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Our Purpose

Acorn School is a small, independent day school which provides a caring and supportive learning environment for 11-16 year olds with social, emotional and/ or mental health difficulties (SEMH/ SEBD) and for those who have autism spectrum condition and specific learning difficulties.

Acorn School offers a holistic, therapeutic and individualised approach to learning that is oriented towards the needs of the individual student

Lessons are carefully planned around the individual learning and developmental needs of our students. Our focus on building positive and trusting relationships and a sense of belonging enables our students to develop the skills and knowledge they need to access the full school curriculum.

Our Vision

The Phoenix HEART values of; Honesty, Empathy, Aspiration, Respect and Trust underpin everything that we do here at Acorn School. We endeavour to use the best innovative practices to make learning inspirational, interesting and relevant.

Students who attend Acorn school often arrive with significant barriers to learning. Through building positive relationships and building a bespoke curriculum around the individual we strive to remove those barriers.

We aim to:

- Help and encourage students to positively manage their own behaviour
- Increase self-esteem and independence
- Help students develop positive relationships with others
- Provide students with the skills to be as independent as possible and prepared for life once they move on to college or the world of work
- Provide a broad, balanced and relevant curriculum that meets each students needs

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- To keep students safe and protect their welfare, and help provide them with the skills to keep themselves safe
- Provide all students with a quality education regardless of their background, gender, sexuality, religion or race
- Work in partnership with parents, carers and other professionals as an effective multi-disciplinary team

What we do to help our students who have special educational needs?

Acorn School provides students with individually tailored packages of education for students within a safe, caring and supportive environment. The emphasis is on the development of friendly and caring relationships, where learning and living can be positive and enjoyable experiences.

Our students often have trouble in building and maintaining relationships with peers and adults and as a result they struggle to engage with learning and to cope in mainstream education. Many of our students may often feel anxious and misunderstood and need support to help them manage their emotions and therefore, their behaviour.

Acorn school's approach is based around meeting the individual needs of each and every student, wherever possible on a personalised basis.

By working 1:1 and in small groups with our students we are able to provide positive role models and mentors that can help students develop positive relationships with staff and peers. By focussing on the positive, having clear targets and realistic expectations our students are able to thrive and reach their goals.

The school works closely with parents, Social workers and care staff to provide a joined up approach to ensuring the best possible outcomes for our students. Acorn also works collaboratively with external professional agencies (e.g. Social Services, Health, CAMHS, Speech & Language Therapy Service, Educational Psychology Service, Careers South West, YOT, Police).

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Therapeutic Support

Within the first 6 weeks of arriving at Acorn School our Educational Psychologist will observe and assess students. This will allow teaching staff to ensure that they know how each student learns and the best approaches to help them succeed. The school will also conduct academic assessments alongside *Thrive* and *Boxhall* Profile assessments. This will create a picture of the individual student's needs and help ensure realistic and achievable targets are put into place.

At Acorn School we use the Thrive approach in order to help students build trusting relationships with adults and feel safe in the school environment. Initial assessments will highlight the developmental needs of our students and allow us to build a plan that will help them to make progress socially and emotionally as well as academically.

How do we adapt our teaching to suit the students?

Acorn School provides a personalised curriculum in order to meet student's individual educational, emotional and social needs. These students have historically had interruptions to their educational experiences which have impacted on their development and by creating a bespoke programme to include both on and off site education curriculum; we are able to evidence impact on learning and development. This flexible approach is rooted in holistic thinking about the individual and their needs.

Acorn School offers students a broad and balanced curriculum which allows students to grow academically, vocationally, socially, physically and morally.

When a student starts their learning journey at Acorn School we assess their academic, developmental and emotional needs. A learning programme will then be designed in order to help them succeed.

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Literacy and Numeracy are the main focus of every morning and students are taught in small groups or 1:1 allowing teachers to target their individual literacy and numeracy needs.

We offer a range of qualifications and awards across the curriculum, including GCSE's, Entry Level Certificates, ASDAN awards and short courses, Functional Skills Certificates and AQA unit awards. We are currently developing our BTEC programme.

Subjects offered include;

Literacy • Numeracy • Science • Humanities • Design & Technology • Art & Textiles • Cookery • PSHE & Citizenship • ICT • MFL • Music • Outdoor Education • Physical Education • RE / Cultural studies.

PSHE and Citizenship

Personal, Social and Health Education [PHSE] and Citizenship are taught to all of our students as discrete subjects. The PSHE curriculum enables learners to develop the knowledge, skills and understanding of spiritual, moral and cultural issues needed to manage their lives now and in the future. Many of our PSHE lessons are bespoke so that we can also focus on the specific needs the student may have around e.g. risk taking behaviour or unhealthy choices. All students are taught how to remain safe on the internet protected from radicalisation and are given the tools to help them to stay safe.

At Acorn we help students to understand and stay safe in a wide range of relationships. We offer Sex education - both in Science and PHSE Programmes - where we look at sex and relationship education, early sexual activity and pregnancy, the importance of relationships, how different forms of contraception work, where to get advice and the nature and importance of marriage for family life and the bringing up of children. Parents may withdraw their children from all or part of the sex education that is provided by the PHSE programme but not that which is required as part of the National Curriculum science.

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Outdoor Learning

Our Forest School lessons encourage learning, confidence and self-esteem through practical activities and plan activities which foster enjoyment, participation, practical and social skills. Independence is encouraged by an understanding of health and safety needs, group and individual tasks. The Outdoor Curriculum offers a therapeutic and educational programme to students who can sometimes be hard to reach and who may have experienced difficulties with a more formal approach to education and rigid timetables. We aim to provide opportunities and experiences where students can develop:

- Knowledge and understanding of the environment
- Resilience and risk-taking
- Team-work and leadership
- Cross curricular learning, outside the classroom
- Independence
- Self-esteem
- Self-confidence
- Social interaction and communication

ACTIVITIES INCLUDE: • Woodwork • Tool construction • Shelter Making • Cooking • Natural Craft • Construction • Controlled Fires • Bushcraft • Natural Dyes • Orienteering • Metal Detecting

Physical Education

Weekly use is made of the local facilities at local sports centres and we also visit local swimming pools as part of our Physical Education Curriculum. Our PE lessons focus on the social and emotional aspects of learning as well as improving physical ability.

We can offer tennis, football, basketball, badminton, volleyball, climbing, sailing, kayaking, swimming, orienteering, assault courses, horse riding, running, walking and surfing.

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Enrichment activities

At Acorn we believe that learning is not confined to the classroom. In order for our students to have new experiences, become receptive to new ideas and develop an understanding of their place in the world, students have access to weekly enrichment activities that will allow our students to have the opportunity to develop their social skills, their self –esteem and learn in a more practical way.

We have visited museums, heritage sites, beaches, outdoor education centres as well as trying out new skills such as archery, dry slope skiing and horse riding.

Achievement

At Acorn school we believe that every day is a fresh start. We recognise all successes, however small, and reward our students for them. We aim to build confidence and self-esteem through the use of praise and encouragement, which is re-enforced with a reward scheme and the opportunity to earn points and credits for achieving their own personal targets and a positive attitude to learning. These are presented at the end of each week.

How do we ensure that student's views are taken into consideration?

All students have 1:1 mentoring sessions with key staff in the school when they are able to talk about any issues or concerns. As a very small school there are regular opportunities for all students to come to together to discuss ideas.

The student voice is also captured through:

- PEP meetings
- Care Reviews
- EHCP reviews.
- Responses to weekly reports from students and parents/carers.
- Close home/school liaison

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How we check that a student is making progress and how parents are kept informed?

Assessment is a key area in school to ensure that all students make expected progress in line with their abilities and special educational needs. This begins with baseline assessment on admission to Acorn School. The information from this allows staff at Acorn to determine a learning flightpath for each student. Progress is then measured from this baseline starting point on a termly basis. Staff also regularly take assessment for learning opportunities and mark students work on a regular basis in accordance with our standard marking policy using 'formative' approaches to help students to understand what they need to do to improve.

Parents and Carers receive a weekly report which highlights student successes and achievements as well as considering their next steps, attendance and attitude to learning. Further to this, parents and carers receive a termly report which includes progress and attendance data as well as a written report for each subject.

Attendance

Acorn school works hard to improve student attendance and to engage students in their learning. Where attendance is falling for an individual, the reasons for this are carefully monitored through contact with the home as well as Educational Welfare Officer Support. An Action Plan is created where attendance continues to be a concern and specific interventions are put into place in order to help that student re-engage.

Staff expertise and training

All teaching and support staff are appropriately qualified (or undergoing training) to fulfil their designated duties. Many have had many years of experience in education, especially in SEMH.

Staff training and development is given high priority across the whole school and organisation as a whole.

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All staff receive ongoing training in SEMH related aspects of professional development to help them to understand and meet students' needs, particularly in areas around attachment and trauma. This allows staff to help students maximise their personal and academic potential. The Thrive approach towards the assessment and progression of emotional and social development is firmly embedded throughout the curriculum.

All school staff receive regular awareness raising / training in:

- Safeguarding & Child Protection related issues (including PREVENT & CSE)
- Health & Safety such as COSHH, Fire Training, Food Hygiene and First Aid
- THRIVE (Emotional Development) and Attachment Awareness.
- De-escalation and physical intervention techniques.
- Autism Awareness
- Mental Health Awareness
- Medication Training

When Acorn School is identified as an appropriate provision for a student a detailed admission pack is completed by parents and carers and information is gathered from previous schools regarding current attainment and learning needs.

Students will often start on a reduced timetable for the first week few weeks whilst initial assessments take place.

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Transition at the end of Year 11:

Life Skills

The program facilitates young people in taking responsibility for themselves, by preparing them for their future roles as responsible adults. We offer a short course in personal finance which aims to help young people to understand where money comes from, how to budget and live independently and understand the financial implications of personal life choices.

We have weekly cookery lessons which teach students to cook sweet and savoury recipes from around the world and students are encouraged to think about healthy food choices and how to budget for food and ingredients. Experiences of life outside school, home and care are a very important part of the education we offer and we maintain links with outside agencies such as careers advisors, colleges, and police and youth services in order to widen the curriculum and provide motivation.

Students have opportunities to complete a work experience placements as well as attending college taster days. Previous work experience placements have included nursery work, mechanics, upholstery, carpentry, hairdressing and charity work.

Each student has access to a full programme of careers education and guidance and the school is supported by our local careers service.

Acorn School ensures that the curriculum helps to prepare all Year 11 students for the next positive steps in their lives.

This includes:

- Working with students to help them develop their future career aspirations from as early as Year 9 onwards.
- Personalisation of their curriculum and timetable to suit their needs in order to achieve their goals.

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- Working with the local colleges and local community to source work experienced placements. In order to provide students with first-hand experience of working life.
- Supported visits (student & parent/ carer where possible) to post 16 educational provisions as early as Year 9 in order to create aspirational pathways for future choices.
- Support with the application processes for post 16 provisions
- Joined up support with all relevant professions in order to guide students through any transition phase
- Preparation for adulthood through our life skills and functional skills programmes help students develop the skills and experiences they need for their next steps.

For Further information contact– Abbie Heard (Head Teacher) on 01271859720 or email acornschoo@plcl.org.uk

How do I get further information about local services?

The Local Offer For any information around Devon’s Local Offer please refer to: <https://new.devon.gov.uk/educationandfamilies/specialeducational-needs-and-disability-send-local-offer>.