

Acorn Independent College

39-47 High Street, Southall, Middlesex, UB1 2HF

Inspection dates	12–14 June 2013	
Overall effectiveness	Good	2
Pupils' achievement	Outstanding	1
Pupils' behaviour and personal development	Good	2
Quality of teaching	Outstanding	1
Quality of curriculum	Good	2
Pupils' welfare, health and safety	Good	2
Leadership and management	Good	2

Summary of key findings

This school is good because

- Outstanding teaching has ensured that the majority of students achieve exceptionally well from their starting points.
- Behaviour is good and in lessons it is often exemplary. Good relationships and high levels of respect prevail to help create a cohesive, tolerant learning community.
- Students' welfare, health and safety are given a high priority. Students value the support they are given for their ongoing welfare and academic success.
- On leaving the college, students are very well prepared to further their academic studies, often at their first-choice university.
- Good leadership and management have played a significant role in sustaining outstanding teaching and achievement.

It is not yet outstanding because

- Careers guidance is not well developed.
- Students are given too few responsibilities to encourage their overall commitment to the college.
- Arrangements for checking the quality of teaching are not fully developed with targets to improve the small amount of teaching which is not outstanding.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school meets schedule 1 of The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010, as amended by The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2012 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements.

Information about this inspection

- The school was inspected with half a day's notice.
- The inspectors observed 10 lessons. The majority of teachers were observed. Students' work was sampled. Inspectors looked at a wide range of school documents relating to students' achievement, the curriculum, teaching, leadership and students' welfare.
- Meetings were held with students, the Principal (a proprietor), the co-proprietor, senior leaders, teaching staff, welfare and registrar staff.
- Only a very small number of parental responses were posted on the online survey, Parent View. Inspectors evaluated the 10 responses from the staff questionnaire.

Inspection team

Flora Bean, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Michael Sutherland-Harper	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Established in 1999, Acorn Independent College is an independent co-educational secondary school which is registered to take up to 220 students aged from 11 to 18 years. It occupies a five-storey building on a main road in Southall.
- The college is run by two proprietors, one of whom is the Principal.
- Their aim is 'to help each one of its students, by offering sound advice and applying the highest possible educational standards, achieve the very best which he or she is capable of.'
- Of the 97 students currently on roll, 25 are of compulsory school age, including seven students in Key Stage 3. The majority of students are in Years 12 and 13.
- Almost all students are of Asian heritage.
- The college provides one- and two-year GCSE and A-Level courses with a particular focus on the sciences and mathematics.
- There are a few students with special educational needs but no students with a statement of special educational needs.
- The college does not offer any additional provision.
- The college had its last Ofsted inspection in March 2010.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of leadership and management by having better checks made on the quality of teaching so that even more is outstanding.
- Improve further the quality of the curriculum by developing the provision for careers guidance.
- Improve the provision for students' personal development by encouraging a greater commitment from students to the life of the college by, for example, giving them more responsibilities.

Inspection judgements

Pupils' achievement

Outstanding

Students' achievement is outstanding. Inspection evidence from lesson observations, students' work and examination results clearly indicates that across the college students make outstanding progress due to a well-developed curriculum and teaching which is outstanding. Students achieve exceptionally well in almost all subjects and especially in the sciences and mathematics. They produce high-quality work in response to lessons which incorporate very good pace and challenge. They achieve exceptionally high levels of proficiency in numeracy and good, and often outstanding, reading and writing skills. There are no gaps between performance of any different groups who begin in the college with lower starting points and performance at all key stages is often well above that of other students nationally. Students in both Key Stages 3 and 4 progress exceptionally well in small classes where individual help ensures their needs are very well met. Disabled students and those with special educational needs are exceptionally well provided for because the college assigns individual staff mentors who closely monitor their progress and identify their needs, which ensures their very good progress over time. Attainment in national examinations has been consistently high, with many outstanding results at GCSE and A level in the sciences, mathematics and art, in particular. The vast majority of students achieve high grades to gain places at the universities of their choice, often to study medicine, dentistry or optometry. This represents outstanding academic progress over time, particularly for those who attend the intensive courses to retake examinations in order to improve their grades at GCSE or A level.

Pupils' behaviour and personal development

Good

Students' behaviour and personal development are good. They have positive attitudes to learning and demonstrate good levels of tolerance for a wide range of beliefs and cultures within the student population. Through their daily interactions, they demonstrate positive relationships and acceptance of each other. New students who arrive during the year integrate quickly. In discussion, students reported that they feel safe in the college and that bullying of any kind is rare. Should the need arise, staff deal with any bullying occurrence swiftly. Students report that they are well supported by individual staff, including the Principal, but that the community aspect of their college is less well developed because, for example, they are not given sufficient responsibilities to contribute to the college as a community. The students have recently raised money for a local charity.

The vast majority of students are self-motivated and want to achieve success. They value most the exceptional teaching and support for their learning, and the opportunities to extend their learning. For example, during the inspection, Year 9 and Year 10 enjoyed a trip to the open air theatre in Regent's park to see a dramatic production of Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mocking Bird*, which they are currently studying in English. Students are highly appreciative of staff support, which is reflected in their good levels of attendance.

Good provision is made for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. All students of compulsory school age study religious studies and personal, social and health education (PSHE) which includes citizenship. This work contributes positively to their understanding of different cultures, faiths and beliefs. In a Year 10 lesson for example, students discussed together the issues of community cohesion and religious tolerance.

The Principal has ensured that where political issues are brought to the attention of students, a balanced presentation of opposing views is presented. The curriculum is effective in ensuring that students respect the fundamental British values of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect. Students have a clear understanding of public institutions and services in England. This is supported through visits to places such as the Houses of Parliament.

Quality of teaching**Outstanding**

The quality of teaching is outstanding and has a significant impact on students' achievement and success. Teaching is characterised by very strong subject knowledge, focused use of questioning and thorough planning. Work set is well matched to suit individual needs, including any students with special educational needs, so all can make progress from their starting points.

In response to lessons which incorporate a lively pace and excellent guidance, students are challenged to work at a high level and to contribute to their learning. Students' previous knowledge and skills are taken into account and extended, as seen for, example, in a physics revision lesson on reflection and refraction where the teaching was thorough and engaged all students in discussion to ensure good understanding. In English, students are encouraged to explore vocabulary and create a glossary of new words which extends their ability to develop excellent writing skills. Students are encouraged to ask searching questions and offer hypotheses that successfully extend their level of thinking and reflection for the benefit of the whole class. Students anticipate a fast pace of learning with high-quality debate and explanations. As a result, students make excellent gains in lessons and over time.

The college is effective in monitoring students' progress through ongoing formal and informal assessments. Homework is set regularly, is often discussed in class and is marked with comments to help students to improve. Students are made aware of the progress they are making and clear targets for improvement are regularly shared. Teachers work hard to raise the levels which students seek to achieve and take great care to promote student self-confidence. The college has achieved extremely positive outcomes with many students who have previously been less successful elsewhere.

Quality of curriculum**Good**

The curriculum is good and contributes well to students' outstanding progress. It provides a good range of mathematical, scientific, human and social subjects. Appropriate schemes of work are in place and are continually reviewed to bring about further improvements in curricular provision. All students' individual interests and abilities are considered in allocating them to subjects as part of their preparation for adult life. Chemistry, physics, biology and mathematics feature strongly. Students achieve exceptionally well in art.

The range of courses includes one- or two-year programmes for both GCSE and A level. Short 're-take' courses of a term's duration are also available. There are 20 possible examination courses at A level and 12 for GCSE. Key Stage 3 students follow courses including the three sciences, information and communication technology (ICT), PSHE and religious studies. Thirty hours are available during the week for the curriculum and most students have a full timetable. All students have regular opportunities to develop their reading, writing and communication skills, although these are slightly less well developed than their mathematical skills. The college makes good provision through the curriculum for any student with learning difficulties. Opportunities for physical education are made through weekly attendance at a local leisure centre and, when the weather permits, the college makes use of a local park.

The curriculum is enriched by a good extra-curricular programme, such as a very popular chess club, a recent 'Dragon's Den' competition, and outings and trips to theatres and art galleries. In discussion, students expressed a desire for more music and drama, and for further technological experiences to enhance their overall education. The college has good links with medical and dentistry schools, with visiting speakers to advise on university application and entrance. It has begun a good careers programme and is looking at ways to provide further careers advice because, at present, it is not as good as it could be.

Pupils' welfare, health and safety**Good**

The quality of students' welfare, health and safety are good. There have been significant improvements since the last inspection and all of the independent school regulations for welfare are now fully met. In discussion, students reported that they feel safe and secure at the college and can turn to any of the staff for help if needed.

The college has a comprehensive range of policies, including those for child protection, health and safety, fire and first aid, behaviour and anti-bullying, and these are appropriately implemented. Procedures for checking the suitability of staff to work with students are rigorous, and all the required checks have been carried out and are appropriately recorded on a single central record. The designated person responsible for overseeing safeguarding, including child protection, has attended higher-level training and all staff have completed an appropriate level of training. Admission and attendance procedures are clear and registration procedures are carried out to meet regulatory requirements.

All requisite fire risk assessments and maintenance to reduce the risk from fire and other hazards are carried out on a regular basis and electrical appliances are regularly checked by appropriately qualified contractors. Risk assessments are regularly carried out for the building and outings, and any issues that arise are dealt with swiftly. Robust procedures are in place to ensure that students are safe when they attend any off-site activities or trips. A good number of staff are trained in first aid and fire safety, and the college provides regular update training. Procedures to ensure the well-being of any student with special educational needs or a disability are rigorous.

Leadership and management**Good**

Leadership and management are good. The proprietor/Principal has played a significant role in the college's development and clearly communicates high expectations and ambitions for the college to ensure all students have maximum opportunities to reach their potential. The leadership of the school ensures that the college meets all the regulations for independent schools. The appointment of high-calibre teaching staff is a priority to ensure teaching continues to be outstanding. There is a shared focus, from all who work at the college, on continually seeking to improve students' achievement. Previous performance in examination results has been sustained and remains consistently high, particularly in the sciences and mathematics.

Procedures for performance management and professional development are adequate. Staff deployment is carefully planned but the monitoring of their work requires further development to further build on the high quality of teaching. Self-evaluation is generally good and being developed further, as are opportunities for staff training and development.

Clear policies and procedures ensure the welfare, health and safety of students is maintained. The premises and accommodation provide a good learning environment with suitable measures in place to ensure the safety of students is a priority. The curriculum ensures all students have good opportunities to learn. Great emphasis is placed on good behaviour to ensure maximum opportunities for students to learn, including through good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

The college works well with parents and carers to ensure a consistency of approach to students' development. The quality of information for parents and carers is good. The college's website provides a good insight into college life. Reports on students' progress are regular, detailed and informative. Appropriate procedures are in place for handling complaints.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	A school which provides an exceptional quality of education and significantly exceeds minimum requirements.
Grade 2	Good	A school which provides a high quality of education that exceeds minimum requirements.
Grade 3	Adequate	A school which meets minimum requirements but needs to improve the quality of education it provides.
Grade 4	Inadequate	A school where minimum requirements are not met and/or the quality of education has serious weaknesses.

School details

Unique reference number	131982
Inspection number	420206
DfE registration number	307/6081
Type of school	Senior school
School status	Independent School
Age range of pupils	13–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	97
Number of part time pupils	0
Proprietor	Gladys Watt and Graham Watt
Headteacher	Gladys Watt
Date of previous school inspection	17–18 March 2010
Annual fees (day pupils)	£5,100–£13,100
Telephone number	020 8751 9900
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Email address	enquiries@acorn-college.co.uk

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