

# The London Acorn School

Morden Cottage, Morden Hall Park, London, SM4 5JD

**Inspection dates** 28–30 January 2014

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>Outstanding</b>	<b>1</b>
Pupils' achievement	Outstanding	1
Pupils' behaviour and personal development	Outstanding	1
Quality of teaching	Outstanding	1
Quality of curriculum	Outstanding	1
Pupils' welfare, health and safety	Good	2
Leadership and management	Good	2

## Summary of key findings

### This school is outstanding because

- In a very short time, senior leaders and directors have successfully established a very strong, nurturing ethos in which pupils can thrive. The school is already providing an outstanding quality of education. All staff share the same very high ambition for the school. The senior leaders know their school extremely well and understand what to do to maintain the highest standards.
- The leadership of teaching is outstanding and secures outstanding outcomes for pupils. The headteacher leads by example. All teachers demonstrate excellent subject knowledge and teach with energy and imagination. Teachers routinely reflect on the impact of their teaching on pupils' learning and development and ways to improve their skills. Pupils make outstanding progress in their learning because they are helped to acquire knowledge and skills that are impressive in breadth and depth, and at a rapid rate.
- Pupils' outstanding achievement owes much to an approach to learning and personal development that is centred on their physical and emotional well-being and their moral and spiritual development. Pupils' outstanding personal development and behaviour are reflected in their very high attendance, love of learning, positive relationships with others and appreciation of the natural environment.
- The curriculum is broad, rich and successfully integrates all academic subjects with drawing, painting, crafts and physical activity. It is exemplary in its ability to inspire pupils and impart lasting knowledge.
- Pupils, parents and carers have full confidence in the school's ability to keep children safe and happy. Pupils are cared for well and safety education is given a high priority. Parents and carers would all recommend the school to others.

### 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 inspection was carried out with one day's notice.
- The inspector observed 11 lessons or sessions taught by five teachers. Discussions were held with pupils and staff. Meetings were held with the senior leaders. Pupils' work was scrutinised, as well as documentation relating to safeguarding, welfare, health and safety, curriculum planning and teachers' assessments.
- The inspector also took account of the responses in six questionnaires completed by staff and 12 parental responses to Ofsted's on-line 'Parent View' survey. The views of the governing body were sought through a telephone conversation with one director.

## Inspection team

Michèle Messaoudi, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

## Full report

### Information about this school

- The London Acorn School is a new school that was registered in March 2013 to provide education for up to 84 boys and girls aged from three to 14 years. It is located in Morden, in the London Borough of Merton. The school is housed in a National Trust property that is a Grade II listed building. It uses a local school of gymnastics and a local dinghy sailing facility for physical education. The school opened in September 2013 and this is its first inspection.
- There are currently 12 pupils on roll between the ages of three and 13 years, three of whom are in the Early Years Foundation Stage. The Kindergarten class includes five children aged from three to six years. Three pupils attend part time, one of whom is a pupil of secondary-school age who is part home-educated. None of the pupils has a statement of special educational needs. Pupils between the ages of six and 14 years form the Lower School.
- The school is owned by The London Acorn School CIC which consists of five directors. It is an associate member of The Acorn School Ltd that owns The Acorn School in Nailsworth, Gloucestershire. The school teaches a curriculum based on the Waldorf Steiner curriculum, with modifications. In the Lower School, lessons can be 'main lessons' that are taught by class teachers, follow a particular structure and focus on specific curriculum units, or 'subject lessons' taught mostly by subject specialists.
- The staff include the headteacher, who currently teaches full time, the Kindergarten leader, and a teacher who is also the director of administration. In addition, there are two specialist teachers for music, clay work and woodwork shared with The Acorn School in Nailsworth, a part-time French teacher and a teaching assistant.
- One of the school's aims is to:
  - 'provide an outstanding holistic education that nurtures and develops each pupil's intellectual, emotional and physical self-confidence. This is achieved through a balanced curriculum that integrates academic, creative and physical activities, underpinned by a strong commitment to moral values'.

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

- Strengthen the leadership and management of the school as it grows and so maintain pupils' outstanding levels of achievement by:
  - using a clearly written management plan to support further improvements and check the effectiveness of the actions taken
  - further improving communications with parents and carers so that all feel that their concerns are addressed effectively and that they are sufficiently informed of their children's progress
  - ensuring that the senior leaders are supported and challenged sufficiently well in all areas of their work, not solely those relating to the quality of education.
- Further develop the roles of the directors, along with systems that are sufficiently robust to hold the school to account with rigour in all aspects of its work.

## Inspection judgements

### Pupils' achievement

### Outstanding

Pupils' outstanding achievement is the result of an outstanding curriculum, outstanding teaching, and a holistic approach to learning and personal development that is centred on pupils' physical and emotional well-being and their moral and spiritual development. Flexible grouping in mixed-age classes with a very high adult-to-pupil ratio serves the needs of all pupils well. From the Kindergarten onwards, almost all pupils make outstanding progress because they are helped to acquire knowledge and skills that are impressive in breadth and depth, and at a rapid rate. In the Kindergarten, children learn through free play and also from a wealth of practical experiences, imitating adults who give them the space they need to explore, be absorbed, imagine and discover, without being hurried. Children show high levels of concentration and dexterity, for example, when mixing two colours with water and creating patterns of their choice to produce a unique painting. They develop practical life skills such as washing up, baking bread, and carding sheep's wool. They discover the natural world and the rhythm of seasons through nature walks. They express themselves confidently and fluently and are prepared well for formal reading and writing by the age of six. Five-year-olds demonstrate a secure understanding of numbers, addition and subtraction when applied to real-life situations.

In the Lower School, pupils grasp new knowledge quickly and securely in 'main lessons' through teachers' excellent knowledge of the curriculum, vivid narratives (presentations of topics through stories), and high-quality drawings which inspire them to explore a topic in depth. Links between subject areas deepen their understanding of topics, often to exceptional levels. For example, during a geometry 'main lesson', pupils aged 11 and 12 arrived at an excellent understanding of the qualities and properties of circles by drawing pentagons, pentagrams, octagons and octagrams inside a circle, and exploring links between the concept of 360 degrees, the Persian calendar and astronomy. Their understanding exceeded expectations for their age. Pupils' books show excellent progress in writing and drawing. Their secure understanding of subject areas is reflected in the quality of their drawings and re-telling of the initial narrative. Pupils who joined with standards of writing and mathematics that were lower than the expected levels are catching up fast. In 'subject lessons', pupils benefit immensely from specialist teaching. For example, in woodwork, pupils aged 11 to 13 years demonstrated excellent sawing, sanding, bevelling and drilling skills, and applied a wide range of mathematical skills when assembling a complex tool for turning wood.

### Pupils' behaviour and personal development

### Outstanding

Pupils' outstanding behaviour and personal development is underpinned by their outstanding emotional, spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The school's ethos, curriculum, daily 'rhythms', and teaching focus successfully on enabling pupils to reflect quietly on their immediate world and their own experiences. Pupils enjoy narratives, legends and religious stories from a wide range of cultural traditions, poetry, and the celebration of festivals, which all help them to establish universal values such as sincerity, honesty, courage, justice and respect for others. As a result, pupils are calm, reflective and appreciative of their lives and those of others. Pupils appreciate the warm family atmosphere created by the staff and form very positive and respectful relationships with adults and peers, whatever their cultural backgrounds. They understand how to prevent bullying and say that they have experienced none in school. The school code and the role models provided by staff promote very high standards of behaviour, morality and attitude to work and, reflecting this, pupils' behaviour is mostly exemplary. Pupils say that they love their school and that they would not change anything about it. Their attendance is very high. They develop a strong sense of responsibility, self-confidence, self-esteem and leadership skills by fulfilling responsibilities around the school and participating in community events. For example, at a National Trust Christmas fair they modelled how to make candles and orange and clove pomanders. They recently gained an insight into nature conservation by engaging in coppicing activities, and appreciated that

they could use some of the cut wood for woodwork. Pupils gain an excellent awareness of public institutions through the curriculum and educational visits. Leaders ensure that when controversial and political issues are considered, that steps have been taken to offer a balanced presentation of opposing views.

### Quality of teaching

### Outstanding

Teaching is outstanding and enables most pupils to make outstanding progress. All teachers are trained to teach the Waldorf Steiner curriculum through the prescribed methodology. They prepare an environment that is calm and orderly, and so conducive to high-quality learning. In the Kindergarten, teaching is characterised by a thorough understanding of how children learn through imitation and play, and through sensory exploration. Planning follows a thematic approach based on the rhythm of the seasons and provides memorable experiences that enable children to learn exceptionally well in all areas of the curriculum. The staff skilfully observe children's learning and development and use this information to plan activities that help them to gain high levels of confidence, enhance their social and emotional development and increase their knowledge of the world around them.

In the Lower School, all teachers demonstrate excellent subject knowledge and teach with energy and imagination. Pupils respond by being fully attentive, motivated and creative. In the 'main lessons' and some 'subject lessons' observed, teachers integrated several subjects successfully, which helped pupils to broaden their understanding of the topic studied. Teachers' consistently high expectations are communicated through verbal feedback, as teachers keenly observe pupils and check on their understanding and progress. Consequently, pupils can improve their work and attain much higher standards by the end of the lesson. Where appropriate, pupils are also encouraged to evaluate the work of peers and their own work, and also to discuss the written comments which teachers leave at the back of their books. Teachers help pupils to consolidate their learning by building systematically on what they have learnt before, and revisiting content that has not yet been acquired securely. They ask probing questions that lead pupils to explain what they understand, deepen their understanding, or identify gaps in their learning. The procedures for assessing pupils' learning and monitoring their progress against their starting points and the curriculum targets are very effective and developing. Lessons are evaluated to inform the teaching of the next lessons and respond to pupils' needs very promptly.

### Quality of curriculum

### Outstanding

The outstanding curriculum enables pupils to achieve exceptionally well in all subject areas and supports their outstanding spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The school meets its aim to provide a broad curriculum that successfully integrates all academic subjects with drawing, painting, crafts and physical activity. The curriculum includes all the required areas of learning and subjects are taught when the school judges them to be appropriate for pupils' stage of development, in conformity with Steiner principles. Having dance or other forms of physical exercise in the morning refreshes pupils for academic learning. In the Kindergarten, the curriculum covers all the required areas of learning of the Early Years Foundation Stage, with the difference that reading and writing are taught formally from the age of six. Children learn and develop through a good balance of play which they initiate and activities which adults model or lead. They have varied and rich learning experiences which help them to make exceptional progress in their emotional, social, physical and creative development.

In the Lower School, the curriculum is extremely well balanced between the physical, practical and more academic areas of learning, with an aesthetic strand running through all the areas. The curriculum is exemplary in its ability to inspire pupils and impart lasting knowledge. This is achieved particularly well through the 'main lessons' in which, for a period of three to four weeks, pupils study a new topic in depth through a 'three-day rhythm'. First, the new materials are presented through a stimulating narrative that makes links between several subjects, illustrated by

high-quality drawings presented by teachers on the blackboard. Second, the content of the lesson is recalled and extended where appropriate. Third, pupils write up what they have learnt in their own words in books which they illustrate beautifully and keep. Through this intellectual and aesthetic process, pupils engage their ability to assimilate and interpret new information, and emulate the high-quality drawings presented to them. Outside the 'main lessons', pupils benefit from specialist teaching for music, clay work, woodwork, French and gymnastics. Personal, social, health and citizenship education permeates the whole curriculum and contributes enormously to pupils' personal development. There are plans in hand for the summer term to engage pupils in projects to develop their enterprise, mathematical and leadership skills. The curriculum is planned very effectively and detailed schemes of work support the teaching well. A wide range of enrichment activities also plays an important part in extending pupils' learning.

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

**Good**

The school makes good provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety and staff care extremely well for their pupils. All the requirements for independent schools and for the welfare of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage are met. Staff successfully create a happy family atmosphere in which each child finds a place. Pupils and their parents and carers have full confidence in the school's ability to promote the highest standards of behaviour and prevent bullying. Pupils feel safe and know how to keep safe because safety education is given a high priority. For example, pupils learn to recognise poisonous plants, to be safe near water and on the road, and to distinguish between appropriate and inappropriate behaviour in their social relationships. Supervision is vigilant throughout the day and there are few accidents. Pupils are encouraged to eat healthily and to enjoy a wide range of physical exercise.

Safeguarding arrangements meet requirements and all the adults working at the school have been properly vetted. The required recruitment checks are recorded centrally in the correct manner. All staff receive training in child protection to standards approved by the local authority and at the appropriate intervals. There is a sufficient number of staff trained in first aid with paediatric qualifications. The staff's work is supported well by policies for child protection, behaviour, anti-bullying, health and safety, fire safety and first aid that are written clearly and reflect the latest guidance. Very minor omissions in some policies were rectified during the inspection. All the regulatory fire checks are carried out and recorded diligently. There are appropriate risk assessments of the premises and on-site and off-site visits. This area of the school's work is not yet outstanding because the directors cannot demonstrate that they have sufficiently rigorous systems to oversee the safeguarding arrangements and hold the school to account.

### **Leadership and management**

**Good**

The leadership and management of the school are good overall. The directors and senior leaders have successfully focused on establishing a very strong school ethos and fostering pupils' outstanding spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. With the support of the established Acorn School in Nailsworth, the leadership of teaching has become outstanding and secures outstanding outcomes for pupils. The headteacher leads by example and the staff form a very cohesive team, driven by the same ambitious vision. They have established a culture of reflecting on the most effective ways to interpret the curriculum and release each pupil's potential. Consequently, the curriculum is outstanding, serves the needs of all pupils extremely well and contributes to their outstanding personal development and behaviour. The school can demonstrate that all the standards for independent schools are met and that parents and carers receive the full range of information to which they are entitled, including the procedure for making complaints. The 'parents' charter' ensures that parents and carers support the school ethos and their children very effectively. Parents and carers are very positive about the school and would all recommend it to others. However, not all feel sufficiently well informed of their children's progress and that their concerns are addressed effectively. The premises provide extremely pleasant teaching accommodation for safe and effective learning. The school's partnership with the National Trust is

developing for the benefit of all pupils.

The senior leaders evaluate the school's effectiveness accurately and demonstrate a good understanding of what to do to maintain the current very high standards as the school grows. However, further improvements are not supported by a clearly written management plan. While they have rightly prioritised the quality of education, the directors have not yet developed sufficiently robust systems to support the senior leaders in all aspects of their work and check on the quality of their work with sufficient rigour.

## 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 the quality of education has serious weaknesses.



## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	139417
<b>Inspection number</b>	422865
<b>DfE registration number</b>	315/6001

This inspection was carried out under section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005, 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.

<b>Type of school</b>	Day primary and secondary school
<b>School status</b>	Independent school
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	3–14 years
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	12
<b>Number of part time pupils</b>	3
<b>Proprietor</b>	The London Acorn School CIC
<b>Chair</b>	Sarah Thorne
<b>Headteacher</b>	Cathy Brick
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
<b>Annual fees (day pupils)</b>	£5,800 to £8,296
<b>Telephone number</b>	020 8544 9769
<b>Email address</b>	<a href="mailto:info@thelondonacornschoo.co.uk">info@thelondonacornschoo.co.uk</a>

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaining about inspections', which is available from Ofsted's website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk). If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk).



You can use Parent View to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school. Ofsted will use the information parents and carers provide when deciding which schools to inspect and when.

You can also use Parent View to find out what other parents and carers think about schools in England. You can visit [www.parentview.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.parentview.ofsted.gov.uk), or look for the link on the main Ofsted website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk).

You may copy all or parts of this document for non-commercial educational purposes, as long as you give details of the source and date of publication and do not alter the information in any way.

To receive regular email alerts about new publications, including survey reports and school inspection reports, please visit our website and go to 'Subscribe'.

Piccadilly Gate  
Store St  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 4234  
Textphone: 0161 618 8524  
E: [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
W: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

© Crown copyright 2014

