

# Little Acorns School

London Beach Farm, Ashford Road, Tenterden, Kent, TN30 6SR

**Inspection dates** 14–16 May 2013

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>2</b>
Pupils' achievement	Good	2
Pupils' behaviour and personal development	Good	2
Quality of teaching	Good	2
Quality of curriculum	Good	2
Pupils' welfare, health and safety	Good	2
Leadership and management	Good	2

## Summary of key findings

### This school is good because

- The quality of teaching is consistently good and ensures that all pupils make good progress with their learning, often from low starting points.
- Pupils are interested in the imaginative and creative lessons which they experience every day; as a result their behaviour is good.
- All members of staff have an excellent understanding of the next steps in learning required for each individual pupil.
- The school is a very safe place for pupils, extremely well supported by high levels of cooperation between the education and care staff.
- The good leadership and management of the school ensure that everyone has a shared focus on improving teaching, the lives of pupils and preparing them well for the future.

### It is not yet outstanding because

- Not all pupils are making rapid and continuous progress in the subjects studied.
- The effective evaluations of all aspects of school life are not articulated in a comprehensive school improvement plan.

### Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school meets schedule 1 of The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010, as amended by The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2012 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements.

## Information about this inspection

- The school was inspected following one day's notice.
- Eight lessons were observed, taught by three teachers and supported by a number of additional staff.
- Discussions were held with the headteacher, a number of members of staff and with all pupils.
- A range of documents were read, including school policies, individual pupils' learning plans and progress records, and samples of their work.
- Additional information was considered from seven questionnaires returned by staff. There were no results displayed for responses to the Ofsted Parent View website.

## Inspection team

David Young, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

## Full report

### Information about this school

- Little Acorns School opened in 1999, and is part of a small therapeutic community that specialises in working with pupils who have severe behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. The school does not provide alternative provision.
- The school is owned by Choice Lifestyles and is registered to take boys and girls in the age range five to 14 years.
- There are eight pupils, aged seven to 12 years, attending the school and all are resident at the aligned children's home.
- Five pupils have statements of special educational needs related to their difficulties and learning needs.
- Key Stage 2 pupils are taught together in the nurture group, and those in Key Stage 3 in the senior class.
- The care provision was inspected at the same time and is the subject of a separate report.
- The school's last full inspection was in January 2010.

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

- Devise strategies to accelerate and monitor the development of the literacy skills of individual pupils in Key Stage 3.
- Draw on the school's assessment records to create a summary document for each pupil which displays, in an accessible format, evidence of the extent of their progress over time in English, mathematics and science.
- Ensure that effective procedures for the evaluation of all aspects of the work of the school are taken forward in a current and widely shared school plan for improvement.

## Inspection judgements

### Pupils' achievement

**Good**

Pupils, including those with statements of special educational needs, make good progress over time with their learning in both classes. This is a direct reflection of the quality of teaching and of the curriculum provided. Each individual pupil has unique emotional and social barriers to learning and the majority are working at levels of attainment below the national average. The school's records indicate that overall pupils' rates of progress from low starting points in literacy and numeracy mostly match and sometimes exceed national expectations. However, the lowest attaining pupils in Key Stage 3 are not currently progressing at a consistently good rate with their literacy. Pupils demonstrate good achievement in a range of individual skills through the externally accredited unit award scheme, where a number of certificates have been achieved. There is a good emphasis on the development of learning across a range of subjects and individual pupils achieve well, for example, in humanities, art and music. The majority of pupils make good progress over time with the personal qualities required to concentrate, persevere, take responsibility and prepare for the future.

### Pupils' behaviour and personal development

**Good**

Pupils' behaviour in classrooms and around the school is mostly good. They make good progress with the development of their emotional and social skills, enabling them to benefit over time from the wide range of opportunities provided by the school. The quality of relationships between staff and pupils is outstanding and the staff have an excellent understanding of the personalities and attributes of each individual. Excellent handover arrangements, and continuous dialogue between home and school, provide a secure context within which behaviour and attitudes are managed consistently. Staff demonstrate excellent patience and resilience in helping pupils to manage their own frustrations and anger. High levels of supervision ensure that pupils do not experience any bullying and any incidents of unacceptable behaviour are quickly corrected by staff intervention. Attendance and punctuality to lessons are good. The development of self-confidence and independence is given a high priority, supported well by a realistic understanding of how challenging this is for the majority of pupils. Staff intervene appropriately to ensure that any lapses in behaviour do not interfere with their learning and are extremely vigilant about their personal welfare. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Good opportunities are provided for pupils to learn about other beliefs and cultures nationally and overseas and pupils are helped to develop respect for other people and communities. They enjoy opportunities to engage in challenging learning involving new experiences, such as learning Japanese or counting in Punjabi. Off-site trips, including to local sites such as the church and the woods, contribute effectively to the development of reflective and creative skills. Regular trips to the library, to museums and a variety of locations of historical and cultural significance contribute effectively to pupils' understanding of the society in which they are growing up and of British services and institutions.

### Quality of teaching

**Good**

The quality of teaching is good and contributes to pupils' good progress. A major strength of the teaching is the extent to which individual pupils' strengths and weaknesses in learning styles and achievement are understood by staff. This knowledge is used to support some outstanding preparation of different learning activities to meet the needs of individual pupils, particularly in the nurture group. In both the senior and nurture groups, colourful displays of pupils' work and a wide range of interesting visual resources are used effectively to support and extend learning. Pupils in the senior group are provided with excellent opportunities to develop teamwork skills and are expected to be responsive to each other's strengths and needs, even when they find this difficult.

A combination of good humour, creative ideas and constant encouragement enables all pupils in the senior class to make steady progress across a range of subjects. Pupils in the nurture group benefit from excellent staff support, either individually or working in pairs. Every activity is carefully planned to make sure that each individual pupil can achieve. Expectations are high and many activities are challenging but interest levels are such that pupils persevere and maintain their concentration extremely well. There is an appropriate emphasis on the development of skills in literacy and numeracy at levels appropriate to each individual pupil. Pupils in the senior class respond and cooperate best when taught together as a group and this results in mostly good learning for all pupils. However, it places some restrictions on the speed at which lower attaining pupils make progress with their literacy. Pupils in both classes are attentive and engaged as a result of interesting, creative and imaginative approaches to learning. Pupils' behaviour in the classrooms is largely managed through effective engagement in learning. Any incidents are managed well and are not allowed to have a disruptive impact on the learning of others. Teachers have an excellent understanding of the levels at which pupils are working and their targets for improvement, underpinned by effective use of consistent whole-school procedures. These assess pupils' individual levels of attainment at regular intervals, but are not displayed in a way which enables staff to readily monitor the extent of individual pupils' progress over time.

### Quality of curriculum

**Good**

The quality of the curriculum is good. Pupils have access to a wide range of imaginative and memorable learning experiences across the full range of required subjects. Teachers link and integrate learning from a number of subject areas into themes and projects which pupils enjoy. 'Crossing the River Amazon safely' or constructing individual items of headgear are examples of the interesting activities which provide pupils with opportunities to develop and display a range of personal and teamwork skills. The quality of teachers' planning is excellent. Activities are varied and involve a wide range of learning styles. There is an appropriate emphasis on the teaching of essential skills in literacy and numeracy, and reinforcement of learning is thorough. Pupils' individual statements of special educational needs are taken into account effectively in the production of individual education plans which guide both the planning of lessons and the content of the curriculum. Schemes of work demonstrate how skills and knowledge are built up progressively from the various pupils' starting points. The curriculum allows teachers to place a strong emphasis on the development of pupils' emotional resilience and social skills with a continuous focus, particularly in the senior class, on preparing pupils for the responsibilities of adult life. Good use is made of unit awards to reward small steps in learning and achievement. Extensions to the curriculum, for example through off-site activities and educational visits, provide pupils with memorable experiences which are reflected in their classroom learning. Staff in the children's home and in the school cooperate extremely well to make sure that pupils' learning extends well beyond the classroom and the school day. The curriculum is supported by access to a good range of resources, including regular individual use of laptop computers.

### Pupils' welfare, health and safety

**Good**

Arrangements for the welfare, health and safety of pupils are good and all the independent school standards are met. The school has made good progress, since the last inspection, in the development of systematic approaches to the development of policy and the monitoring of activities, although the administration of written documents does not always keep pace with the quality of implementation. Arrangements for checking the suitability of all staff who work with the pupils are comprehensive and recorded in a single central register. Staff are trained to the required levels in child protection, the use of restraint, first aid and fire safety. Good routines are established for the systematic monitoring and recording of all aspects of fire safety. Regular checks

on the maintenance of the premises contribute to pupils' safety. Risk assessments are completed, and reviewed as necessary, for an appropriate range of activities including off-site visits. The management of pupils' behaviour in classrooms and around the site is very effective and contributes to the well-being of pupils. Working relationships between the home and the school are exemplary, including the handover arrangements between the school and the home which ensure excellent awareness of pupils' readiness for learning on a continuous basis. Relationships with external agencies, including placing authorities (and thus with parents and carers), are characterised by effective communication and timely intervention to ensure that individual needs are promoted.

## Leadership and management

**Good**

The quality of leadership and management of the school is good and effective procedures are in place for monitoring and improving teaching and staff performance. The staff work as an effective team with seamless integration of routines between the school and the home. Staff are clear about the school's purposes and have a consistent approach to the implementation of policies. The cooperation between staff and their high expectations ensure that everyone's focus is on the learning and progress of pupils. School leaders have ensured that the premises and accommodation are maintained to a high standard, that suitable information is available for parents, carers and placing authorities and that effective procedures are implemented to manage any concerns or complaints. All of the independent school standards are met as a result of effective leadership, which demonstrates good progress since the last inspection. The quality of the curriculum, of teaching and pupils' achievement and behaviour result from good teamwork and mutual respect within the school community. Areas for development have been identified and addressed since the last inspection. However, the future vision and plans for the school are not set out in a comprehensive improvement plan based on the systematic and coordinated evaluation of all aspects of school life.

## What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	A school which provides an exceptional quality of education and significantly exceeds minimum requirements.
Grade 2	Good	A school which provides a high quality of education that exceeds minimum requirements.
Grade 3	Adequate	A school which meets minimum requirements but needs to improve the quality of education it provides.
Grade 4	Inadequate	A school where minimum requirements are not met and/or the quality of education has serious weaknesses.

## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	131810
<b>Social care unique reference number</b>	SCO23651
<b>Inspection number</b>	420221
<b>DfE registration number</b>	886/6085

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

<b>Type of school</b>	Day school for pupils with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties
<b>School status</b>	Independent School
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	5–14
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	8
<b>Number of part time pupils</b>	0
<b>Proprietor</b>	Choice Lifestyles
<b>Headteacher</b>	Lorraine Putt
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	January 2010
<b>Annual fees (day pupils)</b>	£40,998
<b>Telephone number</b>	01233 850422
<b>Fax number</b>	01233 850119
<b>Email address</b>	lorraine.putt@choicelifestyles.net

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