

# The Acorn School

Church Street, Nailsworth, Stroud, Gloucestershire GL6 0BP

## Inspection dates

14 February 2018

## Overall outcome

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

## Main inspection findings

### Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

#### *Paragraph 7–7(b)*

- This inspection was undertaken as a consequence of a complaint that raised wider concerns about the school. These concerns related to the school's work to keep pupils safe, the management of behaviour, including bullying, the use of risk assessments and the suitability of the school premises, including showering and changing facilities.
- The school's current arrangements for safeguarding and protecting children from harm are not effective. Staff know their pupils well and are good at spotting any signs that might indicate a child is at risk. They do not, however, use this information well to take matters forward. Leaders have an insecure understanding of when it is appropriate to contact the local authority about any concerns they have. They do not, for example, give sufficient thought as to whether it would be more appropriate to seek external advice before speaking to parents. Overall, leaders are not consistently taking effective action to reduce risk.
- Record-keeping with regard to child protection is poor. It lacks any consistent or systematic approach. In addition, key information, such as notes of conversations with parents or the local authority, is often not present. The outcomes of incidents or follow-up actions are typically poorly recorded or entirely absent from the records.
- The school's safeguarding policy is published on its website and pays due regard to the guidance issued by the Secretary of State in 'Keeping children safe in education', 2016.

#### *Paragraph 9–9(b)*

- The school has a clear procedure for managing any incidents of poor behaviour. The proprietors have recently introduced a system of graduated response to any incidents that occur, accompanied by clearly explained sanctions. Records show that the system is being implemented appropriately and in line with the policy.
- School leaders use fixed-term exclusions for serious breaches of the school's behaviour policy. Records indicate that this is done in an appropriate manner. Parents are involved in the procedure and a reintegration process occurs when the pupil concerned returns to the school after the completion of the exclusion. There have been no permanent exclusions since the previous inspection. The school undertakes

regular checks to ensure that any excluded pupil is safe during the period of the exclusion. Leaders do not use the sanction of exclusion unless they are sure that the pupil will be appropriately looked after during their time away from the school.

#### *Paragraph 10*

- The school has drawn up and implemented an effective anti-bullying strategy. Pupils are adamant that bullying is rare and they are confident that school staff would deal with it effectively should it occur. Parents also expressed their confidence in the school's approach to bullying and could describe examples of the school's effective work in this area.

#### *Paragraph 14*

- Pupils are well supervised during their time at the school. Staff-to-pupil ratios are appropriate, including on the many residential trips the school organises. Pupils are very clear that they feel well supervised during their time in school. They could describe, for example, how there is always at least one adult present during break and lunchtime.
- The staff code of conduct lays down very clear guidance on the appropriate professional boundaries between staff and pupils. The school deliberately fosters a 'family' atmosphere as part of its approach to pastoral care. Pupils and parents are very supportive of this approach and value it highly, emphasising at the same time that relations between staff and pupils are respectful and professional.

#### *Paragraph 16–16(b)*

- Leaders undertake appropriate risk assessments for all the school's activities. There are well-developed risk assessments for the school premises and the activities carried out on a day-to-day basis. The fire risk assessment demonstrates clearly that leaders act to reduce any identified risk. Risk assessments for the numerous residential trips are clear and all staff involved are expected to read and sign them before the trip takes place.
- The standards in this part are not met.

### Part 5. Premises of and accommodation at schools

#### *Paragraph 23(1)–23(1)(c)*

- The school has a contract to use nearby changing and shower facilities belonging to the local town council. In addition, it is in the process of constructing a purpose-built shower block on the school site. When asked by inspectors, neither pupils nor parents expressed any concerns about the current arrangements for changing into sports kit when on the school site. Suitable, separate toilet facilities are provided for the sole use of boys and girls.

#### *Paragraph 25*

- The proprietors make certain that the school's premises are maintained to such a level that the health and safety of pupils are ensured. With particular reference to one of the matters raised in the complaint, the site is secure. External fencing is appropriate and entrance to all buildings is secured by the use of keypads.
- The standards in this part are met.

## Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

### *Paragraph 34(1)–34(1)(c)*

- As the shortcomings in safeguarding processes and practice indicate, the proprietors do not ensure that the independent school standards are met consistently.
- The standard in this part is not 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, as set out in the annex of this report. Not all of the standards and associated requirements were checked during this inspection.

## School details

Unique reference number	115808
DfE registration number	916/6068
Inspection number	10045376

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 status	Independent school
Age range of pupils	6 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	50
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	8
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Acorn School Ltd (G&S Whiting)
Headteacher	Graeme Whiting
Annual fees (day pupils)	£6,675 to £9,450
Telephone number	01453 836 508
Website	<a href="http://www.theacornschool.com">www.theacornschool.com</a>
Email address	<a href="mailto:info@theacornschool.com">info@theacornschool.com</a>
Date of previous standard inspection	21–23 June 2016

### Information about this school

- The Acorn School is a small, independent day school. The proprietors are also the senior leaders of the school.
- The school is registered for pupils aged from six to 18. It currently has 50 pupils on roll and is registered for a maximum capacity of 123.
- The school's previous standard inspection took place on 21–23 June 2016.

- The school does not use alternative provision.
- The school does not enter pupils for public examinations.

## Information about this inspection

- This emergency inspection was commissioned by the Department for Education in response to a complaint it had received about the school.
- The inspection was conducted without notice.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher and other staff during the day. The lead inspector toured the school with the headteacher.
- Inspectors looked at a range of documents provided by the school, including those on its website. In particular, they looked at the records relating to safeguarding, behaviour and risk assessment.
- The lead inspector met with a group of pupils to discuss their experience of the school. He also met with a group of parents to gather their opinions on the school.

## Inspection team

Stephen Lee, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Nicola Lownds	Social Care Regulatory Inspector

## **Annex. Compliance with regulatory requirements**

### **The school does not meet the following independent school standards**

#### **Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils**

- 7 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that–
  - 7(a) arrangements are made to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils at the school; and
  - 7(b) such arrangements have regard to any guidance issued by the Secretary of State.

#### **Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools**

- 34(1) The standard about the quality of leadership and management is met if the proprietor ensures that persons with leadership and management responsibilities at the school–
  - 34(1)(a) demonstrate good skills and knowledge appropriate to their role so that the independent school standards are met consistently;
  - 34(1)(b) fulfil their responsibilities effectively so that the independent school standards are met consistently; and
  - 34(1)(c) actively promote the well-being of pupils.



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