

# Little Acorns Playgroup

Inspection report for early years provision

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	129363
<b>Inspection date</b>	07 December 2007
<b>Inspector</b>	Jane Mount
<b>Setting Address</b>	Warners End Community Centre, Stoneycroft, Warners End, HEMEL HEMPSTEAD, Hertfordshire, HP1 3QG
<b>Telephone number</b>	01442 266732
<b>E-mail</b>	
<b>Registered person</b>	The Trustee's of Warners End Neighbourhood Association
<b>Type of inspection</b>	Integrated
<b>Type of care</b>	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](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 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?

Little Acorns Playgroup operates from Warners End Community Centre, Warners End, Hemel Hempstead. The group has sole use of a large playroom with an integral kitchen, toilets, a quiet room and a secure outside play area. The playgroup serves the local and wider community.

There are currently 26 children on roll including 20 children who receive funding for nursery education. Children attend for a variety of sessions and the setting is able to support children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and children who speak English as an additional language. The group opens Monday to Friday, term time only and sessions are from 09:15 until 12:15.

Little Acorns Playgroup employs four staff. Over half the staff have early years qualifications and one member of staff is currently undertaking an appropriate childcare qualification. The group is a member of the Pre-school Learning Alliance.

## THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PROVISION

### Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

Children benefit from a healthy, balanced diet. At snack time they have the opportunity to try a selection of healthy options such as cucumber, banana and raisins. Special dietary requirements are met well. For example, individual dietary needs are recorded appropriately so that all staff are fully aware of any specific dietary requirements such as a food allergy a child may have. Consequently, children's health is protected. Children are able to practise their independence skills. For example, at snack time they confidently pour their own drinks and have a choice of milk and water. Water is available throughout the session and children are encouraged to independently pour themselves a drink if thirsty, with a tray and cups on a table where children can easily access them. Children have regular opportunities to learn about healthy eating through planned activities, discussion and play. For example, in the summer the children enjoyed growing some produce such as tomatoes, peppers and cress and through discussion learnt about the healthy benefits of eating fresh fruit and vegetables. Also, the children had a healthy eating week when they enjoyed learning about healthy food choices and they participated in 'Dacorum healthy eating project' when the children learnt more about the importance of cooking and eating nutritious foods.

Children's health is protected and cross-infection is minimised as staff follow the settings clear health and hygiene procedures. For example, children stay healthy because staff wash their hands before preparing or handling food. Tablecloths are used at snack time and are thoroughly cleaned after use and also staff wear disposable gloves when appropriate. Priority is given to ensuring staff have up-to-date first aid knowledge and a fully stocked first aid kit is available which is regularly checked and re-stocked as necessary. Children's health is safeguarded as there are clear recording procedures for accidents and when administering medication. Children are cared for in an environment where they learn the importance of good hygiene and personal care. Support and guidance from staff helps children to gain a clear understanding of good hygiene practices to ensure they stay healthy. For example, staff remind children to flush the toilet after use and to wash their hands. Staff help younger children to wipe their noses and dispose of tissues appropriately afterwards. Most children know they must wash their hands after visiting the toilet or before eating. They enjoy using the soap to thoroughly clean their hands before drying them on paper towels. Consequently, the risk of cross-infection is minimised.

Children have regular opportunities to exercise and develop their physical skills within the daily routine and through planned activities. Children benefit from the fresh air when playing outside and their physical health and development are promoted as staff support children as they confidently run and jump. Children have some opportunities to balance and to climb and children are learning that physical exercise can be fun. They show enjoyment when playing outside and their physical development is promoted as they confidently negotiate around obstacles when riding bikes. Staff also provide regular music and movement sessions which children confidently participate in. For example, in the large hall they keenly join in with jumping in imaginary puddles and delight in being 'as small as a mouse' and 'as thin as a pin'. Children are able to rest and be more active according to their needs. For example, children enjoy sitting in the quiet room and looking at books.

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

The provision is good.

Children have choice in an environment kept safe but where they are able to explore with safe limits set. Staff have a good knowledge of health and safety procedures and positive steps are taken to promote safety and to keep children safe. For example, supervised entry to the playgroup is managed well by staff which ensures no-one can gain unauthorised access and children are unable to leave unsupervised. Consequently, children remain safe. Appropriate safety precautions are taken such as regular emergency evacuation practises which all staff are fully aware of and know how to implement in an emergency and overall these are effective. Children's risk of accidental injury is minimised because staff are vigilant and any potential risks or hazards are identified and immediately minimised. For example, informative risk assessments are completed and maintained including a daily check list and a more comprehensive assessment every half term. Risk assessments are also carried out when the group go on outings and visits such as nature walks in the local area. Also, accident records are monitored to ensure there are no recurring patterns of accidents. Consequently, children are safeguarded.

Children have opportunities to learn about how to keep themselves and others safe with staff explaining safe practices. For example, explaining to a group of children why building a high tower of wooden bricks may be dangerous as the bricks may fall and hurt someone. Staff usually remind children why they must not run when inside and why they must ensure there is sufficient space when riding their bikes outside. Also, children learn about safety through planned topics such as when they learnt about road safety and enjoyed dressing-up and acting out how to cross the road safely. Children are able to use a range of safe and developmentally appropriate resources to promote their learning. The provision has been organised to encourage children to independently access most resources. For example, furniture is child height with low level storage units to encourage them to explore and select resources easily. Resources are well maintained and regularly checked by staff to ensure they are clean and safe and have no broken or missing pieces.

Children's welfare is safeguarded because staff have a secure knowledge of child protection and give priority to children's safety and welfare. There is an informative child protection policy in place and includes procedures to follow if allegations are made against a member of staff. All staff are fully aware of the policy and know how to implement it. Children are protected from harm and neglect because staff are fully familiar with recording and reporting procedures if they did have a concern. There is a designated person responsible for child protection who supports and guides the staff team. Consequently, children remain safe from harm and are not at risk.

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

The provision is good.

Younger children's learning is promoted because the staff have a secure knowledge of child development and the 'Birth to three matters' framework which they implement well. Staff use the framework to plan and organise developmentally appropriate play experiences and activities for children aged under three years. Children's progress is monitored by key workers who observe and assess children to see how they are progressing. Key workers know their key children and their families well which ensures children's individual needs are met effectively and therefore children develop confidence and self-esteem. Staff work in close partnership with parents which results in them being able to effectively support children in their play.

Younger children happily separate from their parents and carers at the beginning of the session, they are motivated in their play and enthusiastically explore the environment. Children are able to participate in a varied range of activities which provide a balance of free play and more structured play opportunities within the daily routine which positively contribute to their overall development. Children's independence skills are encouraged as they are able to move around safely and make independent choices about their chosen activities with the support and guidance of staff. Staff give praise and encouragement as appropriate which develops children's confidence and self-esteem.

Children enjoy sensory experiences with opportunities to explore paint, sand, water and other mediums on a regular basis. For example, they delight in exploring the texture of the sand as they build sandcastles and look for hidden shells. They enjoy rolling and cutting play dough and talk with friends about what they are doing. They use their imaginations when playing in the home corner and enjoy making 'pizza' for lunch or dressing up as workmen and 'mending' various items in the setting. Staff encourage and develop children's communication skills such as when they listen and respond to children's questions while looking at books together.

### Nursery Education

The quality of teaching and learning is good. Overall staff have a very secure understanding and knowledge of the Foundation Stage and how to implement it. Subsequently, children take part in a varied range of activities and play experiences which enable them to make progress in all areas of their learning. Children are motivated in their play and generally making good progress towards the early learning goals with resources organised to allow them to make choices and gain independence. Children are encouraged to persist in tasks with appropriate support given and staff are skilled at asking open-ended questions that encourage children to think. Staff build trusting relationships with the children and talk about safety and behaviour within routines and children's behaviour is managed in a positive manner which helps promote children's self-esteem.

Curriculum planning includes long, medium and short term plans and is linked to the six areas of learning and overall provides a broad and balanced curriculum. However, although short term plans are generally informative they do not show clear learning intentions linked to the stepping stones or how activities can be adapted for individual children who learn at different rates. Consequently, some children's individual learning needs may not be addressed and their progress may be potentially hindered. The setting is aware their planning systems are not completely effective and they are currently under review. Staff observe and assess children to identify their achievements and progress over time. Children's assessment records are linked to the six areas of learning and the stepping stones and overall show how children are progressing.

Children arrive happy and immediately settle and engage in activities. They are aware of their boundaries and of behavioural expectations such as sharing and turn taking. Children show good independence skills through being able to access all areas. For example, they confidently choose resources to play with and independently put on their own aprons when playing with the sand or water. They go to the toilet on their own and are confident enough to ask for help if needed. Children actively participate in preparing the fruit and vegetables for snack time and enjoy washing up and drying the cups afterwards. Children keenly help to tidy away toys and are praised by staff for doing so which helps develop children's confidence and self-esteem. Children eagerly participate in activities and are keen to learn. They have regular opportunities to experience music, imaginative play and explore varied materials and media. For example,

they use their imaginations when buying fruit from the 'Little Acorns Christmas shop' or when playing with bricks and making bridges for their model cars to go through. Children's creative skills are promoted as they have regular opportunities to participate in art and craft activities such as painting, sticking and chalking. For example, they enjoy sticking and gluing when making Christmas trees and using their cutting skills when making snowflakes. Children can freely access drawing and writing materials.

Mathematical concepts are reinforced through books, singing and counting during the daily routine. For example, children confidently count how many cups are needed at snack time. Children show great confidence and understanding in their mathematical learning through varied activities which involve numbers, shapes, patterns and problem solving. For example, when asked, children are able to confidently colour in various shapes such as a square and a circle and can name some shapes such as a triangle and a diamond. Children explore concepts such as quantity and volume through water and sand play. Staff encourage mathematical language. For example, when playing with bricks they talk with children about tall and short and when looking through and using a magnifying glass talk about bigger and smaller.

Children listen and respond with enjoyment when listening to stories, songs and rhymes. They enjoy looking at books and can often be seen sitting looking at books with friends. They delight in joining in with the actions when singing songs and request favourite stories at story time. Children are beginning to understand that print carries meaning and have many opportunities to become familiar with the written word. For example, labelling on toy boxes and recognising their names on coat pegs. Children link sounds to letters such as when using their name cards at snack time. Children can freely access writing materials and enjoy writing for a purpose such as making shopping lists in the home corner. Children's physical skills are fostered with regular opportunities to exercise incorporated within the daily routine. Physical play is incorporated in the planning of children's activities. Children show control and co-ordination as they run and jump when playing outside. They are able to skilfully negotiate around obstacles as they ride their bikes or push buggies. Children have some opportunities to climb such as when they visit a local children's park. Children demonstrate good scissor and pencil control and have some health and bodily awareness. For example, they understand that when they exercise they will become hot and need to have a drink of water.

Children have access to resources that develop their knowledge and understanding of technology and the world. For example, they are confident when using a computer and show good control when using the mouse. In the home corner they confidently use the telephone to 'phone' home and enjoy using calculators in the maths area. Children are learning about the living world. For example, they regularly put food on the bird table in the garden. They enjoy looking through binoculars to see the birds as they feed and then trying to recognise the birds on a wall chart. Children are beginning to learn about the environment and re-cycling. They keenly participate in gardening activities such as planting and growing sunflowers and have recently planted some spring bulbs which they regularly check to see how they are growing. Children develop a sense of place such as when they go for nature walks in the local area.

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

The provision is good.

Children have opportunities to learn about themselves, each other and the world around them. Their awareness of diversity and their understanding of others is promoted through the range of resources and activities they can select and take part in each day. For example, children begin to appreciate the customs and cultures of others through learning about festivals such

as Chinese New Year when children delighted in using chopsticks and trying to eat Chinese food. Also, each day children have opportunities to learn how to say hello in different languages such as Spanish or Italian. Pictures and posters reflect positive images and help children to develop positive attitudes towards others and help them to become aware of the wider world. For example, colourful picture displays show different foods from around the world. Children learn about the local community through regular outings such as visits to the children's park or nature walks.

Children understand responsible behaviour and are beginning to learn right from wrong. They are encouraged to show care and concern and to behave considerately towards others. Staff talk with children about helping each other in their play and children are learning to share, take turns and to behave considerately towards others. One way this is achieved is through the use of 'Peanuts' who is a soft toy and who is used as a way to encourage children to be kind and caring. Children delight in taking turns in taking him home to care for him and enthusiastically talk about 'Peanuts' adventures when he has visited their home. Children are taught to be polite to others and can be regularly heard saying 'please' and 'thank you' and staff are good role models. Behaviour is dealt with in ways appropriate to the child's level of understanding and positive behaviour is always rewarded. For example, when staff praise children for helping to sweep up the spilt sand or help another child find a toy. Children with English as an additional language are supported well and there are good strategies in place for children with learning difficulties or disabilities and their families. Children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is fostered. All children are highly valued and fully included and their families appropriately supported.

The partnership with parents and carers is outstanding. Relationships between staff and parents and carers is excellent which significantly contributes to children's well-being, care and learning. A clear and effective settling-in programme ensures children settle well and become secure in their surroundings. Children's individual needs are met as information is obtained from parents through 'pre-start visits'. Information is then exchanged on a daily basis between parents and staff to ensure children receive appropriate care and support. A key worker system is used and priority is given to ensure parents are fully aware of who their child's key worker is. Informative notice boards and displays, termly newsletters, up-to-date policies and procedures, a parents booklet and a website are all ways parents are kept fully informed about the provision. Information about the 'Birth to three matters' framework and the Curriculum guidance for the foundation stage are also shared with parents. Consequently, parents are able to actively help their children make progress in their learning as they are well informed. Parents are welcomed into the setting and children's achievements are verbally shared on a daily basis with more formal parents meetings also organised as another way of sharing children's development and progress. Parent questionnaires are used as a way of monitoring the quality of care and education provided, with the last one completed in April 2007. Feedback from parents has been very positive. Also, parents spoken to at inspection highly praised the staff and playgroup. They commented on the caring and welcoming environment with friendly and helpful staff. Parents felt fully informed of the progress their children are making and were extremely happy with the type of care and education their children receive.

## **Organisation**

The organisation is good.

Children are cared for in a setting where their needs are effectively met because staff, time and resources are well organised. Staff work extremely well together as a staff team and are very supportive of each other and clearly know each others strengths and weaknesses. Staff

focus on supporting and interacting with the children to ensure children's care, learning and play needs are met. Recruitment procedures ensure children are cared for by staff who have relevant experience and qualifications and skills to do their job and all staff working with children are suitable to do so. Children's safety and well-being are, overall, promoted because appropriate checks are completed on all staff and records are maintained. Any persons such as visitors who have not been vetted would not have unsupervised access to children and all staff are aware of this. Generally effective induction systems ensure staff are fully informed of the settings policies and procedures which they then implement in a clear and consistent manner. Children are cared for by staff who have a secure knowledge and understanding of child development. They have a strong commitment to professional development and keep up to date with current childcare practices through regular staff training. For example, the setting has recently attended a briefing session on the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). Consequently, staff are developing an understanding and knowledge of the new framework which is to be introduced in 2008 and this will further improve outcomes for children.

All required documentation for the efficient and safe management of the setting and to promote children's welfare, care and learning are in place. For example, comprehensive and informative policies and procedures are in place which are regularly reviewed and updated. Ratios are always maintained and staff are well deployed with a key worker system in operation which ensures children's care, learning and play are promoted by staff who know the children well. Registers are maintained and accurately record children's attendance and there are good procedures in place for recording staff and visitors. However, the organisation of registers is not effective enough to ensure they are always accessible such as when the group go to the hall for music and movement. Consequently, in an emergency children's safety is potentially not fully protected.

The leadership and management is good. Staff are guided by the effective leadership of the manager. She has a clear vision for the playgroup and is committed to ensuring it is a safe and secure place which is stimulating and where children are learning and progressing to reach their full potential. She leads by example and is a good role model. The manager highly values her staff team and knows and utilises their skills well. Children are cared for by staff who are supportive of each other and who work well together as a team and they are very clear on their roles and responsibilities. Staff are supported well by the manager with staff meetings held on a weekly basis and there are plans to introduce staff appraisals. The information gained from staff meetings is used as a way of monitoring the quality of care and education provided to the children within the setting. Staff and parental questionnaires are also used as a way of monitoring the quality of the provision. All recommendations raised from the last inspection have been successfully addressed and consequently, outcomes for children have improved and are good. Overall, children's needs are met.

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

At the last care inspection the provider was asked to ensure there is a written induction policy and a policy regarding medication. They were also asked to ensure all areas are used to their full potential including the quiet room. All recommendations have been successfully completed. Access to the quiet room has been reviewed and children can now move freely between the main playroom and the quiet room. Consequently, play opportunities have increased for children and it has been easier to manage staff deployment and ensure correct staff to child ratios are maintained. All policies and procedures are regularly reviewed and updated and include a policy regarding the administration of medication which is clear and informative. A written staff induction programme is also in place which all new staff complete and this ensures staff are



clear on their roles and responsibilities and how to implement the settings policies and procedures. Consequently, children's care and well-being are protected.

At the last nursery education inspection the provider was asked to ensure there were sufficient chances for children to exercise and to develop systems to review the quality of the provision and staff training needs. All recommendations have been successfully completed. The quality of the care and education are monitored. For example, through the completion of parent and staff questionnaires and regular staff meeting. Staff training needs are identified and addressed immediately. Staff training records are maintained and reflect a staff team committed to professional development as they regularly update their knowledge. Planning systems have been reviewed to ensure physical play is included and children now participate in planned physical play experiences on a daily basis using the inside and outside environment to their full potential. Consequently, children's physical development is promoted.

### **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 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):

- review the organisation of registers so they are easily accessible at all times in case of an emergency (this refers to when using the hall).

#### **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):

- further develop short term planning to be more informative and to include clearer learning intentions linked to the stepping stones and how activities can be adapted for children who learn at different rates.

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](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)