

Inspection of The London Acorn School

Morden Cottage, Morden Hall Park, Morden Hall Road, London SM4 5JD

Inspection dates: 7 to 9 December 2021

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Good

Personal development

Good

Leadership and management

Requires improvement

Early years provision

Good

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Good

Does the school meet the independent school standards?

No

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are happy and safe at the London Acorn School. They like their school and their teachers. Teachers encourage pupils to be creative and expressive. They support pupils' understanding of the world and where they sit as individuals within it.

The school makes regular use of the neighbouring parkland. Pupils know the names of the trees surrounding their school. The youngest children visit the 'Kinde Tree' daily. This is a cluster of trees where they play creatively together and recall what they have previously learned. Adults make sure that pupils safely enjoy the outdoor environment that surrounds them.

Leaders purposefully promote an 'unhurried approach' to academic work. However, they also understand that pupils need the knowledge and skills to succeed at secondary school and beyond. Recently, leaders introduced changes to the school's curriculum. There is more to do to ensure that pupils build the knowledge and skills they need in all areas of the curriculum ready for the next stage in their education.

Pupils behave well. They are considerate of each other inside classrooms, around the school and outdoors. Pupils know what bullying is and what to do if it should occur. Adults take effective action to resolve any issues should they arise.

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

Leaders recently introduced separate national curriculum subjects to the existing curriculum. Although leaders have defined clear end points for different subjects up to the end of class 5 (Year 6), the curriculum itself is not clearly sequenced. For example, in mathematics in class 3/4 (Years 4 and 5) pupils were learning about horizontal, vertical and diagonal lines with no opportunities to reason or build on prior learning. There is no curriculum planning to support what pupils might be taught in the secondary phase of the school.

The school has an exemption from the early years foundation stage learning and development requirements. This means pupils do not formally learn to read until they are in class 1 (Year 2). When pupils learn to read, teachers provide books that match the sounds they know. Pupils who fall behind with their reading are supported effectively to catch up. Pupils' early learning experiences equip them with a rich vocabulary base. This knowledge of language further supports pupils' understanding of what they read.

Leaders promote a love of reading. This year, leaders opened the school's new library and introduced reading records for pupils to log their reading experiences. These recent initiatives are successfully encouraging a collaborative approach with parents in supporting pupils to read.

In the past, pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) have sometimes not been identified early. Leaders identified this and prioritised training for all staff so that they are skilled in identifying when a pupil may need additional support to meet their needs and access the same curriculum as their peers. Pupils with SEND are appropriately supported.

Leaders have recently introduced assessments to check how well pupils are achieving in reading and mathematics. Assessments to check what pupils know and remember in other subjects are not established.

In class, pupils follow adults' instructions well. They listen attentively and are clear about routines and expectations. Older children in kindergarten are positive role models for the younger children. Pupils are motivated and have positive attitudes to learning. Pupils behave with respect towards each other and adults. All this helps teaching to proceed uninterrupted.

Pupils know how to stay healthy. They understand how people and families can be different, and they celebrate this. Teachers emphasise the spiritual dimensions of learning and foster a sense in pupils that there are much bigger things than themselves. Pupils are less knowledgeable about different religions and only recall learning about the Islamic faith. Plans show that other religions will be covered in the future, but these have not yet been implemented. Curriculum plans for personal, social and health education cover what is required for the primary phase, including relationships and sex education (RSE). However, there are no RSE or careers guidance curriculum plans in readiness for pupils in the secondary phase.

Leaders and staff encourage pupils to make a positive contribution to society. For example, they have formed positive links with the National Trust and the local library. Pupils explained how recent initiatives to compost their classroom waste support sustainability.

Leaders and staff support pupils to develop their knowledge and understanding of the world through real-life experiences. For example, the kindergarten class spend a considerable part of every day in the surrounding park. Children look for natural resources to bring back to the classroom. For example, children were whittling sticks to make Christmas decorations. These sessions encourage the development of pupils' personal, physical and social skills.

The proprietor body and those responsible for governance do not have a clear oversight of the independent school standards and statutory responsibilities. The school is not currently compliant with all the independent school standards, and this inspection highlighted several weaknesses that were put right during the inspection. Parents were not formally consulted over the new relationships, sex and health education policy. This consultation was made formal during the inspection, but it was one example of the proprietor body and governors' lack of awareness of their statutory responsibilities.

Leaders support staff with their workload. They are mindful that introducing too many new initiatives at once is burdensome. Staff appreciate the staggered approach to curriculum changes.

The school is compliant with schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders and staff prioritise pupils' immediate safety. They have identified the risks presented by the school's location and have implemented appropriate safety measures. For example, pupils know what to do if a dog were to approach them at play time.

The school's safeguarding policy is published on the school's website and reflects current government requirements. All staff receive regular and up-to-date safeguarding training. They know what signs may indicate a pupil needs help. They also know and follow the school's procedures for reporting concerns. Leaders with responsibility for safeguarding liaise with external agencies for advice when needed.

Leaders check the suitability of staff to work with children. However, there were a number of administrative errors on the single central record. These were corrected during the inspection.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and proprietor)

- The proprietor body and those responsible for governance do not fulfil all their statutory duties. They do not understand all the independent school standards. This means they do not assure themselves that all statutory advice and guidance is followed. Leaders should make sure rigorous systems and procedures are in place to ensure all the independent school standards are consistently met and that the school is fully compliant.
- Curriculum thinking is not clearly sequenced. This means teachers decide what pupils learn rather than following the school's curriculum planning. This also means there is no agreed assessment system to check what pupils know and remember in the wider curriculum. Leaders should ensure that the curriculum is coherently planned in all subjects so that pupils gain the knowledge and skills they need for future learning.
- Teachers' subject and pedagogical knowledge is variable, and they have not received training to help them to deliver the recently introduced subject curriculum. This means there are inconsistencies in what pupils learn. Leaders should underpin the development of the curriculum by supporting staff to address any gaps in their knowledge of the subjects they teach.

- The school is registered to admit pupils up to age 14. There are no curriculum plans for pupils beyond the primary phase. This means the school is not ready to provide education, including RSE and careers guidance, to pupils in the secondary phase. Leaders should ensure curriculum planning is in place to meet the statutory requirements for pupils up to age 14.

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.

If you are the provider and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

School details

Unique reference number	139417
DfE registration number	315/6001
Local authority	Merton
Inspection number	10204283
Type of school	Other independent school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	3 to 14
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	60
Number of part-time pupils	None
Proprietor	The London Acorn School CIC
Chair	Belinda Hurwitz
Headteacher	Deborah Speakman
Annual fees (day pupils)	£10,000 to £10,500
Telephone number	020 8544 9769
Website	www.thelondonacornschool.co.uk
Email address	info@thelondonacornschool.co.uk
Dates of previous inspection	21 to 23 November 2017

Information about this school

- The London Acorn School is an independent school for boys and girls aged three to 14 years.
- There are 60 pupils on roll. In total, 28 children attend the kindergarten. Currently, there are only pupils in the primary phase and no pupils in Years 7 to 9 on roll.
- The headteacher took up her appointment in January 2021.
- The school's stated aim is to blend Steiner and Forest School approaches with a mainstream curriculum.
- The school's last full standard inspection took place in November 2017, when its overall effectiveness was judged to be good.
- The school does not make use of any alternative provision.

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.

This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation.

The school has failed to meet the independent school standards. These are the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

- Inspectors met with the headteacher, school business manager, two governors and the proprietor.
- Inspectors met with the leader with responsibility for safeguarding, looked at records and scrutinised the school's safeguarding practice.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour throughout the school day and spoke to staff about pupils' personal development. They also held discussions with pupils about their views of the quality of education the school provides.
- The inspectors carried out deep dives in mathematics, reading, and art and design. Inspectors met with subject leaders and pupils, visited lessons, met with teaching staff, and looked at pupils' work. Other subjects were also considered as part of this inspection.
- Inspectors spoke to parents directly and considered their views through Ofsted's Parent View survey. They also considered the results of the survey for staff.

- Inspectors reviewed a range of evidence to check compliance with the independent school standards.

Inspection team

Alison Colenso, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Andrew Rigby

Ofsted Inspector

Annex. Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school failed to meet the following independent school standards

Part 1. Quality of education provided

- 2(1) The standard in this paragraph is met if-
- 2(1)(a) the proprietor ensures that a written policy on the curriculum, supported by appropriate plans and schemes of work, which provides for the matters specified in sub-paragraph (2) is drawn up and implemented effectively; and
- 2(1)(b) the written policy, plans and schemes of work-
- 2(1)(b)(i) take into account the ages, aptitudes and needs of all pupils, including those pupils with an EHC plan.
- 2(2) For the purposes of paragraph (2)(1)(a), the matters are-
- 2(2)(e) for pupils receiving secondary education, access to accurate, up-to-date careers guidance that-
- 2(2)(e)(i) is presented in an impartial manner;
- 2(2)(e)(ii) enables them to make informed choices about a broad range of career options; and
- 2(2)(e)(iii) helps to encourage them to fulfil their potential.
- 2A(1) The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor-
- 2(A)(1)(b) ensures that every registered pupil who is provided with secondary education at the school is provided with relationships and sex education, except in so far as the pupil is excused as mentioned in sub-paragraph (2).

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