

# Acorns Primary School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	135347
<b>Local Authority</b>	Lancashire
<b>Inspection number</b>	341639
<b>Inspection dates</b>	20–21 January 2010
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Alastair Younger

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

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<b>Type of school</b>	Special
<b>School category</b>	Community special
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	2–11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	67
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mr David Marland
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mr Steve Artis
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
<b>School address</b>	Moor Park Blackpool Road Preston PR1 6AU
<b>Telephone number</b>	01772 792681
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<b>Email address</b>	Head@acorns.lancs.sch.uk

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## Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. The inspectors spent over 50% of the time allocated to the inspection focussed on observing lessons, talking to pupils and looking at their work, they visited nine lessons and saw all the teachers. They held discussions with the chair of governors, staff and pupils. They observed the school's work, and looked at much of the school's documentation including the school improvement plan, curriculum planning, the minutes of staff and governing body meetings and information relating to the checking of pupils' progress. Fifteen parental questionnaires were analysed, along with seven from pupils and 13 from staff.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- whether those pupils making less than good progress came from any particular group or whether they were individuals facing particularly challenging circumstances
- the quality of teaching and learning in lessons
- the contribution of staff other than senior leaders and managers to the leadership and management of the school.

## Information about the school

Pupils have a very wide range of special educational needs and/or disabilities. These range from moderate to profound learning difficulties and include physical disability and sensory impairment. Many pupils have complex medical conditions. About a quarter of all pupils have autism or related significant communication delay indicated in their statement of special educational need.

The school identifies three main groups of pupils:

- experiential and interactive (mainly with profound and multiple learning difficulties)
- assisted (mainly with severe learning difficulties)
- independent (mainly with moderate learning difficulties)

Nearly all pupils come from Preston and almost one in ten are looked after by the local authority. About a third are from minority ethnic families. Pupils can be admitted at any age. Last year's intake included five children in the Early Years Foundation Stage and six pupils who transferred from mainstream schools.

The school opened in September 2008 following local authority reorganisation.

**Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate**

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

## Inspection judgements

**Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?**

**2**

**The school's capacity for sustained improvement**

**2**

## Main findings

The school fully meets its aim to provide a happy, safe and caring environment for pupils and staff. The quality of care, guidance and support for all pupils is outstanding. Parents are wholeheartedly appreciative of the way that the school is helping their children. 'My child has made tremendous progress academically and socially; I feel that this is because the staff are prepared to go the extra mile to help him' is typical of many glowing comments submitted to inspectors. The school goes out of its way to support parents and help them to play a full and effective part in their children's education. Each pupil who filled in a questionnaire or spoke to inspectors during the inspection, reported that they enjoy school and feel safe.

The overall quality of teaching and learning is good. However, while teachers generally plan lessons well there are times when this good quality planning does not sufficiently extend to those less formal settings which punctuate the school day and that are included as teaching time in the curriculum.

In a short period of time, senior leaders and managers have embedded a strong sense of ambition among staff. All staff are keen to help the school to keep improving. They demonstrate a good range of specialist skills and considerable dedication to their work. Over the course of the past year, rigorous attention to checking on pupils' progress, coupled with accurate self-evaluation, have helped the school to identify where fine-tuning could help to further improvement.

There is a strong sense of community within the school. This is a big improvement on a year ago when some staff reported that there was little cohesion, even within classrooms. Inclusive links with other schools are being developed, but are not yet at the level the headteacher aspires to. At this stage in its development, broader community links are still being forged, but there is currently no comprehensive action plan for the further development of community cohesion. Despite this, the accuracy of self-evaluation and the evident improvement in provision and the impact of effective leadership and management, indicate the school's good capacity for further sustained improvement.

## What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Produce a comprehensive action plan for furthering the school's contribution to community cohesion and include in this the means by which the school intends to evaluate its success.
- Ensure that uniformly good planning extends to all periods of the school day that

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are included as teaching time.

## Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Pupils enjoy their experience of school. In lessons they work hard, behave well and show considerable enthusiasm for learning. As a result, helped by good teaching, they make good progress. As one pupil commented, 'I enjoy school and have lots of friends. I don't always want to do my work but my staff and friends help'.

Children admitted into the Early Years Foundation Stage are nearly always at the very earliest stages of learning and development. Pupils admitted later are often more-able, but it is very unusual on admission for pupils of any age to be working at a level measurable within the National Curriculum.

Pupils in the 'experiential and interactive' group make good progress. This is usually measured in terms of response to prompts or reaction to stimulus. Teachers are very careful to make sure that these signs of progress do not go unnoticed.

Pupils in the 'assisted' group make equally good progress because they receive good, skilled support and tasks are well tailored to their needs. Many of these pupils progress well from a very low starting point to the higher points of scales that record achievement below Level 1 of the National Curriculum

Pupils in the 'independent' group make good progress from low starting points and often reach Level 2 of the National Curriculum before they leave. Some of these pupils are helped through inclusive links with mainstream schools, an initiative that the school is keen to extend.

Great care is taken to promote equality of opportunity. The very small minority of pupils who did not make the progress expected of them last year all had exceptional personal circumstances and came from no particular group. Boys and girls achieve equally well, as do pupils from a wide range of ethnic backgrounds. The small number of pupils looked after by the local authority achieve equally as well as other pupils and occasionally better. The low attendance of a tiny minority is the commonest limiting factor to better progress. This is often related to fragile health or home circumstances. Most pupils, however, attend whenever they can.

Pupils enjoy their nutritious school meals, eat plenty of fruit and understand how important it is to take regular drinks. Those with the greatest physical or learning needs are given skilled support by staff to help them make their needs known. The dining room provides an ideal setting for pupils to develop their social and independence skills and to play an important part in the community of the school. Pupils from the wide range of minority ethnic backgrounds get on very well with one another. They develop an understanding of each other's cultures through activities such as visits to ethnic food shops and different places of worship.

*These are the grades for pupils' outcomes*

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<b>Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment <sup>1</sup>	*
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
<b>The extent to which pupils feel safe</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Pupils' behaviour</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance <sup>1</sup>	3
<b>The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development</b>	<b>2</b>

## How effective is the provision?

The quality of teaching observed during the inspection was good. Monitoring reports suggest that at times it is even better. Teachers manage large staff teams well. At times there are as many adults present in a classroom as there are pupils, but it is rare for any of these adults not to be effectively deployed to help meet individual physical, behavioural or learning needs. These staff teams ensure that pupils always get a warm welcome. As a result, pupils are attentive from the start and keenly motivated to learn. Staff are skilled in promoting communication through the use of different aids, including signing and the use of symbols. A good range of physical resources is well used to help pupils to learn and remember. Computers and other technological aids are used well, often as a means to promote independent learning. Pupils are suitably challenged because teachers have a good understanding of what they have already learned and remembered. Assessment procedures are generally good, with staff taking care to record every sign of progress however small. Occasionally, time at the very end of lessons is not sufficiently well used to draw the lesson to a close, celebrate pupils' achievement and prepare them for the next experience.

The curriculum is well organised and provides a good, well-balanced range of experiences. Cross-curricular provision is developing well. The most important and best developed part of this is the way in which personal, social and health education is seen

<sup>1</sup> The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low.

\* In some special schools inspectors do not make a judgement about attainment in relation to expectations of the pupils' age.

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as a core component of the curriculum and is consistently promoted in every situation throughout the school day. Many activities in and out of the classroom enrich pupils' learning experiences and add considerable enjoyment to their experience of school. There are frequent visits and a good programme of visitors, such as an Indian dancer who contributed to a recent Bollywood day. The curriculum is successfully extended through a wide range of after-school clubs which are attended by all pupils and much enjoyed. As in many schools of this type, the timetable is punctuated by valuable short sessions, such as those where social development, communication and eating programmes form the learning focus. These are considered to be teaching time, but the planning for them is weaker than for other lessons because learning objectives tend to be less precise and assessment of progress less rigorous. At times these sessions focus more on reinforcing previous learning than promoting that which is new.

The provision of outstanding care, guidance and support is central to the success of the school. Excellent attention is paid to individual needs. When pupils are seen to be struggling for any reason they are rapidly given extra support by school staff or, when needed, by a wide range of other agencies and professionals, whose work is very efficiently coordinated by the school. Great care is taken to involve parents in all important decisions and to help them to contribute to their children's education and development. Rigorous, effective safeguarding procedures are in place. Particularly reassuring support is given to the most medically fragile pupils. Parents are unanimous in believing that their children are being well prepared for future changes, whether they be movements within the school or changing school. Inspectors agree.

*These are the grades for the quality of provision*

<b>The quality of teaching</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
<b>The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of care, guidance and support</b>	<b>1</b>

**How effective are leadership and management?**

Over the course of the past year, senior leaders, managers and governors have been exceptionally successful in pulling together a team of staff, recruited from three different schools. A year ago, several staff expressed discontent over organisational issues relating to the formation of the new school. Their concerns have been successfully assuaged and morale is now high. A sense of optimism runs through the school, with staff expressing pride in working there and sharing a strong desire to make pupils' lives better. Governors are playing a full role in contributing to this. Rigorous monitoring and accurate evaluation, to which governors and parents contribute, lead to the early identification of ways in which improvement can continue. Teaching is good; monitoring

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suggests that it continues to improve and, with it, pupils' achievement. Teachers with a wide range of skills have been helped to develop further skills to work effectively with groups of pupils they had not previously encountered. Training has been good, but is becoming increasingly restricted by pressures on the school budget. In just over a year, the school has established good links with several mainstream schools and is keen to develop these further. Equality of opportunity is central to the ethos of the school. It is strongly promoted and carefully evaluated. There is no discrimination. Good practice in implementing all aspects of safeguarding prevails. Parents express total confidence in the school. Close working with many other professionals and agencies contributes well to pupils feeling, and being, safe. The school has been exceptionally effective in promoting cohesion within its own boundary. Pupils and staff from a wide range of backgrounds get on well with each other. Beyond this its contribution diminishes as the definition of community widens. There is currently no clear action plan for the ways in which the school intends to address this but there is a keen commitment to produce one.

*These are the grades for leadership and management*

<b>The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement</b>	<b>1</b>
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
<b>The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money</b>	<b>2</b>

## Early Years Foundation Stage

Children entering the Early Years Foundation Stage often do so at a considerable disadvantage in life. The nature of their needs and difficulties has often been evident from birth. Attainment on entry is usually at the very earliest stages of learning and development, often measured in response to stimulus. Increasing numbers of children are being admitted when, from a very early age, they are identified as not having the



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communication skills expected of children their age. From these points of disadvantage children make good progress because they are well taught in a stimulating environment. At present, this does not include sufficiently effective use or development of the outdoor learning area. Leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage are good in that they secure a strong identity and sense of purpose. However, roles and responsibilities are indistinctly identified. Children receive the same exceptional care, guidance and support that are accorded all other pupils in the school.

*These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage*

<b>Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2

**Views of parents and carers**

Parents are strongly supportive of the school. They feel fully involved in the school's work to help their children. Typical of several comments made by parents about the school was 'It's got some lovely teachers and assistants and it's a welcoming environment for both children and parents'. Almost no parents expressed any concern about the school and when they did, it related not to the school as it is, but to the time before the local authority reorganised provision. Inspectors fully agree with the views of parents.

### Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Acorns Primary School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspector received 15 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 67 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	10	67	5	33	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	10	67	5	33	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	10	67	4	27	1	7	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	8	53	6	40	1	7	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	10	67	4	27	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	9	60	5	33	1	7	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	9	60	6	40	0	0	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	7	47	8	53	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	11	73	3	20	1	7	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	8	53	6	40	1	7	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	10	67	5	33	0	0	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	9	60	6	40	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	10	67	5	33	0	0	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

## Glossary

### What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

### Overall effectiveness of schools inspected between September 2007 and July 2008

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	39	58	3	0
Primary schools	13	50	33	4
Secondary schools	17	40	34	9
Sixth forms	18	43	37	2
Special schools	26	54	18	2
Pupil referral units	7	55	30	7
All schools	15	49	32	5

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above were reported in The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2007/08.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

## Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.</li><li>■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.</li><li>■ The quality of teaching.</li><li>■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships.</li><li>■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.</li></ul>
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

**This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.**



23 January 2010

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Acorns Primary School, Preston, PR1 6AU

We thoroughly enjoyed our visit to your school the other day. You made us very welcome and it was lovely to see so many smiling faces.

You told us how much you enjoyed school and how safe you felt and we could see why because you are exceptionally well cared for and supported. You play your part by being polite and well behaved

We saw you being well taught; with the result that you are happy, eager learners and you are making good progress.

It was lovely to see how enthusiastic you were to join in all of the activities offered to you, including the after-school clubs.

It seemed to us that all of your staff are working to help you towards successful futures. The people at the top, especially your headteacher, should take a lot of credit for this.

There are two things we want the school to do better. They are:

- to help you meet up with and learn more about people outside Preston
- to make sure that all your learning is well planned.

Well done, you are delightful children and you go to a good school.

Thank you on behalf of my colleagues.

Yours sincerely,

Mr Alastair Younger

Lead inspector

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