



Acorns Pre School

Inspection report for early years provision

Unique Reference Number	508710
Inspection date	07 July 2006
Inspector	Susan Elizabeth Warren
Setting Address	St Andrews School, Great Yeldham, Halstead, Essex, CO9 4PT
Telephone number	01787 238384
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Registered person	Acorns Pre School Committee
Type of inspection	Integrated
Type of care	Sessional care

ABOUT THIS INSPECTION

The purpose of this inspection is to assure government, parents and the public of the quality of childcare and, if applicable, of nursery education. The inspection was carried out under Part XA Children Act 1989 as introduced by the Care Standards Act 2000 and, where nursery education is provided, under Schedule 26 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998.

This report details the main strengths and any areas for improvement identified during the inspection. The judgements included in the report are made in relation to the outcomes for children set out in the Children Act 2004; the National Standards for under 8s day care and childminding; and, where nursery education is provided, the *Curriculum guidance for the foundation stage*.

The report includes information on any complaints about the childcare provision which Ofsted has received since the last inspection or registration or 1 April 2004 whichever is the later.

The key inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding: this aspect of the provision is of exceptionally high quality

Good: this aspect of the provision is strong

Satisfactory: this aspect of the provision is sound

Inadequate: this aspect of the provision is not good enough

For more information about early years inspections, please see the booklet *Are you ready for your inspection?* which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

THE QUALITY AND STANDARDS OF THE CARE AND NURSERY EDUCATION

On the basis of the evidence collected on this inspection:

The quality and standards of the care are good. The registered person meets the National Standards for under 8s day care and childminding.

The quality and standards of the nursery education are good.

WHAT SORT OF SETTING IS IT?

Acorns Pre-School opened in 1992 and operates from a demountable classroom in the grounds of a primary school in Great Yeldham, Essex. A maximum of 18 children may attend the pre-school at any one time. The nursery is open each weekday from 09.00 to 11.30 and on some afternoons from 12:30 to 15:00, with an optional lunch club on one day a week, during term times only. All children share access to a secure enclosed outdoor play area.

There are currently 33 children aged from 2 to under 5 years on roll. Of these, 24 children receive funding for early education. Children come from the local area and surrounding villages. The pre-school currently supports a small number of children with learning difficulties.

The pre-school employs 6 members of staff. Of these, 2 hold appropriate early years qualifications.

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PROVISION

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

Children are kept healthy at the pre-school because staff follow good basic procedures to maintain children's health and hygiene. Children understand that they must wash their hands after using the toilet or before eating, staff are on hand to encourage and oversee this as they always accompany children to the toilet. Tissues are available in the playroom and children know where to dispose of these hygienically.

Children requiring first aid are attended to by trained staff, and all accidents are recorded for a parent or carer to sign. Likewise, those requiring medication have the doses recorded and signed off by a parent or carer. The first aid box, as well as any medication brought in for children, is stored out of children's reach. Children who become poorly are kept comfortable until they can be collected, and parents are advised that children must not attend if they are sick or infectious, though this policy is not currently available in written form. Sun safety is observed, with advice to parents to provide hats and apply sun cream before children attend, though supplies are available if they forget; consent is sought before staff apply sun protection to any child.

Children enjoy a nutritious snack and a drink mid-session to boost energy levels and provide a social occasion when they all sit together with staff. The snack typically contains a choice of fresh fruit or vegetables plus toast or bread. Milk or water is available in small jugs so children can help themselves. Children are involved in the preparation and serving of the snack and staff sit at the tables, encouraging good table manners and conversation, music provides a calming background. Other foods are introduced, for example, as part of festival celebrations such as Chinese New Year, to help children become accustomed to new tastes and ideas. All allergies and food preferences are well known to staff, who are vigilant in ensuring that children do not receive unsuitable foods.

Children attending the lunch club bring a packed lunch which is stored safely until needed; parents are asked to provide cool packs to keep items fresh in hot weather. Drinks of fresh water are available at all times, either set out for children to help themselves, or on request.

Children have opportunities to play outside every session. They use the large school playground for riding a variety of wheeled toys, using a ball or hoop, or to paint with

water on the concrete surfaces. Grassy areas are available and children also use the static climbing and balancing apparatus. A covered arbour provides a magical picnic place and shelter from the sun. Children develop large movement skills as they move freely around the outside area, running and using the equipment for catching and throwing.

They learn to participate in group activities as they play parachute games and organise themselves for a ride on the train, constructed from smooth logs. Small muscle skills are developed using tools and construction kits, mark making equipment and sand and water play. Children pour and fill containers with increasing control, they cut and roll playdough, shaping it with tools and their hands. The writing table has a variety of hole punches and other tools to help refine movement skills as children freely experiment with ways to join paper to make books and cards. Children are reminded about space for themselves and others as they move around both indoors and outside. They can line up or sit on the floor when asked and find a chair when needed.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

Children are cared for in a stimulating, child centred environment, well designed to maintain their comfort, safety and security. The main playroom is attractively decorated and well maintained, using children's work to good effect to create displays and visual appeal. Presentation is meticulous with excellent use of labelling to create a consistent style using clear, bold lettering. The room is well set out before children enter, making it easy for them to begin enjoying the resources and activities as soon as they arrive. They have space for their personal belongings on clearly named coat hooks, and a name card to self register, building self esteem and a sense of belonging.

Parents have access to a notice board with useful information about the pre-school, as well as general information regarding child protection and other areas of interest. The planning is also clearly displayed so they can see what the children will be doing. Security is well thought out, doors are locked during sessions so children cannot leave unseen. Visitors are signed in and out and an attendance register shows staff and children present. Daily risk assessments ensure that hazards are removed and the areas used by children are safe and suitable; maintenance is promptly carried out when required.

Children and staff take part in fire drills so they know what to do in the event of an emergency evacuation. Outings are risk assessed each time and all staff are briefed in their roles and responsibilities. Contact details and all emergency supplies are carried when away from the main setting.

The furniture and equipment used is all high quality, well maintained and carefully selected to be child friendly and easy to use. For example, the computer desks are low level, allow two children to sit at each and are colourful and inviting. The floor is clean and comfortable for floor play, with large hard areas for messy and wet activities. Air conditioning maintains an ambient working temperature all year round,

which has an impact on staff's and children's comfort and well-being. Natural and artificial light can be adjusted to create convenient and suitable working conditions according to need.

Children's welfare is paramount and staff regularly attend courses to update their knowledge and understanding of child protection issues. They are aware of the local safeguarding children's board procedures and share these details with parents before children are admitted. Any concerns are monitored and referred as necessary to help protect children from harm or neglect.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

Children enjoy their time at the setting and are helped to make good all round progress. The youngest children attending follow a programme of activities based on the 'Birth to three matters' framework whilst those aged three and above follow the Foundation Stage curriculum. For all children, the sessions are well planned and offer a variety of activities and equipment to stimulate and challenge them, encourage imaginative play and develop their social interaction skills. Children respond positively as they feel comfortable and secure, and able to try new things. The sessions include active and quiet times, free play and more structured activities, bringing variety and a good pace for the children.

Nursery Education

The quality of teaching and learning is good

Children follow a programme of planned activities designed to help them progress through the stepping stones towards the early learning goals, based on the Foundation Stage curriculum. Staff's knowledge and understanding is good although qualification levels just meet the minimum required by the National Standards. Focused activities are planned to promote the stepping stones, and these are assessed and evaluated. Staff also observe and record what children are doing as they engage with the basic, core provision available at all times. These observations and assessments inform the children's records and are used to plan the next stages of learning for individual children. Portfolios are developed which include details of the stepping stones achieved, examples of work and a yearly report. The records are updated on an ongoing basis and available to be viewed by parents at any time.

A variety of teaching approaches are used, including whole group, small group and individual teaching. Children's preferred styles are acknowledged and staff make provision for these, allowing children to be involved in their own learning. Key workers have detailed knowledge of the children in their key groups, but staff respond to all children as and when the need arises.

Children generally behave very well in response to staff's consistent management, based on positive encouragement and praise, whereby children become aware of the codes for acceptable behaviour. Staff note any challenging behaviour and apply strategies such as discussion to help children overcome their problems.

A well organised and tightly run session is essential to make good use of the time available. Flexibility and spontaneity are vital, for example to use the outside area as this is shared resource, and to follow children's interests, for example to observe a rainbow or puddles after rain. Staff achieve this well as they work as a team, with understanding of one another's roles and responsibilities, and the rotas and timetables, with the result that children's time and learning opportunities are maximised and a sense of purposeful, worthwhile activity is evident until home time.

Children listen and respond to their names at registration, sitting attentively and contributing to the general conversation. They are confident speakers and enthusiastic listeners, enjoying a story or song and joining in with familiar sections. They talk freely to one another as they play and work, negotiating for turns with equipment or exploring an imaginary play scenario with small world props or construction kits. Children use books for pleasure and to find information; staff model good 'book behaviour' so children learn to respect and enjoy books appropriately. They can practise mark making in a variety of ways, a well resourced writing area is part of the core provision. Outside, clipboards and pens are provided as well as water for painting with large brushes. Some children learn to write their names, forming letters correctly and begin to link sounds with letters. They have name cards to aid recognition and can refer to these when needed.

Children's mathematical development is promoted through free play with sand and water, as well as equipment for sorting and matching, shape recognition and counting. They learn to count in everyday contexts and begin to understand basic calculation as they see how many girls and boys are present, how many cups are needed for snack time and as they sing counting songs such as Five Little Ducks, introducing ideas of addition and subtraction. They pour and fill containers, estimating how many small ones are equal to a large one. They use non standard measures to compare length and height. They design and make models from construction kits as well as found and recycled materials, exploring shape and colour as they select the right piece.

Children develop an understanding of the needs of living things as they plant and grow flowers and vegetables from seed. They look after the fish in the playroom and see other animals when they visit the zoo and wildlife centre. Children become aware of the changing seasons as they explore the school grounds on nature walks at different times of year, collecting leaves and other specimens. Children gain a good understanding of their local community as they visit places of interest and welcome speakers to talk to them about their jobs. They also participate in events such as the flower show, and fundraise for local causes. Their knowledge of the uses of information technology is promoted by use of computers, a compact disc player and a listening corner with headphones, as well as a digital camera used to record their activities. They have various items of technology in the role play areas, such as a till, toaster and telephones. Children become competent at using a mouse and can operate simple programmes with minimal input from staff, supporting their learning across all areas.

Creative development is fostered by providing a balance of free and guided art and craft activities, helping children explore colour, texture and form in two and three dimensions. They enjoy painting and printing, marble rolling and collage, seeing the

effects of colour mixing as they do so. They have dough and other tactile materials to mould and shape, and interesting textures to apply to their collage work, such as representing a fluffy sheep or a shiny fish. Children explore real and imaginary events in the role play area which is themed to relate to the topic, for example a travel agent or a hospital. Domestic props are available along with dressing up clothes so that roles can be fully adopted for the duration of their play. Musical instruments are used either freely or in structured music and movement sessions, so children learn about rhythm and pitch. They also use recorded music both to listen to and to sing along with, action songs are favourites and fun for all!

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

Children's individual needs are well known to staff. Details are initially recorded on the registration forms, and updated as they change. Key workers speak informally to parents at the beginning and end of sessions, and if a more private talk is needed this can be arranged for a mutually convenient time. The children's sense of belonging and self-esteem are fostered as they use the self registration system and find their named coat pegs. They develop firm friendships with one another and have warm and friendly relationships with staff and the other adults they come into contact with. They are confident and eager to try new activities, such as colour mixing, dance or cooking. An end of term party is popular and fun, and creates special memories for children who are about to go on to school.

Children become aware of wider world cultures as they celebrate festivals and cultural events throughout the calendar year. They have books containing multicultural images and dolls and figures representing differing levels of ability and race. Staff are careful to avoid gender stereotyping and give all children equal access to resources and equipment.

Children needing additional help are well supported within the setting. The staff member with responsibility for children with learning disabilities liaises closely with parents and with outside professionals to ensure that the correct help is made available to enable them to make good progress and access all activities at an appropriate level. Children's progress is monitored and activities adapted if necessary.

The children behave very well and are responsive to staff, who issue gentle reminders to be polite and considerate. Children understand right from wrong and are generally kind and helpful to one another. They are cooperative at tidy up time and respond to the cues such as 'give me five', the signal to stop and listen.

Social, moral spiritual and cultural development is fostered.

Children learn to tolerate and respect one another, celebrating their differences and similarities. They become aware of the consequences of their actions and how these affect others. They are encouraged to express their own needs and feelings, and to think about those of other people around them. Staff are aware that children have differing levels of understanding and are patient with those who need extra time to

respond positively.

There is a very effective partnership with parents which is established before children begin attending. Parents are shown round and offered a prospectus with information and advice on what to expect when their child begins. They are invited to serve on the committee and take an active part in all aspects of life, including fundraising, taking a turn on the rota, providing fruit for the snack menu and attending social and educational functions throughout the year. Parents respond very positively to most events and have the opportunity to have their wishes and ideas considered by way of the comments book, which is available for them to use to express their thoughts and feelings.

Nursery education

The partnership with parents and carers is good.

Parents have every opportunity to be involved in their child's learning, either by attending sessions on the rota or by informal chats with the child's key worker or other staff. Currently, there are no formal systems in place for parents to view and discuss children's developmental records, though they are made aware that they can ask to view these at any time. Presentations at different times inform parents of activities and learning opportunities that their child will encounter, and these are very popular with a time to ask questions and add their ideas. Many parents choose to take an active part in the setting whilst their children are attending and speak highly of the approachability of staff, and how well they feel their children are progressing. They are kept informed of topics, outings and special events by way of a well presented newsletter, as well as notices and posters displayed in the entrance and on the board outside.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

Overall, children's needs are met.

Children are cared for by staff who have undergone checks and are vetted to determine their suitability to work with children. The current staffing situation is just meeting minimum requirements for qualified staff. All staff are experienced and have a good understanding of their roles and responsibilities.

Children are cared for in one group and each has a key worker assigned to oversee their development portfolios and report to parents on their progress. The sessions are well organised and flow well, with active and quiet times, a social snack time and indoor and outdoor play planned for. Outdoor learning is becoming more prominent and the group are actively developing this so that all areas of learning can be approached through both indoor and outdoor play.

All documentation and paperwork to support children is available and presented to a very high standard. Most policies and procedures have been rewritten in the past year, although there is still one policy, for sick children, outstanding and some very

recent changes to wording on the child protection policy are to be amended. Confidentiality is understood and followed, with all records kept securely in private files.

Nursery Education

Leadership and management is good.

The team is very strong and all staff share the ethos of providing good, play based activities to help children learn and develop their social skills in a secure and stimulating environment. Individual staff are aware of their strengths and an appraisal system identifies areas for development and training needs, in order to keep up with changing demands and provide the skills needed to deliver the Foundation Stage curriculum. Currently, the staff qualifications are just meeting the minimum requirements under the National Standards.

Progress since the new leader has been in post has been good, with staff and parents speaking positively about the direction and general feel of the group, and this is reflected in children's achievements.

There is a forward looking approach, with areas of strength and areas for improvement identified and planned for, such as the provision for outside play which is being developed. Activities are monitored and evaluated to ensure that the learning intentions are being achieved, and all staff are involved in planning and delivering activities.

The committee is active and supportive, assisting with recruitment and induction for new staff, and in liaising and maintaining strong links with the school, which most children will go on to attend. Good use is made of the links with the school to advise and coordinate the approach to literacy and numeracy to provide continuity for children. The pre school also welcomes advice and support from other outside professionals such as the local authority development worker.

Improvements since the last inspection

At the last inspection the group was asked to review all policies and procedures in line with the confidentiality policy, and to reflect the requirements of the National Standards. The group was asked to update records to clearly show that staff are vetted and suitable to work with children.

Most policies and procedures have been reviewed and are in line with National Standards requirements, reflecting confidentiality. They are signed and dated and available to parents and carers. There is still no written policy regarding sick children.

Staff records are updated and contain evidence of clearance for all staff, demonstrating their suitability to be in contact with children.

As a result of these actions, children's care and welfare are improved.

Complaints since the last inspection

There have been no complaints made to Ofsted since 1 April 2004.

The provider is required to keep a record of complaints made by parents, which they can see on request. The complaints record may contain complaints other than those made to Ofsted.

THE QUALITY AND STANDARDS OF THE CARE AND NURSERY EDUCATION

On the basis of the evidence collected on this inspection:

The quality and standards of the care are good. The registered person meets the National Standards for under 8s day care and childminding.

The quality and standards of the nursery education are good.

WHAT MUST BE DONE TO SECURE FUTURE IMPROVEMENT?

The quality and standards of the care

To improve the quality and standards of care further the registered person should take account of the following recommendation(s):

- demonstrate how staff development and training is used to maintain an appropriate skills base to meet the care and educational needs of children.

The quality and standards of the nursery education

To improve the quality and standards of nursery education further the registered person should take account of the following recommendation(s):

- continue to develop outdoor learning to provide a full range of activities across the areas of learning to challenge and stimulate children.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the leaflet *Building better childcare: Compliments and concerns about inspectors' judgements* which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk