

Inspection of The Acorn School

Church Street, Nailsworth, Stroud, Gloucestershire GL6 0BP

Inspection dates: 23 to 25 May 2023

Overall effectiveness

Outstanding

The quality of education

Outstanding

Behaviour and attitudes

Outstanding

Personal development

Outstanding

Leadership and management

Outstanding

Sixth-form provision

Outstanding

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Good

Does the school meet the independent school standards?

Yes

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils describe their school as a very safe and warm place to be. They note that staff always check on how they are feeling and that this makes them feel cared for. Pupils describe the school as feeling like a family in which everyone knows each other well. Pupils see learning as 'fun' but recognise that the work set is challenging and makes them think.

Pupils enjoy the many activities that take place outdoors and beyond the school. There is a huge variety of these. For example, there are winter and summer camps. Pupils learn practical skills and face significant challenges during such events. They undertake activities, such as orienteering, that rapidly develop their independence.

Staff teach pupils to understand and respect the differences between people. As a result, pupils are extremely courteous and kind to each other. They are very tolerant of others and readily challenge discrimination. There is a high level of trust between pupils and between pupils and staff. Pupils are exceptionally well motivated. Learning is not disrupted by poor behaviour. The school is a very calm and orderly place. Pupils say that bullying never happens. They say that if it did, staff would stop it quickly and ensure that it did not re-occur.

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

The school's curriculum is very ambitious for all pupils. This includes those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). It is inspired by the work of Rudolf Steiner, the national curriculum and educational research. It enables pupils to make very strong progress during their time in the school.

Staff use assessment precisely as a key aspect of teaching and learning. This enables them to know when pupils do not understand or have misconceptions. Pupils receive helpful feedback, which they consider and act on. The impact of the curriculum is clearly evident in pupils' standards of reading, writing, drawing and illustration. Pupils take great pride in their work.

The curriculum in the sixth form is deep and broad. It is academically demanding, and students have very strong subject and cross-curricular knowledge. The wider programme is well-developed, and students show high levels of self-awareness and awareness of others. They support younger pupils and are committed to the school's ethos.

In the lower school, teachers focus on the development of pupils by nurturing their artistic, physical and creative talents. Priority is also given to pupils' enjoyment of fairy tales and stories. This approach, combined with the systematic teaching of phonics, is very effective. Pupils learn to read quickly. Throughout the school, pupils read with fluency. Pupils with SEND are very well supported. Pupils who fall behind rapidly catch-up with their peers.

The school's values are woven through every aspect of its provision. These characterise the quality of relationships. These values are understood by pupils. As a result, pupils behave well, their attitudes to learning are very strong and they are highly motivated. Teachers are enthusiastic. They have excellent subject knowledge and expertise, which inspires the pupils.

Leaders are strongly committed to the personal development of their pupils. This is planned both within and beyond the classroom. Leaders focus on the needs of individuals through a group and whole-school approach. There is a vast range of trips and activities planned for all classes. For example, in addition to the class camp, there are termly adventure days and orienteering days. Pupils are enthusiastic about kayaking, swimming, surfing and teamwork in general.

The high-quality careers education programme is securely embedded across the school. It is delivered throughout the curriculum and through weekly dedicated lessons. For example, outside speakers are frequent. A wide range of adults come to speak to the pupils about their careers, lives and experiences. The programme of personal development continues into the sixth form. Students feel well informed about keeping themselves safe and being well prepared for the next stages of their education. All sixth-form students are looking forward to continuing their learning at university next year.

Leaders and staff work very closely with parents, who are viewed as co-educators. Parents are frequent and regular visitors to the school. They attend weekly assemblies and are extremely positive about what the school provides for their children.

Staff describe their workload as manageable. They feel that leaders are very approachable and highly considerate of their well-being. They value the training and development that they receive.

The proprietors and the school's leaders work closely together. They share a strong vision for the school and take effective actions to enable it to work very well in practice. These have ensured that the Independent School Standards are met.

The school complies with schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders are very vigilant for any safeguarding concerns in the school. They provide good-quality training for staff, on a regular basis. Everyone knows how to recognise and respond to pupils' needs. Staff also know what to expect as a result. There is efficient and well organised follow-up to any concerns raised. Leaders publish suitable information about safeguarding on the school's website.

An external adviser evaluates leaders' approach to safeguarding. This process checks that the school's systems work well and that they are understood by staff. Leaders and the proprietor have received training to ensure that they employ staff suitable to work with children and young people.

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 and carers 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	115808
DfE registration number	916/6068
Local authority	Gloucestershire
Inspection number	10267606
Type of school	Other independent school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	6 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	66
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	6
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Graeme Whiting
Headteacher	Christine Cook and Sarah Whiting
Annual fees (day pupils)	£7,371 to £11,620
Telephone number	01453 836508
Website	www.theacornschool.com
Email address	contact@theacornschool.com
Dates of previous inspection	22 to 24 January 2019

Information about this school

- The Acorn School is a co-educational, non-selective independent day school.
- The school has been managed by the proprietors since it was established in 1991. The school does not have a governing body.
- The school is operated by The Acorn School Ltd. The proprietors run the school together. One of the proprietors continues to teach in the school.
- The co-headteachers took over the day-to-day running of the school in September 2022.
- The lower school operates for pupils between the ages of six and 14, when pupils transfer to the upper school, which includes the sixth form.

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.

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in the following subjects: early reading, English, mathematics and history. For each deep dive, inspectors met with subject leaders, looked at curriculum plans, visited a sample of lessons, looked at a range of pupils' work and held discussions with teachers and pupils.
- The lead inspector heard children reading to a familiar adult and reading aloud in classes.
- Inspectors met with curriculum leaders and looked more widely at documentation and visited other subject areas.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher and other members of the leadership team.
- The lead inspector met with the proprietors and members of the Transitional Board, who are supporting the school's proposed change of status to a 'not for profit' organisation. This inspection considered that process.
- Inspectors examined the school's arrangements for safeguarding by meeting with the designated leads for safeguarding. They also scrutinised policies, procedures and record-keeping and reviewed the safeguarding checks made on staff when they are recruited.

- Inspectors spoke to pupils around the school site and held meetings with boys, girls and a mixed group of pupils.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of school documents, including policies and record-keeping for behaviour management, exclusions and attendance.
- Inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted Parent View, the online inspection questionnaire for parents, including the free-text comments.

Inspection team

Malcolm Willis, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Hilary Goddard

Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
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