



Acorn Centre

Inspection report for early years provision

Unique Reference Number	EY339290
Inspection date	12 February 2007
Inspector	Linda Janet Witts
Setting Address	Acorn Centre, Grange Primary School, Homleigh Road, Tuffley, Gloucester, GL4 0RN
Telephone number	01452 541351
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Registered person	The Acorn Centre
Type of inspection	Integrated
Type of care	Full day 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 satisfactory.

WHAT SORT OF SETTING IS IT?

The Acorn Centre operates from a self-contained unit within Grange Primary School. The school is situated in a residential area, on the outskirts of the city of Gloucester. Children attend mainly from the Podsmead and Tuffley areas, with a few coming from further away. The group is registered for 42 children aged two to five years. Funded three and four-year-olds are accepted. There are currently 65 children on roll, of whom 53 are funded three and four-year-olds. The group supports children with special needs and those for whom English is an additional language.

The group operates term-time only and sessions run daily between 09.00 and 15.00. Children can attend for a session or for the whole day. A cooked meal or packed lunch can be provided by the school canteen. Children have access to two playrooms, toilets, children's kitchen and an entrance hall. The group has its own outdoor play area. This area includes grassed and hard standing surfaces. Eight members of staff work in the group. Most members of staff hold level

3 qualifications in child care, and are first aid and child protection trained. Students offer additional support within the group.

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PROVISION

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

Children's good health is actively promoted. Children play in a clean well-maintained environment where staff take positive steps to keep the premises clean. They ensure safe handling of food and help children to understand that washing their hands before eating, helps to keep them healthy. Children learn about germs and how they can make them ill. There are occasions when younger children forget to wash their hands after using the toilet and staff do not always see this. Children who become unwell or injure themselves are cared for sensitively. Staff are trained in administering first aid and records of accidents are appropriately maintained. Parents receive written information about the group's sickness policy and about infectious illnesses; appropriate permissions and records are in place regarding the administration of medication to children. Children tend not to require a sleep whilst attending the centre, as they attend on a sessional basis or are too busy playing. For those that attend all day or become tired, there is no cosy area where they can relax, if they wish.

Children are provided with nutritious snacks. They are offered a selection of fruit and a choice of milk or water, at snack-time. Children bring in lunch from home and most contain a healthy variety of foods. Parents do not receive guidance about what to put in lunch boxes, to promote healthy eating. Mealtimes are relaxed, social occasions when children and adults sit together to enjoy their food and each other's company.

Children get plenty of physical exercise and have very good outdoor play opportunities. Indoors children move around the spacious play areas confidently. They manoeuvre dolls in pushchairs at speed around the area avoiding collision with other children or objects. Within the centre they enjoy climbing; they experiment climbing on a climbing frame, in a variety of ways and enjoy sliding down the slide before running round to repeat the activity. They climb in and out of a large ball pit and eagerly jump into the balls safely. They crawl through tunnels and move with gusto as they join in movement activities, such as dancing or acting out stories. For example, children act out 'We're going on a bear hunt story'. They stride around as a group, avoiding collision, varying the speed of their steps. They use large arm movements as they move 'through swishing grass' and 'swim through water'. Then they run at speed 'away from the bear'. Children also have weekly opportunities to use the school hall. Here they can use a broader range of equipment and undertake large group activities such as parachute games. Outside children enjoy fresh air and exercise in all weather. They have fun in the snow, running, rolling snow, throwing snowballs and building snowmen. The centre has its own outdoor play space and children can also use the school playing fields and facilities. The group has a good range of physical play equipment that is used effectively to support children's all-round physical development.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

Children's safety is promoted well. They are secure and supervised well by the vigilant staff. A security system and doors that cannot be opened from the outside ensure that children are protected from unwanted visitors. All visitors are asked to sign a record of their attendance and children are never left unsupervised with anyone who is not appropriately vetted. The environment in which children play is safe and areas where children need to be accompanied are protected by safety gates, to prevent children's free access. Children learn to keep themselves safe. For example, they are told to take care not to slip when venturing out into the snow. They learn to carry and use resources safely. For example, after circle-time children carry their chairs and position them around tables carefully. They remove toy storage boxes from low level shelving and carry them safely across to activity tables. They also use scissors with care. Regular fire drills are undertaken in conjunction with the host school. This helps to familiarise children with emergency evacuation procedures.

Children use safe and suitable toys and equipment that stimulate them. Resources are of good quality and stored in low storage units to enable children to be involved in the selection of activities. Equipment is regularly checked to ensure it is in a good state of repair.

All staff are trained in child protection, to ensure that they are aware of possible signs of abuse or neglect and appropriate action to take if they have concerns about a child's welfare. The group has a comprehensive child protection policy to safeguard children and this includes a suitable strategy to deal with any allegations against a member of staff or volunteer.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

Children of all ages enjoy their time at the Acorn Centre. They all, including those who are very new to the group, arrive with enthusiasm, detaching from their carer with confidence. They are relaxed in the company of the staff and students. Children are familiar with the routine and happily join in group activities such as circle-time, snack-time and story-time. Children are able to choose a variety of resources, initiating their own choice of activity, and also engage in adult-led activities. Activities are adapted for younger children to ensure their participation and enjoyment.

Nursery Education

The quality of teaching and children's learning is satisfactory. Children benefit from the staff team's childcare experience and sound knowledge of the Foundation Stage of learning. Children are making satisfactory progress across all six areas of the Foundation Stage curriculum. Their progress in personal, social and emotional development is good and also children do well in many aspects of physical, creative development and their knowledge and understanding of the world. Children's progress in some aspects of communication, language and literacy and mathematical development is weaker. The learning environment is attractive. Children can see print used for a variety of purposes, posters of interest and photographs of themselves at play. An enjoyable range of worthwhile activities is offered at each session and children are able to

enjoy regular outdoor play opportunities. Staff happily adapt their plans to respond spontaneously to unexpected events, such as a heavy snowfall. Staff instinctively ask questions to promote children's language and thinking but are not so confident about introducing mathematical ideas. Staff help students to gain confidence in supporting children in their learning.

Staff make regular observations of children and share information with the children's key carers. There is however a reliance upon staff's mental knowledge of children's abilities, used to inform future planning. Plans cover all six areas of learning but do not give sufficient attention to the areas where children's progress is weaker. Staff complete assessment sheets for each child to highlight achievements in relation to developmental stepping stones. These show gaps in children's learning which staff have only recently become aware of and they intend to focus future plans on these areas. Also, plans do not clearly show learning intentions or differentiation for individual children. Therefore those adults who are not involved in planning meetings can sometimes fail to extend activities to challenge the more able children. The group has an experienced special educational needs co-ordinator who works successfully with children's parents and outside professionals to support children with learning difficulties and disabilities. Support for children with English as an additional language is satisfactory. Children's assessment records are developing, in the form of 'learning journeys'. These records identify where children are in their learning and include evidence of learning in descriptive observations, photographs of children undertaking activities and samples of their work. Children are proud of their 'learning journeys' and often ask that staff add pieces of chosen work to their folders. Parents are aware that they can look at their children's progress records as they wish.

Most children are developing confident communication skills. Many are happy to talk in large and small groups, to both familiar and unfamiliar adults. At circle-time children are encouraged to share their news and many are keen to talk about their families and experiences. Three and four-year-olds join in and show their enjoyment of stories read by adults and enthusiastically join in the acting out of stories such as 'We're going on a bear hunt'. The book area is uninspiring and does not encourage children to look at books for themselves. Children are able to draw and paint, gaining control when using writing implements. Many can hold a pencil correctly and make marks such as lines and circles and give meaning to the marks made. Some adults are quick to write children's names on work before giving children the opportunity to do this for themselves. Children can collect writing materials from the drawing table to use within their play but writing for different purposes is not fully considered when staff set up other activities.

The young children are encouraged to show interest in counting. They enjoy number rhymes counting up and back. They talk about numbers such as how old they are and join in when others count. There are few numerals for children to explore and handle. Numbers are sometimes used as labels, such as numbers on the homes of the 'three little pigs' created to reflect the story theme the children are doing. Children are introduced to simple shapes and some can name them. Children use mathematical language, such as 'big' and 'small' and use mathematical ideas as they construct on small and large scale. Children select objects by shape, such as spheres and rods from magnetic construction resources, to make ice creams that are distributed to their friends and adults. Children are not actively supported to increase their mathematical awareness such as to problem solve, calculate and recognise numerals.

Children have good opportunities to investigate natural and man-made materials and to learn science. For example, they have fun as they explore shredded paper and hay. They explore outdoors. The group ventures out into the snow, listening to the sound of their feet crunching as they sink into the snow. They explore the texture of the snow, allowing it to trickle through their fingers then scrunching it hard to form snowballs. They also monitor the melting process of a small snowman, created by one of the children, which is carefully carried back into the centre. Children are keen to use the group's computer. Some are able to manipulate the computer mouse and try to complete simple computer programmes, under adult guidance. Children have opportunities to see how technological equipment works. For example they see a digital camera used regularly with the centre and help staff to fill the group's dishwasher. The children have plenty of construction resources that they join together, building for their own purpose. They construct with junk on both small and large scale. When producing large-scale group structures children discuss their ideas and ask staff for the materials they need. Children are introduced to different cultures through planned activities, for example, festival celebrations.

Children safely use a range of tools and equipment; for example, using a paint brush with control, pencils, scissors, play dough cutters and rolling pins. They manipulate resources of different size and shape skilfully as they go about their play. Many can manage the fastening on their coats. Others practise with adult support. Children also transfer resources between different areas of the centre with care.

Children learn different painting techniques through planned activities. Displays of foot prints, bubble painting and free painting are prominently displayed. They can freely choose to paint at an easel, as they wish, selecting colours and experimenting by mixing them. Children use their imagination within their play. Children visit the home corner as part of role-play based on their own first-hand experiences. They are often able to use real food such as cabbage and carrots. They can be seen pretending to buy the vegetables, to prepare them by peeling apart leaves, pretending to wash them, before serving to their 'family' or 'visitors'. They often extend their imaginative play by taking resources from the home corner into other areas of the centre. For example, taking dolls out in pushchairs and having picnics. They dress-up and utilise resources as props. Children enjoy musical activities and a good range of musical instruments is available to children. They learn songs which they perform for their parents, carers and school pupils.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

Children are very happy and settled within the group. New children are reassured and gain confidence very quickly. Children develop very good relationships with the staff and students. They are relaxed in the company of adults and their peers. Children with learning difficulties or disabilities are supported extremely well. The high adult to child ratios ensure that one to one support is given as required. Staff are experienced in the recognition of special needs and work closely with parents and outside professionals to support children in their development effectively. Activities are adapted as necessary to ensure that all children wishing to participate in an activity can do so.

Children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is fostered. Children are encouraged to be independent in their personal care and activity choices and many persevere at activities for extended periods of time. Children learn good manners and are becoming familiar with the behavioural expectations within the group. Most are very well behaved, follow instruction well and are encouraged to share and take turns. Incidents of unacceptable behaviour are shared with parents but not always recorded fully. Children know that there are times when they are expected to be quieter, such as during circle-time and school assembly. Children can choose quieter activities away from active play as they wish, but do not have a cosy area where they can relax. Children attending come from a range of different ethnic backgrounds and can see some positive images of their own and other cultures. They also participate in activities that introduce children to the wider community.

Partnership with parents is satisfactory. Parents receive written information about the provision and regular newsletters to keep them up to date with news about the group. The parent information includes the group's complaints procedure. Full details of playgroup policies are readily available for parents to examine. A suggestion box is available for parents but it is rarely used. The group has not received any complaints and has not developed a system for recording any, should they be received. Each member of staff is committed in their role as key carers to individual children. They have established good relationships with the children and their parents and promote two-way communication. Positive steps are taken to encourage parents to take an interest in their children's learning. They are encouraged to talk with staff and to look at children's 'learning journey' assessment records. These include photographs and examples of children's work for them to see. There are also photographic displays linked to the six areas of learning of the Foundation Stage to help parents to understand about the curriculum. Parents are invited to join their children on outings and to watch children's concerts, such as the Christmas Nativity concert.

Organisation

The organisation is satisfactory.

The group leader and deputy have been employed for fourteen years with the group and have supported staff, children and parents well during the move to the group's current premises. The group is now settled in the spacious facilities situated within Grange Primary School. A very good relationship has been developed between the group and its host school. The provision meets the needs of the range of children for whom it provides. Children play happily within the well-organised play space. However, there is no cosy area for children. The children can select activities from a suitable range of pre-planned and freely chosen activities. They have regular opportunities to play outside. Ratios of adults to children are excellent offering one to one support for those children that need it and to help to ensure that children are appropriately supervised and contributing to the smooth running of each session. The Acorn centre is welcoming to children, parents and visitors. There are colourful displays of children's work and photographs of the children at play. Children can see print used as labels but see few numerals. The resources available are attractively stored and are of good quality. The outcomes for children are promoted well.

Staff maintain most required records well. They record actual times of children's and staff attendance, accident and medication records. They gather all necessary information from parents to enable them to meet individual children's needs and keep records of children's progress. The group does not have a system to record complaints, should any be received, or a means of recording details of any incidents.

Leadership and management of the playgroup are satisfactory.

Systems are in place to ensure staff are appropriately qualified and cleared for work with children. A high percentage of staff hold level 3 qualifications in childcare. A system of appraisal works effectively to identify training to support individuals' personal development. All staff are trained in child protection and first aid. Attendance at local training workshops is good. Students are welcomed into the group and receive good support from staff to enable them to play an active role within the group. Children are protected from people who are not vetted. Although, the leader reports that committee members have undergone criminal records bureau checks, Ofsted is not aware of all personnel in committee roles.

There are strong links between the group and the school. They are valued as a part of the school and children are able to become familiar with the premises, teachers and behavioural expectations. Children are able to enjoy joint activities with the reception class and staff share information routinely with the reception class teacher and head teacher. This aids children's smooth transition into school.

The leader fosters team spirit and works closely with her staff and with the committee chairperson. Together they review their practice and identify areas for improvement. The group tries to encourage feedback from parents and suggestions received would be welcomed and acted upon. Staff have allocated time for planning and assessment of children's progress and regularly share information about individual children to ensure that they are meeting each child's needs and supporting their learning.

Improvements since the last inspection

This is the group's first inspection under this registration. Therefore there are no care actions or recommendations to report on. With regards to nursery education at the group's last inspection they were asked to develop the observation and assessment systems to ensure they link closely to inform future planning and so that learning in the outdoor environment is well planned and children are sufficiently challenged to build on prior knowledge through practical play. Secondly, to improve the partnership with parents to share information about the Foundation Stage, stepping stones, activities and detail about their children's progress.

The group has responded positively to the recommendations made. They use photographic displays linked to different areas of the Foundation Stage of learning to help parents to understand the links between activities and children's learning. Each child has a 'learning journey' progress record folder which parents are encouraged to look at and staff happily provide verbal information to support the documentation. The staff are continuing to develop their use of observation and assessment. There is still a heavy reliance on their mental knowledge of where children are in their learning when sharing information and using it to inform future

planning. The outdoor environment is used well to promote children's learning. There remains scope for staff to actively ensure that all children are sufficiently challenged, particularly the more able children.

Complaints since the last inspection

Since registration there have been no complaints made to Ofsted that required the provider to take action to meet the National Standards.

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 satisfactory.

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):

- develop a system for recording incidents and also parental complaints
- submit details of all committee members, and forms required to initiate suitability checks, as necessary, for each individual

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):

- develop the book area to provide an area where children are encouraged to look at books and can relax. (also applies to childcare)
- consider additional ways to introduce children to mathematical ideas, through practical activities and enable children to see more numbers within their play environment

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