

Focused Compliance and Educational Quality Inspection Reports

Acorn House College

February 2020



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School's Details

College	Acorn House College			
DfE number	307/6081			
Address	Acorn House College 39-47 High Street Southall London UB1 3HF			
Telephone number	020 8571 9900			
Email address	info@acornhousecollege.com			
Headteacher	Dr Francis Choi			
Co-Proprietors	Dr Selva Pankaj & Mrs Tharshiny Pankaj			
Age range	14 to 19			
Number of pupils on roll	45			
	Seniors	9	Sixth Form	36
Inspection dates	11-13 February 2020			

1. Background Information

About the school

- 1.1 Acorn House College is an independent co-educational sixth form and GCSE college, with a focus on Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) subjects.
- 1.2 The College was founded by Mrs Gladys Watts in 1999 who retired in 2015. Since the previous inspection, the college has been taken over by Regent Group and relaunched under new management in Autumn 2017. The current headteacher was appointed at that time. Governance is provided by the proprietors, directors of Regent Group, supported by a board of advisors.

What the school seeks to do

- 1.3 The College aims to provide students a clear and coherent pathway to achieving their goals, to offer the best preparation and access to higher education and world of work, to present an environment where the individual is valued and respected, to prepare students for life as 21st century British and global citizens, to provide a safe learning environment for students and to help unleash their potential in order to fulfil their ambitions, and to provide research-based guidance to students and enhance their aspirations.

About the pupils

- 1.4 Most pupils come from the local area from a diverse range of family background. Many of the local students are second generation British. Data provided by the school indicates that the average ability of pupils is below average compared to those that take the same tests nationally. No pupil in the school has an education, health and care (EHC) plan. The school has identified a very small number of pupils currently as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), which include dyslexia, dyscalculia or dyspraxia, and receive additional specialist help. English is an additional language (EAL) for no pupils. Extension and challenge are provided for more able pupils.

2. Regulatory Compliance Inspection

Preface

The registration authority for independent schools is the Department for Education (DfE), which directs inspection according to a specified frequency or at any time where the DfE has particular concerns about a school. The Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) is the body approved by the Secretary of State for the purpose of inspecting schools which are, or whose heads are, in membership of the associations which form the Independent Schools Council (ISC) and reporting on the extent to which they meet the Independent School Standards ('the standards') in the Schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014. Accordingly, inspection records whether the school meets each of these standards, which are arranged in eight Parts, each of which is divided into separate paragraphs. Additionally, the inspection reports on the school's accessibility plan under Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010 and the ban on corporal punishment under section 548 of the Education Act 1996. It comments on the progress made by the school in meeting the compliance action points set out in the school's most recent statutory inspection.

All association independent schools will have an inspection within three years from April 2016, in accordance with the Framework and DfE requirements. The inspection may be of COMPLIANCE ONLY or a combined inspection of EDUCATIONAL QUALITY AND COMPLIANCE depending on a number of factors, including findings from their most recent inspection. Schools judged not to meet the standards may also be subject to a progress monitoring visit before their next routine inspection. The progress monitoring visit will judge whether the school has taken the necessary action to meet any un-met standards identified at their previous inspection.

The inspection was also carried out under the arrangements of the ISC Associations for the maintenance and improvement of the quality of their membership.

This is a FOCUSED COMPLIANCE INSPECTION which was combined with an inspection of EDUCATIONAL QUALITY, the report of which appears later in this document. The COMPLIANCE inspection reports only on the school's compliance with the standards. The standards represent minimum requirements and judgements are given either as **met** or as **not met**. All schools are required to meet all the standards applicable to them. Where the minimum requirements are not met, this is clearly indicated in the relevant section of the report and the school is required to take the actions specified. In this focused compliance inspection, key regulations and standards have been inspected in detail. These are the regulations on safeguarding; measures to guard against bullying; arrangements for pupils' health and safety, arrangements to check the suitability of staff; the provision of information to parents; the handling of parents' complaints; and other related aspects of leadership and management. The remaining standards and requirements are deemed to continue to be met unless evidence to the contrary has been found.

Inspections do not include matters that are outside of the regulatory framework described above, such as: an exhaustive health and safety audit; compliance with data protection requirements; an in-depth examination of the structural condition of the school, its services or other physical features; contractual arrangements with parents; an investigation of the financial viability of the school or its accounting procedures.

Inspectors may be aware of individual safeguarding concerns, allegations and complaints as part of the inspection process. Such matters will not usually be referred to specifically in published reports in this document but will have been considered by the team in reaching its judgements.

Links to the full regulations and requirements can be found here: [The Education \(Independent School Standards\) Regulations 2014](#).

Key findings

- 2.1 The school meets the standards in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 and associated requirements and no further action is required as a result of this inspection.**

PART 1 – Quality of education provided

- 2.2 Pupils take GCSE/A-level examinations in their final year at the school. The small numbers involved prevent reliable comparison with national averages.
- 2.3 The curriculum is documented, supported by appropriate plans and schemes of work for the pupils and covers the required breadth of material. The teaching enables pupils to make good progress, encompasses effective behaviour management and is supported by suitable resources. A suitable framework for the assessment of pupils' performance is in place.
- 2.4 The standards relating to the quality of education [paragraphs 1–4] are met.**

PART 2 – Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

- 2.5 Principles and values are actively promoted which facilitate the personal development of pupils as responsible, tolerant, law-abiding citizens.
- 2.6 The standard relating to spiritual, moral, social and cultural development [paragraph 5] is met.**

PART 3 – Welfare, health and safety of pupils

- 2.7 Arrangements are made to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils by means that pay due regard to current statutory guidance; good behaviour is promoted; bullying is prevented so far as reasonably practicable; health and safety requirements are met, including those relating to fire safety; provision is made for first aid. Pupils are properly supervised; admission and attendance registers are maintained, as required, and there is a strategic approach to risk assessment. A disability access plan is in place.
- 2.8 The standards relating to welfare, health and safety [paragraphs 6–16], the requirement of Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010, and the ban on corporal punishment under section 548 of the Education Act 1996 are met.**

PART 4 – Suitability of staff, supply staff, and proprietors

- 2.9 The school makes appropriate checks to ensure the suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors, and a register is kept as required.
- 2.10 The standards relating to the suitability of those in contact with pupils at the school [paragraphs 17–21] are met.**

PART 5 – Premises of and accommodation at schools

- 2.11 Suitable toilet and changing facilities, and showering facilities where required by the standard, and appropriate accommodation for pupils' medical and therapy needs are provided. The premises are maintained to a standard commensurate with health and safety; acoustics and lighting are appropriate; water provision is adequate. Suitable outdoor space is provided for physical education and outdoor play.
- 2.12 The standards relating to the premises and accommodation [paragraphs 22–31] are met.**

PART 6 – Provision of information

2.13 A range of information is variously published, provided or made available to parents, inspectors and the Department for Education. This includes details about the proprietor, the ethos of the school and the curriculum, and of the school's arrangements for admission, behaviour and exclusions, bullying, health and safety, first aid, details of the complaints procedure, and the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year, and the provision for any with education, health and care plans or English as an additional language. It also includes particulars of the school's academic performance during the preceding school year, inspection reports and (for parents only) a report at least annually of their own child's progress. The safeguarding policy is posted on the school's website.

2.14 The standard relating to the provision of information [paragraph 32] is met.

PART 7 – Manner in which complaints are handled

2.15 Parental complaints, if any, are handled effectively through a three-stage process, (informal, formal and a hearing before a panel of three, one of whom is independent of the school). Each stage has clear time scales, and at the third stage the panel can make findings and recommendations which are communicated to the complainant. Records are kept appropriately, including of any action taken, whether or not a complaint is successful.

2.16 The standard relating to the handling of complaints [paragraph 33] is met.

PART 8 – Quality of leadership in and management of schools

2.17 The proprietor ensures that the leadership and management demonstrate good skills and knowledge, and fulfil their responsibilities effectively, so that the other standards are consistently met, and they actively promote the well-being of the pupils.

2.18 The standard relating to leadership and management of the school [paragraph 34] is met.

3. Educational Quality Inspection

Preface

The EDUCATIONAL QUALITY inspection reports on the quality of the school's work. It focuses on the two key outcomes:

- The achievement of the pupils, including their academic development, and
- The personal development of the pupils.

Since the school was last inspected, the framework for inspection has changed. The current inspection framework uses different criteria and arrangements for grading from those used in previous inspection frameworks. The judgements made on this inspection are, therefore, not directly comparable to judgements made on previous inspections.

All independent schools are required to meet the requirements of the Independent School Standards. However, different inspectorates apply different frameworks that are suited to the different types of schools they inspect. The ISI terminology reflects quality judgements that are at least equivalent to those used by the national inspectorate, Ofsted. ISI reports do not provide a single overarching judgement for the school but instead give a clear judgement about key outcomes for pupils and information on the quality of the school's work.

The headline judgements must include one of the ISI descriptors 'excellent', 'good', 'sound' or 'unsatisfactory'.

Where necessary, National Curriculum nomenclature is used to refer to year groups in the school

Key findings

3.1 The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements is sound.

- The most motivated pupils achieve ambitious levels of attainment and pursue the next phase of their education with confidence.
- Many pupils show good levels of knowledge, skills and understanding in their chosen fields of study.
- Some older pupils display mature attitudes to learning demonstrating initiative and independence, but these levels are not widespread throughout the college.
- Pupils achieve only a limited amount outside the formal curriculum.

3.2 The quality of the pupils' personal development is sound.

- Pupils with a wide variety of backgrounds freely express their individuality in an atmosphere of mutual respect in a diverse college community. They have a well embedded spiritual awareness founded on worship outside college and the recently introduced personal development programme.
- Pupils can discuss their own personal strengths and weaknesses to an extent expected for their age and ability. Most pupils develop strong self-knowledge, self-esteem, and resilience during their time in the college. The majority of, but not all, pupils behave well: older pupils are positive role models.
- A few pupils involve themselves in helping others in the community even though there are few organised opportunities through college.
- Pupils know how to stay safe and adopt a healthy lifestyle, but that awareness is developed almost exclusively outside the college.

Recommendations

3.3 The school is advised to make the following improvements:

- Encourage pupils to undertake independent learning activities using a range of resources beyond their teachers, and more able pupils to pursue their own academic interests outside lessons.
- Participate in competitions and other opportunities for pupils to develop confidence and gain recognition for achievements outside the formal curriculum.
- Introduce further opportunities for younger pupils to self-reflect on their attitudes to work and behaviour, and for all to actively contribute positively to the lives of others in the school.
- Further promote pupils' awareness of physical and mental health and ensure that advice and guidance is freely available to all pupils.

The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements

- 3.4 The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements is sound.
- 3.5 The most motivated pupils achieve ambitious levels of attainment and are able to pursue the next phase of their education with confidence. Very few parents responded to the questionnaires, but those that did comment said that the improvement in the motivation and attainment of their children was due to the dedication and commitment of the teachers to their learning. According to the data supplied by the college, the general academic attainment of pupils is broadly in line with expectations, with some pupils gaining good results. The proprietors have secured and supported high quality tutorial style teaching provision for the pupils which has resulted in a significant improvement in their attainment grades.
- 3.6 Most pupils, including any with special educational needs or disability (SEND), make progress towards reaching their ambitious academic goals. Most pupils make good levels of progress during lessons, but there is no measure to demonstrate progress during their time at the college. Due to the nature of the college in which the focus is on guiding the pupils towards success in examinations, there are very few opportunities for progress in subjects which are not externally assessed. Pupils study courses which are strictly limited to their personal further education and career goals. A few pupils develop creative skills through the study of art but there are no opportunities in college for other traditional creative pursuits such as music and drama. Some of the younger pupils develop their physical skills due to the limited sports provision for those studying GCSE courses in Year 11, but not offered to older pupils.
- 3.7 Most pupils demonstrate good levels of knowledge, skills and understanding in several areas of their studies. For more able and motivated pupils, the levels are high particularly in their preferred disciplines, particularly strongly, but not solely, in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects. In a further mathematics class, pupils explain with confidence and clarity the complex concept of how to find all roots of unity. In chemistry, pupils demonstrate their understanding in responding to questions on reduction agents and geometric isomers. In response to questionnaires, pupils say that they have gained a passion for their studies due to the enthusiasm of the teachers.
- 3.8 Over the college year, pupils develop communication skills in line with expectations for their age. Listening skills are particularly well developed. Pupils are able to apply these to most areas of their learning. Pupils reading aloud coped fluently with words or expressions they had not previously encountered, for example "personification" and "pathetic fallacy". In biology, pupils start the lesson explaining a topic to the class, for example describing nucleotides and the difference between DNA and RNA. In physics and chemistry lessons, pupils can frame explanations using correct technical vocabulary, although some need help. Small class sizes give pupils confidence to attempt and give detailed explanations. Pupils can write in their own words a detailed explanation of why elements react and do not react with each other.
- 3.9 Pupils show high levels of competency in numeracy, helped by not relying on calculators in mathematics lessons. There are many examples where these skills are confidently used in other areas of learning, such as science and economics lessons. In economics, pupils proficiently carry out calculations relating to exchange rates and price elasticity. They also competently draw a supply and demand curve showing changes in oil consumption due to recent coronavirus outbreak.
- 3.10 Pupils are competent in the use of information and communication technology (ICT) to support their learning and a range of opportunities are taken in many subjects to promote its effective use. For example, pupils use the internet to research ideas for art projects and definitions of technical terms in computer studies. Pupils rely on their teachers for factual knowledge and explanation, and the unavailability of accessible ICT impinges on the general development of individual study skills, including independent research and learning from other sources.

- 3.11 Most pupils develop basic study skills appropriate for their age during their time in college. In the majority of classes, most pupils write their own detailed notes without relying on dictation. In history, they expressed their views clearly when analysing source material, in this case a picture of militia apprehending criminals before the establishment of the Peelers. Many pupils effectively develop their study skills and improve their ability to be analytical during their time at the college. For example, Year 11 pupils carefully analyse an extract from the *Carew Murder Case* and plan their answer in detail. They use suitable techniques and ask intelligent questions in order to deepen their understanding. More able and motivated pupils have gained higher order skills by the time they move on to the next phase of their education. In an A-level English class, pupils showed good understanding of poetic devices in their discussion and analysis of an unseen poem *Being Boring*.
- 3.12 In the context of the school's size pupils achieve only a limited amount outside the formal curriculum. Several pupils have achieved personal success in a number of fields such as Tae Kwan-do, Mixed Martial Arts, National Citizen Service and The Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme outside college but encouraged and supported by college staff.
- 3.13 Most pupils are quite well motivated, focus on their individual work and approach it with confidence. They enjoy working in groups when the task is appropriate, for example when presenting and explaining a topic to the class. Older pupils use a social media group to discuss academic problems and ask and help each other. They say that staff show them problem solving strategies so that, after a while they can research and solve the problems independently. In a careers discussion session, pupils openly talked about their aspirations and shared thoughts and advice with each other in a positive collaborative environment. Many of the pupils studying A-level courses in Year 13 display mature attitudes to learning, demonstrating initiative and independence. Some of the younger pupils do not always work collaboratively or take leadership in their learning, which as a result slows their progress.

The quality of the pupils' personal development

- 3.14 The quality of the pupils' personal development is sound.
- 3.15 Pupils respect and value diversity within society, and within the college. Pupils with a wide variety of ethnic and religious backgrounds freely express their individuality in an atmosphere of mutual respect for each other's cultures and faiths in this diverse college community. Multi-faith prayer space is available and is sometimes used but there is no insistence on it being used for any specific faith. Pupils are aware of the dangers to themselves and others posed by those who seek to stifle differing opinions or healthy debate. Pupils say that the small numbers mean that they have to 'be themselves', that everyone is different and so everyone deserves respect and they all look out for each other. Good relationships are fostered within the small teaching groups and these generate the strong ethos of tolerance and mutual respect on which their social interactions are based.
- 3.16 Pupils are able to identify their own personal strengths and weaknesses at a level expected for their age. Most pupils develop strong self-knowledge, self-esteem, self-discipline and resilience during their time in the college. This is due to consistent mentoring, pastoral care and support from the staff and more recently from the personal development coach of the recently introduced personal development programme. Older pupils explain to each other their career aspirations and university options identifying their academic strengths and character traits such as empathy, courage and attention to detail. They speak confidently and listen well in turn, all giving advice and asking intelligent questions. Although their major focus is on examination preparation, most pupils are helped to some extent to prepare for the next stage of their lives, for example with preparing applications, practice interview scenarios, and careers talks.

- 3.17 Pupils are proficient in their ability to reflect, self-evaluate and improve their own learning using feedback sheets provided by teacher. Also, pupils show a sound understanding of how to improve their own learning and performance by developing their initial ideas into more complex pieces of artwork. The small class size gives students the confidence to experiment with guidance and regular constructive feedback from the teacher. Some pupils have developed an enthusiasm for sport, increasing their perseverance and competitiveness and determination to face physical challenges. They are beginning to set their own goals and push themselves to achieve them.
- 3.18 Pupils understand how decisions made will impact them in the future, especially in terms of thinking about the next stage of their education. Most of the pupils in Y13 are able to make decisions about their study habits and their future. They are enabled to do this through the consistent support and guidance from family and college staff. The college has recently introduced an externally produced personal development programme. With support from the personal development coach and other college staff, insecure pupils who begin with negative attitudes to their learning are helped to find their interests and inner strength of character and start to make their own decisions and approach their future with positivity. Some pupils have had poor education experiences in their past and view the college as a second chance. Mentored and supported by college staff, they make better choices as they decide to grasp the academic opportunities provided. They find their passion for study, gain confidence and acquire strong decision-making skills before moving on to the next stage of their education.
- 3.19 Many pupils have religious and spiritual affiliations outside college. Whatever their faith or none, they express an appreciation of the non-material aspects of life such as peaceful meditation, the beauty of nature, and being awed by the changing qualities of light in the sky. They appreciate kindness, honesty, respect and tolerance in others and aspire to those qualities themselves. Pupils begin to make sense of their place in the world and reconsider how they behave towards others. The new personal development programme involves modelling the mind and is successful in helping pupils to uncover their inner strength.
- 3.20 Most pupils behave well, comply with the expectations of the college ethos, and are respectful of others in the community with the older pupils in particular being positive role models. Many are keen to behave well and act for the common good. Some of the younger pupils are beginning to accept responsibility for their behaviour and are developing their moral understanding. Pupils enjoy good-natured spirited exchanges between themselves but show little tolerance of unkindness or bullying. Some pupils expressed their views on right and wrong and the implications of different ways of keeping order in a discussion about the relative roles of the militia and police. Older sociology pupils developed their moral understanding while exploring the difference between a guilty mind and a guilty act when discussing the Grenfell disaster, the difference between manslaughter and murder and whom, if anyone, might be to blame.
- 3.21 During their time at the college, pupils develop confidence and are able to interact well and work with others. Pupils say that the teachers encourage a welcoming and friendly atmosphere. Social skills are taught and practised. For example, staff mentor students to improve how they phrase questions more sensitively. As a result, against a secure backcloth, pupils become resilient and face challenge, and construct problem-solving strategies to overcome challenges.

- 3.22 Although pupils recognise these creative problem-solving skills in one another, they have few opportunities for collaborative work because of the college emphasis on individual responsibility and achieving personal academic goals. Groups of pupils have presented a well-received assembly on being kind, and they work collaboratively when presenting a topic to the class at the start of a lesson. For example, in biology, when pupils working on the board to show the differences between DNA and RNA start to find it challenging, other pupils willingly join in to offer help and advice. Pupils say that they find the task is easier, more fun and less stressful when they work in groups such as when participating in a mask-making activity in art. They also enjoyed being part of a team across the year groups to research and present the values of different parties in the 'Hustings event' in the period leading up to the General Election. Many pupils participate and enjoy teamwork or team sports in their lives outside college. For example, they participate in Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme expeditions and spoke about giving practical support to an exhausted team-mate.
- 3.23 Some pupils fulfil a limited number of responsibilities and contribute positively to the lives of others within the school. They develop a good awareness of life beyond education through the work experience and service opportunities arranged by the college. Some pupils involve themselves in helping others in the community even though there are few organised opportunities through college where the emphasis is on achieving individual goals. Several pupils have completed courses with the National Citizen Service, and others have achieved Duke of Edinburgh Awards. Some have volunteered in old people's homes and children's centres. Some pupils have been involved with coaching younger children in football and martial arts. Pupils are good communicators with young and old people, and with those with mobility or hearing impairment. They are aware of those less fortunate than themselves and contribute generously to fundraising events for local and national charities.
- 3.24 Pupils know how to stay safe online and older pupils are generous with sharing their expertise with less experienced internet users. Pupils appreciate the need for a healthy lifestyle and the part played in that by physical activity and a balanced diet. Pupils bring their own lunches from home or go out into the local community to buy them. The younger pupils understand how to be physically healthy and the importance of exercise and willingly participate in the weekly physical activity at the local sports centre. They develop basic fitness and opt for activities such as badminton or basketball skills. There are no organised physical activities offered by the college to the older pupils who pursue their own sporting interests such as boxing, cycling, martial arts, running and football outside college. Pupils are aware of mental health issues, particularly anxiety and stress, but apart from through PHSE, pupils gain much of their awareness outside school.

4. Inspection Evidence

- 4.1 The inspectors observed lessons, conducted formal interviews with pupils and examined samples of pupils' work. They held discussions with members of staff and with the proprietors and attended form meetings. The responses of parents, staff and pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires were analysed, and the inspectors examined curriculum and other documentation made available by the school.

Inspectors

Mrs Linda Smallwood	Reporting inspector
Dr Bruce Waymark	Compliance team inspector (Deputy Head (Academic), HMC school)
Mr David Young	Team inspector (Headteacher, ISA school)