

Inspection of a good school: Acorns Primary School

Moor Park, Blackpool Road, Preston, Lancashire PR1 6AU

Inspection dates:

1 and 2 November 2023

Outcome

There has been no change to this school's overall judgement of good as a result of this ungraded (section 8) inspection. However, the evidence gathered suggests that the inspection grade might be outstanding if a graded (section 5) inspection were carried out now. The school's next inspection will be a graded inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils excel in this school. They thrive in the warm and welcoming environment. Pupils are nurtured by caring staff. They develop their communication skills exceptionally well because staff find exactly the right 'hook' that will allow them to do so. The school gives pupils a voice. Pupils are able to make choices and make their needs known to staff. At playtimes, pupils choose which activity they want to take part in. For example, some choose to play with bubbles, others choose trampolines or outdoor equipment. Pupils are happy in school. This is clear from the delight and excitement on pupils' faces.

Staff have high expectations and are aspirational for all pupils. Pupils enjoy a broad and exciting curriculum that enables them to achieve highly. All pupils, no matter how complex their needs are, take an active and full part in school life. For instance, adapted canoes and rock-climbing apparatus allow wheelchair users to enjoy the same activities as their peers. Pupils enjoy trips to museums, adventure parks, cycling and competitive sports events with other schools.

Pupils settle well in lessons and are ready to learn. This is because staff get to know each pupil extremely well. Pupils know that extra help is quickly available if they struggle with their behaviour or emotions.

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

The school has carefully designed its curriculum to meet the individual special educational needs and/or disabilities of all pupils. Teachers break down learning into tiny steps. They personalise activities to meet the needs of each pupil. This allows pupils, at their own pace, to develop their knowledge and skills over time. Teachers use assessment strategies effectively to shape future teaching. They check that pupils can apply their learning in different contexts. For example, pupils are encouraged to use their road safety knowledge

to cross the road in a safe place and their mathematical understanding to use the correct money to buy a food item when shopping.

The school has carefully designed its early reading programme. Children in the early years and older pupils are immersed in songs, stories, rhymes, poetry and music. Staff are well trained. They have a wealth of expertise, which enables them to deliver the reading programme consistently across the school. Staff know how to engage pupils and maintain their attention. Staff use language and communication aids well to help pupils to connect images to words. Pupils continue to use these communication aids at home and in the community. This means that they benefit from a consistent approach to learning between home and school. The school's successful communication and reading programme allows many pupils to gain the knowledge and skills that they need to become confident, fluent readers.

Many pupils have long-term medical needs. This affects their attendance at school. Staff work closely with parents, carers and medical professionals to support pupils and to ensure that pupils feel comfortable and happy in school. This ensures that pupils attend school as regularly as they can.

The school's work to develop pupils' personal development is very strong. At the heart of the school's approach is its commitment to provide pupils with choices. In this way, pupils become independent, confident and resilient. These attributes have a positive impact on pupils' behaviour. Pupils feel listened to and, consequently, understood.

Pupils' physical development is a key priority. In the early years, staff focus on developing children's gross and fine motor skills. Staff work closely with medical professionals to develop carefully tailored programmes for pupils. These focus on sitting, posture, standing and moving. For some pupils, this work is life-changing.

Pupils learn how to use technology in a safe way. They understand what it means to be a good friend, including when they are online. Pupils have opportunities to learn about different religious and cultural festivals with their peers, parents and carers and the community. They enjoy sharing food, music and prayers with others.

The school has engaged with all staff, which has upskilled, empowered and inspired leaders at all levels. Staff are fully informed and included when changes are planned. This has meant a reduction in workload. For example, staff were fully involved in shaping the curriculum. Staff are very proud to work at the school and are rightly proud of pupils' achievements.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Background

When we have judged a school to be good, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. This is called an ungraded inspection, and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection, which is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the second ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be good in January 2010.

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.

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	135347
Local authority	Lancashire
Inspection number	10256226
Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	2 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	89
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Amanda Howarth
Headteacher	Paula Barlow
Website	www.acorns.lancs.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	8 November 2017, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- A new headteacher has taken up post since the last inspection.
- At the time of this inspection there were no two-year-old children on roll at the school.
- The school does not use alternative provision.
- All pupils have an education, health and care plan. The school caters for pupils with visual impairment, hearing impairment, speech, language and communication needs, autism, multi-sensory impairment, moderate learning difficulties, severe learning difficulties, and profound and multiple learning difficulties.

Information about this inspection

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.
- 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 and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.

- Inspectors met with the headteacher and other leaders. Inspectors also spoke with the school improvement partner and a representative from the local authority.
- An inspector met with members of the governing body, including the chair of governors.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: communication and early reading, physical development, and personal, social, health and economic education. For each deep dive, inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors also discussed the curriculum in some other subjects.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- Inspectors looked at a range of documents, spoke to some parents, spoke to pupils and spoke with staff about the school.
- Inspectors considered the views of parents expressed through Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text responses. They also considered responses to Ofsted's online survey for staff. There were no responses to the pupil survey to consider.

Inspection team

Julie Bather, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Claire Hollister

Ofsted Inspector

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