

# Little Acorns Montessorri School

Inspection report for early years provision

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**Unique Reference Number** EY312157

**Inspection date** 15 June 2007

**Inspector** Maura Pigram

**Setting Address** The Bob Williams Building, Lincoln Field, Bushey, Hertfordshire, WD23 2ES

**Telephone number**

**E-mail**

**Registered person** Little Acorns Montessorri School Ltd

**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](http://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 satisfactory. 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?

Little Acorns Montessori School registered in 2005 and operates from two rooms within a building on the Lincolnsfield site. This is situated in Bushey, Hertfordshire. The large hall is used for children from two to five years of age. The smaller room is used by children under two years of age. A maximum of 30 children may attend the school at any one time. The school is open each weekday from 09.00 to 15.30 term time only. All children share access to an outdoor play area.

There are currently 31 children from two to five years on roll. Of these, 16 children receive funding for nursery education. The setting supports children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. They also support children who have English as an additional language.

The school employs five members of staff. Of these, four hold appropriate early years qualifications. The setting follows Montessori principles. It receives support from the local authority.

## THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PROVISION

### **Helping children to be healthy**

The provision is satisfactory.

Children develop effective self-care skills. For example, children wash their own cups and plates after snack and self-select aprons to wear for messy activities. They help themselves to tissues and dispose of them appropriately after use. They are aware of the need to wash their hands prior to eating and after toileting. They know to remove shoes when they are indoors and to wear their slippers indoors. As a result, they are learning about the importance of good hygiene routines.

Children have their health and dietary needs met because there is a close partnership with parents. Children are able to visit the snack area as they wish. They choose from the bowls of fresh fruit and the jugs of water or juice. These are regularly replenished. Parents and carers are reminded to include healthy options in their children's lunches. These are appropriately stored in the kitchen fridge. Consequently, children's health is effectively promoted.

Procedures are in place to help staff act in the children's best interests, should they require medical attention. All necessary documentation, including written parental consents and contact details, are in place to permit staff to act quickly if children become ill or if there is a medical emergency. There is always a member of staff with a current first aid qualification on site. The first aid kit is well stocked and easily accessible. This means that children's health, if they have an accident, is appropriately protected.

Children have regular opportunities for outdoor play. In the garden they play with bikes, cars and balls. Consequently, they are able to develop their large motor movements and coordination. They use utensils and tools such as scissors with confidence. The daily routine and the organisation of the room offers space and appropriate areas for quiet play. Children who need a sleep are able to do so according to their needs.

Younger children are developing their independence physically and emotionally. They are active and are becoming increasingly independent, acquiring control over their bodies and new physical skills. The staff have a clear understanding of the needs of the younger children. For example, they generally provide appropriate activities and resources to support the children's physical and emotional development.

### **Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe**

The provision is satisfactory.

Children are cared for in a welcoming and well-maintained indoor environment. Risks are minimised by the vigilant staff. An emergency evacuation procedure is in place which is practised with the children. Although there is a long gap between these sessions. This means that potentially some children may miss the opportunity of taking part in the evacuation procedure. The beginning and end of sessions are well-managed and orderly. This means that children's safety is effectively promoted. Children move around freely to play and are able to access resources safely. They use a varied range of developmentally appropriate, good quality toys and equipment. These are cleaned and checked frequently to make sure they are safe for children to use. Children know to mop up any spills of water and know how to handle equipment safely. For example, nearby staff remind a child how to hold the cutlery for lunch safely. Children

develop their understanding of keeping safe when they go for walks around the site. As a result, they are learning how to keep themselves and each other safe.

Children's welfare is effectively safeguarded. There is a designated member of staff responsible for child protection. Staff members are fully aware of the nursery's child protection procedures and what to do if they have concerns about a child in their care. The manager is pro-active in ensuring she has relevant information such as an information booklet from the Local Safeguarding Children Board. Consequently, children's welfare is well protected.

### **Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do**

The provision is good.

Children are happy and settled in a supportive and caring environment. They are greeted warmly by a staff member as they enter the nursery. They quickly engross themselves in their chosen activities, freely selecting from the resources on offer. Consequently, children are developing their confidence and self-esteem. Younger children in the infant room are well supported. They are introduced to the Montessori resources alongside other resources such as interactive toys and building blocks. Children have some opportunities for sensory play. Staff have undertaken training in the 'Birth to three matters' framework and are starting to use this in assessments and planning. As a result children are settled and thrive.

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory.

Staff have some knowledge of the Foundation Stage and are taking steps to link this into their Montessori method of teaching. Planning covers all the six areas of learning. Children are making satisfactorily progress through the stepping stones. Staff undertake regular written observations and assessments of the children. Starting points are known and these are linked onto individual planning. Children's written records of assessment clearly identify the progress children are making through the Montessori goals. These are used effectively to inform planning to support individual children's development. However, children are not always supported to extend their own spontaneous ideas and interests. This means that there are missed opportunities for the children to make connections in some aspects of their learning. This is particularly evident in creative and imaginative play.

Children's personal, social and emotional development is progressing well. They are confident and support each other in their chosen tasks. They behave well as they know what is expected of them. Children are independent and able to make choices. The good quality Montessori resources support this as does the daily routine. For example, the children are able to select aprons from the child height stand. They know how to organise themselves and happily take turns. For example, children negotiate between themselves about how many dishes they will wash before the other child has a turn.

Children can communicate clearly. They are encouraged to listen to others and contribute their own ideas in small groups. They have a good range of vocabulary and enjoy small group activities. During one session they are enthralled as they are given the opportunity to carefully hold an owl puppet. This helps them to maintain their interest in the topic and enlivens the session. They love looking at books independently and can retell stories to their peers. They also enjoy listening to story tapes. During this activity they concentrate for a long period of time. Children know the names and sounds of many letters of the alphabet and are beginning to write. Many can write their own names. They routinely find their name cards and some are able to recognise their friends names. For example, prior to lunch two children are asked to have a look on the

list to see whose turn it is to help lay the table for lunch. Children confidently do this and are able to tell the group who is helping today.

Children learn about numbers and the concept of maths through using a variety of Montessori equipment. They correctly organise rods, spindles, cylinders and cubes into steps of size. They use cubes and triangles to create 2D and 3D shapes. Children count in units of tens and hundreds using bead blocks. They are able to recognise written numbers when playing hop-sotch or completing number jig-saws. Children are positively supported during these activities. This means they are effectively challenged and their knowledge extended.

Children's creativity is developing in some areas. They have easy access to paint, colouring pencils, scissors and glue. They eagerly join in songs and listen attentively to the adult leading the singing sessions. Musical instruments are available for the children to use. Montessori equipment is always readily available to the children. Additional equipment such as role play resources are not always incorporated into the daily planning. As a result, there are some missed opportunities to develop children's skills in these areas. Children learn about the natural world as they walk to the nearby farm to visit animals. They recently learnt about the life cycle of the butterfly. They are in the process of learning about the life cycle of frogs and toads. For example, frog spore contained in suitable containers support the children's curiosity. They learn about different countries and cultures through discussions, songs and the celebration of festivals. Recently they enjoyed making book marks as a gift for Father's Day. Knowledge and understanding of the world is supported through the use of flags, jig-saws and the globe.

### **Helping children make a positive contribution**

The provision is good.

Children are valued and respected as individuals. They make independent choices and decisions throughout their day when selecting tasks. The flexible settling-in period means that staff have the opportunity to get to know the children and their parents. This means that their individual needs can be met. Parents complete an initial registration form for their child. Any extra support that children may need is effectively identified. The school have established links with outside agencies such as speech and language therapy. Consequently, guidance can be sought and all parties work together to meet specific needs. This means that positive steps are taken to ensure that all children are fully involved.

Children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is fostered. They regularly take part in meaningful activities to help them gain a good understanding of different cultural and religious festivals. Some staff share songs and rhymes in various languages with the children. In addition children are offered French lessons once a week from an outside individual. They learn about the world around them through their regular walks and through discussing flags from different countries. The children have easy access to resources which help value diversity such as jigsaws. This increases children's knowledge and understanding of the world.

Children behave well because they know what is expected of them. Staff created a calm environment speaking to the children in quiet tones through out their attendance. Children feel a sense of belonging as they are given responsibilities such as laying the table for lunch. Praise and encouragement is routinely given to the children. As a result, they develop good levels of confidence and self-esteem.

Children benefit from the strong partnership with parents and carers that the school has formed. Consequently, there is a continuation of care between the children's parents and the staff.

Parents speak highly of the provision. Some children attending have older siblings who have also attended the school. Newsletters are regularly provided and a notice board informs them of up and coming events such as parents meetings. There is a system in place to record any complaints which complies with the requirements of the National Standards. This means that parents are aware of the procedures to follow if they have any concerns regarding the welfare of their children.

The partnership with parents and carers of funded children is satisfactory.

Parents are provided with ample information about the Montessori methods of teaching and how this is promoted. They also receive a guide showing how these are linked to the six areas of learning in the Foundation Stage curriculum. However, parents do not receive any other information about the curriculum. This means that potentially parents are not fully involved to support their children's learning. Parents have an opportunity to exchange information about their children on a daily basis. In addition, parent consultation sessions are offered so that their children's achievements can be discussed.

### **Organisation**

The organisation is satisfactory.

Children are cared for within a safe and secure environment where they can rest, play and eat in comfort. The staff work well together and the manager is proactive in obtaining information to benefit the children's welfare. Policies and procedures work in practice to promote children's health, safety, enjoyment, achievement and ability to make a positive contribution. Recruitment and vetting procedures are robust. There is a clear induction system in place. As a result, students and new staff are clear about their roles and responsibilities. The adult to child ratio positively supports children's care, learning and play. Professional development is given a high priority. For example, key staff recently completed the 'Birth to three matters' framework training. This contributes to the children's good health, enjoyment and achievements in the setting.

The leadership and management of funded children is satisfactory.

All staff work together to plan activities and play. Consequently, children learn and make sound progress through the Foundation Stage. Staff have the opportunity to regularly discuss and evaluate their practice. Some areas of learning are very well monitored and assessed. Provision for nursery education are evaluated and areas for improvement are acted upon. For example, the manager makes good use of local authority training and advice to ensure the Montessori style of teaching is linked to the Foundation Stage curriculum. The manager is appropriately qualified and experienced. Overall the children's needs are met.

### **Improvements since the last inspection**

At the last care inspection the provider was asked to extend the outdoor play into the daily routine. She was also asked to ensure that the fire procedures are displayed at all times. These have been done. Children now have free access to the outdoor environment which means that they learn the importance of exercise. Fire procedures are clearly displayed. Consequently, all staff are aware of procedures to follow in the event of an emergency. This means that the children's safety is protected.

At the last education inspection the provider was asked to improve the staff's knowledge and understanding of the Foundation Stage curriculum. She was also asked to develop information for parents to ensure that they are fully informed of the Foundation Stage curriculum. These issues are ongoing. Staff are continually developing their understanding of the Foundation Stage curriculum and how this can be linked to the Montessori style of teaching. Consequently, children progress is continually evaluated. An information document has been developed to show parents and carers the six areas of learning and how these are linked to the Montessori methods. However, no other information such as an overview of the Foundation Stage is provided therefore this remains as a recommendation in this inspection.

### **Complaints since the last inspection**

There have been no complaints made to Ofsted since the last inspection. 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 satisfactory. 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):

- provide daily opportunities both indoors and outdoors for exploration and sensory play
- practise and record emergency evacuation drills taking into account the pattern of attendance of children and staff.

#### **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):

- accommodate the different ways children learn by ensuring children have opportunities to express their own feelings and interests
- develop information for parents to ensure that they are fully informed of the Foundation Stage curriculum.

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