotherapy and occupational therapy, blend seamlessly into daily routines. Consequently, pupils successfully overcome any barriers to learning.

The curriculum is interesting and engaging. It is tailored to each pupil's individual EHC plan and specific special educational needs and/or disabilities targets. Leaders have set out well, step by step, what pupils should learn and remember from their starting points. Teachers provide activities which promote pupils' natural curiosity. However, sometimes, teachers do not always check carefully what pupils know and can do. This means that they do not identify and address misconceptions in pupils' knowledge before introducing new activities. As a result, pupils do not learn as well as they could from their starting points.

Pupils in key stages 4 and 5 are well supported to make appropriate choices about the courses they select. Leaders work well with pupils to ensure that the choices made are based on pupils' EHC plan targets, interests and desired career path. Pupils can choose to study a mixture of examinations, including GCSEs and vocational studies linked to what they aim to study at college. They receive well-considered independent careers guidance. Pupils visit local colleges and receive

support to apply for courses and attend interviews. Many sixth-form students successfully move on to further education or work.

Pupils develop a strong love of reading. Across the school, pupils look forward to listening to the stories and poems staff read. They are excited to visit the well-stocked library. Older pupils listen to younger children read, and prize their roles as 'reading buddies'. In key stage 2 and beyond, the reading curriculum helps pupils to develop their appreciation of a diverse range of texts. Leaders have introduced a new phonics programme. They make sure that the books pupils read help them practise the sounds they learn. Leaders acknowledge that some staff do not deliver the school's phonics programme effectively. This means that some of the weakest readers do not learn to read quickly.

Children in early years are well supported. They learn to take turns, work independently and share resources. Staff routinely use a range of communication strategies to support children, including those who are non-verbal. As a result, children are fully engaged in the work they do.

Leaders place pupils' personal development at the heart of the school's work. Staff focus on pupils' character. For instance, pupils raise funds and donations for charities they support. Older pupils routinely organise litter picks in the local parks. Pupils work with a range of artists, musicians, storytellers and professionals. They recently displayed their artwork on 'recycling' in the local library. Pupils understand fairness, and they know that everyone is equal, regardless of any differences. They learn about different religions and cultures. One Year 8 pupil said: 'It does not matter if you are gay or the pronoun you choose. We are all equal and that is important.'

Governors and trustees know their school very well. They have an accurate picture of the school's strengths and of what needs to improve further. Governors challenge leaders around the impact of their actions to improve the quality of education. Leaders value the support and leadership training provided by the trust. Staff are proud to work at Arbour Vale. However, some staff who responded to Ofsted's staff survey report that leaders are not always mindful of their workload pressures.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders provide effective support to pupils and their families. They have created a strong culture of safeguarding. Staff are vigilant. They receive regular training to enable them to spot potential signs of abuse. As a result, staff record concerns in a detailed and timely manner. Leaders make referrals to the placing local authorities as appropriate. They work well with a range of external agencies to ensure that pupils get the support they need.

The curriculum provides opportunities for pupils to learn how to keep themselves safe, for example when learning online or when using the local roads.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Some staff lack subject expertise in teaching phonics effectively. As a result, the weakest readers do not learn to read quickly and confidently. Leaders should continue to provide training to develop staff's expertise to teach pupils to read.
- Occasionally, teachers do not check and address pupils' misconceptions of the content taught. Consequently, sometimes, pupils do not learn the planned knowledge as well as they could from their individual starting points. Leaders need to ensure that all staff are clear about how to use assessment effectively to help pupils embed the important knowledge they need to learn.
- Some staff who responded to Ofsted's staff survey do not always feel supported to manage their workload well. Leaders need to take appropriate and timely action to address the concerns raised.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

School details

Unique reference number	145741
Local authority	Slough
Inspection number	10256245
Type of school	All-through
School category	Academy special sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	3 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	341
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	66
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Jay Mercer
Principal	Neil Sykes
Website	www.arbourvaleschool.org
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- Arbour Vale School joined the Orchard Hill College Academy Trust in November 2018. The predecessor school was judged as inadequate in its last inspection in June 2017.
- The school caters for pupils with moderate, severe or profound learning difficulties. All pupils have severe communication difficulties, and many also have complex medical needs. Most pupils also have additional severe and complex needs, including a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder. All pupils have an EHC plan.
- Most pupils are referred to the school by Slough Borough Council, with some from adjacent authorities. Most pupils travel to school through local authority transport arrangements.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the principal, senior leaders, staff and pupils. The lead inspector met with the chair and vice-chair of governors. She also met with the chief executive officer and chair of trustees. Inspectors spoke on the telephone with two virtual school headteachers and an officer from Slough Borough Council.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading; mathematics; information, computing and technology; and personal, social and health education. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers and looked at a sample of pupils' work.
- To inspect safeguarding, inspectors checked the single central record of recruitment checks and talked to leaders responsible for safeguarding. Inspectors also talked to a range of staff and some pupils informally, including during social times.
- Inspectors considered the responses to the confidential staff survey and spoke to a range of staff about their views of the school.
- The inspection team took account of the responses to the Ofsted Parent View questionnaire and the additional free-text responses.

Inspection team

Shazia Akram, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Rachel McDonald-Taylor	Ofsted Inspector
Linda Jacobs	Ofsted Inspector

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