

# Acorn Park School

Independent school progress monitoring inspection report

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## **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, and under the Care Standards Act 2000 having regard to the national minimum standards for children's homes.

The inspection was conducted at the request of the Registration Authority for independent schools in order to monitor the progress the school has made in implementing its action plan following the previous inspection.

## **Information about the school**

Acorn Park School was acquired by its new owner, Acorn Care and Education in May 2011. The school is for pupils aged four to 19 years with autism; they also have severe learning difficulties and severe challenging behaviour. It is also registered as a children's home because some pupils reside there for more than 295 days per year. There are 27 pupils on roll currently and all are between the ages of 11 and 19 years. This school and home occupy a very large, enclosed campus. A new headteacher was appointed in September 2011 and a new senior management team formed in January 2012.

## **Context of the inspection**

During the last school year, concerns were raised about the management of students' behaviour and the use of relaxation/calm rooms. As a result, the school was visited in May 2011 in relation to these matters. Although the management of students and the use of the rooms were acceptable, with staff following precise guidance, there were a small number of regulations which were not met. The school constructed an action plan. This was evaluated on 30 October 2011 and was deemed to be broadly satisfactory, although needing some improvement. This inspection is the first visit to follow up the progress the school has made in implementing its action plan.

At the same time as this inspection, an evaluation of the re-registered children's home's provision was undertaken. Social care and education inspectors worked together. A separate report on the quality of care will be published on the Ofsted website.

## **Summary of the progress made in implementing the action plan**

The school has made good progress in implementing its action plan.

A number of health safety issues were raised at the time of the last inspection in May 2011. These were in relation to the teaching environment the students were taught and the relaxation/calm rooms which students sometimes go to when their behaviour

is challenging. There were hazards such as exposed electrical sockets, cabling, large protruding padlocks on cupboards and hard angular surfaces which could cause injury, given some students' responses when exhibiting difficult behaviour. In addition, some other aspects of the school's accommodation did not meet regulations, such as poorly lit areas, uneven temperatures in buildings, damaged walls and poorly decorated spaces. Some fire extinguishers had been removed from their locations and staff did not know where they were. Furniture was not always appropriate for students with autism and severe learning difficulties. The school planned to address the hazards and make all spaces safe. It also identified that it was to make the building 'autism friendly' ensuring that there was a high standard of lighting, heating, furniture and decoration, which would meet the needs of autistic students.

The new owners have invested considerably in the accommodation. Half the school buildings are now being extensively re-modelled to provide much improved and higher quality of premises which are suitable for students with autism. The remainder of the school will be completed when the first part is finished. All safety issues have been addressed and the environment is one which is now safe. It is regularly monitored and any issues are prioritised for immediate rectification. Rooms are now well lit, areas have more even heating and new furniture has been purchased that is more appropriate for the needs of students. Risk assessments of the premises are thoroughly undertaken so that the school has a detailed knowledge of its buildings and any issues.

The anti-bullying policy did not take account of the latest DfE guidance at the time of the last visit. The school planned to revise its policy and ensure that incidents were regularly monitored and recorded. The policy now takes full account of the latest government guidance *Preventing and tackling bullying*. All behavioural incidents, whatever their type, are recorded in the school's incident book. There is thorough analysis of these incidents, identifying the school's response and the impact of its interventions.

Previously, the first aid policy did not outline what the school would do when there was a need to deal with blood and body fluids or the level of injury it would deal with. The school planned to revise the policy to this include this information. An appendix to the policy now outlines detailed procedures for staff to follow, including the management of hazardous waste.

The required information about the school's proprietors was not included in the single central register at the time of the last inspection. The school undertook in its action plan to update this to ensure that all the necessary details were included. This present inspection found that the single central register includes all the necessary information, including that on the new proprietorial body.

Although the management of behaviour was deemed acceptable at the previous visit, the recording of physical restraint and of the use of the relaxation rooms was not always sufficiently detailed. The school's response in its action plan was unsatisfactory because there was not enough information as to how it was to

improve this. The monitoring of the records was to be tied into meeting the social care requirement for the external monitoring of records and this has been done well. The school's recording is now sufficiently thorough. There is a clear picture of what led up to an incident, what was done to prevent it and what actually happened during the incident. The records relating to the use of the rooms are now completed with sufficient detail. There is still some occasional inconsistency in recording, which the schools is aware of through its own monitoring of records; suitable arrangements are in place to improve this. Records also show what happened after an incident, and that staff and students have been debriefed. However, there is not always a reference to the outcome of this debrief, which is good practice. The school is actively reviewing how this can be best achieved, especially through using the students' symbol communication system and through external advocates.

## **Compliance with regulatory requirements**

The school has made good progress and now meets all regulatory requirements.

## School details

<b>School status</b>	Independent		
<b>Type of school</b>	Special school for pupils with autism		
<b>Date school opened</b>	May 2005		
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	4 to 19 years		
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed		
<b>Number on roll (full-time pupils)</b>	Boys: 22	Girls: 3	Total: 25
<b>Number of boarders</b>	Boys: 20	Girls: 3	Total: 23
<b>Number of pupils with a statement of special educational needs</b>	Boys: 21	Girls: 3	Total: 24
<b>Number of pupils who are looked after</b>	Boys: 12	Girls: 1	Total: 13
<b>Annual fees (day pupils)</b>	£87,335		
<b>Annual fees (boarders)</b>	£225,000		
<b>Headteacher</b>	Keith Cox		
<b>Proprietor</b>	Acorn Care and Education		