

The Acorn School

Independent School

Inspection Report

DCSF Registration Number	916/6068
Unique Reference Number	115808
Inspection number	329692
Inspection dates	22 January 2009
Reporting inspector	John Coleman HMI

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 162A of the Education Act 2002 (as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005).

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Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London WC2B 6SE
T 08456 404040

www.ofsted.gov.uk



Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out by Ofsted under section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005, in order to advise the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

This was a light touch inspection (LTI) which focused principally on the quality of education provided by the school; its provision for the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development; the arrangements for safeguarding pupils and the improvements the school has made since its last inspection.

Information about the school

The Acorn School is located on the site of a former maintained primary school and the accommodation includes a converted house and two demountable classrooms. Founded in 1991 by the current proprietor and his wife, the school offers educational provision for pupils aged 3 to 19 years. There are 104 pupils currently on roll. The school aims to provide children with the finest education possible, using the principles of Rudolf Steiner, as well as those developed by the proprietor and his wife. No external examinations or tests are undertaken. Pupils applying to university, usually at the age of 19, submit portfolios of work and personal theses. The school has a very successful record of university placements. In keeping with Steiner views, the school is opposed to information and communication technology (ICT) for pupils below the age of 15. The vision of the school states, '*the child is at the very centre and nurturing the special qualities of each child is paramount to our endeavours at Acorn.*' The school was last inspected in June 2005.

The school has applied for exemption from the reading, writing and assessment aspects of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). Hence, these aspects were not inspected and no judgements are made. The school must teach all elements of the learning and development requirements unless exemption is granted by the Secretary of State.

Evaluation of the school

Acorn school is outstandingly successful in fulfilling its stated aims, because the passionate inspiration of the headteacher engenders an ethos in which all pupils feel valued and nurtured. In this family climate, pupils' personal development and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are outstanding. The quality of education provided is good with outstanding provision for extra-curricular activities, residential opportunities and outdoor adventurous pursuits. The behaviour of pupils is outstanding. Provision for children in EYFS is good. The school has acted well on the recommendations of the last report. The school meets the vast majority of the regulations.

Quality of education

The overall quality of education is good. The curriculum and other activities are good in meeting the range of needs and interests of pupils. Subjects are taught when the school considers it to be an appropriate point in the pupils' development.

Consequently, in the Kindergarten, there is an emphasis upon developing children's social, emotional and creative skills but there is no formal attempt to include the teaching of reading and writing until about the age of seven years. ICT is not included until pupils are about 15 years of age. The first two hours of every day is a main lesson where one subject is taught for several weeks. There are then subject lessons for the rest of the day. The curriculum includes all the required areas of experience.

The lower school curriculum draws on many cross-curricular links: For example, a lesson about King Edward's standardisation of the 'inch', successfully integrated pupils' learning in history and mathematics. The upper school curriculum includes a three-day-cycle, which involves the presentation of the subject matter, the recall of this and artistic interpretation followed by writing up notes in an essay style. The curriculum is enriched by a wide range of visitors including many parents who readily bring their skills and expertise into lessons. A good example was when a class of pupils enjoyed a talk about cetaceans from a parent with extensive knowledge about these sea creatures. The number and range of educational visits, including residential opportunities for pupils, is extensive. These include a European trip featuring visits to many places including the Somme, Venice and Vesuvius, in order to extend pupils' learning about artists, battles and the physical features of the earth. Pupils talk vividly and enthusiastically about their participation in outdoor adventurous activities such as skiing, water-skiing, canoeing, hill walking and sailing. They also appreciate the extra-curricular activities on offer for them such as gymnastics, volleyball, swimming, orchestra and choir.

The effectiveness of teaching and assessment in meeting the full range of pupils' needs is good. The quality of teaching ranges from satisfactory to outstanding but most is good. There is inconsistency in the way teachers' planning identifies objectives for pupils' learning. Teachers throughout the school know their pupils very well, and because of this they provide learning which takes good account of each individual's needs. Teaching is characterised by a formal style in many lessons where the learning of knowledge is emphasised. In the lower school there are very calm, purposeful classrooms and pupils enjoy good relationships with each other and with the staff. The development of pupils' speaking and listening skills is good due to the way in which teachers allow pupils many opportunities to contribute to the lesson. Pupils' attitudes to learning are first class; they show a strong desire to learn and are enthusiastic and eager for new knowledge and skills. In the upper school, teachers' subject knowledge is excellent and this results in pupils fully engaging in their learning. Pupils bring a wide range of general knowledge and personal enquiry into their learning in lessons; this is because the school successfully encourages pupils to develop as independent learners and to share their experiences with each other. Effective use is made of the school's resources to aid pupils' learning especially in physical education, art and history. The school does not use external forms of tests

or assessments but does carry out frequent internal assessments. The results of these are used well to inform what pupils do next and to build a secure evidence of each pupil's progress. Reports to parents draw extensively on teachers' good knowledge of every pupil's performance. The marking of pupils' work and written feedback in their books, is inconsistent across the school and subjects. Teachers do, however, provide oral feedback aided by the small numbers of pupils in each class.

Pupils make good progress in their learning, especially in creative, social, physical and emotional skills. They enter with skills which are typical for their age. Due to good and effective teaching, they make good progress overall, so that by the time they enter the lower school they have very good creative, social, physical and emotional skills. Mathematical skills are similar to those of most pupils at this age. Speaking and listening skills are excellent. In the lower school, good progress is maintained so that by age 11, the standards of basic skills in English and mathematics are broadly what can be expected of most pupils at this age. Pupils' creative, social, physical and emotional skills are well advanced. In the upper school pupils make good progress overall. Progress is satisfactory in mathematics and exceptionally high in physical education, art, history and in pupils' personal development. The quality of the work is further demonstrated by the fact that all students who apply to university succeed in gaining entry.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

The quality of provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Pupils are confident, independent young people who show immense enjoyment in all aspects of school life. They have a high level of interest and engagement in activities and lessons. This is due to the way the school staff successfully build and nurture pupils' self esteem and confidence. All adults in the school show high levels of interest in the well being of each pupil. Consequently, pupils feel safe and secure and say that staff are very approachable if they have a problem. Pupils are unanimous that there is no bullying in this school. They love school, as shown by the high rates of attendance and their outstanding behaviour. They praised many aspects of the school and feel that they are making good progress. A typical comment states, 'I think the school work here is suited to me and everyone else.' Parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the school, believing 'it is run with such love and a real understanding of children's needs'. Pupils develop as well-rounded individuals with a firm knowledge of the culture of the local, national and global community. The curriculum educates them about other faiths and beliefs.

Safeguarding pupils' welfare, health and safety

The overall welfare, health and safety of pupils are good. Pupils are strongly encouraged to be healthy through the school's extensive programme. The school provides guidance for sex and drug education. Suitable risk assessments are in place to safeguard pupils. Following the last inspection, additional training was arranged for the child protection coordinator. First aid training is also in place. The procedures for recruiting staff including the required criminal checks are suitably in place. The

school does not comply with the requirements of the Disability and Discrimination Act 2002, since it does not have a plan in place which is reviewed regularly. Nor does it ensure that parents are aware of the school's complaints policy.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

The overall effectiveness of EYFS is good. Learning opportunities provide children in Kindergarten with plenty of creative and social activities. Teachers are adept at keeping useful notes on children's work and progress which are used well in their daily planning. All the aspects of the curriculum which were inspected fulfil the requirements of EYFS in the learning and development strands. The provision is good overall and the creative and social aspects are outstanding. Consequently, children are helped to learn and develop effectively. The Kindergarten is a calm environment in which staff are quietly spoken. Children behave very well in response to the staff's high expectations. Speaking and listening skills are promoted effectively so that children are articulate and confident. Children's self esteem is nurtured and blossoms because staff show high levels of care, interest and support for each child. Children's personal development and well being are good. Planning in Kindergarten is good and is carefully linked to the Steiner philosophy about daily rhythm and the creative curriculum. Teaching is good overall, though the questions which children are asked do not always help them to learn as quickly as they could. There is an inclusive ethos so that children feel at ease in their environment. They learn routines quickly and know where to find what they need and how to ask for help. Overall, children's achievement is good. Leadership and management are good and ensure that the Kindergarten provides well for the children's needs. The quality of the welfare, health and safety requirements is good. Staff have first aid training, which is regularly updated but it does not include the paediatric aspects.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school meets all of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended January 2005, with the exception of those listed below.

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the provision of information for parents, carers and others (standard 6) and must:

- ensure that parents are aware they can request the school's complaints procedure (paragraph 6(2) (j)).

In order to comply with the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 2002 the school should devise a three-year accessibility plan.

In order to comply with the welfare requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage the school must:

- Provide paediatric first aid training for staff in the EYFS.

What the school could do to improve further

While not required by the regulations, the school might wish to consider the following points for development:

- Improve the consistency of teachers' planning in the lower school so that learning objectives for pupils are clearly defined.
- Improve the rate of progress which pupils make in mathematics to match the levels of progress made in the creative and physical areas of the curriculum.

Inspection Judgement Recording Form

outstanding	good	satisfactory	inadequate
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The quality of education

Overall quality of education		✓		
How well the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of pupils		✓		
How effective teaching and assessment are in meeting the full range of pupils' needs		✓		
How well pupils make progress in their learning		✓		

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

Quality of provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	✓			
The behaviour of pupils	✓			

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

The overall welfare, health and safety of pupils		✓		
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The quality of the Early Years Foundation Stage provision

How effectively are children in the Early Years Foundation Stage helped to learn and develop?		✓		
How well do children achieve in the Early Years Foundation Stage relative to their starting points and capabilities?		✓		
How good are the personal development and well-being of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage?		✓		
What is the quality of welfare, health and safety of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage?		✓		
How effectively is the provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage led and managed?		✓		
What is the overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage including, where relevant, the quality of childcare?		✓		

School details

Name of school	The Acorn School		
DCSF number	916/6068		
Unique reference number	115808		
Type of school	Independent Co-educational		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	1991		
Age range of pupils	3–19		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 46	Girls: 53	Total: 99
Number on roll (part-time pupils)	Boys: 1	Girls: 4	Total: 5
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need	Boys: 0	Girls: 0	Total: 0
Number of pupils who are looked after	Boys: 0	Girls: 0	Total: 0
Annual fees (day pupils)	£819–6342		
Address of school	Church Street Nailsworth Stroud Gloucestershire GL6 0BP		
Telephone number	01453836508		
Fax number	01453836508		
Email address	info@theacornschool.com		
Headteacher	Mr G Whiting		
Proprietor	Mr G Whiting		
Reporting inspector	John Coleman HMI		
Dates of inspection	22 January 2009		