

Inspection of a good school: Acorn Free School

248 Calder Road, Brant Road, Lincoln, Lincolnshire LN5 9TL

Inspection dates:

8–9 October 2019

Outcome

Acorn Free School continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils attend this school for short periods of time. This is because they may be at risk of exclusion from their mainstream schools. Staff are caring and supportive. They teach pupils the knowledge they need to continue their learning. They also provide support for pupils' personal development and behaviour. Staff help pupils to manage their behaviour and to achieve their best. Relationships between pupils and staff are positive. Pupils enjoy their learning at Acorn. Most pupils make a positive return to their mainstream schools.

Pupils enjoy learning beyond lesson time. For example, they make their own lunches from a range of healthy options. They understand the importance of maintaining good health. Pupils can choose to take part in a variety of activities to broaden their experiences. These include activities such as chess, badminton and motorbike riding.

Pupils say that staff manage instances of poor behaviour fairly and consistently. They say they are kept safe and feel safe. During the inspection, pupils were well-behaved and respectful to each other and adults. Pupils say that bullying is rare. They are confident that staff would deal with bullying well, if it did occur. The school is a calm place to learn.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

The school provides a good quality of education. Governors, leaders and staff have an ambitious vision for what pupils should learn. They want to give pupils every chance to achieve well and continue their education. They provide a nurturing environment. The acting headteacher is implementing plans to raise expectations for staff and pupils.

Leaders plan sequenced steps of learning in most subjects. Yet, some subjects are not as precise. Leaders have not thought about what they want pupils to learn in all subjects. They have not ensured that concepts in some subjects are connected as well as they should be.

Subjects that are well planned develop pupils' knowledge well. Pupils remember what they have learned. Lessons build upon pupils' learning in their mainstream schools. In

English, key stage 3 pupils practise and consolidate their grammatical knowledge. They write descriptive phrases. This helps pupils to develop their creative writing.

Teachers make sure activities are suited to pupils' needs. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are well supported. Adults help pupils with SEND to catch up or move on with their learning.

English and mathematics are well taught. Teachers help pupils to build their knowledge. Reading is a priority. Every day, teachers check how well pupils are reading. They help pupils to achieve well in reading. Those who struggle to read learn the letters and sounds they need to progress. Teachers ensure that pupils practise and apply their mathematical knowledge to solving problems. This is helping pupils to become confident in mathematics.

Leaders offer pupils a broad curriculum. Pupils particularly enjoy learning about mechanical engineering. They learn about health and safety issues and do practical and theoretical activities. They relish the opportunity to learn to ride motorbikes safely as part of their course.

Leaders recognise that some pupils enjoy practical learning more than academic learning. They plan to introduce more vocational courses such as construction and hospitality. Leaders hope to appeal to a wider variety of pupils' interests.

Pupils are well supported to improve their behaviour. Staff help them to understand the impact of their actions. Pupils get on well with their teachers and other staff. Pupils enjoy the school's approach to the curriculum. They talk about their feelings and opinions with trained staff. This helps them to understand their actions and the world around them.

Leaders help staff to be successful in their roles. Staff appreciate leaders' support and training. Leaders are considerate of staff's welfare and workload. Staff enjoy working at the school and are eager to improve their practice.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Staff understand how to keep pupils safe. Pupils are well cared for. Staff are trained to identify the potential risks to pupils. The school's record of the checks they carry out on adults who work in the school is thorough.

The designated leaders for safeguarding act promptly to keep pupils safe. They work with a range of external agencies to get pupils the help and support they need. Teachers teach pupils how to stay safe in different situations. These include protecting themselves from the risks of drugs and alcohol.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The school's approach to the professional development of staff has improved. Staff feel well supported and valued. Leaders now need to ensure that staff at all levels receive the support they need to further improve their knowledge of the subjects they teach.
- The sequencing seen in many subjects is not matched in all areas of the curriculum. The content of some subjects is not chosen and sequenced as well as it could be. Leaders need to ensure that the content of all subject plans is well chosen and carefully sequenced.
- Leaders have restructured the school day to facilitate a broader curriculum which better meets the needs of pupils. Leaders now need to implement plans to broaden the range of vocational courses for pupils in areas such as construction and hospitality.

Background

When we have judged a school to be good we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. This is called a section 8 inspection of a good school or non-exempt outstanding school. We do not give graded judgements on a section 8 inspection. However, if we find some evidence that the school could now be better than good or that standards may be declining, then the next inspection will be a section 5 inspection. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the section 8 inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will convert the section 8 inspection to a section 5 inspection immediately.

This is the first section 8 inspection since we judged Acorn Free School to be good on 30 June to 1 July 2015.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use Ofsted Parent View information when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

If you're not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil

premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

School details

Unique reference number	139774
Local authority	Lincolnshire
Inspection number	10048188
Type of school	Alternative provision
School category	Academy free school
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	23
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Graham Arnold
Headteacher	Angela Dawson (Acting Headteacher)
Website	www.theacornschoo.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	30 June–1 July 2015

Information about this school

- In 2018, a new chair of the governing body was appointed to the school. Governance of the school has been reviewed and restructured.
- In September 2019, a new acting headteacher was appointed after the resignation of the previous headteacher.
- The school does not use alternative providers.

Information about this inspection

- Pupils told inspectors about their school and talked to them about their work.
- Meetings were held with the acting headteacher and assistant headteacher. Inspectors met with the subject leaders for English, mechanical engineering, humanities and mathematics. The lead inspector also met with the leader responsible for the provision of pupils with SEND.
- The lead inspector met with the chair of the governing body.
- Nine parents spoke informally with inspectors by telephone during the inspection. There were no responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View.
- Inspectors considered the 11 responses to Ofsted's survey for staff. There were no

responses to the pupil survey; however, the inspector scrutinised the school's own survey recently carried out with pupils.

- The lead inspector looked at a range of documents, including: the school's self-evaluation of current performance and plans for improvement; the overview of the school's curriculum planning; information relating to safeguarding; information about behaviour management; information on the school's website and the school's most recent information relating to the attendance of pupils.
- The lead inspector scrutinised the school's system for recruiting staff to ensure that the school is compliant and safeguards pupils appropriately. Inspectors also met with leaders and staff to discuss the arrangements for keeping pupils safe. Inspectors checked that staff and pupils understand what to do if they have a concern.
- The inspectors considered the teaching and learning in English, mathematics, and mechanical engineering in detail. They visited lessons, scrutinised the school's planning with subject leaders and met with teachers and pupils. Inspectors also looked at samples of pupils' workbooks in subjects such as science; humanities; personal, social and health education; art; food and nutrition; and information technology.

Inspection team

Stephanie Innes-Taylor, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Jackie Thornalley

Ofsted Inspector

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