

Inspection of Acorn School

Seckington Cross, Winkleigh, Devon EX19 8EY

Inspection dates: 19–21 November 2019

Overall effectiveness **Good**

The quality of education **Good**

Behaviour and attitudes **Good**

Personal development **Good**

Leadership and management **Good**

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection Good

Does the school meet the independent school standards? **Yes**

What is it like to attend this school?

The staff at Acorn are caring. They know every pupil well. As a result, staff ensure that the full range of pupils' social, emotional and mental health needs are well met.

This is a happy school. Staff and pupils share much humour. They work and relax together in a safe and orderly environment. Leaders have high expectations of every pupil. Staff skilfully help pupils to settle and find their feet. As pupils gain confidence, they make more contributions to daily events or in helping each other. For example, older pupils provide 'buddy' support to younger pupils. Pupils told us that they like this school because they feel understood and appreciated 'for who they are'.

Pupils know the school's rules. They are highly motivated to gain rewards. Pupils try hard and want to do well. Staff know when pupils are getting anxious. As a result, they quickly adapt what they are doing to help restore calm and reduce stress. Pupils say that there is no bullying. Staff are deployed well to work with the pupils. Leaders complete detailed risk assessments to keep pupils safe.

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

Following the relocation of the school, leaders have continued to have high expectations. The school's owners want every pupil to have a rewarding education. This school offers a vital chance for pupils to be successful. Staff fully understand this. They are uncompromising in their work with pupils, but, all the while, are patient and understanding in how they support pupils.

Leaders have a clear programme setting out what they want pupils to know in each subject. Leaders have based this on the national curriculum. This is ambitious because most pupils are working below what is expected of them. However, teachers are thorough in checking what pupils know and adapt lessons so that pupils can catch up. This helps pupils to achieve well in most subjects, including pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. However, in mathematics, teachers do not plan well enough the small steps in learning that will help some pupils.

Teachers encourage pupils to read throughout the day. Pupils learn about different books, styles and authors. For example, primary pupils use their reading skills to learn about human digestion. Other pupils learn about classic literature, including, 'The Wind in the Willows'. Teachers select reading books well to stimulate pupils' interest. These books are linked well to other subjects, for example learning about crime and punishment in Tudor England while reading Shakespeare. Pupils like to express their thoughts and feelings about what they have read. The range of reading helps pupils to learn well in many subjects. Well-chosen texts bring learning to life. These enable pupils to find out more and be enthusiastic learners. However, teachers are not consistent in their approach to checking how well pupils are doing in reading. This holds some pupils back, as they do not have a reading book

matched to their ability, particularly those who are starting to be able to read on their own. Staff provide effective support for pupils who still need some help to catch up with phonics. Consequently, most pupils are confident in their phonic knowledge.

Teachers plan a curriculum that makes learning fun. They use a variety of resources, including the outdoors, to grab the pupils' attention. Pupils like the wider opportunities that the school offers. These include: swimming, cinema and fishing. These opportunities are based upon each individual pupil's interests. As a result, pupils use a range of knowledge and skills in different situations that help prepare them for the next steps they take in education and life.

Leaders ensure that the school is fully compliant with the Independent School Standards. This includes ensuring that the school meets schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010.

Pupils know how to treat each other well. They have a keen understanding of difference and diversity. Leaders are not afraid of tackling difficult issues head on. For example, following an incident in the school, pupils studied Rosa Parks. They learned about the civil rights movement. Pupils speak with great understanding of this issue. They also learn about other religions and cultures through their religious education and personal, social and health education (PSHE) lessons. This helps them to be prepared for life in modern Britain.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders ensure that staff are well trained to work with pupils. Leaders act swiftly to keep pupils safe and work closely with the full range of external partners. Staff are knowledgeable about safeguarding matters, including child protection.

Leaders promote the school's therapeutic curriculum well. This gives pupils access to a wide range of support and services through the proprietor (Phoenix Childcare Limited). Pupils' mental health needs are regularly reviewed in line with their education, health and care plans. This helps to keep the pupils safe and well.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and proprietor)

- The school does not have a consistent approach to assessing pupils in reading. As a result, teachers are not ensuring that all pupils have books that match their reading ability. This interferes with how well a few pupils are learning to read, particularly those who are just becoming independent readers. Leaders need to ensure that teachers' ongoing assessments are timely and accurate to help pupils gain greater confidence and fluency in reading.
- Teachers are not consistently identifying the precise next steps to help pupils in

mathematics. As a result, a few pupils are not gaining enough knowledge to be confident mathematicians, particularly in their understanding of number. Leaders need to ensure that teachers identify the right building blocks through the curriculum for all pupils to achieve well.

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](#).

School details

Unique reference number	135773
DfE registration number	878/6061
Local authority	Devon
Inspection number	10090666
Type of school	Other Independent Special School
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	8 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	18
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Phoenix Childcare Limited
Chief Executive Officer	Jonathan Pain
Headteacher	Abigail Heard
Annual fees (day pupils)	£52,718.89
Telephone number	01271 859720
Website	phoenixschools.org.uk
Email address	acornschool@phoenixschools.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	4–6 October 2016

Information about this school

- Acorn School has been established to care for pupils who face challenges with their social or emotional well-being or mental health. All the 18 pupils currently in the school are funded by Devon local authority.
- Since the previous standard inspection in October 2016, there have been two additional inspections to evaluate the premises and consider a material change. These took place in January and June 2019.
- Following the approval of the Department for Education (DfE) for changes to the school's registration details, the school relocated to its current location in Winkleigh, Devon. This now accommodates all pupils on the same site, including the separate primary and secondary parts of the school.
- All the pupils currently on the roll have joined the school since the relocation of its premises.
- The primary part of the school opened in April 2019. The secondary part opened in September 2019. There currently are no pupils in key stage 4.
- The school uses one alternative provider. This is Horwood Coombe Forest School.

Information about this inspection

We carried out this inspection under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008. The purpose of the inspection is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

The school meets the independent school standards. These are the requirements set out in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

- We did deep dives in the following subjects: reading, mathematics, physical education (PE) and PSHE. We spoke with leaders, staff and pupils, visited lessons and looked at pupils' work.
- During the inspection, we worked with the headteacher and deputy and met with a range of other leaders and teachers. These included the primary and secondary leads for English, mathematics, PE, PSHE and history. We conducted a visit to look at off-site outdoor education.
- We heard pupils read and spoke to them about their learning.
- We met with staff to evaluate their workload and how they are being supported by senior leaders.
- We scrutinised safeguarding information, including the single central record. Further evaluations were made of the implementation of health and safety policies, including the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005.

Inspection team

Stewart Gale, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Andy Lole

Ofsted Inspector

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