

# The Acorns Primary and Nursery School

Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	134866
<b>Local authority</b>	Cheshire West and Chester
<b>Inspection number</b>	381753
<b>Inspection dates</b>	30–31 May 2012
<b>Lead inspector</b>	Marguerite Murphy HMI

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

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<b>Type of school</b>	Primary
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	3–11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	325
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Martin Nield
<b>Headteacher</b>	Amanda Powell
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	2 October 2008
<b>School address</b>	Pooltown Road Ellesmere Port Cheshire CH65 7ED
<b>Telephone number</b>	0151 3551546
<b>Fax number</b>	0151 3506460
<b>Email address</b>	head@theacorns.cheshire.sch.uk

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## Introduction

### Inspection team

Marguerite Murphy  
Clarice Nelson-Rowe  
Gary Kirkley

Her Majesty's Inspector  
Additional inspector  
Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. The inspectors observed 15 teachers in 15 lessons and other learning activities such as individual or small group intervention work, including some led by teaching assistants. Inspectors observed assemblies and listened to pupils read. Meetings were held with senior and middle leaders, groups of pupils, members of the governing body, and members of staff. The inspectors observed the school's work and looked at its self-evaluation, improvement plans, safeguarding documentation and monitoring records. They, also, analysed questionnaires completed by 108 parents and carers, 109 pupils, and 39 members of staff.

## Information about the school

This is a larger than average-sized primary school that had been operating on a split site up until November 2011, when refurbishment and new building work was completed. Most pupils are of White British heritage and speak English as their first language. A well above-average proportion of pupils is known to be eligible for free school meals. An average proportion of pupils is supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs. The school meets the government's current floor standard, which sets the minimum standards for attainment and progress. The school has resourced provision for up to 10 pupils with complex needs. The school runs a breakfast and after-school club each day. There is a federation arrangement in place between the Acorns and Whitley Village, a small primary school in Lower Whitley, near Warrington. It involves a shared leadership arrangement in which the headteacher spends one day each week at Whitley Village.

The school holds awards in its provision for Sports, Arts, Eco-school, Inclusion, Dyslexia, and 'Let's Get Cooking' accreditation. It is also accredited as a NPQH Leadership Development School by the National College.

**Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory and 4 is inadequate**  
Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

## Inspection judgements

<b>Overall Effectiveness</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Achievement of pupils</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Quality of teaching</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Behaviour and safety of pupils</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Leadership and management</b>	<b>1</b>

## Key Findings

- The Acorns is a good school that has maintained and built further on its previously good performance. This has been driven by continuous improvement in the effectiveness of leadership and management, including governance, so that these are now outstanding. The school’s overall effectiveness is not yet outstanding because teaching and pupils’ achievement are good overall. Attainment in reading and writing, while continuing to rise steadily, is not as high as in mathematics. Also, the proportion of teaching that is better than good is not high enough to secure outstanding achievement for all groups of pupils.
- Children get a good start to their schooling in the Early Years Foundation Stage and make good progress towards their early learning goals. The good progress continues through Key Stages 1 and 2 so that all pupils achieve well.
- Teaching is consistently good and sometimes outstanding. It is enhanced by the contribution of high-quality teaching assistants and other support staff who form a key part of the whole school team.
- The headteacher and senior leaders set high standards and articulate a relentless drive for improvement that is reflected in the school’s rigorous monitoring of the performance of all staff. The impact is evident in the school’s high-quality curriculum and pupils’ spiritual, social, moral, and cultural development, as well as the improved Early Years Foundation Stage provision that is now good.
- The behaviour and safety of pupils at the school are outstanding, demonstrated by their typically enthusiastic and positive attitudes to learning and their respect for each other and for adults.

## What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise attainment in reading and writing so that a higher proportion of pupils meets or exceeds the typically expected levels for 11 year-olds by:

- building on the improvements already evident in pupils’ application of phonics (linking sounds and letters) to raise further the expectations of pupils’ work in reading and writing
  - developing more opportunities for pupils to practise, apply and display their writing skills throughout the curriculum, for example, through extended writing tasks as part of topic work.
- Raise the proportion of teaching that is outstanding by:
- demonstrating higher expectations of pupils’ independence and quality of work in a consistently effective balance between teacher input and pupil activity in all lessons
  - increasing the number of internal or external opportunities for teachers to share best practice and ideas and learn from each other
  - ensuring that leaders or other colleagues’ observations of lessons focus more closely on the impact of teaching on the rate of progress made by all groups of pupils in the class.

## Main Report

### Achievement of pupils

A substantial proportion of children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage well below the age-related expectations in their knowledge, skills and understanding, most noticeably in their language and communication skills. Parents and carers who responded to the inspection questionnaire expressed the unanimous view that their children make good progress and inspection evidence confirms this. Pupils’ reading skills improve to below average at the end of Year 2 and average by Year 6. That reflects pupils’ good achievement throughout the school to reach attainment that meets national averages overall by the end of Key Stage 2 and often above this in mathematics, where progress is strongest. Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs, sometimes, make outstanding progress from their starting points. For example, those in a lower-ability set in Years 3 and 4 made excellent progress in applying their phonic skills to real speaking, reading and writing contexts. High-quality learning was achieved through lively and active participation in rhythmic singing and dancing to reinforce pupils’ knowledge of different sounds made by letter combinations. Pupils are enthusiastic about mathematics and told inspectors that they enjoy being given challenges. In a Year 5 lesson, pupils of all abilities made good progress in calculation methods as they worked together and discussed the methods they would use to break down a problem into manageable sections. Scrutiny of pupils’ writing in their books and on display around the school shows good presentation and progress, although the school acknowledges that there is room to develop this further through opportunities for pupils to write more extended pieces of work across the curriculum.

The good quality and regular teaching of phonics from the Nursery upwards is having the desired effect on pupils’ improving achievement in reading and writing by the end of Key Stage 1. That is not always taken full advantage of when teachers plan lessons and set their expectations of what pupils should now be able to achieve. Consequently, the proportion of higher-attaining pupils achieving Level 5 in English by the end of Key Stage 2 remains well-below average, although this is starting to rise.

## Quality of teaching

Common strengths in the quality of teaching include excellent relationships, strong subject knowledge and a focus on ensuring that a variety of tasks and activities are planned that promote pupils' motivation and enjoyment of learning. In the Nursery and Reception classes, a good balance of teacher-led and child-initiated activities helps to build children's independence as a result of provision that caters to their particular interests at the same time as building key skills in communication, literacy, and numeracy. Throughout the school, good attention is paid to the effective deployment of teaching assistants and to promoting a multi-sensory approach, in order to meet pupils' different needs and learning styles. That contributes to the particularly effective impact of teaching on the progress made by pupils with special educational needs. Teachers make good use of a well-balanced curriculum to provide memorable experiences for pupils that enliven subjects and topics and enhance pupils' spiritual, moral, social, and cultural development. The experiences include educational trips and visits and incorporate opportunities to benefit from partnership work with the federated school and others in the local and wider area. Teachers use assessment strategies such as questioning and marking to check pupils' progress, in order to build on their learning and set targets for improvement. However, the quality of them varies in the extent to which they enable a regular, two-way dialogue between teachers and individual pupils to move learning on more rapidly, for example, for higher-attaining pupils.

Parents and carers who responded to the inspection questionnaire expressed the unanimous view that their children are taught well and helped to develop their skills in communication, reading, writing, and mathematics. Inspection evidence confirms that teaching is good and that, in the best lessons, pupils are challenged even more if the teacher's input is brisk and regular without being dominant, so that expectations of group and independent work by the pupils themselves are high.

## Behaviour and safety of pupils

The school's outstanding levels of care, guidance and support, noted at its previous inspection, are key factors in pupils' excellent personal development and in their continuing exemplary behaviour. All staff and almost all parents and carers agree that behaviour is at least good. On the very few occasions when individuals find it difficult to maintain that, pupils are themselves very clear about the school's procedures that are managed effectively and consistently by staff. They say there are no problems with bullying, although they understand this comes in many forms, and would have no hesitation in reporting any incidents. Inspectors noted the predominantly outstanding behaviour and attitudes of the pupils, whether in lessons, around the school, or at lunch and break times. Pupils set an excellent example to others in their calm and considerate manner and represent their school well in the way they relate to adults and visitors in the school and community. Although attendance is below the national average, the positive impact of the work of the school's family liaison officers is demonstrated in case studies that demonstrate significant improvements made through rapid response to family difficulties.

## Leadership and management

The outstanding leadership of the headteacher, complemented by the excellent skills of senior and middle leaders and the governing body, sets the tone for a school that is continually improving. The school's effective performance-management procedures for all

teaching and support staff play a significant part in communicating its high expectations. Staff share the school's vision, are involved fully in its accurate self-evaluation, and are supported well to play their part in raising pupils' achievement. The governing body is involved fully in the recruitment of high-quality staff, who are matched well to the school's ethos and vision. Many take a lead role in the professional development of others, for example, with regard to provision for pupils with complex or additional needs, and those who are at risk of being vulnerable or do not attend regularly enough. Everyone's skills are valued and utilised for the benefit of the pupils, from the teaching assistant who delivers a fun programme of physical activities to improve pupils' self-esteem, to the enthusiastic and well-regarded site manager who is an integral part of many school events and residential trips! Effective partnerships with parents and carers, external agencies, the federated school, and the local Education Improvement Partnership all help to make a positive contribution and share good practice to improve achievement for pupils in the school and local area.

Staff are held to account for the progress pupils make, although the monitoring of teaching does not always ensure the highest levels of challenge. Currently, feedback to staff following lesson observations tends to focus more on the quality of the teacher's input and organisation, rather than on its impact on the rates of progress for all groups of pupils. Staff show high levels of professionalism and appreciate opportunities to share best practice and observe each other. Leaders recognise that there is scope to develop this further, within and beyond the school itself.

The school's analyses of the performance of different groups or cohorts of learners enable leaders to track progress and identify any underachievement. Within the otherwise continuous and positive trend over a five year period since 2007, an unusual dip in attainment at Year 6 occurred in 2010. The school's detailed tracking identified a combination of factors and circumstances that had impacted negatively on results. Actions taken by the school ensured a quick recovery to achieve very good progress and its best results to date in 2011, indicating a very strong capacity to sustain improvement. The school can also demonstrate considerable success in narrowing the gap between national averages for the achievement of the high proportion of pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals and of those who are disabled or have special educational needs. A high-quality, well-balanced curriculum and the school's commitment to promoting equality and adopting best practice in the safeguarding of pupils support its success. All of these factors make an excellent contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social, and cultural development and to the school's motto of, 'Acorns grow through learning and laughter'.

## Glossary

### What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

### Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	54	42	2	2
Primary schools	14	49	32	6
Secondary schools	20	39	34	7
Special schools	33	45	20	3
Pupil referral units	9	55	28	8
All schools	16	47	31	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September to 31 December 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.



## Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Floor standards	the national minimum expectation of attainment and progression measures
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the governors and headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.
Safety	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

**This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.**



1 June 2012

Dear Pupils

**Inspection of The Acorns Primary and Nursery School, Ellesmere Port, CH65 7ED**

Thank you for your warm welcome and the help you provided when the inspection team visited recently. We enjoyed watching you at work and listening to your views, which are very important to us. We are pleased to report that your school is good, with a number of aspects that are already outstanding, including some that have improved further since its last inspection. For example, we found that the Early Years Foundation Stage is also good now and that leadership and management are outstanding. Your headteacher, leadership team and governing body are doing a great job and are determined to move the school on further so that it becomes outstanding in everything it does.

Of course, key factors in the school's success are the good teaching and additional support from teaching assistants and other staff that ensure you achieve well in English and, particularly, in mathematics. Not forgetting, too, that your behaviour and attitudes to learning are outstanding! It was a pleasure to see you enjoying your lessons and helping each other at work and play.

We have recommended two targets for improvement. One is to raise the standard of work in reading and writing further, and the other is to do the same with teaching, so that it is even better than good in more lessons than it is now. We know that you and your teachers are up for a challenge, so just go for it! You can help by practising your reading as much as possible and working towards the targets teachers give you in writing, especially to complete some longer, interesting pieces of writing in different subjects.

Well done and good luck for the future.

Yours sincerely

Marguerite Murphy  
Her Majesty's Inspector (on behalf of the inspection team)

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