

Abacus Nursery School

Inspection report for early years provision

Unique Reference Number	205163
Inspection date	09 October 2007
Inspector	Ann Doreen Burford
Setting Address	Unit 2 Lickey End Buildings, Barnsley Hall Drive, Bromsgrove, Worcs, B61 0EX
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Registered person	Shirley Anne Wilks
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 outstanding. The registered person meets the National Standards for under 8s day care and childminding.

The quality and standards of the nursery education are outstanding.

WHAT SORT OF SETTING IS IT?

Abacus Nursery School is a privately owned nursery. It opened in 1998 in a converted building on the outskirts of Bromsgrove, Worcestershire. The children are based in three main play areas with additional space for small group activities. A maximum of 40 children may attend the nursery at any one time. The nursery is open each weekday from 08.00 to 18.00 for 51 weeks of the year.

All children share access to a secure enclosed outdoor play area.

There are currently 59 children aged from two to under five years on roll. Of these, 35 children receive funding for nursery education. The nursery currently supports a number of children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and is able to support children who speak English as an additional language.

The nursery has 12 members of staff who work with the children and has additional relief staff available for emergency cover. Of these 12, eight hold appropriate early years qualifications and two are working towards a qualification.

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PROVISION

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

Children's health needs are fully protected because of the dedication shown by the caring staff and management. Detailed health care plans are developed in consultation with parents for all children with existing medical conditions and relevant training is completed by staff. Comprehensive information is available for parents on the signs and symptoms of infectious diseases and the exclusion times to reduce the spread of infection. The majority of staff are first aid trained so in the event of an accident immediate relevant action is taken. This comprehensive approach ensures the health needs of all children are met.

The management are very committed to helping children learn about leading a healthy lifestyle so as part of this drive they have achieved a bronze award as a healthy setting from the local authority and are already planning how they can build on this high achievement. Snack time is a café style system so children are developing their awareness of taking responsibility for eating healthily. A selection of fresh fruit or raw vegetables are provided at every snack time. Jugs of fresh drinking water and beakers are easily accessible in every play room to ensure children are well hydrated. As part of the bronze award as a healthy setting the staff and some parents have worked together to develop an informative leaflet on the contents of a healthy lunch box. This information is made available in the welcome pack for all parents.

Children frequently access the well-designed outdoor play area as it is seen as an outdoor classroom. All the children relish their time outdoors as they extend their learning in this stimulating environment. They enjoy using the extensive range of equipment and toys with increasing dexterity. Appropriate action is taken by staff to protect children's health during adverse weather conditions. Spare outdoor protective clothing is available for wet or hot weather. Sheltered areas are available for children to sit in quiet contemplation which supports their emotional well-being.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is outstanding.

Children enjoy a lovely warm and welcoming atmosphere as they and their parents are greeted by name as they arrive. The vibrant entrance sets the exciting ambience that is extended throughout this imaginatively converted building where children can learn, explore and develop safely and with close adult support. There is a high ratio of well-qualified adults who are carefully deployed, ensuring children are always well supervised. Staff have a tick list they use every morning before children arrive to ensure all the rooms are safe and ready. Staff regularly reflect on the layout of each play area ensuring that the room is safe without compromising challenge.

The vast range of toys and equipment enhances children's learning and it all meets current safety legislation. Additional toys from other sources such as the local authority partnership also supplements children's experiences. All of the equipment is meticulously checked and cleaned. Staff complete a detailed health and safety assessment of every activity. The children are asked what steps they should take to keep themselves safe before taking part in a new challenge. The main entrance door and the door to the play rooms are alarmed so that children cannot leave the building without staff being alerted. The entrance door cannot be opened from the outside so no one can enter without supervision. This meticulous approach ensures children stay safe. Staff are clear over their role and responsibilities relating to safety and there

is a very good range of safety features in place to protect children from harm. For example, radiators are guarded, electrical sockets are protected and safety gates prevent children leaving their base play area. There is a health and safety officer who takes responsibility for regularly completing the thorough risk assessments and keeping all of the staff up-to-date with relevant legislation and issues. Children learn how to keep themselves safe in an emergency, for example participating in an emergency evacuation procedure. The manager then assesses the practice to identify if there are areas for improvement.

Children are well protected by adults who have a clear understanding of how to protect children and recognise that this is their first priority. All of the senior staff have completed relevant training which has been cascaded to all of the other staff. They are all vigilant, aware of the signs and symptoms of possible abuse and know the appropriate procedures to follow should they have concerns about a child. An extensive range of journals and guidance is available for staff to use as a reference.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

Children enjoy attending the nursery where they feel secure and well nurtured. Staff develop warm and caring relationships with the children in their care. An effective key worker system and lots of cuddles and reassurance helps children who are new to the group to settle quickly. Two-year-olds have their own play area where they can explore freely and experience a range of activities specific to their stage of development. These are planned in line with the 'Birth to three matters' framework and young children respond enthusiastically to the interesting and stimulating activities on offer. Staff working with this age group are suitably experienced and understand the principles of this framework. The children are encouraged to develop their senses and natural curiosity through a range of interesting materials such as dried pasta, sand, water and paint. They join in with conversations and learn new words through playful interactions with staff and each other and enjoy lots of songs and rhymes. At times they join in with their older peers so they understand there is a wider community within the setting. Children are given time to enjoy their play so they can experiment and develop without the pressure to make a product to take home.

Nursery Education

The quality of teaching and learning is outstanding. The first-class learning experiences offer a balance of child and adult-initiated activities that provide positive experiences which help children to develop confidence and motivate them to learn. This is achieved because of the way the staff complete the planning which shows a clear understanding of the Foundation Stage curriculum and shows how children will make progress towards the early learning goals. The planning is based on observations of children's interests, consequently they are interested and respond to the stimulating experiences which inspire them with awe and wonderment. The varied educational programme on offer includes focus activities which are used to promote specific areas of the curriculum or to help individual children to extend or refine their skills. Children benefit from the excellent teaching which ensures that they enjoy and achieve. They are grouped effectively and encouraged to try new experiences through creative use of topics and themes. Staff work closely with children to develop strong relationships and an enthusiasm for learning. They are skilled at knowing when to intervene and when to allow children time to develop their own ideas and often join in with children's activities to spark their interest and ask questions that make children think.

Children's personal, social and emotional development underpins the rest of the learning. Most children enter the nursery enthusiastically, behave very well and are confident and happy during the time they spend there. They often express excitement and pleasure as they play and learn and show they feel very secure with the staff. Each playroom has its own puppet which gives the areas their separate identity and sense of community. The puppets often introduce a new activity and the children listen engrossed to instructions. Children are confident in initiating their own learning as they choose what they want to do. They are mostly polite and considerate to each other and are learning to share, take turns and work together harmoniously, particularly when helping to tidy away their toys before lunch. They show real pleasure when being chosen as a 'special helper' and respond positively to the clear guidelines and expectations set by staff.

Children's communication, language and literacy skills are well developed. Most children are eloquent communicators and express their intentions or thoughts with increasing confidence. They have opportunities to speak in small groups as they relay their home experiences and talk about their family. Symbols and sign language is readily used to help children with English as an additional language or those still developing their skills. Children have the opportunity to learn French and have learnt to say 'hello' in different languages so at registration time they say 'hello' in a variety of languages. This has given great breadth to children's understanding of the ways to communicate. The library is a wonderful atmospheric area that inspires a love of books. The use of textures creates a cosy place where children can lose themselves in the stories. Imaginative and effective methods help them to link sounds to letters through a phonic learning system and they have good opportunities to recognise their own name. The use of labels, signs and symbols help children to understand that words have real meaning. They also see writing from around the world so are starting to understand there are a variety of ways of writing.

Children are making very good progress in their mathematical development. Children can count confidently, for example the 'special helpers' count how many children are present and add one on as they include themselves. They understand that some activities have rules which include number. For example only four children can play in the sand at one time. There are four caps they wear when playing in the sand so they work out if there is a space or not. They spontaneously find shapes to play with, such as on the writing table they find items to use as a template to draw two dimensional shapes showing how they understand that everyday objects have shape. Staff regularly question children using words such as 'big' and 'little' and provide good quality mathematical resources to help children compare, sort by colour and describe position and quantity. Activities are provided so children have the opportunity to problem solve, staff ask challenging questions and give children time to think and make their own decisions.

Knowledge and understanding of the world is a particular strength in this setting. They explore confidently and learn effectively through practical hands-on experiences. A broad range of rich and stimulating activities are provided that allow children to investigate and explore their environment using a varied range of equipment and materials. They have opportunities to observe, question and explore their natural curiosity as they observe insects in the garden. These provide children with wide opportunities to use their senses, ask questions and build on what they already know. They have excellent opportunities to design and make things with a variety of different shaped and sized construction toys and in their creative play. They enjoy celebrating a range of festivals and are learning to value differing lifestyles. Grandparents are invited to join the children to develop their respect for their elders and family life. The wonderful images around the premises stimulate conversations and are truly inspirational. Children use

real artefacts from other countries so they can use their senses to experience what life is like in other countries, such as music, textiles and food.

Physical development is well promoted both indoors and outdoors. Expert advice is used to enhance the promotion of physical play. This advice has influenced the variety of equipment, such as ribbons for dance and movement, bean bags, balancing activities and other games so children and staff know how to enjoy imaginative physical exercise. Children move safely around the well-organised rooms. They are developing their spatial awareness because of their participation in suitable activities such as playing ball games. Children love the freedom in the well-organised outdoor area; they push, pull or pedal a variety of toys. They are developing their hand and eye coordination as they use a variety of equipment such as scissors with increasing competency.

Children's creativity is valued and encouraged. Their art work is proudly displayed in art galleries and included in displays about topics. For example, as part of the transport topic children designed their own forms of transport from a range of recycled material to use as a display. A range of painting materials is readily accessible so children learn about texture and how different brushes have different effects. For example they have different brushes ranging from a washing-up brush, a household paint brush to a small artists brush. Children use them with flair. Music sessions are provided on a weekly basis by a visiting musician so children learn rhythm and join in with favourite songs as well as learning new ones. They enjoy giving performances for special occasions for family and friends. They enjoy using their imaginations in role play such as in the travel agents. Children often take their imaginations outside to the play area where they use the cars and ride-on toys as part of their games.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

Children feel a strong sense of belonging because of the effective key worker system. Staff have completed relevant training so they understand the ethos behind this principle. The settling-in procedure helps to identify children's individual needs, such as comforters and the best way to help each child separate from their parent or carer. Staff talk to parents about their child, gain early information about their care needs and developmental starting points and provide advice to help parents support their children's learning at home. The staff obviously know the children in their care well. Favourite toys are made available so children quickly settle. Children use a prolific range of playthings, resources and artefacts to help them develop an awareness of their local community and the wider world. They participate in wonderful activities and regularly talk about their families and compare this with the lives of their friends. For example children can identify differences and similarities between their own religion and others.

Children with learning difficulties or physical disabilities are extremely well supported by dedicated staff who are proactive in their approach. There is a strong commitment to working closely with parents and this aids the early identification of any additional needs a child may have. Staff visit specialist settings and have forged positive relationships with other professionals to enhance the care of all children.

Children's individuality is valued and staff help children feel good about themselves by frequently providing positive support, praise and encouragement to help build their self-esteem. A high emphasis is placed on developing children's positive behaviour and they are encouraged to treat each other and their toys with care and respect. There is a rota so children can take turns being a 'special helper'. They have jobs of age-appropriate responsibility which they take very

seriously and with a sense of pride. Staff provide a positive and consistent approach towards managing children's behaviour. They encourage appropriate behaviour in all interactions with children, offer lots of praise to show that good behaviour is valued and offer good examples. Children's spiritual, social and cultural development is fostered.

The partnership with parents and carers is outstanding. A strong relationship with parents is developed as they share in what they know about their children with staff, are given advice on how to join in with the learning at home and are given plenty of opportunities to discuss their child's progress. Planning for each play area is in a folder which is stored in the entrance area so parents are informed about the current learning programme. Regular formal parents' evenings are organised where the key workers are available to discuss children's progress. An abundance of information is available for parents. Before their child starts at the setting a 'welcome pack' is provided. There is a parents' notice board with information about the setting and other relevant childcare guidance. Regular newsletters are developed to help parents to work with their children at home and to ask parents for help with such things as providing costumes for parties. Parents' views and concerns are respected and acknowledged and they know how to make a complaint on behalf of their children if they wish to. Parental evaluations on the strengths and weaknesses of the care and education is actively sought. The management and staff welcome their views and act upon their suggestions.

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

Children thrive because they are well supported by the highly professional staff team. High staffing levels are maintained and this ensures children are given close attention at all times. Additional staff, such as the administrative support worker and bank staff to cover holidays and sickness means child ratios are never compromised. The key worker system is extremely effective in supporting children and helping them to form close bonds with the adults who care for them. Robust employment and staff checking procedures ensure that children are protected by experienced and qualified staff who keep up-to-date with early years good practice.

Leadership and management is outstanding. The management of this setting is inspirational. Their commitment to improvement is exceptional which is reflected in their commitment to completing quality assurance schemes. They have recently achieved a bronze quality assurance award for the care of children and have started the next phase of this award scheme. They have also achieved a bronze award for being a healthy setting and again have started to plan on how to build on this success. Regular staff meetings are held to share information and discuss children's progress and the owners work closely beside staff to observe practice and help them to improve their knowledge through support. Training plans show a commitment to ongoing staff development and yearly appraisal and comprehensive induction procedures reflect the high level of enthusiasm and commitment shown by all staff. Close links have been made with other early years professionals and local schools in order to share good practice issues and make strong links that will benefit the children. Parental views inform the ongoing self-evaluation of the group and aids the identification of the setting's strengths and weaknesses. The amalgamation of management, staff and parents evaluative views inform their action plan so this group goes from strength to strength. This attitude enables them to introduce new initiatives which benefit the care and education of the children.

The substantial range of documentation policies and records ensure children's health, safety and well-being are always carefully considered. The nursery has an extensive operational plan and this is regularly updated to meet changes in legislation and practice. All day-to-day

documentation and records are kept close to hand so that staff can easily update them and gain appropriate signatures from parents and confidentiality is maintained at all times. Overall the children's needs are met.

Improvements since the last inspection

At the last inspection the provider was asked to improve hand drying facilities. Paper towels are readily available for use after craft activities or using the toilet. They were also asked to update the risk assessments which has been successfully completed. They have a health and safety officer who takes responsibility for ensuring that the assessments meet all current legislation. These actions have improved the health and safety of the children.

Nursery education.

At the last inspection the provider was asked to improve the activity plans to record the effective steps staff are taking to vary activities to meet individual children's learning needs and for sharing with others. The planning has been completely re-designed. It is now individual to each child and is based on observations and assessments of their personal interests. This has greatly enhanced the learning opportunities for all children.

Complaints since the last inspection

Since the last inspection there have been no complaints made to Ofsted that required the provider or Ofsted to take any action in order to meet the National Standards.

The provider is required to keep a record of complaints made by the 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 outstanding. The registered person meets the National Standards for under 8s day care and childminding.

The quality and standards of the nursery education are outstanding.

WHAT MUST BE DONE TO SECURE FUTURE IMPROVEMENT?

The quality and standards of the care

No recommendations for improvement are made because the quality and standards of care are outstanding.

The quality and standards of the nursery education

No recommendations for improvement are made because the quality and standards of nursery education are outstanding.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the leaflet *Complaints about Ofsted Early Years: concerns or complaints about Ofsted's role in regulating and inspecting childcare and early education (HMI ref no 2599)* which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk