

Acorn Park School

Andrews Furlong, Mill Road, Banham, Norwich, Norfolk NR16 2HU

Inspection date

13 July 2023

Overall outcome

The school meets all of the independent school standards that were checked during this inspection

Main inspection findings

Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

Paragraph 7, 7(a), 7(b)

- At the time of the previous standard inspection, the requirements of this independent school standard (the standards) were met. Leaders continue to have a robust approach to safeguarding pupils.
- Staff receive effective safeguarding training. They understand the wide range of ways in which pupils can exhibit signs of concern. They are adept at identifying and reporting where they have any concerns that a pupil is at risk of harm.
- Staff know how risks can be different or heightened for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Staff consider pupils' needs to ensure that help and support are adapted appropriately.
- Leaders take all concerns seriously. Detailed safeguarding records show timely and appropriate responses to concerns about pupils. Leaders work closely with external agencies where required to ensure that pupils get timely and effective support.
- Leaders ensure that any concerns related to staff are reported appropriately and investigated thoroughly. They work closely with the local authority designated officer to ensure that this work is proportionate, diligent and timely.
- Leaders ensure that the safeguarding policy and processes are reviewed regularly. The safeguarding policy takes into consideration all appropriate legal guidance. Leaders ensure that the policy is followed.
- Pupils say that adults act on their concerns quickly. They trust adults to safeguard them. They learn about how they can keep themselves safe through the curriculum, including how to stay safe online.
- Staff know the schools' whistleblowing policies. Staff are confident in the processes and their responsibilities in challenging and 'calling out' poor practice should it ever occur. Leaders effectively support staff well-being through in-school counselling and support.
- Governors and the proprietor body check regularly on safeguarding through visits to

the school, externally commissioned audits and their ongoing work with local authority designated officers.

- The requirements of this standard continue to be met.

Paragraphs 9, 9(a), 9(b), 9(c), 10

- At the time of the previous inspection, the requirements of these standards were met.
- Leaders continue to ensure that appropriate behaviour and anti-bullying policies and procedures are in place.
- Pupils join the school with a range of complex needs. Pupils' needs can sometimes mean that they struggle to regulate their behaviour independently. Staff are very well trained to understand pupils' complex needs and behaviours.
- Behaviour support plans are regularly updated in partnership with pupils and their parents and/or carers. These plans provide clear guidance to staff about the best strategies to use to support pupils in managing their behaviour and emotions.
- Leaders keep thorough records of behaviour incidents. They ensure that safeguarding and behaviour systems are closely interlinked. Leaders are curious about what this information tells them. They analyse pupils' behaviour patterns to a granular level. They quickly identify where pupils need any additional ongoing support and/or where staff require further training on specific behaviour strategies.
- Leaders have established a culture where staff approach pupils' behaviour in a calm and measured way. Staff de-escalate most behaviours through calm conversations with pupils. They work closely with pupils and their parents to help pupils develop strategies to manage their own behaviour. Over time, most pupils learn to do this very effectively.
- Leaders check the appropriateness of physical restraint when it is used. Regular 'debriefs' with staff and pupils after serious behaviour incidents support staff to reflect and focus on what can be improved. Leaders also review the use of physical restraint over time so that they understand better how to meet the long-term needs of pupils. The need for the use of physical restraint for specific pupils reduces significantly over time.
- Pupils trust adults to deal with any behaviour and bullying issues. They have a range of adults to talk to and report concerns to. Pupils are very positive about school life and the way staff deal with any incidents that occur.
- Staff feel well supported by leaders when dealing with tricky behaviour.
- The requirements of these standards continue to be met.

Paragraphs 11, 12, 13, 15

- The requirements of these standards were met at the time of the previous inspection.
- Leaders continue to ensure that there are appropriate policies and processes related to health and safety. They are vigilant to any health and safety risks to pupils and staff, both in and out of school.
- An effective first-aid policy is in place and implemented appropriately by staff.
- Leaders' admissions and attendance records comply with the necessary legislation. Leaders diligently follow up on pupil non-attendance to ensure pupils attend regularly.

Many pupils have improved attendance since joining the school.

- Regular checks by the site team and external specialists ensure that the school complies with the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005. Any actions from these checks are dealt with promptly.
- The requirements of these standards continue to be met.

Paragraphs 14, 16

- This standard was met in the previous standard inspection.
- Leaders continue to ensure that there is appropriate supervision of pupils and an appropriate risk assessment policy and process in place.
- There are high levels of supervision in class, during social times, in transition between lessons and in off-site activities.
- Leaders take into account pupils' risk assessments when deciding appropriate staffing levels. Supervision, for example, is increased if pupils have particular behaviour challenges or need extra support.
- Risk assessments are appropriate for the site and the different risks pupils may experience.
- Leaders ensure that risk assessments are live documents and take into account all appropriate needs and risks.
- These standards continue to be met.

Part 4. Suitability of staff, supply staff, and proprietors

Paragraphs 18(1)–21(8)

- These standards were met at the previous inspection.
- Leaders are trained to recruit safely. They use appropriate selection and recruitment procedures when appointing new staff in line with legal guidance.
- Appropriate pre-employment and background checks are in place for all staff, including those who work for an agency and members of the proprietor body.
- The proprietor body commissions regular safeguarding audits, which include checking the accuracy of the single central record.
- These standards continue to be met.

Part 6. Provision of information

Paragraph 32(1), 32(1)(c)

- These standards were met at the previous standard inspection in March 2022.
- The school's website provides access to an appropriate safeguarding policy and information about how to complain.
- This standard continues to be met.

Part 7. Manner in which complaints are handled

Paragraph 33, 33(a)–33(K)

- This standard was met at the previous standard inspection.

- The complaints policy is detailed and shows the process of how parents or pupils could make a complaint. This would enable parents to raise concerns appropriately if need be.
- Leaders ensure that they follow this policy well when they receive any complaints. Complaints are dealt with appropriately and within the designated timescales.
- This standard continues to be met.

Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

Paragraph 34(1)(a), 34(1)(b), 31(1)(c)

- The standard was met at the previous standard inspection.
- Leaders continuously audit and evaluate their chosen approach to dealing with behaviour. Leaders ensure that all staff, including leaders, have the necessary training and support to implement the school's safeguarding and behaviour policies well. Where it is identified staff need further training, this help is quickly put in place.
- Leaders ensure systems are in place to monitor and track behaviour and safeguarding concerns. This means that pupils are protected from harm, neglect and the risks associated with their complex needs.
- Leaders work with a range of external specialists to get honest, evaluative perspectives about what is working in the school and what areas need further improvement. The proprietor body commissions safeguarding audits, for instance, and other checks on leaders' work.
- This standard continues to be met.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school meets the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements that were checked during this inspection. Not all of the standards and associated requirements were checked during this inspection.

School details

Unique reference number	135066
DfE registration number	926/6152
Inspection number	10293156

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

Type of school	Other independent special school
School status	Independent special school
Age range of pupils	6 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	115
Proprietor	Acorn Care and Education Ltd
Chair	Nick Simpson
Headteacher	Philippa Whipp
Annual fees (day pupils)	£67,264
Telephone number	01953888656
Website	www.acornpark.org.uk
Email address	admin@acornpark.org.uk
Date of previous standard inspection	8 to 10 March 2022

Information about this school

- The school provides education for pupils aged six to 19 with a diagnosis of autism. All pupils have an education, health and care plan. Admission to the school is via local authority commissioning.
- The school uses one unregistered part-time alternative provision for a small number of pupils.
- Inspection history:
 - The school received a full standard inspection in February 2020. Inspectors judged the school's overall effectiveness to be inadequate. A significant number of standards were not met.

- The Department for Education (DfE) commissioned a progress monitoring inspection in February 2021. The school did not meet all the standards that were inspected during the inspection.
- The DfE commissioned a second progress monitoring inspection in September 2021. All the standards that were checked during the inspection were met.
- In March 2022, the school received a full standard inspection. Inspectors judged the school to be good.
- In October 2022, The DfE commissioned a material change inspection. Inspectors found that the standards were likely to be met if the material change was agreed. In response, the DfE approved an increase in pupil numbers to 125.

Information about this inspection

- This inspection was an emergency inspection, commissioned by the DfE, in response to concerns raised through qualifying complaints about the school.
- The inspection focused on how leaders manage allegations against adults, how staff implement leaders' behaviour strategies and parts 3, 4, 7 and 8 of the standards.
- The inspector met with a range of leaders, including the head of school, the head of service and the chair of the governing body who represented the proprietor body.
- The inspector held telephone conversations with representatives of the local authority, including the local authority designated officer for safeguarding.
- The inspector toured the site and spoke to staff and pupils without leaders present.
- The inspector spoke with a range of pupils from different classes.
- The inspector met with different staff across the day of inspection.
- The inspector met with the site manager and looked at health and safety and risk assessment records.
- The inspector checked the single central record, met with leaders to discuss safeguarding and looked at records of safeguarding cases. The inspector scrutinised behaviour records, logs of physical intervention and how leaders track behaviour across the school.

Inspection team

Damian Loneragan, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

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