



The Acorn School

Curriculum Policy

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Overview

The Acorn School offers its students a diverse and balanced curriculum that integrates intellectual, practical, physical, and artistic development. The school's curriculum has been developed over time and draws its content and teaching styles from a variety of educational models from across the world, resulting in a dynamic and interesting learning environment, that develops the students into intellectually-able and free-thinking individuals who are ready to enter the world. The curriculum is designed to broaden as the students journey through their stages of development and this is mirrored through the pedagogical approach and curriculum in each class from 1 - 12. The curriculum is planned and adapted to take account of the ages, aptitudes and individual needs of all pupils, including pupils with special educational needs and/or an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP). Reasonable adjustments and appropriate support are made to enable pupils to access the curriculum and make progress from their individual starting points.

The Lower School (Classes 1-8) Programme

In the lower school, each class is led by their Class Teacher who oversees the children's development through their own continuing observations and tracking of the children's progress. They meet their changing needs in a creative and living way, bringing them challenges as well as encouragement and joy in their work. The Class Teacher teaches the main lessons and subject lessons, with the exception of mathematics, english, physical education, languages, Choir, art and craft, which are taught by specialist teachers from Class 3 upwards. Class teachers stay with the same class group of children through much of their lower and middle school journey. In some situations, where the class teacher has the skills and experience to take a class from Class 1 to Class 8, they do, but there is always a review before the class enters the middle school to ensure that the teacher has the ability, and subject-knowledge to continue to lead the class through the middle school. Where it is mutually decided that this is not the case, a specialist middle school teacher takes on the class, leading them through their transition from lower to upper school.

The Lower School offers a broad, rich and balanced programme of subjects and activities, designed to enhance a student's learning experience and developmental stage by providing meaningful engagement and interactions within the classroom. A varied range of subject lessons are headed by main lessons, which are concentrated blocks of study where a particular subject is explored every morning for 3-4 weeks.

The Main Lesson

These thematic lesson blocks allow pupils to explore an unparalleled range of subjects for 3-4 weeks at a time, in an intensive study approach that enables them to attain lasting knowledge. Taking place each morning in two-hour sessions, main lessons follow a 'three-day rhythm' where new material is presented on the first day, recalled on the second and written up in the students' own words on the third day, in a book which they beautifully illustrate. This methodology offers the students the time and tools to process information and transform it into knowledge by way of active discussion, reflection and writing in their own words. This approach effectively synchronises the cognitive, creative and social aspects of classroom learning, and so provides an enriched experience. Pupils are inspired to be inquisitive, and to actively participate in class, and so develop their confidence in communicating their thoughts and ideas with others and creating high quality work that they can be proud of, both academically and artistically. Main Lessons often involve

singing, music, spelling and grammar, recitation, movement, painting and stories as well as writing and drawing.

Subject Lessons

Subject lessons in mathematics, english, physical education, music, handwork, craft, painting, form drawing, foreign languages, gardening and social education are introduced at an appropriate age to meet the developmental needs of the children. Subject lessons are integrated into the main lesson's themes and are sometimes taught by the Class Teacher, but often by other specialist teachers as the children move through the lower school. Each day's timetable is structured so that there is a healthy balance between intellectual, artistic and physical activity, as far as practical considerations allow.

- Please refer to the **Lower School Curriculum Map** for a Main Lesson and Subject Lesson Overview

The Upper School (Classes 9-12) Programme

Throughout classes 9 and 10, during the foundation years of The Acorn Upper School, the students are taught a diverse curriculum with an equal balance between the sciences, humanities and creative subjects with teaching taking place through main lessons and subject lessons. Students are assessed thoroughly through written tests, coursework, including main lesson book work, written assignments and reports, presentations and practical work.

These assessments are gathered through the assessment framework NZCSE from Class 10 – Level 1, Class 11 – Level 2, and Class 12 – Level 3. The students' grades achieved are awarded with the New Zealand Certificate of Steiner Education (NZCSE). The NZCSE is an internationally recognised qualification and is The Acorn School's recognised alternative to GCSEs and A level assessments. For more information on NZCSE link: <https://www.sedt.co.nz> See also Acorn School's Assessment Policy.

The students' progress in the school's programme sees them undertake higher level studies in three to five specialist subjects of their choice, in addition to continuing to study a number of compulsory core subjects through the Main lesson programme. These include a select number of humanities and science main lessons, art, craft, and physical and outdoor education. Through this curriculum, the students are guided towards their future aspirations. All students are required to continue to study maths to L1/L2 and English to L3 with the option to follow an applied maths / English for life programme, where these aren't their academic focus.

During these final two years at the school, students will increasingly take on self-directed study in addition to their taught subjects, under the guidance of the upper school teaching staff. This enables them to build on the knowledge gained from subject and main lessons, and extend their academic achievement in their chosen subjects to a higher level in preparation for university study. Through engaging in self-directed studies the students gain skills that will allow them to excel in undergraduate study, or their chosen career, including independent research, self-motivation, and the ability to manage their time and meet deadlines. In the final year the students undertake a Class 12 project which is a teacher facilitated self-led study which benefits students by helping them to develop their confidence and decision-making abilities, so that they go on to be university students or employees who actively engage and are able to make insightful contributions to discussions with tutors, peers and colleagues.

- Please refer to the **Upper School Curriculum** SEDT assessment booklets for a Main Lesson and Subject Lesson Overview/Assessment Learning Objectives.

Core Elements that support academic development

Physical Education

A principal element of the Acorn ethos is that health and bodily fitness are essential for life. By avoiding a competitive approach to physical movement, we remove the pressure that may undermine the confidence of our students and discourage them from participating. Instead, we encourage students' natural propensity for physical activity and emphasise the personal enjoyment and sense of achievement that comes from leading a healthy and active life. Through educating our students on the merits of exercise and diet, as well as providing countless opportunities to be active, we help them to build a positive, proactive lifestyle.

Every Acorn student begins the day with a session of brisk physical activity, known as 'morning movement'. These 15-minute sessions help students to get into an active, alert frame of mind that prepares them for the day's lessons.

The school's commitment to physical education centres on gymnastics and small-team games, and a progressive curriculum is in place so that students of all abilities can participate and enjoy physical movement.

The school supports children enrolling in positive after school activities and sports where they are beneficial to the child's development and social life and where such activities align with parental and the school's core values. Our teachers are a great source of information about local initiatives and are more than happy to help parents and students make connections with local clubs.

Outdoor Education Trips

One of the fundamental aspects of the school is its emphasis on sports and outdoor education. It feeds into the core belief that for human beings to realise their full potential, being equipped with a physically fit and healthy body is vital.

The school's approach of integrating physical and outward-bound activities into pupils' everyday lives means that our young people have the chance to regularly go on trips that include camping, hiking, surfing, and orienteering, among other things. Through undertaking these outdoor activities as a group, the students are able to grow their leadership skills and physical capability, as well as build on their friendships with classmates.

The following trips mark the core of our Upper School outward-bound programme, with many other trips being arranged throughout the year throughout the school.

- During the first weeks of the Autumn term, the upper school students pack their camping equipment, their surfboards and wetsuits and head down to the picturesque north coast of Devon for the September **Surfing Weekend**



- **Winter Camp** takes place at a centre in southwest Wales and is an ideal time for students to enjoy spending time together away from the classroom, and bonding over laughs and games, whether it is playing cards in the cosy warmth of the main hall or holding a volleyball match in the courtyard. The weather doesn't always permit lots of outdoor adventures, but we have trips in spring and summer for that. Instead, this camp is much more about the students coming together and having a great time. On fine days, they may be out hiking in the beautiful, wild countryside of Wales, or catching fish on a deep-sea fishing trip.
- The action-packed **Summer Camp** is an exciting 5-day trip, usually to Pembrokeshire, but this time under summer conditions, where students enjoy many exciting experiences including surfing, beach days, climbing, deep-sea fishing and other activities.

Between the exciting residential trips outlined above, upper school students have regular adventure days (compulsory) and optional outdoor trips providing activities such as mountain biking, climbing, mountain walking, water sports and camping.

Cultural Trips

Understanding the world through exploring different cultures is a significant part of the upper school education at Acorn. We aim to help students develop an open-minded and on-going interest in perspectives and experiences that differ from their own, and so broaden their horizons. Through partaking in a range of cultural experiences, our students learn to appreciate the role of values, traditions, and ideas in shaping an individual and a community, which in turn serves to inspire them to ask thoughtful, considerate questions. Local trips might include visits to the theatre, museums, and exhibitions, while older students benefit from a History of Art tour that takes them to Italy, a French trip, visiting libraries and volunteering opportunities in the local community.

School Events

Festival days are an important part of school life and bring us together as a community. For the younger children, celebrating the various events throughout the year enables them to naturally relate to the cyclical rhythm of the changing seasons and deepen their appreciation of nature's ways. By observing these seasonal changes and engaging in activities revolving around them, our younger Acorns experience nature in a way where the practical and intuitive come together to bring about a sense of understanding that is felt both innately and consciously.

For older students, festival days are occasions for reflection and resolution, as well as being a chance to have greater involvement in the school community. With changes occurring rapidly and significantly as they shift into adolescence and early adulthood, it is important for these older Acorn students to feel that they have the space to breathe and acknowledge the changes, both personal and external. Festival days help to mark the pace of the school year and offer students the chance to reflect on how far they have come in the past year and what they would like to aim for as they move forward.

Festivals are also times when the entire community can come together and enjoy creating a shared experience of joy and celebration. Whether it is coming together to illuminate the darkening days of the

winter months or to delight in the refreshing signs of spring and summer sunshine, these annual celebrations are central to sustaining the community's sense of vitality and togetherness.

At The Acorn School, we observe festivals primarily drawn from the Christian calendar and other faiths are observed as represented by our diverse local and national and international community, but they are treated more as communal days than religious occasions. We value respect, inclusivity, diversity, and open-mindedness in our community, and we regard these special days in the year as opportunities to encourage the children to act with greater empathy and understanding of those around them.

The curriculum supports pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and actively promotes the fundamental British values of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, and mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs. Further detail is set out in the school's Fundamental British Values and Ethos documentation.

A fuller description of the festival days and their meaning can be found appendix 1.

Curriculum resources that link with this policy

The Acorn School Curriculum Documents:

- Lower School Curriculum Map: Main Lesson and Subject Lesson Overview
- Upper School Curriculum SEDT assessment booklets: for a Main Lesson and Subject Lesson Overview/Assessment Learning Objectives.

Steiner Education Australia, 'Australian Steiner Curriculum Framework Documents'

Kevin Avison, Tobias Richter and Martyn Rawson 'The Tasks and Content of the Steiner-Waldorf Curriculum'.

Appendix 1

Information on Trips, Festivals and Events Through the School Year:

Attendance at school functions is mandatory for all students of the school (unless stated otherwise). Students should present themselves in line with the school dress code at all events, festivals, or occasions where they are representing the school. Some festivals and events have a recommended dress code included in the detail below. Parents are actively encouraged to attend all community events and extended family and friends are always warmly welcomed.

Each festival revolves around particular themes that inform children's dress on the festival day, as well as some of their activities in lessons during that time. We have included a brief overview of the main festivals, events and trips that take place during the school year, below.

Autumn Term Trips, Festivals and Events (for dates, please refer to the annual school calendar).

September Surfing Weekend (Upper School students)

During the first weeks of the Autumn term, the upper school students pack their camping equipment, their surfboards and wetsuits and head down to the picturesque North Devon, or Pembrokeshire for the September Surfing Weekend.

Michaelmas (Late September - Michaelmas Day is on 29th):

Michaelmas celebrates the story of Saint Michael the Archangel, who fought and defeated the forces of darkness, symbolised here as a dragon. The story of Saint Michael is used to remind us to find the light within ourselves, as the days grow shorter and the shadows longer.

The festival coincides with harvest time in the traditional agricultural calendar, and this time of year is generally seen as the point when the seasons change, with autumn steadily giving way to winter. In the week leading up to the festival, the children will bring in various harvest produce that will be kept in the hall in a beautiful autumnal display. At the end of the week, the produce will be passed on to local organisations that provide food for less fortunate families in the area.

Kite Flying and Picnic

Following the harvest festival, there is an afternoon of picnicking and kite-flying on the nearby Selsley Common and all families are warmly invited to attend.

Michaelmas Challenges (Late October - the last day of the first half of the autumn term)

The Michaelmas Challenges are a celebration of the progress that students have made in their physical education lessons. Each class performs the skills they have mastered in their lessons to the parents and community. Parents are encouraged to attend this great event (and perhaps even join in!).

Martinmas (11th November)

Martinmas Day is held in honour of Saint Martin, a Roman soldier who later found his place in monkhood. While still a soldier, he famously split his cloak in two so that he might give half to a beggar suffering through the bitter cold of winter. The story and its themes of charity and compassion are a natural continuation of the themes found in Saint Michael's story, and they encourage the children to be conscious and considerate of others.



Evening lantern walk: The festival is celebrated with an evening lantern walk. The children in the lower school make lanterns at school and also prepare Martinmas songs, which they sing during the lantern walk.

Winter Camp (Late November – Early December) (Upper School Students)

Winter Camp takes place at the Penquoit Centre in southwest Wales and is an ideal time for Upper School students to enjoy spending time together away from the classroom, and bonding over laughs and games, whether it is playing cards in the cosy warmth of the main hall or holding a volleyball match in the courtyard. The weather doesn't always permit lots of outdoor adventures, but we have trips in spring and summer for that. Instead, this camp is much more about the students coming together and having a great time. On fine days, they may be out walking in the beautiful, wild countryside of Wales, or catching fish on a deep-sea fishing trip.

Advent & Christmas (Late November – December)

Advent Assemblies In the weeks leading up to Christmas, the Advent period is observed through short daily assemblies that take place first thing in the morning. An Advent reading will be followed by carol singing, and all parents are welcome to attend. Starting each morning in this collective spirit is a particularly warming way of coming together as a community and following the days into the Christmas period.

Advent Spiral (The first Sunday in Advent).

The Advent Spiral that is often considered the highlight of this festive period., the Advent Spiral is a very special occasion where the students, starting from the youngest and going all the way up through the school, walk a spiral made of evergreens and light candles which they place along the spiral. The entire festival takes place in silence with only the sound of a harp to accompany those walking the spiral. The atmosphere created by the sustained hush and the candlelight offers a magical experience.

Dress Code: All students should be dressed smartly, in line with the school's dress code. For safety reasons, all students should wear trousers and long hair must be tied back.

Christmas Fair (Saturday 10-2pm in early December).

The school hosts annual Christmas and Summer Fairs, which all families are asked to attend and support, with invitations open to extended family and friends. As we are a small school the success of the community events relies on the support of the parents to help set-up, to host the tea/coffee shops and to help with the stalls and games as needed.

Christmas Fair planning meetings have been put in the school's annual events calendar and we'd be grateful of your support.

Carol Concert (Last Wednesday evening of Autumn term)

Dress code: All students are encouraged to dress smartly, usually in suits and dresses. This is also an opportunity for the parents and community to dress up.

Shepherds' Play (Last Friday evening of Autumn term).

The Christmas period is rounded off with the Shepherds' Play on the final day of term in the evening, in which the staff delight the children with their annual retelling of the Nativity story.

Spring Term Trips, Festivals and Events

Candlemas (2nd February)

Traditionally a Christian festival, Candlemas is known for heralding in the first signs of spring and is celebrated by younger classes with songs and activities.

Easter (Late March/April)

The Easter period is celebrated by younger classes through various stories and activities that are woven into their daily curriculum and underline the themes of renewal, Spring, and fresh beginnings. Children may engage in activities such as decorating eggs and nature walks that allow them to discover the changing seasons for themselves, and better appreciate nature's rhythm.

Easter Concert (see annual events calendar for date)

The Easter concert is an opportunity for students to perform to the community, whether that be on personal instruments they learn outside of school, in one of the school choirs, or by singing solo.

Dress code: All students are encouraged to dress smartly, usually in suits and dresses. This is also an opportunity for the parents and community to dress up.

Summer Term Trips, Festivals and Events

May Day (1st May)

A morning of maypole dancing ushers in the month and the start of summer. Children will dress in white with handmade garlands on their heads as they take to the coloured ribbons to weave patterns around the maypole. All parents are invited to attend and join in with the singing as the children dance their way into a fresh new month.

Dress code: All children should wear white and children in Classes 1-5 should wear handmade garlands on their heads.

Whitsun (Seventh Sunday after Easter)

Whitsun celebrates the festival of Pentecost and the spirit of togetherness, symbolised by white doves. Lower School students will dress in white and explore the themes of understanding, openness, and community in their daily activities.

Dress Code: Children should dress in white.

St. John's Fire (Late June)

At the height of summer, the entire school gathers in a nearby field to light a bonfire that symbolises the fires of hope within us all. Children of the younger classes will be asked to wear red or orange on the day of the fire and they will prepare little 'wish parcels' that they will throw into the flames. Families can enjoy a picnic afterwards in the warmth of the midsummer sun and the fire.

Dress code: Children should wear something red or orange.

Summer Camp (Early July for middle and upper school Students)

The action-packed Summer Camp is an exciting 3-5 day trip to Pembrokeshire, but this time under summer conditions where students enjoy many exciting experiences including surfing, beach days, deep-sea fishing and other activities.

Graduation Evening (Parents Social Evening when there is no graduating class) - in the last fortnight of the summer term

A Graduation Evening for the year's graduating students (Class 12) is the high point of the Acorn community's calendar. This is an adult only evening and an opportunity for the community dress up for the occasion and hear the experiences of our magnificent final year students as they depart the school for the next stage of their educational journey.