

Acorn Park School

Andrews Furlong, Mill Road, Banham, Norwich, Norfolk NR16 2HU

Inspection dates

9–11 May 2018

Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Sixth form provision	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The headteacher is providing good leadership in successfully addressing the weaknesses identified at the last inspection. As a result, teaching and learning are now good and pupils across the school are making good progress.
- The headteacher receives good support from the governors to ensure that the independent school standards are met and the school continues to improve.
- Leaders have strengthened the curriculum to ensure that it is relevant to the needs of all pupils and prepares them well for the next stage of their education.
- Teachers' subject knowledge is good and expectations are high. Assessments in English and mathematics are used well to develop pupils' learning and ensure good progress. However, teachers have yet to use the school's new assessment system to track progress across all subjects.
- Teachers do not provide enough opportunities to deepen pupils' reasoning skills in mathematics.
- Health professionals and therapists work seamlessly alongside teachers to successfully develop pupils' communication and social interaction skills.
- Pupils make good progress across the school. The youngest pupils make good progress in basic skills and the oldest pupils make good progress towards their examination courses.
- Pupils feel safe and enjoy school. Good welfare provision ensures pupils' regular attendance and that their behaviour rapidly improves.
- Effective leadership in the sixth form has led to good teaching, learning and progress. As a result, students are prepared well for the next stage of their lives.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school meets the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching, learning and assessment by:
 - providing more opportunities for pupils to deepen their reasoning skills in mathematics
 - ensuring that teachers use the new systems for tracking pupils' progress well across all subjects.
- Strengthen leadership and management by:
 - implementing effectively the new system of assessment to track progress across all subjects from September 2018
 - using assessment information to have a robust whole-school view of pupils' progress over time across all subjects.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The headteacher is providing good leadership and direction to ensure that all the independent school standards are met. With good support from the principal, governors and proprietors, the headteacher has successfully addressed the weaknesses identified at the previous inspection and has implemented actions well to ensure that the two previously unmet standards are now met.
- Pupils are now making good progress because leaders have strengthened teaching.
- Subject leaders are now carefully monitoring the impact of teaching on pupils' learning and progress within their subjects through visits to classrooms and reviews of pupils' work. They have a clear view of the progress pupils are making over time in some subjects, including mathematics and English.
- Leaders have developed strong teamwork between teachers, teaching assistants, health professionals and therapists for the benefit of pupils. This is reflected in the positive questionnaire responses of staff.
- Leaders actively engage parents and carers in pupils' learning and reviews of their education, health and care plans. This is reflected in their positive views of the school, with many parents willing to recommend the school to others.
- The curriculum has been further improved since the previous inspection, with more opportunities to take a wider range of examination courses at GCSE. In addition, the introduction of new vocational training in carpentry, and preparation for the world of work are providing good opportunities for pupils. Functional skills training has also been extended.
- There is a strong emphasis on developing communication and social interaction skills. Clear strategies are in place to support pupils who need additional help, so that they fill any gaps in learning.
- The newly developed provision to promote pupils' personal development is having a very beneficial impact in improving pupils' behaviour and attendance and in raising their self-esteem. This also promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, including British values, effectively. Pupils learn to share, take turns, respect others from different backgrounds and listen to their views. For example, they learn about Armistice Day, explore Aboriginal art and, during multicultural afternoons, they celebrate different festivals, such as Chinese New Year.
- Leaders ensure that all pupils have equal access to all that the school offers and have implemented their plan to improve access for disabled pupils effectively. Staff do not tolerate any form of bullying or harassment. They take swift and effective action when it occurs.
- The National Fostering Agency (NFA) Group, who oversee the work of Acorn Care and Education, have recently carried out a review of the school's work and confirmed that leaders' views of themselves are accurate. The school has developed its website to illustrate the relationships between the NFA and Acorn Care and Education. They are aware that they need to clarify this with the Department for Education (DfE).

- Careers education and work-related learning opportunities have improved since the previous inspection. All pupils benefit from impartial careers guidance which is leading to successful pathways for future education. Pupils in Years 10 and 11, and students in the sixth form, benefit from planned programmes for work experience and are studying towards accreditation in work-related skills.

Governance

- Governors are providing good strategic oversight for the work of the school and have very recently strengthened the school's procedures for recruiting staff. They work closely with the proprietor to ensure that all legal requirements are met and the independent school standards are implemented effectively.
- Members of the governing body look regularly at aspects of its work. As a result, governors have an accurate view of the quality of teaching and its impact on pupils' learning and progress.
- Governors carefully scrutinise headteacher's reports and ask challenging questions in holding leaders to account for the impact of the school's provision on pupils' learning and welfare.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Staff work closely with parents, health professionals, therapists and outside agencies to ensure the safety of pupils. The school is developing a strong culture for safeguarding pupils.
- All training is up to date and ensures that staff are well equipped to fulfil their duties in safeguarding pupils. Thorough procedures are in place to check the suitability of staff to work with pupils. The procedures have recently been strengthened.
- Leaders respond to any concerns about pupils' safety and welfare quickly, and carefully assess any potential risks to pupils.
- Pupils adopt safe practices and move around the school safely. They handle practical equipment and use the internet safely.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment has been strengthened since the previous inspection and is good across the school, including in the sixth form. Teachers are planning learning more effectively. Teaching assistants have also benefited from training to develop their practice. As a result, learning is well planned and delivered to meet the needs of individuals in a calm and productive classroom environment. This ensures that pupils make good progress.
- A wide range of assessment systems are in place, many of which have been developed since the previous inspection. These include individual education plans, individual communication plans and commercial systems of assessment to measure, track and record very small steps of progress and the use of examination grades.
- Assessment is used effectively by teachers to set individual targets to track progress in

learning in English and mathematics. However, they do not extend to the assessment of all subjects. The school is currently piloting a system to assess progress across all subjects, which leaders intend to fully implement in September 2018.

- Pupils' work and the school's tracking information show that the teaching of basic skills is good. The youngest pupils read with confidence, using phonics well to read unfamiliar words. The oldest pupils leave with at least one qualification in English and mathematics. Teachers provide every opportunity to ensure that pupils apply the basic skills of literacy and numeracy in real-life situations, such as reading recipes and budgeting. However, teachers do not provide enough opportunities for pupils to deepen their reasoning skills in mathematics.
- Teachers use their good subject knowledge to set high expectations for learning and behaviour. This was seen in pupils' work, where they made rapid gains in converting fractions into decimals and percentages and in identifying the difference between plant and animal cells.
- Therapists and health professionals work effectively with teachers to develop communication and social skills. During the inspection, for example, pupils worked together pulling lengths of string attached to an elastic band to try and retrieve a bottle from the floor. They were encouraged to exchange ideas to develop a plan and were able to work together successfully to complete the task.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils benefit greatly from the newly introduced system to promote their personal development. The new system has greatly improved pupils' social interactions and developed their confidence, so they successfully focus on learning.
- Pupils are encouraged to express their views and opinions, for example about events taking place in the world which they see on the daily news. They take turns, listen to one another, work well together and respect each other's views.
- Pupils develop self-confidence as they progress through the school by exploring their individual needs, their emotions and how they see themselves.
- Pupils show appreciation of different cultural traditions through art and in listening to different music from around the world. Pupils learn about the important role of women in society and the work of the suffragettes.
- Pupils know that bullying is wrong. The most able pupils identify clearly different forms of bullying in discussion and can explain the impact on the victim of bullying. Pupils with limited verbal communication express their views well with the use of communication aids, signs and symbols. Pupils develop good relationships with staff and other pupils.
- Pupils stay safe and learn about the safe use of the internet and how to travel safely.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Detailed individual behaviour plans are formulated when pupils enter the school. These set clear targets and expectations for behaviour, which are checked each half term.
- Pupils respond well to the good management of their behaviour by staff, who also set high expectations for behaviour and provide good role models for pupils. There were very few incidents of disruption seen during the inspection. Incidents of unacceptable behaviours fall significantly over time and exclusions are rare. Many parents and staff agree that behaviour is good. Pupils also said that behaviour is usually good.
- Over time, pupils' behaviour and attendance improve significantly. This is seen in a sharp reduction in the rates of challenging behaviour and rapid improvement in attendance. Some pupils who refused to attend school prior to admission have made exceptional progress in attending for 95% of the time currently. Unauthorised absence is low, and most pupils achieve broadly average attendance; a few pupils have lower rates of attendance due to medical conditions.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- All pupils, including the disadvantaged, those with limited verbal communication and the most able, are making good progress from their different starting points in a wide range of subjects. At the previous inspection, pupils were not making enough progress in science, as they were in English and mathematics. They are now making equally good progress in science because the subject is taught well.
- The youngest pupils are making good progress in core subjects, especially in reading, because they are taught how to use phonics to read unfamiliar words and they are encouraged to read widely and often. Their writing improves securely over time as seen in their neatly presented work and in their use of a wide range of vocabulary. Good examples of pupils' poetry were seen, particularly 'Dub' poetry based on the Rastafarian culture.
- A wider range of examination courses have been introduced for pupils and students in the sixth form, and because of improved teaching of the subjects, students achieve well. Expectations are high and many pupils are making faster progress than initially expected towards their examination course, with a significant number on course to achieve higher grades than predicted.
- Pupils' books and progress folders demonstrate the personal achievements pupils make from their starting points on entry. All pupils have made sufficient progress towards their targets and many have made rapid progress, doing much better than expected.
- The outcomes of reviews of progress against individual education plan targets show that pupils are making good progress.

Sixth form provision

Good

- Leaders have improved provision effectively in the sixth form since the previous inspection, so it is now good. Students benefit from a clear and distinct sixth form which is separate from the rest of the school. The provision focuses on developing students'

independent living skills, preparation for the world of work and for the next stage of their lives.

- The sixth-form leader has developed a wider range of academic and vocational courses since the previous inspection. New courses include the award scheme to enhance work-related learning, carpentry, photography, qualifications in citizenship, personal development and GCSE science.
- Students also participate in the Norfolk Youth Award to develop their volunteering skills. Plans are in place to provide more vocational courses in the next term.
- High-quality independent careers advice ensures that sixth-form students make good choices for the next stage of their lives. Students now have increased opportunities for work experience on site in the kitchen and on the small farm, and off site in charity shops in Attleborough and at the riding school in Lowestoft.
- Nearly all students who left school in 2017 entered further education college, employment or training. Currently, most students have had their college place confirmed.
- The leader is ensuring that the quality of teaching and learning is good. As a result, students are making good progress towards their academic and vocational courses.
- Teaching of communication and independence skills is considerably enhanced by the work of therapists and health professionals. Consequently, students make good progress in developing communication and skills for independent living.
- Students' behaviour and attendance improve rapidly.
- Students stay safe because staff provide good pastoral support and maintain high levels of supervision.

School details

Unique reference number	135066
DfE registration number	926/6152
Inspection number	10046995

This inspection was carried out under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Type of school	Other independent special school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	6 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	55
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	11
Number of part-time pupils	None
Proprietor	Acorn Care and Education
Chair	Julie Taylor
Headteacher	Arabella Hardy
Annual fees (day pupils)	£45,000 to £85,000
Telephone number	01953 888656
Website	www.acornpark.org.uk
Email address	admin@acornparkschool.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	26–28 April 2016

Information about this school

- Acorn Park is a special school for pupils with autistic spectrum disorder. All pupils have an education, health and care plan or a statement of special educational needs.
- Almost all pupils are boys.
- Approximately one in four pupils are looked after by their local authority.

- There has been an increase in the numbers of qualified teachers to the school since the previous inspection.
- The proprietors Acorn Care and Education are now managed by the NFA Group.
- Since the previous inspection, Ofsted carried out an evaluation of the school's action plan on 26 July 2016 for the two unmet independent school standards. The plan was accepted by the DfE.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited lessons across the school, including the sixth form, jointly with the headteacher and principal. During these visits, they looked at pupils' work and talked to them about their learning. Inspectors also heard a few pupils read.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher, principal, chair of the governing body, other school leaders, the business manager and the managing director of Acorn Care and Education.
- Telephone discussions were held with a few parents and two local authorities to seek their views. The inspectors also considered the views of 13 parents who completed the online questionnaire, Parent View, and the written comments. They also took account of the 46 completed questionnaire returns from staff. The school's most recent questionnaire responses from pupils were considered.
- Inspectors looked at a range of documentation, including policies and procedures to safeguard the welfare and interests of pupils; the single central register of recruitment checks on the suitability of staff to work with pupils; records of training in safeguarding pupils; curriculum planning and the careers policy; minutes of governors' meetings; the school's tracking information about pupils' progress; and external reviews of the school's performance since the previous inspection.
- An inspector toured the premises and looked at the website.

Inspection team

Declan McCarthy, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Caroline Parry	Ofsted Inspector

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