

Inspection of Acorns School

19b Hibbert Lane, Marple, Stockport, Cheshire SK6 7NN

Inspection dates: 1 to 3 March 2022

Overall effectiveness	Good
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The quality of education	Good
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Behaviour and attitudes	Good
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Personal development	Good
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Leadership and management	Good
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Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement
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Does the school meet the independent school standards?	Yes
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What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils enjoy school. They like spending time with their friends and teachers. Pupils appreciate the care and support that the friendly staff give to them. This helps new pupils adapt quickly to school life.

Leaders are determined that all pupils will achieve well. To meet this aim, leaders and staff build pupils' self-esteem and confidence. Pupils benefit from the broad and interesting curriculum which leaders provide. This helps pupils to achieve well, both academically and personally. Pupils leave the school ready for their next steps.

Pupils feel safe in school. They know that teachers are ready to listen to any concerns that they may have. Should bullying arise, pupils are confident that staff will deal with incidents quickly and effectively.

Pupils love the interesting and enjoyable activities that help them to stay active and healthy. For example, pupils enjoy archery, climbing and horse riding. They appreciate the new outdoor area where they can play games, exercise and relax. Pupils learn about the wider world through a wide range of trips and visits.

Pupils learn to be respectful and considerate to others. They are proud of how they improve their behaviour over time. Pupils develop perseverance and concentration in lessons. They are polite and welcoming to visitors.

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

The curriculum is well matched to pupils' needs. In most subjects, subject leaders have used their expertise to identify the most important learning that pupils need to learn. Subject leaders have given careful thought to the steps in learning that pupils need to make in order to secure their knowledge. For example, in geography, leaders have set out in a logical way how pupils will learn about different locations.

In a small number of subjects, including art and design and music, subject leaders' thinking about the curriculum is at an earlier stage. These subject leaders are new to their roles. They have had limited time and training to set out how pupils should secure their learning across key stages.

Leaders have ensured that pupils read regularly in school. Staff provide books and magazines which match pupils' interests. Teachers encourage pupils to read in different subjects, such as geography and science. These opportunities help pupils to extend their vocabulary and develop fluency and understanding when reading.

When pupils join the school, leaders make careful checks on their knowledge, including in reading. Leaders ensure that those pupils at an early stage of reading have regular support to learn phonics. The books that pupils read are closely matched to the sounds they are learning.

Pupils at the school have a range of special educational needs and/or disabilities. Leaders work closely with parents and carers and a range of other professionals to identify pupils' social, emotional and learning needs. In lessons, teachers make regular checks to see how well pupils have learned the intended curriculum. Pupils' varied needs are carefully supported. This support enables most pupils to learn the school's curriculum successfully.

The school is well decorated and resourced. Pupils help choose furnishings and paint colours. They were fully involved in planning the range of exercise equipment for the outdoor area. Pupils develop a sense of belonging.

Staff establish warm, friendly relationships with pupils. Staff are skilled in managing pupils' behaviour and supporting pupils' emotional needs. This ensures that any disruption to learning due to pupils' behaviour is addressed quickly and effectively by staff. Staff help pupils to build their confidence.

The school's curriculum helps pupils to learn about the wider world. For example, pupils learn that all are equal. They visit places of interest, such as museums and a zoo. Pupils learn about important social issues, for example caring for the environment. Leaders help pupils to prepare for leaving school. Pupils learn to cook and to use public transport.

The relationships and sex education policy meets the current statutory guidance. Leaders have consulted with parents on the contents of this policy. The policy includes plans for parents to withdraw their child from sex education lessons if they wish to. Pupils are introduced to a variety of topics in a sensitive and age-appropriate way.

Leaders provide careful and wide-ranging support to help older pupils with their career aspirations. They ensure that pupils have detailed and suitable careers advice. Pupils move successfully to a range of college and training settings of their choice. They are well prepared for their future lives.

Leaders work very closely with parents to ensure that important information is shared between home and school. As one parent said, 'Staff are approachable, kind, caring and, above all, they listen.' This successful close partnership work ensures that new pupils make a smooth transition to the school.

Staff enjoy working at the school. They value the recent steps that leaders have taken to give them time to plan and prepare lessons.

The proprietor body has a detailed understanding of the independent school standards. The members of the proprietor body fulfil their statutory duties and ensure that the school is a safe place. For example, they ensure that fire safety regulations and risk assessments are compliant. The proprietor body has ensured that the school's accessibility plan complies with schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010 and that the safeguarding policy is published on the school's website. The

proprietor body makes sure that staff, pupils and visitors are treated equally and with respect.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders provide staff with regular and detailed safeguarding training. This ensures that staff recognise possible signs of abuse. Staff report any concerns to leaders.

Leaders take effective action when dealing with any safeguarding concerns. They work closely with a range of external agencies to protect pupils. Leaders make sure that pupils and their families get the support and help that they need.

Pupils learn about situations which may lead to harm. They find out about the dangers of drugs and alcohol. Pupils learn how to keep themselves safe when online. They know that they should share any concerns with a trusted adult.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and proprietor)

- In a small number of subjects, the structure of the curriculum lacks some detail. This means that, at times, pupils' learning does not build on what they already know. Leaders should ensure that in these subjects, subject leaders develop their curriculum thinking and identify what important knowledge pupils need to secure before moving on to new learning. This will help pupils to know and remember more of the curriculum.
- Some subject leaders are new to their roles and have had limited experience in leading their subjects. They lack some expertise in ensuring that the pupils learn well in their subjects across all key stages. Leaders should ensure that they provide high-quality training for new subject leaders to enable them to carry out their roles effectively.

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 information from Ofsted Parent View 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 are the provider and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

School details

Unique reference number	131551
DfE registration number	356/6027
Local authority	Stockport
Inspection number	10210335
Type of school	Other Independent Special School
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	5 to 17
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	18
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Keys Group
Chair	Nicola Kelly
Headteacher	Christopher Hampton
Annual fees (day pupils)	£45,240
Telephone number	0161 449 5820
Website	www.keyschildcare.co.uk/services/education/acorns
Email address	admin.acornsschool@keys-group.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	5 to 7 February 2019

Information about this school

- The school does not use alternative provision.
- All pupils have social, emotional and mental health needs. All pupils have an education, health and care plan.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors 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 of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.

- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: reading, mathematics, food technology and personal, social, health and economic education. For each deep dive, inspectors met with subject leaders to discuss curriculums, spoke with teachers, spoke with some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. Inspectors also visited some lessons. Inspectors spoke with leaders about curriculums and looked at samples of pupils' work in some other subjects.
- During the inspection, inspectors spoke with pupils about school life. They spoke with the headteacher, members of staff and members of the proprietor body.
- Inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted Parent View. They also considered the responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire for staff.
- During the inspection, inspectors reviewed a range of documents, including those in relation to safeguarding and information relating to the independent school standards. They looked at records of pupils' behaviour and attendance.
- Inspectors checked the school premises.

Inspection team

Elizabeth Stevens, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Colin Bell

Ofsted Inspector

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