

# Little Acorns School

Independent special school inspection report

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Unique Reference Number (URN)	131810
URN for registered childcare and social care	SCO23651
Inspection number	341962
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Reporting inspector	Greg Sorrell
Social care inspector	Angela Gunning

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## Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out by Ofsted under Section 162A<sup>1</sup> of the Education Act 2002, as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005<sup>2</sup>, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

An inspection of the care provision was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000 having regard to the national minimum standards for children's homes. This inspection took place at the same time but the full report is published separately on Ofsted's website and should be read in conjunction with this report which covers the educational registration of the school.

## Information about the 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. All pupils have statements of special educational needs related to these difficulties and some other identified learning difficulties. The school has a new proprietor since the last inspection in 2007 and is now owned by Choice Lifestyles. There are six pupils attending the school and all are resident at the children's home adjacent to the school. All pupils are in the care of a local authority, who fund the placements. Most pupils have regular supervised contact with their families and respite carers. The school is registered for an 8 to 11 years age range, although it has one pupil who is 12 years of age. The proprietor is in the process of seeking approval to extend the school's age range.

## Evaluation of the school

Little Acorns School provides a satisfactory education for its pupils. The provision is aided significantly by its well-integrated 24-hour care and education provision. The pupils make satisfactory progress academically, although they make good progress in their personal development. The school meets all the requirements for safeguarding and the provision for the pupils' welfare, health and safety is satisfactory. The school has made satisfactory improvement since the last inspection and meets most of the regulations, although two remain unmet since that time. It now has additional non-compliance matters to address, particularly concerning the curriculum and fire safety.

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<sup>1</sup> [www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2002/ukpga\\_20020032\\_en\\_14#pt10-ch1-pb4-l1g162](http://www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2002/ukpga_20020032_en_14#pt10-ch1-pb4-l1g162)

<sup>2</sup> [www.opsi.gov.uk/ACTS/acts2005/ukpga\\_20050018\\_en\\_15#sch8](http://www.opsi.gov.uk/ACTS/acts2005/ukpga_20050018_en_15#sch8)

## Quality of education

The quality of the education and of the curriculum provided is satisfactory. The key reasons for this include the personalised approach taken by teaching staff to provide appropriate learning experiences in the classrooms. There is an appropriately strong emphasis on the development of pupils' communication skills and social interaction as well as the development of their basic skills in literacy, numeracy and subjects of the National Curriculum. A topic approach is often used and includes science, information and communication technology (ICT), art, history, geography and physical education. Another significant factor is the contribution made by the care provision that supports the pupils' 24-hour development through a broad range of relevant activities within the home and local community.

Much of the curriculum documentation has not been formally reviewed since the last inspection and consequently does not reflect the fact there is now a pupil in Year 8. The proprietor is in the process of applying to the Department for Children, Schools and Families to extend its age range. The recently appointed class teacher has relevant experience of this age group and makes suitable arrangements for appropriate age-related study. Similarly, the quality of personal, social and health education is satisfactory because of the many opportunities for pupils' awareness and understanding to grow and develop through circle time, science and physical education, and significant time spent on relationships. However, there is no scheme of work to ensure that work is not unnecessarily repeated. The curriculum meets the requirements of pupils' statements of special educational needs in most respects, although the provision of speech and language therapy is not always evident in pupils' programmes as required. Pupils make good use of the local community to support the curriculum for library visits and sporting activities.

The quality of teaching and assessment is satisfactory. Teachers' planning for individual pupils is good and results in personalised learning that meets the wide range of needs and ensures that pupils' academic progress is satisfactory. The teaching staff work well as a team and seek to support each other, especially where staff are new to the school. Staff make effective use of ICT to enable the pupils to access web-based programs to develop their literacy and numeracy. However, there are few programs to support pupils with additional learning needs in literacy and numeracy. School staff have very recently negotiated access to a projector to aid learning when teaching in groups. Teachers work well with the available resources, although there is insufficient equipment for practical science for one pupil in Key Stage 3. Teachers make imaginative resources to support pupils' learning, for example, cards to support key vocabulary and literacy devices in English when studying *Romeo and Juliet*. Teaching assistants work effectively in supporting individual pupils. They are most effective when fully informed about the planned learning. Occasionally, learning opportunities are missed when pupils have to wait for the teacher to direct their learning instead of progressing through support from an assistant.

Teachers' assessment and marking of work are satisfactory. All pupils receive prompt verbal feedback about their work and behaviour. Some pupils' workbooks show that all their work is marked as being correct, which suggests that some activities provide too little challenge. Tracking of progress is assisted by a computer-based assessment package and informs teachers well about the pupils' progress in reaching attainment targets in English, mathematics and science.

The teaching staff have clear expectations of pupils' behaviour and understand 'triggers' related to their special educational needs that may affect the pupils' emotional state and behaviour. As a result, pupils' personal development is good. Daily logs of pupils' behaviour are kept and any incidents are logged using a common format shared with the home. They manage pupils' behaviour well and ensure that interruptions to learning are minimised. The teaching staff benefit from monthly meetings with a behaviour consultant, although advice and guidance on academic issues are much less evident.

## Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

Provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. A significant factor is the working relationship between education and care staff. The pupils respond well to the good role models provided by staff within the school and in the home. Their good response is assisted by a consistent approach to behaviour management that includes praise, understanding and high expectations.

Pupils are aware of the school's systems for rewards and sanctions and the majority respond well. Staff have developed imaginative ways of enabling pupils to monitor their own behaviour and their attitudes to work and to others. One example is the 'marble tree', whereby pupils drop marbles down tubes that relate to a particular positive behaviour; when the tray below is full this signifies a time for a reward. Another example links pupils' behaviour to rewards in the home; for example, consistently good behaviour in both settings will result in the pupil being given responsibility for a small pet. Classroom responsibilities and jobs around the home enable the pupils to make a positive contribution to their own community. The school has relevant profile data to show improvements in the pupils' self-esteem and confidence. Generally, and particularly in lessons, the pupils' behaviour is good and they stay on task for the majority of time.

Pupils' attendance is good. The recognition of success and the importance of working with others are embedded in the school day. The morning assemblies re-inforce pupils' sense of belonging and set a positive tone for the day. When recounting their weekend experiences, pupils spoke with confidence about what they had done and listened respectfully to others without interruption. When at a local sports centre, the majority of pupils respect the expectations of the general public. These community experiences provided by both education and care staff contribute significantly to the pupils' personal development and to their future adult lives and well-being. Opportunities for inclusion in local schools are sought but none is currently available.

The pupils' are regularly invited to express their views in lessons and in 'community' meetings that involve all staff. The staff are considering the viability of a school council whereby pupils may contribute more formally to the running of the school. Through the curriculum they learn about other faiths and cultures and the roles played by public services and institutions, for example, in topics on Spain and France, and through links with the local police force and visits to a local synagogue. Racial harmony is evident in the school and home settings.

## Welfare, health and safety of the pupils

The provision for the pupils' welfare, health and safety is satisfactory. Arrangements for safeguarding pupils meet requirements. Staff undertake regular training at appropriate levels in child protection to ensure that they are conversant with the correct procedures.

The small numbers in each class and high staff to pupil ratios mean that supervision is always effective. Meetings throughout the day ensure that teaching staff share their information about pupils thoroughly. This understanding is strengthened by regular meetings with care staff at the start and end of each school day. The pupils are prepared well for school by care staff who ensure that the pupils have taken breakfast and arrive in school equipped for learning. Healthy meals at lunchtime and after school, combined with a strong focus on exercise, promote the pupils' health very well. The school's policies are effective in promoting the pupils' health, safety and welfare on site and while on visits to the community. They understand how to stay safe.

Regular training is provided in the management of pupils' behaviour, including the safe restraint of pupils when required. The school's policies are implemented effectively regarding the promotion of good behaviour and the administration of first aid. Accidents and incidents are recorded in detail and are followed up appropriately. The school has effective working relationships with external agencies, including social services and local health providers. Where appropriate, pupils receive other therapies, including psychotherapy, in accordance with their emotional needs.

Routine attention to health and safety is good. Systematic checks are made on the premises, including the condition of portable electrical equipment and fire extinguishers. However, the school has not carried out fire drills during the school day to ensure that pupils are familiar with evacuation procedures, nor was it able to produce a satisfactory fire report. Although the school now has sufficient toilet facilities, they lack adequate hand-washing and -drying facilities. Registers of attendance are maintained regularly, although the school was not able to locate an up-to-date admission register, as was the case at the time of the last inspection. Furthermore, the school was not able to provide an appropriate plan to meet the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 2002, another omission evident during the last inspection.

## Suitability of the proprietor and staff

The proprietor has appropriate safeguards to ensure that the pupils do not encounter unsuitable adults. Recruitment procedures for the proprietor and all staff are informed by the most recent guidance. The school maintains a single central register of all the necessary checks on staff and other personnel as required.

## School's premises and accommodation

The school premises are adequate and, despite being adjacent to their home, the school is regarded as a distinct place for learning during the school day. The school comprises two classrooms, a staff room and an additional therapy room located between the two classrooms. The plans to improve the premises and accommodation have only been partially implemented. There is now an adequate number of toilets within the school, although the lack of hot water and appropriate hand-drying facilities remain weaknesses. The school reports that delays in obtaining planning permission have prevented other improvements being made to create additional teaching and administrative areas. There is ample outdoor and play equipment for pupils' use during breaks. They also make good use of this equipment after school hours under the supervision of care staff. A lack of indoor facilities restricts opportunities for indoor physical activity; however, good use is made of local sports facilities during the school day, after school and during school holidays.

## Provision of information for parents, carers and others

Information is provided in the school's prospectus and other information in relation to the care provision. The proprietor's website contains few details in relation to the school. In partnership with the care provision the school seeks to maintain appropriate contact with parents, carers, local authorities and external agencies. Regular meetings with care staff ensure that there is an up-to-date dialogue about the pupils' welfare. Progress reports of satisfactory quality inform all parties about the pupils' academic progress.

The school does not issue or display on its website the school's safeguarding children policy. As at the time of the last inspection, it was not possible to locate the school's admission register. The school does not send financial information annually to referring local authorities in respect of the income received and expenditure incurred on behalf of pupils. There were no responses from carers or local authorities to the pre-inspection questionnaire.

## Procedures for handling complaints

The school's policy meets all regulations. No complaints have been received in the last school year.

## Effectiveness of the boarding provision

The care inspection was an interim inspection focusing on key standards in relation to staying safe. The provision was judged to be good and national minimum standards were met. The report is available on Ofsted's website and should be viewed in conjunction with this report.

## Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school meets all of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended ('the Regulations'), with the exception of those listed below.<sup>3</sup>

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the curriculum (standard 1) and must:

- establish a curriculum policy set out in writing which accurately describes the curriculum provided, is supported by appropriate plans and schemes of work and is implemented effectively (paragraph 1(2))
- where pupils have a statement of special educational needs, ensure that the education provided fulfils its requirements (paragraph 1(2)(e))
- ensure that classroom resources of an adequate quality, quantity and range and that they are used effectively (paragraph 1(3)(f)).

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety (standard 3) and must:

- ensure that it has a satisfactory level of fire safety, in order to comply with the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005<sup>4</sup> (paragraph 3(5))
- maintain an admission register in accordance with the Education (Pupil Registration) Regulations 2006 (paragraph 3(9)).

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the premises and accommodation (standard 5) and must:

- ensure that washrooms for staff and pupils, including facilities for pupils with special needs, take account of the Education (School Premises) Regulations 1999 (paragraph 5(k)).

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

- make available a copy of the school's safeguarding policy (paragraph 6(4))

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<sup>3</sup> [www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si2003/20031910.htm](http://www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si2003/20031910.htm)

<sup>4</sup> [www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si2005/20051541.htm](http://www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si2005/20051541.htm)

- maintain an admission register which is accessible to inspectors and other outside bodies (paragraph 6(7)(b))
- submit an annual account to local authorities, and on request to the Secretary of State, of income received and expenditure incurred in respect of each pupil funded by those local authorities (paragraph 6(8)).

In order to comply with the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 as amended the school should devise a three-year accessibility plan.<sup>5</sup>

Please see the report on Ofsted's website relating to the care provision in the children's home, which should be read in conjunction with this report.

## What the school could do to improve further

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

- Ensure that all teaching takes account of the pupils' statements of special educational needs.
- Pursue further its application to extend its age range to accommodate Key Stage 3 pupils.

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<sup>5</sup> [www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts1995/ukpga\\_19950050\\_en\\_1](http://www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts1995/ukpga_19950050_en_1)

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 boarding provision *(leave blank if not applicable)*

Evaluation of boarding provision		✓		
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## School details

Name of school	Little Acorns School		
DCSF number	886/6085		
Unique reference number (URN)	131810		
Type of school	Special school		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	1999		
Age range of pupils	8–12		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 5	Girls: 1	Total: 6
Number of boarders	Boys: 5	Girls: 1	Total: 6
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need	Boys: 5	Girls: 1	Total: 6
Number of pupils who are looked after	Boys: 5	Girls: 1	Total: 6
Annual fees (boarders)	£171,169		
Headteacher	Ms Angela Flynn		
Proprietor	Choice Lifestyles		
Reporting inspector	Greg Sorrell		
Dates of inspection	25–26 January 2010		