

Inspection of The London Acorn School

Morden Cottage, Morden Hall Park, Morden Hall Road, London SM4 5JD

Inspection dates: 18 to 20 January 2023

Overall effectiveness	Good
The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Early years provision	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement
Does the school meet the independent school standards?	Yes

What is it like to attend this school?

The proprietors have established a school in which staff have high expectations for pupils and deliver an imaginative and unique curriculum. Leaders and staff at all levels care deeply about the school and its pupils. They nurture pupils' academic learning and individuality so that they achieve well.

Pupils are taught how to observe, enjoy and appreciate the natural world through learning in the open spaces and woodland areas of the surrounding park. Pupils develop independence and teamwork. They grow into confident young people who are well prepared for secondary school.

Pupils are safe and feel safe. They behave well and enjoy learning together. They play their part in making a kind and friendly school community. New pupils feel welcomed and make friends easily. There is almost no bullying but pupils said that if it does happen, adults deal with it well and quickly. There is a strong culture of respect and tolerance for others.

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

The curriculum is ambitious and well planned in discrete subjects and cross-subject themes. All the areas of learning in the independent school standards are included, and pupils learn a wide range of subjects, including woodwork and woodland crafts.

Leaders have ensured that the early years prepares children well for the start of formal education. Throughout the school, support for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is well planned and effective. By the end of Year 6, pupils are ready for secondary school and the next stage of their education.

Staff receive training, for example, in teaching mathematics and early reading and the school is well resourced. Staff use their training to sequence activities and choose resources that help pupils to learn and remember key subject content. Occasionally, when staff focus on the task pupils are doing rather than on what pupils are learning, pupils build knowledge and skills less securely.

Pupils start to learn to read from the summer term of Year 1. Leaders have ensured that there is a rigorous approach to teaching phonics. Adults demonstrate the importance and encourage a love of reading. They read to children in kindergarten and read class texts with older pupils. Staff model sounds for pupils and, weaker readers get the support they need to catch up quickly with their peers. Pupils read widely and regularly. Leaders do not prioritise writing as carefully to help all pupils to build up writing skills as effectively. Some pupils with weaker letter formation, punctuation and sentence structure are not helped to catch up as securely in writing as they are in reading.

Leaders have developed a strong system to check pupils' learning and recall. Subject plans identify opportunities for assessment, and teachers make sure they check

pupils' understanding of subject content in class.

Pupils have positive attitudes to learning so teaching the curriculum is typically uninterrupted. Pupils, and children in early years, are curious, confident learners. They listen to each other, ask questions and offer their views and opinions.

The school provides a range of opportunities to develop pupils' personal and social skills and develop character. Leaders focus on pupils' physical and mental health, and their well-being throughout the school, starting in kindergarten. Pupils are taught to respect the environment and nature. Leaders ensure that pupils learn about and celebrate a wide range of festivals and cultures.

The proprietors and the governors are ambitious for the school. They have taken effective action to improve the school following the last inspection. The current arrangements for leading the school before a new headteacher is appointed have been carefully planned. Senior leaders are knowledgeable and confident. Staff morale is high. Staff said that leaders are supportive and manage their workload effectively.

Leaders have ensured that all the independent school standards and the safeguarding and welfare requirements of the early years foundation stage are met. The school complies with schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010. Leaders have implemented statutory guidance on relationships and sex education.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders ensure that staff have regular safeguarding training. Staff understand what to do if they have a concern about a child and how to report it. Leaders work effectively with external agencies to ensure that pupils get the help they need and are supported in school.

Pupils are taught how to keep themselves safe, including online and in the surrounding park. Leaders ensure that there are clear expectations and routines, and pupils are encouraged to understand and manage risk.

The proprietor ensures that safeguarding has a high priority and that school leaders handle concerns appropriately. All the required pre-employment checks on staff are completed and recorded. The school has a suitable safeguarding policy, which is published on the school's website for parents and carers.

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

- Sometimes, in a few subjects, staff do not choose learning activities which help pupils to learn subject content as well as they should. Leaders should ensure that

staff have the appropriate subject and teaching knowledge they need to design activities for pupils which have a clear purpose and support pupils' learning of the curriculum.

- Some pupils who fall behind in writing are not helped to catch up as well as they are in reading, after the delayed start to learning phonics. Leaders should ensure that all pupils are supported effectively to learn to form letters, spell and construct sentences correctly.

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 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.

School details

Unique reference number	139417
DfE registration number	315/6001
Local authority	Merton
Inspection number	10258198
Type of school	Other independent school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	3 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	54
Number of part-time pupils	None
Proprietor	The London Acorn School CIC
Chair	Belinda Hurwitz
Headteacher	Zoe Howes-Wiles (Acting Head of Teaching and Learning)
Annual fees (day pupils)	£10,401 to £10,920
Telephone number	020 8544 9769
Website	www.thelondonacornschool.co.uk
Email address	info@thelondonacornschool.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	7 to 9 December 2021

Information about this school

- Since the last full inspection, the proprietor has changed the school's registered age range which was previously age three to 14 and is now age three to 11. This change was approved by the Department for Education in March 2022.
- The previous headteacher left her post in December 2022. At the time of this inspection, the headteacher's responsibilities were shared between four senior leaders. The school was led by the acting head of teaching and learning.
- The school premises are located in a National Trust Park in historic buildings, which have been converted for educational use. The school uses the parkland and woodland areas for recreation and outdoor and nature activities.
- The school organises the year groups in a similar way to Steiner schools. The kindergarten includes Reception and Year 1. In the junior school, Class 1 is equivalent of Year 2 up to Class 5 (Year 6). The school has an exemption from the learning and development requirements of the early years foundation stage.
- The school's stated aim is to blend Steiner, Montessori and Forest School approaches with the national curriculum subject content.
- The school's last full standard inspection took place in December 2021, when its overall effectiveness was judged to be requires improvement.

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.

Inspectors discussed any continued impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.

- The inspectors met with the acting head of teaching and learning and other leaders who shared the headteacher's responsibilities.
- The lead inspector met with the proprietors and other members of the governing body, including the chair of the governing body.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics, personal, social and health education and art. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors also looked at pupils' work and visited classes in some other subjects.

- The lead inspector met with leaders with responsibility for safeguarding and safer recruitment and reviewed the record of pre-employment checks. The inspectors talked with staff about the impact of their safeguarding training, and to pupils about how safe they feel in school. The inspectors considered the results of the pupil, staff and parent surveys.

Inspection team

Janet Hallett, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Jo Franklin

Ofsted Inspector

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