

Little Acorns School

London Beach Farm, Ashford Road, St Michael's, Tenterden, Kent TN30 6SR

Inspection Dates

23 June 2017

Overall outcome

The school does not meet all of the independent school standards that were checked during this inspection

Main inspection findings

Part 1. Quality of education provided

Paragraph 3, 3(a) and 3(d)

- The previous standard inspection judged that the quality of teaching, learning and assessment required improvement because teaching was not planned effectively to build on pupils' prior learning.
- Since the last inspection, teachers have formalised the way they plan learning and assess pupils' progress. Planning and assessment documents have been rationalised to avoid duplication. Provision plans are in place for each pupil with clear targets linked to academic, social and emotional development. A new assessment system has been introduced to help teachers track academic progress and identify gaps in pupils' learning. Consequently, teachers have a much clearer understanding of each individual pupil's needs.
- Schemes of work and subject planning are fully in place. Pupils enjoy a broad curriculum that interests and enthuses them. One classroom visit was marked by a pupil explaining the wide range of subjects she is interested in, including languages, art and music. She was also very keen to prove to the inspector she could count to 100 in Japanese.
- Baseline assessments are carried out on entry to the school for all pupils. A wide range of information is collected, including reports from other professionals. Academic ability is assessed using a variety of indicators. Advice provided by an external consultant has given teachers a better understanding of the range of assessment material available to them. As a result, teachers are now well placed to cater for the needs of pupils across a range of subjects.
- In the past, teachers were not able to moderate their judgements or benchmark their assessments of pupils' achievements externally. Arrangements are now in place for teachers to join with a local consortium of schools for the moderation of pupils' work. This will take place from the beginning of the next school year. Teachers look forward to the opportunities for further professional development this initiative will allow them.
- Because school leaders have addressed the shortcomings found in this paragraph, this standard is now met.

Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

Paragraph 7, 7(a), 7(b) and 11

- At the time of the previous standard inspection, safeguarding was found to be ineffective. Staff did not know about statutory guidance for keeping children safe. Consequently, a number of requirements were not met, including the requirement to implement the school's written health and safety policy.
- School leaders have addressed shortcomings in safeguarding with urgency. This has included a safeguarding audit carried out by an appropriately qualified officer from the local authority's safeguarding team. The audit included a review of the school site.
- All staff have completed safeguarding training appropriate to their level of responsibility. This includes training for an additional designated safeguarding lead. Support staff in particular appreciated the bespoke training delivered by the local authority's safeguarding specialist. A senior leader is about to undertake specialist training associated with the recruitment of staff.
- Teaching and support staff are now fully aware of their responsibilities to safeguard pupils. They are aware of the key risks and dangers faced by children in their care, and what to do if they have concerns. Staff are also aware of national guidance and the school's own policies regarding the safeguarding of children. This includes the safeguarding policy itself, which complies with current guidance and is published on the school's website in compliance with paragraph 32(1)(c) of the independent school standards.
- The school site is maintained well. Classrooms are clean and bright. A new boundary fence and double gates are about to be fitted at the front of the school. A new intercom system will help staff control access to the school site.
- Because school leaders have addressed the shortcomings found in this paragraph, this standard is now met.

Part 4. Suitability of staff, supply staff, and proprietors

Paragraph 18(2), 18(2)(b), 21(1), 21(3), 21(3)(a), 21(3)(a)(iii), 21(3)(b) and 21(4)

- The previous standard inspection found evidence that some pre-employment checks on staff had not been carried out. By the end of that inspection, the required information had been checked and entered on to the single central record of staff employed within the school.
- During this monitoring inspection, a check of the single central record found that all required checks are fully in place.
- Because school leaders have addressed the shortcomings found in this paragraph, this standard is now met.

Part 5. Premises of and accommodation at schools

Paragraph 26

- At the last standard inspection, the school's premises were found to be generally unclean and one classroom had a damaged floor which presented a hazard to pupils and staff.
- During this monitoring inspection, the school appeared to be clean and well maintained. The floor in the senior classroom has been repaired. New doors have also been fitted to

the building where the senior classroom is situated.

- Because school leaders have addressed the shortcomings found in this paragraph, this standard is now met.

Part 6. Provision of information

Paragraph 32(1), 32(1)(a), 32(1)(b), 32(1)(c), 32(1)(e), 32(2), 32(2)(a), 32(2)(b), 32(2)(b)(i), 32(3), 32(3)(b), 32(3)(c), 32(3)(d), 32(3)(e) and 32(3)(f)

- At the time of the previous inspection, the school did not meet a range of standards regarding the information that should be provided to parents and others. The full details of these omissions are recorded in the 'compliance with regulatory requirements' section of this report.
- Since the last inspection, leaders have systematically reviewed the school's policies, strategies and other information required by this standard. The way the school presents a range of information on its website has also been updated.
- Full contact details are available on the school's website, including for the proprietor. The required policies are also published on the website. These policies are in date and comply with current guidance. This includes the safeguarding policy.
- Because school leaders have addressed the shortcomings found in this paragraph, this standard is now met.

Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

Paragraph 34(1), 34(1)(a), 34(1)(b), 34(1)(c)

- The previous full inspection found that the proprietor had not ensured that all of the independent school standards were met and that there was no form of governance. The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare was judged inadequate because of the ineffective arrangements to safeguard pupils.
- During this monitoring inspection it was clear to see that most of the unmet independent school standards have been addressed and are now met. It was also evident that most of the qualitative weaknesses that were identified in the school's provision during the last inspection are being tackled effectively. However, arrangements to provide an effective form of governance are not yet in place.
- Plans to form a local governing advisory board are well developed, but not yet fully realised. It is proposed that there will be four members. Three members are already known and have appropriate experience in safeguarding and health and safety, for instance. As yet, a person with a suitable background in education has not been found. A representative of the proprietor will also serve on the advisory board.
- A scheme of delegation has yet to be formalised, although it is hoped this will be in place before the start of the new school year. This will provide the local advisory board with the legal basis to carry out their duties on behalf of the proprietor. Although a preliminary meeting is planned before the end of the summer term, at the time of the inspection there was no firm guarantee this would be the case. Accordingly, adequate arrangements for the proprietor to manage the performance of the co-headteachers and ensure the overall effectiveness of the school are still not in place.
- Because school leaders have not fully addressed the shortcomings found in this

paragraph, this standard is not yet met.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school does not meet the requirements of the schedule to The Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements that were checked during this inspection. This included the standards and requirements that the school was judged to not comply with at the previous inspection. Not all of the standards and associated requirements were checked during this inspection.

The school does not meet the following independent school standards

Standards that were not met at the previous inspection and remain unmet at this inspection

- The proprietor must ensure that the persons with leadership and management responsibilities at the school:
 - demonstrate good skills and knowledge appropriate to their role so that the independent school standards are met consistently
 - fulfil their responsibilities effectively so that the independent school standards are met consistently
 - actively promote well-being of pupils (paragraph 34(1), 34(1)(a), 34(1)(b) and 34(1)(c)).

The school now meets the following independent school standards

- The proprietor ensures that the teaching at the school:
 - enables pupils to acquire new knowledge and make good progress according to their ability so that they increase their understanding and develop their skills in the subjects taught (paragraph 3, 3(a))
 - shows a good understanding of the aptitudes, needs and prior attainments of the pupils, and ensures that these are taken into account in planning of lessons (paragraph 3, 3(d)).
- The proprietor ensures that arrangements are made to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils at the school; and such arrangements have regard to any guidance issued by the Secretary of State (paragraph 7, 7(a) and 7(b)).
- The proprietor ensures that the relevant health and safety laws are complied with by the drawing-up and effective implementation of a written health and safety policy (paragraph 11).
- The proprietor carries out appropriate checks to confirm, in respect of all members of staff, that they are not working in contravention of a prohibition order, an interim prohibition order, or any direction made under section 128 of the 2008 Act or section 142 of the 2002 Act, or any disqualification, prohibition or restriction which takes effect as if contained in either such direction (paragraph 17, 18(1), 18(2) and 18(2)(b)).
- The proprietor keeps a register to show that all pre-employment checks have been carried out for all members of staff, supply staff and proprietors, together with the date that each check was made (paragraph 21(1), 21(3), 21(3)(a), 21(3)(a)(iii), 21(3)(b) and 21(4)).
- The proprietor ensures that the acoustic conditions and sound insulation of each room or other space are suitable, having regard to the nature of the activities which normally take

place therein (paragraph 26).

- The proprietor provides information to parents of pupils, parents of prospective pupils and others about:
 - the proprietor’s full name, address for correspondence during term time and holidays and a telephone number on which the proprietor may be contacted
 - the school’s policy on and arrangements for misbehaviour and exclusion
 - the school’s anti-bullying strategy
 - the names of the co-headteachers
 - the particulars of the educational and welfare provision for pupils with education, health and care plans, and pupils for whom English is an additional language
 - the school’s curriculum policy
 - the school’s written policies for behaviour, health and safety, and first aid
 - the school’s academic performance during the preceding school year, including the results of any public examinations
 - the details of the complaints procedure and the number of complaints registered under the formal complaints procedures during the preceding school year (paragraph 32(1), 32(1)(a), 32(1)(b), 32(1)(c), 32(2), 32(2)(a), 32(2)(b), 32(2)(b)(i), 32(3), 32(3)(a), 32(3)(b), 32(3)(c), 32(3)(d), 32(3)(e) and 32(3)(f)).

School Details

Unique reference number	131810
DfE registration number	886/6085
Inspection number	10038098

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.

Type of school	Other independent special school
School status	Independent special school
Age range of pupils	5 to 14
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	6
Number of part-time pupils	None
Proprietor	Mr Jawad Sheikh – Choice Lifestyles
Chair	None
Headteacher	Tony Hollett and Alison Neal
Annual fees (day pupils)	£42,234
Telephone number	01233 850422
Website	www.choicelifestyles.co.uk
Email address	littleacorns@choicelifestyles.net
Date of previous standard inspection	8–10 November 2016

Information about this school

- Little Acorns opened in 1999. It is a school that specialises in working with pupils who have severe behavioural, emotional and mental health issues. The school does not provide alternative provision.
- The school is owned by Choice Lifestyles and is registered to take pupils aged from five to 14 years of age.
- There are six pupils on roll.
- All pupils have a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan.

- Pupils are taught in two classes: younger pupils together in the nurture class, and older pupils in the senior class.
- The school was last inspected in November 2016 when the overall effectiveness was judged to be inadequate and a number of independent school standards were found to be unmet.

Information about this inspection

- This inspection was carried out at the request of the registration authority for independent schools. The purpose of the inspection was to monitor the progress the school has made in meeting the independent school standards and other requirements that it was judged to not comply with at its previous inspection.
- This was the first progress monitoring inspection since the previous standard inspection. As a monitoring inspection, this inspection was carried out without notice.
- The school's first action plan to address the unmet independent school standards identified at the last inspection was rejected by the Department for Education in February 2017. The subsequent action plan was accepted in April 2017.
- During this inspection, the inspector carried out a range of activities within the school. These included classroom visits to observe teaching and learning, talking to pupils and staff, and assessing the quality of pupils' work. Pupils' behaviour in classrooms and at lunchtime was also observed.
- Meetings were held with the joint headteachers, both together and individually. A meeting was also held with two members of the support staff.
- A telephone conversation was held with a representative of the proprietor, who also acts as the named responsible person.
- A wide range of documentation was scrutinised, including the school's safeguarding, behaviour, curriculum and other associated policies. Records of visits by an independent consultant to advise school leaders on assessment and school improvement were also examined, as was the local authority's recent audit of safeguarding arrangements. Pupils' progress information, teachers' schemes of work and planning, and the single central record of staff checks were also scrutinised.

Inspection team

Clive Close, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

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