

Inspection of Acorn Park School

Andrew's Furlong, Mill Road, Banham, Norfolk NR16 2HU

Inspection dates: 8 to 10 March 2022

Overall effectiveness **Good**

The quality of education **Good**

Behaviour and attitudes **Good**

Personal development **Good**

Leadership and management **Good**

Sixth-form provision **Good**

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection Inadequate

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

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils of all ages feel happy, supported and well cared for. They say, 'You can be yourself – school is very inclusive.' Learning in small classes enables pupils to get to know their teachers well. Pupils have personalised plans that enable them to re-engage in learning and enjoy school life. Many pupils experience academic success.

Pupils feel safe. Bullying is rare. Pupils receive good pastoral and therapeutic care, which helps promote their good behaviour. Incidents of misbehaviour are carefully managed by trained staff.

Pupils learn to stay safe and gain essential life skills needed for adulthood. Pupils learn to communicate and interact with others in the best way they can. Pupils also learn about healthy relationships, diversity and British values.

Pupils' lives are enriched by the curriculum and a wide range of extra activities and special events. Pupils thrive personally and socially through outdoor learning and caring for animals on the school farm.

Students in the small sixth form receive the same quality of personalised education and care. They are well prepared for the next stage of their lives.

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

Leaders have made significant improvements to the quality of education, pupils' behaviour and the school's relations with parents and carers. Leaders have developed an ambitious curriculum for pupils from key stage 1 to key stage 5. New middle leaders are leading these improvements well. Some are new in post and are still developing their knowledge and skills in their areas of responsibility.

In the 'formal' pathway, pupils can gain GCSE and functional skills qualifications and other awards. In lessons, they work on different tasks based on their starting points before moving on to the next stage. One-to-one support helps pupils to remember what they have been taught. For example, pupils develop their knowledge and skills through applying mathematics to solve problems in real-life situations. Pupils are confident to use a timetable to calculate journey times, and question others about likely arrival times. They achieve well because the curriculum is taught well.

Each pupil is encouraged to read every day. Many are able and confident to read increasingly complex texts and poetry. Pupils develop an enjoyment of reading. While the teaching of reading is prioritised, not all adults emphasise the most important words that pupils should learn. This slows the speed at which a few pupils learn to read.

The 'semi-formal' pathway is designed so that pupils learn important knowledge and skills to become more independent. They develop their communication and social interaction as they learn new information. Pupils use their mathematical knowledge

to weigh and measure cooking ingredients and work out the cost of living. Pupils learn essential life skills, such as shopping, preparing snacks, housework and personal care, to prepare them for the next stage of their life. This includes opportunities to gain Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network and Gateway awards.

Low-level disruption is rare. When and if it happens, staff successfully help pupils to regulate their behaviour. Suspensions are rare. There are a few pupils who are regularly absent. Leaders have built good relationships with families and liaise with care and medical staff when needed to help pupils attend school more regularly. However, for a few pupils, their attendance still needs to be even better.

Parents praise the high quality of pastoral care and support that staff provide. They value the therapeutic support provided. In the Potter Centre, adults deliver high-quality care for pupils with the most complex needs. Pupils learn how to stay safe, communicate their needs and, where appropriate, engage in real-life tasks needed for independent living.

Off-site visits to places of interest, sports day and raising funds for charity add significantly to pupils' enjoyment of school. Careers guidance broadens their horizons. Almost all pupils progress into the sixth form or local colleges.

The sixth form is very small. Students are known well. Staff provide personalised programmes to meet students' complex needs. Students become more independent. They are suitably prepared for the next stage of education or training, and for living independently. Effectively designed careers teaching ensures that students gain workplace and employability skills.

Governors have overseen the dramatic improvements at the school. They hold leaders and staff accountable for the quality of education and care. The proprietor body ensures that all the independent school standards are consistently met.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders make sure that the necessary checks are made when appointing adults to work with children. Minor discrepancies in recording on the single central record were quickly rectified during the inspection.

Leaders have strengthened procedures to safeguard pupils and protect them from harm. Safeguarding concerns are recorded systematically. A team of trained staff respond promptly to ensure that concerns are followed up. Leaders carefully analyse and identify patterns and trends to reduce the risks faced by pupils.

Pupils are taught how to keep safe, including when using the internet. Information is provided to parents about online risks and keeping their child safe when online.

What does the school need to do to improve? (Information for the school and proprietor)

- While the teaching of reading is prioritised, not all adults emphasise the most important words that pupils should learn. Leaders should ensure that all staff are trained to identify the most important words that pupils should know in the early stages of reading. Leaders should then make sure that staff put lessons learned from this training into practice.
- Some middle leaders are new in post. Senior leaders should put in place a programme of effective professional development and training to empower these subject leaders to continue to develop their curriculum knowledge and areas of responsibility fully.

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	135066
DfE registration number	926/6152
Local authority	Norfolk
Inspection number	10220978
Type of school	Other independent special school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	6 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	97
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	11
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Acorn Care and Education Ltd
Chair	Nick Simpson
Headteacher	Peter Marshall (Head of Service)
Annual fees (day pupils)	£62,500
Telephone number	01953 888656
Website	www.acornpark.org.uk
Email address	admin@acornparkschool.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	25 to 27 February 2020

Information about this school

- The school provides education for pupils aged six to 19 with a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder. All pupils have an education, health and care plan. Admission to the school is via local authority placement.
- Two pupils attend alternative provision. Both of them access Acorn Digital Learning.
- The school was inspected in February 2020 and judged to be inadequate. The inspection found significant failings in the quality of education and leadership and management. Not all the independent school standards were met.
- The Department for Education (DfE) commissioned Ofsted to carry out a progress monitoring inspection in February 2021. The school did not meet all the standards that were inspected during the inspection.
- The DfE commissioned Ofsted to carry out a second progress monitoring inspection in September 2021. All the independent school standards that were checked during the inspection were met.

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 set out in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

This was the first routine inspection the school had 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 met with the head of service, head of school, senior and middle leaders, teachers and support staff, a group of pupils and the chair of the governing body. An inspector held a telephone conversation with the chief operating officer of the proprietor body.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of documentation, including policy and procedures, behaviour and attendance records, self-evaluation and improvement planning, and information relating to safeguarding.
- An inspector met with the designated safeguarding lead to discuss the school's safeguarding arrangements. The school's single central record was scrutinised.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives into English (including early reading), mathematics, personal, social and health education and independence. This

included meetings with leaders, teachers, support staff and pupils, visiting lessons and scrutinising pupils' work.

- Inspectors considered the views and comments of 57 parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. They considered 89 responses from staff, and 28 responses from pupils to their respective online questionnaires.

Inspection team

John Mitcheson, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Kim Hall

Her Majesty's Inspector

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