

# The Acorn School

Church Street, Nailsworth, Stroud, Gloucester GL6 0BP

<b>Inspection dates</b>	21–23 June, 2016
<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>Good</b>
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	Outstanding

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a good school

- Leaders have ensured that all independent school standards are met.
- Senior leaders have a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They share their vision to provide a high-quality education for each pupil.
- Leaders ensure that all aspects for keeping pupils safe are of a high standard.
- The curriculum is broad, providing a range of creative, practical and extra-curricular subjects which develop pupils' academic, artistic and physical skills well.
- Teaching is good. Each pupil's learning needs are very well known, and teachers ensure that all pupils are given good-quality individual support and guidance.
- Pupils' outcomes are good. Pupils are fully engaged in their learning, and make good progress as a result.
- Sixth form students' pre-university work demonstrates high standards of achievement, particularly in humanities and sciences.
- Younger pupils develop reading skills quickly and make good progress throughout the school. They read widely and often.
- There are clear expectations that pupils complete regular homework assignments which help to consolidate their good understanding of their learning tasks.
- Pupils are eager, enthusiastic learners. Their attitudes to learning are positive.
- Pupils are happy in school. Their personal development, behaviour and welfare are good, and they thrive in the caring environment.
- Parents express strong support for the school. They believe their children are well cared for and their individual needs are met well.

### It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Leaders are not checking pupils' progress systematically throughout the school to further raise pupils' achievement to the highest levels.
- Leaders have not used information on pupils' progress effectively to provide staff with high-quality professional development training to further improve the quality of teaching.
- Some teachers are not following the school's feedback and marking policy in ensuring that pupils use the feedback to improve their work.

### 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 leadership and management by:
  - checking pupils' progress systematically throughout the school to raise pupils' achievement to the highest levels
  - providing more consistent opportunities for teachers to develop their skills through continuing professional development.
- Improve the quality of teaching and pupils' progress further by:
  - checking that teachers consistently follow the school's feedback and marking policy in ensuring that pupils use the feedback to improve their work.

## Inspection judgements

### Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- Leaders have ensured that all independent school standards are met. The school demonstrates the characteristics of a good school.
- Leaders have a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. The headteacher evaluates the quality of teaching across the school and provides teachers with appropriate guidance to support improvement.
- Leaders set high expectations for pupils and staff, particularly in the quality and depth of study expected. They are ambitious for pupils and promote an ethos which has a strong emphasis on nurturing the skills of each individual pupil. There is a clear sense of purpose which teachers share.
- The curriculum is very broad as well as providing all the required areas for learning. The curriculum for younger pupils, in particular, meets their needs very well. Subjects such as crafts, needlework, woodwork and natural sciences are introduced when leaders believe them to be appropriate to pupils' development. The curriculum for older pupils includes a range of subjects such as sociology, politics, biography, Spanish and history of art. It also offers bookbinding as well as the statutory English, mathematics, science and physical education. The educational focus of 'healthy mind and healthy body' is underpinned by the curriculum very well.
- Extra-curricular clubs offer pupils opportunities to integrate physical and outward-bound activities into their everyday lives. They regularly go on trips that include camping, hiking, surfing and orienteering as well as water sports. Sporting activities such as wakeboarding, volleyball, swimming and gymnastics are provided as part of the main curriculum.
- Teachers work well together to lead different aspects of the curriculum. They have voluntarily undertaken leadership responsibilities for health, welfare and sport, as well as the sciences and humanities for older pupils. The deputy headteacher oversees very effectively the development of pupils' literacy skills in the lower school.
- The spiritual, moral, social and cultural curriculum actively promotes a good understanding of British values, and positively prepares pupils for life after school. Pupils learn about society through politics and sociology lessons. Guest speakers give presentations on a wide range of careers, such as midwifery, law, archaeology and photography. Pupils have a good understanding of their moral responsibilities and have enthusiastically carried out fundraising activities for the school's sponsored orphanage in Thailand. These events have included sponsored swimming, a summer fair and auctions in school.
- Parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the school leadership. They value highly the daily access to their children's teachers, and the supply of regular information on their children's progress. Comments on Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, such as 'The school promotes the joy of learning', 'Simply a lovely school that is very caring and gentle in its approach' and 'The focus is on the whole child, physical, spiritual and intellectual so it feels like a very rich education' are typical. An overwhelming majority would recommend the school to other parents.
- Every response in the staff questionnaires showed that staff believe the leadership of the school to be good or better.
- Leadership is not outstanding because leaders are not closely monitoring the progress of all pupils across the school, including in the sixth form, to ensure that it is consistently good or better.
- **The governance of the school**
  - The school's proprietors, the headteacher and his wife, who is the deputy headteacher, have a good understanding of the strengths and areas for improvement in the school. They are actively involved in monitoring and maintaining the good quality of teaching in the school.
  - The school's website names an independent trustee of the Acorn School Educational Trust who can be contacted in the event of complaints or concerns.
  - The deputy headteacher has undergone safer recruitment training and carries out appropriate checks on the suitability of staff to work in the school.
  - The proprietors ensure that finances are monitored closely. This ensures that the resources are managed efficiently.
- The school's health, safety and safeguarding policies are published on the school's website. They meet all statutory independent school standards and are regularly reviewed. All staff are routinely trained in safeguarding procedures and demonstrate a good understanding of how to keep pupils safe.

## Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good

- Most teachers plan lessons that challenge pupils. Lessons in the upper school deepen pupils' knowledge well and give them sufficient time to develop their learning further.
- In the lower school, subjects are delivered in a way which enables pupils to make clear connections between the areas of learning. This was seen in a woodwork lesson where pupils used precise mathematical calculations to measure fixings when making coracles. Pupils demonstrate a good understanding of how to apply their knowledge in both practical and academic ways.
- In the small classes, pupils receive helpful individual support, and teachers give them continuous feedback which enables pupils to make good progress. Teachers understand pupils' needs well and provide levels of challenge according to those needs.
- Reading and writing are taught skilfully throughout the school. Teachers ensure that pupils understand how to structure their stories, and give them a range of appropriate writing tasks. Pupils are taught how to read and interpret meanings well, and many are confident, independent readers by the age of 11.
- Teachers set regular homework tasks which are appropriate to pupils' needs. Pupils clearly value these assignments which they use to consolidate good understanding of their learning. Pupils apply their knowledge, review their achievements, and conscientiously revise their work in preparation for the next stages of their education or training.
- Reports to parents in the upper school are regular and draw extensively on teachers' good understanding of their children's achievements. Parents of younger pupils value their annual reports and the frequent opportunities they have to talk to teachers about how well their children are doing. They comment: 'We are kept well-informed of his progress with parents' evenings, and can request a one-to-one with his teacher anytime. We like the fact that the teachers are always happy and ready to talk, and that the headmaster's door is always open.'
- Teachers promote equality of opportunity throughout the school. Most encourage pupils to challenge stereotypes and to consider carefully the diversity of society outside their close school community.
- Teachers follow the school's feedback and marking policy, but some do not check that pupils act on the feedback to improve their work.

## Personal development, behaviour and welfare is good

### Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Most pupils are confident learners. They enjoy their lessons and engage willingly in learning activities. Their physical well-being is particularly well provided for. Pupils have frequent opportunities to play games in the playgrounds and to enjoy nature walks in the nearby parks.
- Pupils value their education, are punctual and arrive well prepared for their lessons. The rate of persistent absence is very low. Attendance is in line with national averages.
- Teachers demonstrate good care for their pupils throughout the school. Values such as kindness, respect and friendship are strongly promoted, and older pupils show affection and consideration for the younger pupils.
- Pupils' personal and social development is well developed. The ethos of the school is to develop each individual pupil's confidence, and teachers know each pupil well. Teachers encourage pupils to share and play together well during breaktimes. Some younger pupils do not act on teachers' guidance to improve their work.
- Older pupils receive individual support and guidance when considering their futures. Careers guidance is provided during main lessons which are adapted to include specific topics, such as environmental science, when pupils express interest in particular university courses.
- Parents believe their children's welfare and personal development to be of a very high standard. Their many comments include: 'It is a breath of fresh air to have a school and a community that support and truly care for one another and the world around them', and that 'Each child feels important and valued.'

## Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils are happy in school, and behaviour in lessons is good. They enjoy learning and have particularly warm relationships with teachers. Pupils are very good listeners and persevere with their learning tasks with good self-discipline. Incidents of any sort of disruption are extremely rare.
- The school maintains detailed records of the very few behaviour incidents that happen. Teachers know each pupil extremely well and so provide the guidance needed to resolve any issues, when they occur.
- Sixth form students are confident in expressing their ideas and they show respect for others' points of view, but younger pupils are less self-assured with many not regularly contributing to discussions in lessons or debating their ideas.
- The school takes a firm position on pupils' access to media technology. The parents' charter is a signed agreement between school and parents to restrict access to the media until pupils reach the age of 14. Older pupils have opportunities to learn how to keep themselves safe on the internet. They discuss issues about emotional well-being, safe and positive relationships, and how to avoid the dangers of social media.
- Parents say that the school keeps their children safe from any harm. Records show that the school takes decisive action to communicate with parents if they have any concerns.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is well developed through religious education lessons with a specific Christian ethos. Pupils are encouraged to be tolerant and respectful of others in society, although their understanding of social issues is restricted within this strongly protected community.

## Outcomes for pupils

are good

- Pupils throughout the school make good progress in English and mathematics, with most achieving high standards by the time they enter the upper school. They are supported well in those subjects because literacy, numeracy, writing, reading, speaking and listening are consistently reinforced across the curriculum.
- Pupils read widely and often, with fluency and comprehension appropriate to their age. They are independent and enthusiastic readers both in school and at home.
- The headteacher has taken effective action to put into place recommendations from the last inspection to improve pupils' mathematical skills. Standards throughout the school are good, and younger pupils acquire mathematical knowledge appropriate to their age.
- Outcomes for pupils in the main subjects are good, particularly in physical education, art, history, science, nutrition and geography.
- The older pupils' portfolios of work demonstrate excellent standards of presentation. The drawings of maps, diagrams and artistic representations of their work illustrate fluent, accurate descriptions of topics they have learned in their main subject areas.
- Pupils are not taught to read or write until the age of seven, and those in the youngest classes work at levels below age-related expectations. However, throughout the lower school, they make rapid progress until they achieve good standards by the age of 11 which are in line with those for pupils of a similar age.
- The school does not use external forms of examinations or tests but does carry out frequent internal assessments. The results of these are used very effectively to inform pupils what to do next, most of whom decide to apply to university. The proportion of pupils who are successful in gaining university places is very high because the school has prepared them well for the next stage of their education.

## Sixth form provision

is good

- All the independent school standards are met in relation to the sixth form provision.
- The sixth form is led and managed effectively, and students achieve well. Leaders ensure that students have programmes of study that meet their academic needs and build on their prior attainment.
- Students in the sixth form classes have a combination of joint and individual lessons according to their needs. The headteacher's daily tutoring sessions challenge students' retention of knowledge and set high expectations of how to link their understanding across a range of academic subjects.

- The quality of teaching in the sixth form is good. Systems for tracking, monitoring and reviewing students' achievement promote strong progress for almost all students and they are held to account for their own progress. The most able students are provided with good levels of challenge to help them make good progress.
- The sixth form curriculum is excellent. All students study a broad range of subjects including English and mathematics. Students are divided into theoretical and applied mathematics groups according to their needs. The curriculum also includes a balance of creative, physical and academic subjects such as woodwork, sport, jewellery, bookbinding, stained glass, Spanish, biographies, platonic solids and physics. Students thoroughly enjoy the stimulating variety of subjects which they experience over time.
- Students believe that teaching in the sixth form is good as a result of the tuition they receive and the good organisation of their learning. They are given good support in self-study modules which they pursue in preparation for university courses. They feel safe, behave with great maturity and good humour, and are confident, thoughtful learners.
- The great majority of students make strong progress from their starting points. They continue on to higher levels of education as a result of a rich combination of support and challenge. Their pre-university modules demonstrate high levels of achievement. This is particularly true in sciences such as entomology and humanities studies. For example, in studying world social history since 1945, students prepare detailed and thoughtful analyses of the consequences of twentieth-century events such as the Iraq and Afghanistan wars.
- Students' high standards of work in their pre-university portfolios are used as the basis for their applications to universities. All students who apply are successful in entering the university courses of their choice, as a result of the school's thorough preparation for the next stage of their education.
- Career guidance is broad and varied. Guest speakers and parents support students' personal development through presentations and work experience opportunities. These help students develop good social and employability skills in occupations as varied as photography, yacht design and graphic design.

## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	115808
<b>Inspection number</b>	10012958
<b>DfE registration number</b>	6068

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.

<b>Type of school</b>	Independent co-educational
<b>School status</b>	Independent school
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	7–19
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Gender of pupils in the sixth form</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	58
<b>Of which, number on roll in sixth form</b>	15
<b>Number of part-time pupils</b>	0
<b>Proprietors</b>	Graeme and Sarah Whiting
<b>Chair</b>	Graeme Whiting
<b>Headteacher</b>	Graeme Whiting
<b>Annual fees (day pupils)</b>	£5,880–£8,250
<b>Telephone number</b>	01453 836508
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.theacornschool.com">www.theacornschool.com</a>
<b>Email address</b>	<a href="mailto:info@theacornschool.com">info@theacornschool.com</a>
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	16–17 May 2012

## Information about this school

- The Acorn School is a co-educational, non-selective and non-denominational independent day school which was first established in 1991. It is located close to the centre of Nailsworth.
- The Acorn School has been managed by proprietors since it opened. The building is owned by the Acorn School Educational Trust. Janette Hall is named on the school's website as the trustee.
- The present headteacher and deputy headteacher are the named proprietors.
- The school admits girls and boys aged seven to 19.
- All pupils are of White British heritage. There are no pupils who speak English as an additional language.
- The school is registered for 122 pupils and there are currently 58 pupils on roll. The headteacher is also the part-time teacher for Classes 10, 11 and 12 in the upper school. The deputy headteacher is the teacher for Class 7 in the lower school.
- There are no pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, or with education, health and care plans. There are no disadvantaged pupils.
- The school uses Stroud sports leisure centre, and older pupils have weekly physical education timetabled lessons in Westonburt School.
- The school was previously inspected in May 2012.
- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.

## Information about this inspection

- The inspection was carried out with one day's notice.
- The lead inspector was accompanied by a shadow lead inspector on days 1 and 2 of the inspection.
- Inspectors observed learning in 15 lessons covering all classes including the sixth form. Teaching in one lesson was observed jointly with the headteacher.
- Discussions took place with the headteacher, the deputy headteacher, teachers with responsibilities for science, sports and humanities, and with staff and pupils.
- Pupils' work was examined during lessons, and a more detailed scrutiny was made of samples of written work from all classes. Inspectors spoke with pupils throughout the inspection in order to gather their views.
- Inspectors listened to Class 4/5 pupils reading.
- Inspectors had meetings with pupils from Class 7 and sixth form pupils in Classes 10, 11 and 12.
- Inspectors examined a range of school documentation including policies and records about how the school was keeping pupils safe, and information about pupils' behaviour and their learning, progress and achievement.
- Inspectors considered 39 responses to Parent View, together with 12 staff questionnaires which had also been returned.
- Discussions were held with 12 parents during a formal parents' meeting. Informal discussions were also held with parents as they collected or dropped off their children.

## Inspection team

Sheila Crew, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector



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