

Acorn School

Little Oak, Knowstone, South Molton, Devon EX36 4SA

Inspection dates

31 January 2019

Overall outcome

The school meets the independent school standards relevant to the material change.

Main inspection findings

Part 1. Quality of education provided

Paragraph 2

- Leaders have appropriate curriculum plans in place for pupils, devised in accordance with the specifications of the national curriculum. Plans take into account the special educational needs of pupils and the proposed extension to the school's age range. Leaders' aims and rationale for the curriculum are laid out clearly in the policy, which sets out how these aims will be achieved. The policy emphasises the importance of curriculum continuity for pupils as they move up through the school. This includes the provision of appropriate, impartial careers advice to secure their next steps beyond school.
- The curriculum provides suitable opportunities for pupils to develop their understanding of personal, social and health education. These opportunities are provided through a combination of taught schemes of work and enrichment activities. For example, when participating in off-site activities, pupils previously in the school have developed their social skills working as part of a group. They have learned about personal responsibility and how to be good citizens.
- Leaders have developed staff expertise and secured access to clinical services to provide a therapeutic service for pupils. Staff have been trained in understanding attachment issues and have received PACE (Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity and Empathy) training. The in-house therapeutic team, in addition to teaching staff, will include clinical psychologists, a speech and language therapist, an occupational therapist and an arts therapist. This provision will help to ensure that pupils are able to access the curriculum and get the most out of their school experience.

Paragraph 3

- The proposed curriculum is dynamic and interesting. Schemes of work are designed to appeal to pupils' interests and stimulate their imagination. For example, a scheme of work entitled 'Tomorrow's World' will encourage pupils to consider a technological future. The schemes of work ensure that pupils develop knowledge and skills in different academic areas. For example, pupils will be able to develop their writing skills producing newspaper reports. They will learn about the history of computing and how to conduct safe, effective research online.

- Short- and long-term planning indicates that staff consider how best to engage pupils of different ages, including the proposed additional year groups, in their learning. Staff consider the skills and knowledge to be taught, and the means to achieve this, including the use of enrichment activities. Planning and resourcing are tailored to the needs of individual pupils, given their special educational needs and/or disabilities. Staff will plan lessons with reference to each pupil's risk assessment and education, health and care plan.
- Teaching spaces are conducive to learning. They are warm, inviting spaces decorated with interesting, informative subject displays. Classrooms are also well equipped and resourced to assist pupils in their learning. For example, many rooms are equipped with interactive whiteboard technology.

Paragraph 4

- Systems are in place to establish pupils' starting points when they join the school, both academically and in terms of personal development. Staff will monitor pupils' progress closely using robust assessment systems and adapt provision to their ongoing needs. Pupils will be entered for different qualifications, including GCSEs, functional skills and entry-level qualifications, according to suitability.
- Staff will provide progress reports to parents to explain in clear, accessible language how well pupils are doing.
- The school meets the standards in this part.

Part 2. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

Paragraph 5

- Staff are proactive in their search for new ways in which the local area and community might develop pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The school's move to a new location is providing further opportunities. For example, leaders are keen to involve pupils in a boat-restoration project across the road from the new school building.
- Pupils previously at the school have engaged in community charity events, such as making cakes for a 'Marie Curie' cake sale.
- Provision is in place to enable pupils to experience a wide range of extra-curricular activities, both within and outside of school. Pupils previously in the school have taken part in bell ringing, to learn how to fulfil a specific, important role in a group activity. On other occasions, pupils have experimented playing with various musical instruments and decorated pumpkins for Halloween.
- Some schemes of work and displays around the school teach pupils about British values. One display informs pupils about the purpose and organisation of the Houses of Parliament.
- The school meets the standards in this part.

Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

Paragraph 7

- Leaders with designated safeguarding responsibilities have a clear understanding of their role. They ensure that staff are suitably trained and keep well-organised, comprehensive records to this effect. All staff are aware of their child-protection responsibilities and know to be vigilant for signs of abuse or neglect.
- Staff are aware of the procedures to follow should they have concerns about a child. They know to speak to designated safeguarding staff and to complete an online referral.

Paragraph 11

- A comprehensive health and safety policy is in place. The policy makes clear the proprietor's duty to ensure the safety of staff and pupils. It is written in conjunction with other relevant risk assessments.
- The new building and grounds are designed with pupils' safety in mind. The site is secure. Leaders have assessed the site for risk and taken appropriate action to ensure pupils' safety.

Paragraph 12

- A comprehensive fire risk assessment was undertaken by an external company in November 2018. The risk assessment's conclusion was that the likelihood of fire and overall risk were low. This was because, for example, reasonable measures had been taken to prevent electrical fires, portable appliances had been tested and wiring was correctly installed and inspected.
- The new building has suitable fire doors in place and they are clearly marked.

Paragraph 14

- Leaders' decisions concerning staff deployment mean that pupils attending the school will receive appropriate supervision. The anticipated number of pupils joining the school is 12. This is in keeping with leaders' intention to increase the number of pupils on roll, which is also a proposed material change considered as part of this inspection. Leaders plan to run three classes of four pupils, each with a teacher and teaching assistant. These staff will be assisted by other staff providing therapeutic or one-to-one learning interventions.

Paragraph 16

- Suitable risk assessments are in place, both for individual pupils and for different aspects of the school's work, such as extra-curricular visits. Risk assessments identify hazards and the control measures required to minimise risk in each case.
- The school meets the standards in this part.

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

Paragraphs 17 to 21

- Leaders at the school and representatives of the proprietor have had safer-recruitment training to ensure that they recruit suitable staff.
- Checks to ensure that current staff are suitable to work with pupils are detailed and up to date. Leaders ensure that checks relating to identity, the right to work in the United Kingdom and suitability to work with children are in place. These checks are signed and dated. In the case of teachers, qualifications are also recorded on the single central record.
- The school meets the standard in this part.

Part 5. Premises of and accommodation at schools

Paragraphs 22 to 31

- The new school building, phase one of the building project and the subject of this material change inspection, provides suitable accommodation for pupils. This building will be used primarily by pupils aged nine to 11. Corridors and classrooms are well lit and provide plenty of space. Classrooms are also clean, comfortable and well furnished.
- Appropriate facilities are in place for the use of pupils. Toilets are clean and hygienic, and ensure privacy. Hand-washing facilities are available in each toilet and the water is of a suitable temperature. A well-equipped medical room ensures that pupils have access to first-aid facilities should they be required.
- The school building and external recreational areas contribute to pupils' safety. Adequate internal and external lighting is in place, along with suitable site fencing. Internal doors are equipped with locks suitable to this setting. Rooms can be locked from the outside but unlocked from the inside. Consequently, pupils cannot be locked inside a room.
- The school meets the standard in this part.

Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

Paragraph 34

- Leaders have a clear vision for the school. New pupils joining the school will receive an experience designed to meet their individual needs. The combination of academic and therapeutic expertise, clear curriculum plans, and a well-resourced teaching environment will ensure that pupils get the most out of their school experience.
- Leaders have given due regard to the independent school standards in light of the school's relocation and new build. They have endeavoured to ensure that pupils will be safe and in receipt of a high-quality education.
- The school meets the standard in this part.

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 that are relevant to the material change.

School details

Unique reference number	135773
DfE registration number	878/6061
Inspection number	10092672

This inspection was carried out under section 162(4) of the Education Act 2002, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's compliance with the independent school standards relevant to the material change that the school has applied to make.

Type of school	Day school
School status	Independent special school
Proprietor	Phoenix Learning and Care Ltd
Chair	Jon Pain
Headteacher	Mrs Abigail Heard
Annual fees (day pupils)	£48,389.45
Telephone number	01271 859 720
Website	www.phoenixschools.org.uk
Email address	aheard@phoenixschools.org.uk
Date of previous standard inspection	4–6 October 2016

Pupils

	School's current position	School's proposal	Inspector's recommendation
Age range of pupils	11 to 16	Nine to 16	Nine to 16
Number of pupils on the school roll	0	12	12

Pupils

	School's current position	School's proposal
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Mixed

Number of full-time pupils of compulsory school age	Nil	12
Number of part-time pupils	Nil	Nil
Number of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities	Nil	12
Of which, number of pupils with an education, health and care plan	Nil	12
Of which, number of pupils paid for by a local authority with an education, health and care plan	Nil	12

Staff

	School's current position	School's proposal
Number of full-time equivalent teaching staff	5	7
Number of part-time teaching staff	1	0
Number of staff in the welfare provision	0	1

Information about this school

- Acorn School is an independent day school for boys and girls aged 11 to 16 years. The proprietor wishes to extend the range to provide education to pupils from nine to 16.
- The school is in the process of changing location from the current site in Knowstone to the new site in Winkleigh, Devon. The new site consists of two new buildings, one of which is complete and is the subject of this material change. This is the phase one build, which will cater for all pupils from key stage 2 to key stage 4 until the second building project is complete. This second, much larger building, is the phase 2 build. Once this building is complete it will be used by pupils in upper key stage 3 and key

stage 4. It is due to be finished in May 2019. This will require another material change inspection.

- The proprietor wishes to increase the capacity of the school's roll from seven to 12. There are no pupils in the school currently.
- The school was last inspected in October 2016, when it was judged to be good.
- Historically, all pupils attending the school have had special educational needs and/or disabilities, and an education, health and care plan. This is also likely to be the case when new pupils join the school.

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 three-fold. The first purpose was to consider whether the school can accommodate an extension to its age range to take pupils from the age of nine instead of 11. The second purpose was to establish whether new premises are fit for purpose. The third purpose was to consider whether the capacity of the school roll could increase from seven pupils to 12.
- The inspector met with the headteacher and the director of education for Phoenix Learning and Care Ltd. Accompanied by both staff, he toured the school site to evaluate the degree to which the premises complied with the independent school standards.
- The inspector evaluated documentation including curriculum plans, schemes of work and progress monitoring and assessment information. He also scrutinised records relating to health and safety, such as risk assessments.
- The inspector reviewed the school's single central record.

Inspection team

Steve Smith, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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Textphone: 0161 618 8524
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