

The London Acorn School

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

Inspection dates

21–23 November 2017

Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Early years provision	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Outstanding

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The new headteacher, well supported by the proprietor, governors, school leaders and other staff, has taken successful steps to ensure that all the independent school standards continue to be met.
- Teaching, learning and assessment are good. Pupils make good progress and achieve well because they are well taught. However, teaching does not always challenge the most able pupils to achieve as well as they should.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted very well. Pupils participate in many exciting pursuits, including 'forest school'. These activities help pupils build their confidence and achieve well.
- Parents and carers are very supportive of the school and greatly appreciate its caring and nurturing ethos.
- Good leadership, teaching and provision in the early years have ensured that children make good progress. They are well prepared to start Year 1.
- Pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning are good. They feel safe and secure in school. However, sometimes, adults provide too much support so that pupils become over-reliant on them to guide their learning.
- Staff benefit from the many opportunities to develop and improve their teaching. However, the school's programme of coaching for teachers is not fully developed.
- Governance is effective. Governors visit the school often and have a good grasp of its work. They oversee the arrangements for staff appraisal, which are effective.
- Arrangements for safeguarding are effective. All staff receive regular training and updates to ensure that they are aware of the latest guidance.
- Leaders do not currently collect assessment information on pupils' progress in subjects other than English and mathematics. A new system is currently being implemented but it is too early to judge its effectiveness.

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?

- Further improve leadership and management by ensuring that:
 - the school’s development programme for teachers is intensified
 - the school’s new assessment system is fully established
 - leaders, staff and governors are regularly provided with information about pupils’ progress in all subjects, so that improvements can be made swiftly where they are needed.
- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment by ensuring that:
 - teachers challenge all pupils, including the most able, enabling them to achieve the best they can
 - pupils become less reliant on adults to support their learning.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The new headteacher provides very effective leadership to a dedicated team of staff. Since her appointment, she has reorganised staff responsibilities, reviewed contracts and strengthened appraisal arrangements. These changes have been made to ensure that the school meets its own high expectations. With the support of the proprietor, governors and staff, the headteacher has ensured that all the independent school standards continue to be met.
- The headteacher has worked closely and effectively with staff to secure improvements in teaching and pupils' outcomes. She understands well what the school needs to do to become outstanding.
- The stimulating and effective curriculum has been designed to capture pupils' imagination so that they are motivated to achieve well. Literacy and numeracy are carefully threaded through a wide range of other subjects to enable pupils to develop and apply their skills to their work. Each morning, pupils recite or chant verses of poetry, sometimes with their parents. This is intended to help them focus on their learning. Pupils find this approach very useful in helping them to maintain high levels of concentration throughout the day.
- At key stages 1 and 2, pupils are immersed in a variety of rich classroom experiences, based on the national curriculum. For example, pupils are able to learn French and German from Year 1. They are excited to have the opportunity to learn to play musical instruments and participate in productions as well as in sporting activities. Themed projects, known in the school as the 'main lesson', enable pupils to gain good skills across all seven areas of learning.
- The location of the school, in the middle of a National Trust park, has encouraged staff to take every opportunity to make effective use of this natural outside classroom. Pupils thoroughly enjoy their 'forest school' activities, which are carefully linked to topics in the curriculum. This daily experience strongly promotes pupils' self-confidence, happiness and well-being by encouraging them to connect with the natural world and explore topics in greater depth.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted well through the curriculum, as well as through visits to places of interest. These outings, together with the annual residential visit, help pupils to appreciate how people from different cultures and backgrounds contribute to life in modern Britain. Trips, visits and after-school pursuits, such as chess, sailing and yoga, further enrich pupils' experience and promote equality well.
- Pupils receive helpful and effective careers guidance and advice that helps them make informed decisions about future career options.
- Leaders have commissioned high-quality external support and advice from specialist advisers and consultants. These have helped the school to improve.
- The partnership between families and the school is very strong. Of the large number of parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, virtually all would recommend the school. Parents greatly appreciate the school's caring and nurturing

ethos.

- Regular and well-considered staff training sessions are devoted to improving different aspects of teaching. These activities and the effective staff appraisal arrangements are having a beneficial effect on the quality of the teaching. However, leaders have not made the best use of the school's coaching programme to ensure that teaching enables pupils to achieve their best.
- In April 2017, leaders introduced a new assessment system so that data on the progress of pupils across all subjects can be collected, checked, monitored and evaluated. The new arrangements were introduced because leaders are currently relying on individual staff comments. As a result, not all staff and governors have access to the information on different subjects. The new system is still in the early stages of implementation and it is too early to judge its overall effectiveness.

Governance

- Governance is effective.
- Governors bring to their role considerable professional expertise from a range of fields. They visit regularly and have a good understanding of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. They also regularly commission helpful reviews led by external consultants to provide them with expert advice on areas such as safeguarding and health and safety. This gives them the confidence to challenge leaders and hold them to account for the school's work. However, they do not receive regular summaries of pupils' progress in all subjects and so do not have a full picture of the school's performance.
- Since the previous inspection, arrangements for the appraisal of staff have been strengthened. Governors have a good understanding of the process and check to ensure that any decisions regarding salary increases are supported by improvements in pupils' progress.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- The safety of pupils is a high priority for the school. High levels of staff supervision around the school site and on trips and visits help to keep pupils safe.
- Across all subjects, and during reflection times, staff successfully explore issues relating to safety to ensure that pupils feel safe, secure and confident.
- All staff training, including that for the designated and deputy safeguarding leads, is up to date. Regular safeguarding audits and briefing sessions ensure that staff are kept abreast of any concerns that arise. Effective training is provided to ensure that adults help pupils to stay safe from dangers, both locally and online. Staff demonstrate the impact of training in describing how they would spot the signs that pupils may need early help.
- The school's effective safeguarding policy, which is published on its website, is firmly based on the Secretary of State's latest guidance, 'Keeping children safe in education' (September 2016).
- Parents who responded to the online questionnaire, Parent View, wholeheartedly agreed that their children feel happy and safe in the school.

- Staff conduct weekly reviews to ensure that the building and outside areas are safe, entrances are secure, and all equipment is in good order.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Pupils make good progress because they are well taught. Teachers plan interesting activities that motivate pupils to achieve well. Warm, supportive and caring relationships contribute strongly to ensuring that pupils are ready and in a suitable frame of mind to learn.
- Specialist teachers share their expertise with their colleagues. Consequently, staff have very secure subject knowledge. They use this well to develop pupils' literacy and numeracy skills so that they become confident learners.
- Teachers provide many opportunities for pupils to practise their speaking and listening skills regularly across a range of subjects, for example by reciting poems or explaining their solutions to mathematical or scientific problems. These regular classroom activities provide a firm foundation for their academic development.
- Teachers often link writing activities to the texts or topics they are studying, and pupils respond by writing with enthusiasm and imagination. For example, during the inspection, pupils were observed in an English lesson confidently editing their own and each other's poems. They made helpful suggestions for the use of more interesting vocabulary and checked the accuracy of their spelling and grammar.
- Teachers provide interesting tasks that enable pupils to explore mathematical ideas and apply them to different contexts. They are encouraged to think for themselves when solving mathematical problems. For example, pupils were observed using different methods to work out averages for a variety of situations.
- As part of an extended project, pupils learned about the geographical and historical development of ancient Greece, and in particular the role of Alexander the Great. During this time, pupils wrote and performed poems and a play and visited the British museum. Scrutiny of pupils' project files showed that pupils produced art and written work of good quality.
- For pupils who require additional support in their learning, provision is effective. Tasks and resources are matched to their needs, supporting good progress and overcoming any barriers to learning.
- Pupils make good progress. However, teachers do not always provide the most able pupils with challenging enough activities to enable them to make the most rapid progress possible.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- The school's caring and nurturing atmosphere promotes positive relationships between pupils and adults. This ensures that pupils feel valued and self-confident, and encourages

them to become actively involved in their studies.

- Pupils regularly take part in 'forest school', physical fitness and sports activities. These experiences make a strong contribution to their well-being and to their physical and emotional development.
- Throughout the curriculum, pupils learn the importance of maintaining a healthy lifestyle. During the inspection, pupils baked bread and prepared fresh vegetables and fruits. These activities help pupils of all ages to understand where their food comes from and to develop their own skills for preparing healthy and nutritious meals. For example, younger children were observed making bread and preparing vegetables that had been grown in the school garden.
- Pupils have many opportunities throughout the school day to reflect, with staff, on their learning. This activity is very beneficial in improving pupils' self-esteem and helping them to understand which strategies help them to remain calm and learn successfully.
- Pupils who spoke to inspectors reported that bullying is rare and that, if it does occur, it is dealt with quickly by teachers. Pupils have a good understanding of the different types of bullying, including homophobic bullying. They have a good awareness of how to use the internet safely and how to travel safely when out of school, particularly through the park. Pupils reported that they feel safe in school.
- Through regular reflection, assemblies and off-site visits, pupils have many opportunities to celebrate and learn tolerance of different cultures and faiths. Pupils also learn how to be alert at spotting unusual behaviour by adults, and the dangers of being drawn into extremism.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Around the school and in classrooms, pupils are polite, friendly and well-mannered, showing respect for each other and their teachers. They work well together.
- The high expectations of staff and their effective management of classroom activities ensure that poor behaviour is extremely rare.
- Pupils attend school regularly. They reported that they love the school because they 'have lots of freedom, learning is fun, and it is not so stressed here'.
- Overall, relationships are positive between staff and pupils and between the pupils themselves. Nevertheless, despite the efforts of the school to develop pupils' confidence and independence as learners, sometimes adults provide too much support so that pupils become over-dependent on them to guide their learning.
- This is why behaviour is not outstanding.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Pupils make good progress in a range of subjects, including English and mathematics. They are well prepared for the next stage of their education. Pupils from different ethnic backgrounds make equally good progress. Those who have additional needs make strong gains in literacy and numeracy because they are well taught.

- In English, pupils gain a secure grounding in a variety of genres, including poetry, factual reports and persuasive writing. As they move through the school, they become more confident in structuring longer and more detailed pieces of writing. They develop good communication skills and are able to read a range of texts with fluency and feeling.
- Scrutiny of pupils' work and observation of learning in mathematics show a strong emphasis on problem solving and confirm that pupils make good progress. In science, older pupils conduct extensive investigations into topics such as photosynthesis. They develop a range of skills to make predictions and observations and then to draw conclusions from their findings.
- Pupils thoroughly enjoy taking part in creative work. They make particularly strong progress in art, drama, music, sport and woodwork. This is because participation in these activities helps them to become confident and resilient to ensure that the project is successfully completed.
- Although the most able pupils make good progress, sometimes the work they are set does not challenge them to make substantial progress.

Early years provision

Good

- Assessments made soon after arrival show that children's skills and abilities are broadly typical for their age. Through effective planning and teaching, children make good progress and achieve above average standards. They are well prepared to begin Year 1.
- Staff work closely together to ensure that activities are enjoyable and motivating across all areas of learning. Activities are linked through natural themes, including growth through the seasons and the weather. Children work on themes of what they see around them. For example, they had built a replica of a town in their classroom and were shopping and trading together. This enabled them to gain a good understanding of life in modern Britain.
- Early years staff develop a close understanding of children's interests and needs through dialogue with parents and children and close observation of the learning. In a play session, for example, staff closely observed children's responses to their prompts and questions to gauge their level of understanding.
- Children have many opportunities to explore the indoor and outdoor environments to develop their own interests and curiosity. They work happily together, sharing resources and talking enthusiastically about their activities. Children develop high levels of concentration and enjoyment which enable them to behave and achieve well.
- All the relevant independent school standards and the statutory requirements related to safeguarding practice in the early years have been met.
- Leadership of the early years provision is effective. Staff check children's progress carefully so that they understand the children's learning well. Nevertheless, sometimes, staff do not always plan sufficiently challenging activities to ensure that all children, including the most able, make outstanding progress.

School details

Unique reference number	139417
DfE registration number	315/6001
Inspection number	10026299

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 school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	3 to 14
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	55
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	The London Acorn School CIC
Chair	Marc Bautista
Headteacher	Claire Scopas
Annual fees (day pupils)	£8,428–£9,884
Telephone number	020 8544 9769
Website	www.thelondonacornschool.co.uk
Email address	info@thelondonacornschool.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	28–30 January 2014

Information about this school

- The London Acorn School is an independent school for boys and girls aged three to 14 years.
- There are 55 pupils on roll. In total, 31 children attend the kindergarten. Just over one in 10 pupils has additional learning needs. None has a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care (EHC) plan. Currently, there are very few key stage 3 pupils on roll.
- Two thirds of pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds, with the remainder being White British.

- The school is owned by The London Acorn School CIC which consists of three directors.
- The school's curriculum is based on the national curriculum and a variety of educational approaches.
- The school was last inspected in January 2014, when it was judged to be outstanding.
- The school meets the independent school standards for what it must publish on its website.
- The school does not use any off-site training for pupils.
- The headteacher took up her appointment in July 2017, having previously been the deputy headteacher.
- The school aims to 'create the necessary space and structures to support the growth of balanced, well-educated, creative individuals. Each child's best interests lie at the heart of everything the school does'.

Information about this inspection

- This full standard inspection took place with one day's notice.
- The inspector visited all classrooms, in each case jointly with either a director or the headteacher. He spoke to pupils informally throughout the inspection.
- There were 77 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and 31 text comments. The inspector also considered the 21 responses to the staff questionnaire.
- The inspector held discussions with the headteacher, staff members and four governors, including the chair and a director.
- The inspector reviewed documents and policies, including those related to safeguarding, to check the school's compliance with the independent school standards. He scrutinised pupils' books and the school's information about pupils' attainment and progress.

Inspection team

David Scott, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Raising concerns and making a complaint about Ofsted', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.gov.uk/government/publications/complaints-about-ofsted. If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

Parent View

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 and as part of the inspection.

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, or look for the link on the main Ofsted website: www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted.

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 and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at www.gov.uk/ofsted.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 4234
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

© Crown copyright 2018