

## School report

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# Acorn Free School

248 Calder Road, Brant Road, Lincoln, LN5 9TL

**Inspection dates** 30 June –1 July 2015

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	
	This inspection:	<b>Good</b>	<b>2</b>
Leadership and management		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a good school.

- School leaders have created a culture where students' behaviour and attitudes to their learning are greatly improved.
- School leaders ensure that most students return back to their mainstream academies and have every chance to be successful in the next stage of their education.
- Students achieve well. Most make good progress in English and mathematics and are making up ground they have lost in the past due to good teaching.
- Students say they feel safe at The Acorn Free School. Students appreciate the interest that staff take in their well-being.
- All staff have high expectations of students' behaviour.
- Students enjoy coming to school and their attendance is usually good.
- Governors hold school leaders to account for their work. New members of the governing body already demonstrate a clear understanding about the strengths of the school and the areas in which it needs to improve.
- Parents are delighted with the work of the school. They are grateful of the support they receive and the improvements to the children's behaviour both in school and at home.
- The academies which place students at The Acorn Free School are overwhelmingly positive about the strong impact the school has had on the students' behaviour.
- School leaders ensure that the curriculum meets the needs of the students and supports their understanding of spiritual, moral, social and cultural learning including the promotion of British values.

### It is not yet an outstanding school because

- The feedback the staff give to students does not always provide enough information for them to quickly take the next step in their learning.
- Not all time in lessons is used as effectively as it could be to promote learning.
- Not enough priority is given to the leadership of curriculum areas, particularly English and mathematics.
- Performance management is not always used well enough to improve students' achievement.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning in nine lessons. Each inspector jointly observed at least one lesson with the headteacher or the inclusion manager. Inspectors also observed break times and lunchtimes.
- Meetings were held with headteacher, inclusion manager and senior teacher.
- Inspectors met with the teachers, instructors and teaching assistants.
- The lead inspector had separate meetings with the Vice Chair of the Governing Body, a governor, and had a telephone conversation with the Chair of the Governing Body.
- Inspectors met with a number of students and also spoke to them in classrooms and during social times.
- The lead inspector spoke with key members of staff from the academies that place students at The Acorn Free School.
- There were too few responses to Parent View (Ofsted’s website for parents to express their opinions about the school) for inspectors to gather information. Inspectors spoke to a selection of parents and grandparents on the telephone and looked at school records of feedback from parents since the school opened.
- A wide range of documents was scrutinised. This included the schools’ record about the quality of teaching, surveys from academies that place students at the school, student surveys, behaviour logs, incident reports, safeguarding files, recruitment information, records of staff suitability checks, attendance information, the school’s self-evaluation and school development plans.
- Inspectors looked at examples of students’ work and conducted a joint work scrutiny with the senior teacher and vice-chair of the governing body.
- The responses in questionnaires completed by eight members of staff were considered.
- The lead inspector spoke to the manager of Whisby Education Centre, which is used by the school to provide alternative provision.

## Inspection team

Phil Harrison, Lead inspector

Her Majesty’s Inspector

Martin Finch

Her Majesty’s Inspector

## Full report

### Information about this school

- The Acorn Free School was opened in September 2013. It is a free school and an alternative provision for students aged 11–16.
- The school is designed to support students who are at risk of being excluded from their mainstream school or academy.
- The purpose of the school is to return students to mainstream education where possible. The length of time students stay at the school is determined by their progress.
- The school offers a behaviour outreach service to primary and secondary schools and academies.
- The school caters for children who have social, emotional or mental health difficulties. All students are defined by the school as requiring support for their special educational needs. Currently 2 students have statements of special educational need or an education, health and care plan.
- Since the school opened the number of students attending has increased. At the time of inspection there were 22 students on roll. One hundred and eleven students have attended the school since September 2014.
- Most students are White British boys.
- All students have experienced disruption to their education due to their behaviour at other schools and academies.
- The teaching staff are a mixture of qualified teachers and instructors.
- The school does not receive Year 7 catch-up funding or pupil premium funding.
- The school currently uses one alternative provider; Whisby Education Centre.

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

- Strengthen the quality of subject leadership and management so that it is of a consistently high standard by ensuring that:
  - leaders' checks on learning are precise and actions taken then lead to making teaching and students' achievement outstanding.
- Ensure that performance management arrangements are in place for all staff in order to further promote their professional development and to improve student progress.
- Improve the quality of teaching by:
  - ensuring feedback to students always provides enough information for the student to quickly take the next step in their learning
  - making sure that all students' targets are measurable
  - challenging the most-able students in English and mathematics to accelerate their progress further
  - using opportunities across the curriculum to develop English and mathematics skills
  - effectively using all time in lessons to better promote students' learning.

## Inspection judgements

### The leadership and management are good

- School leaders and governors have established a culture which is allowing students to flourish. The school ethos is focused firmly on respect and valuing each other, in order to establish good relationships and positive attitudes to learning.
- School leaders are successful in their aim to improve students' behaviour and give them maximum opportunity to return to their academy. Most students leave the school with improved attitudes to learning; therefore they are well prepared for their next step. One student wrote to the headteacher and stated 'thank you for believing in me and giving me a second chance'.
- Parents are supportive of school leaders. One parent commented that 'they are absolutely brilliant; I could not praise them enough for all they have done. They have been a massive help and my son has improved in every way'.
- Since the school opened leaders have taken prompt action to ensure teaching is now good. Leaders have ensured that staff have both a professional capability to promote learning alongside the necessary inter-personal skills needed to develop positive relationships with students.
- Leaders take into account the needs of all students and this ensures that there is an equality of opportunity for all of them. Students benefit from frequent opportunities which promote spiritual, moral, social and cultural aspects of their development. Each term students undertake charity and fundraising events. Leaders actively promote students' understanding of diversity and British values. The school works with the Stonewall Champions programme to prevent and tackle homophobic bullying and celebrate difference.
- The school is well kept and there are attractive displays of students' work around the corridors and in classrooms. Students demonstrate respect for their school environment and feel proud when their work is selected to be put on show.
- The school's curriculum has been designed to ensure students get access to focussed teaching in English and mathematics alongside a range of other subjects, including sessions on behaviour modification. This means that students learn a range of appropriate skills and knowledge whilst at the school. Occasionally, staff do not use all the time available to them to promote learning effectively. Students receive advice and guidance about future careers through taught lessons and from individual staff during social times.
- School leaders ensure that there are appropriate plans for teaching and the curriculum in place; however due to the small size of the school the role of subject leaders checking on student learning and improving teaching has yet to be fully developed.
- The headteacher leads a daily assembly in which students reflect upon their own beliefs and how they prepare themselves for life in modern Britain. Students demonstrate high levels of understanding, attention and maturity during these times.
- Leaders monitor progress, attendance and behaviour when students go to Whisby Education Centre. When students attend they are always supported by staff from The Acorn Free School which helps to promote their progress. Staff from the Whisby Education Centre say that the links with The Acorn Free School are very strong and this means that

students get the best possible experience.

- Governors and leaders ensure that all safeguarding arrangements meet statutory requirements and are effective.
- The school does not receive pupil premium funding.
- The governance of the school:
  - Members of the governing body have much to offer the school in terms of their professional knowledge and skills. The governing body meets regularly and there is frequent contact between the headteacher, Chair and Vice Chair. Governors are highly supportive of school leaders and are proud to have set up such a unique provision for the students.
  - Governors have an accurate understanding about the quality of teaching and have been supportive of school leaders when improvements have needed to be made. They act quickly to tackle underperformance of staff. Governors demonstrate a clear understanding about what challenge is needed to improve teaching further and how improvements to performance management arrangements can support this. Not all staff are subject to rigorous performance management targets which are linked to the achievements of students.
  - The governing body receives information about students' progress in great detail. Governors use this information to check that leaders are doing all they can to support students to fulfil their potential.
  - Whilst governors have ensured safeguarding procedures are rigorous and meet statutory requirements the Chair and Vice Chair are aware that the wider governing body needs an improved level of information about this important area of work. All students spoken to during the inspection told inspectors that they felt safe.

## **The behaviour and safety of pupils** are good

### **Behaviour**

- The behaviour of pupils is good. The majority of students have a positive attitude to learning and have a good rapport with different staff. Students readily informed inspectors that their behaviour has improved over time at the school. One student said 'I used to swear a lot and be involved in fights. Now I don't swear or get involved in fights.'
- Students know the behaviour policy very well and say it is applied consistently by all members of staff. Students conduct themselves well around school and are polite and open doors for visitors. Disruption to lessons has reduced rapidly since the revised behaviour policy has been introduced.
- Students are well aware of the different forms of bullying, including homophobic bullying. They are confident that staff take effective action if any bullying is reported. Inspectors were provided with documented evidence that they do. Students understand not to give personal details on-line and the school has worked with an outside organisation to warn students about the dangers of substance misuse and the harmful effects of alcohol.
- Students' attendance is robustly monitored and recorded. Any absence is immediately followed up and if necessary the education welfare office and the school's special educational needs coordinator, support students effectively to raise their attendance level. Whilst at The Acorn Free School the majority of students improve their attendance.
- Students are clear that racist remarks are unacceptable. The school has a robust response to any racism which means that this is rare. The school have excluded students for racist remarks and also set up sessions for students with the local police which helped to modify their behaviour.
- In lessons, students 'get on' with their work and usually complete all that is required of them. They work well on their own but also in small groups. Incidents of low-level disruption are rare.

- Inspectors spoke to several parents about improvements to their child's behaviour. 'My son is like a new child' and 'my son has turned his behaviour around' are typical comments shared by parents. These views were also echoed by senior staff from the academies which send the students to The Acorn Free School.

### Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. Staff are well trained to keep students safe and they always act upon any concerns they have. The staff team are excellent at sharing information about students with each other; this promotes everyone's safety.
- The school works successfully with outside agencies to keep students safe; for example, one student spoke positively about how a counsellor organised by school has helped to reduce the number of fights he was involved in.
- All staff who responded to the staff questionnaire agreed that students are safe at The Acorn Free School.
- Students who access the alternative provision at Whisby Education Centre are supported by staff who know them well. This combined with thorough risk assessments means that students' safety is promoted when away from the school site.
- Students say they feel safe. Many students who spoke to inspectors expressed how they felt cared for by the staff team and how calm the school usually was. There is no use of physical intervention.
- The school building and grounds are very well maintained. The necessary checks are completed for fire safety and the comprehensive CCTV around the site deters unwelcome visitors and promotes students safety.
- Comprehensive risk assessments are in place for school based activities, including the use of motorbikes in the school grounds. Inspectors observed the headteacher leading a motorbike riding lesson in which students demonstrated a mature approach to their personal safety and that of others.

### The quality of teaching is good

- Classroom staff are highly skilled at quickly developing positive relationships with students. The atmosphere created by staff in lessons leads to students feeling both supported and challenged. Students are keen to do well because they like the staff. One student commented 'this school feels more like a family than a school'.
- The schools' records about the quality of teaching show that teaching has improved considerably since the school opened in September 2013. The school now has a stable group of teachers and instructors who are working well together as a team to improve their skills and knowledge. They meet regularly to discuss how they can best help the students to improve their learning and behaviour. A member of staff wrote in a questionnaire that 'the school appears to be getting better all the time'.
- Good teaching ensures students make good progress in English and mathematics over time. In the most effective lessons teachers and instructors use creative ideas to engage the students well. Students demonstrated their enthusiasm for learning in a lesson where they were debating issues involving crime and punishment. They listened respectfully to contrasting viewpoints that differed from their own. In another lesson an instructor used opportunities arising from students' comments to explore wider issues, such as what it meant to be British. One student commented that 'you follow laws but you do not have to follow one religion'.
- Teachers regularly encourage students to give their views and to give reasons for their opinions. This develops their speaking and listening skills. Over time students communicate increasingly well with each other and form positive friendships.

- Students' work is regularly marked and there are some good examples of how marking has helped them to make further progress. Not all staff are implementing this approach fully and there is still quite a lot of marking that only has ticks or the occasional positive comment. There are some missed opportunities to promote further learning through the use of feedback to students.
- Teachers assess and track students' attainment and progress frequently. Any underachievement is highlighted swiftly and a plan for intervention is put in place. School leaders then carry out regular checks to ensure the intervention is working. This means that those students that fall behind usually catch up quickly. In a mathematics revision lesson inspectors observed the teacher quickly moving the students on in their learning when she identified that they had a secure understanding of the work.
- Where it is identified that students would benefit from a structured and systematic approach to teaching literacy skills, additional time is given to students on a one-to-one basis to promote these skills. This work has helped to provide students with the ability they need to access the curriculum back at their academy or in class at The Acorn Free School. Reading is promoted by staff but the lack of a library and access to a wide range of books does not allow students enough opportunity to develop this area of learning.
- The school's special educational needs co-ordinator ensures that appropriate assessments are carried out on the students. This work then results in target areas for students to work in class or during additional times when more intensive support is provided. When completing this work students' progress is slower than it could be because targets are not precise or measurable.
- There are some occasions when the most able students do not make further progress due to work being too easy. Whilst progress for these students' is often good they could do even better with further challenge. Opportunities are sometimes missed to develop students' English and mathematics skills when they are studying other subjects.

### **The achievement of pupils** is good

- When students join the school, many of them have not made the progress expected of them since leaving primary school because of disruptions to their secondary education due to their behaviour. Many of the students are working below the level expected of them nationally in English and mathematics.
- Students' achievement is promoted because students now have consistency to their education. A deputy headteacher from an academy which sends students to The Acorn Free School commented 'we have a number of students who would have been permanently excluded had this provision not supported their needs'. He goes on to say '...it is clear that our young people are making better progress in all outcomes because of the work undertaken by Acorn'.
- The Acorn Free School ensures that students are well-prepared for the next stage of their education. All current Year 11 students are moving on to college or apprenticeships. The majority of Year 11 students have made good progress in English, mathematics and science.
- Students' skills and knowledge across different subjects are quickly and accurately assessed on entry to the school, taking into account any information about the student from their previous school. The school is increasingly using external organisations to help them moderate their judgements.
- The achievement of students is accelerated because the teaching environment is conducive to students feeling settled and valued, regardless of how able they are. Induction arrangements for students are good and they quickly settle into their learning. One student, who had been at the school for one week, said to inspectors 'I really like it here already, everyone is really friendly.'
- Students' increasing confidence and engagement in lessons mean that they are often willing to accept challenge and attempt work that is harder than their current level. This is particularly evident in English

and mathematics where achievement is thoroughly tracked. An inspector, the senior teacher and a governor looked at examples of work from students who had been at the school the longest. This clearly demonstrated that these students make good progress.

- Students achieve well in the other subjects, such as: food technology; physical education; art; technology; humanities and personal, social and health education. These are all on offer as part of the broad and balanced curriculum.
- The school carefully monitors the progress of all students, especially in English and mathematics. The information provided by the school shows that all groups of students achieve equally well, including disadvantaged students and the most able. Disabled students and those who have special educational needs make similar progress as their peers as a result of the support they receive from teachers, instructors and teaching assistants. School leaders ensure additional resources are put in place in order to meet specific individual needs.
- Senior staff from the academies which place students at The Acorn Free School were able to tell inspectors about several examples of how well the students have done on their return from both full-time and part-time placements. They describe students who have improved their attitude to learning and who are now increasing their levels of achievement.
- The school does not enter students early for GCSE examinations.
- Students who access Whisby Education Centre make significant progress in their interpersonal skills and attitudes to learning. This has an impact on their ability to participate in lessons both at The Acorn Free School and at their academy, therefore accelerating their learning.



## What inspection judgements mean

School	Grade	Judgement	Description
	Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
	Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
	Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
	Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	139774
<b>Local authority</b>	Lincolnshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	450231

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

<b>Type of school</b>	Pupil referral unit
<b>School category</b>	Academy free school
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	22
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Freddie White
<b>Headteacher</b>	Jerry Tucker
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
<b>Telephone number</b>	01522 822428
<b>Email address</b>	enquiries@theacornschoo.co.uk

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