

Little Acorns

Inspection report for early years provision

Unique Reference Number	EY294250
Inspection date	15 November 2007
Inspector	Janette Elaina Lockwood
Setting Address	The Cabin, Barnard Road, Leigh-on-Sea, Essex, SS9 3PH
Telephone number	Mob 07961563562
E-mail	
Registered person	Little Acorns Pre -School
Type of inspection	Integrated
Type of care	Sessional care

ABOUT THIS INSPECTION

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

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

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

The key inspection judgements and what they mean

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

Good: this aspect of the provision is strong

Satisfactory: this aspect of the provision is sound

Inadequate: this aspect of the provision is not good enough

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

THE QUALITY AND STANDARDS OF THE CARE AND NURSERY EDUCATION

On the basis of the evidence collected on this inspection:

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

The quality and standards of the nursery education are good.

WHAT SORT OF SETTING IS IT?

Little Acorns pre-school is run by a committee. It opened at the current premises in 2004 and operates from a scout hall. It is situated in a residential area in West Leigh on Sea, close to local shops and services. A maximum of 26 children may attend the pre-school at any one time. The pre-school is open each weekday from 09.30 to 12.00 term time only.

There are currently 39 children from two to under five years on roll. Of these 22, children receive funding for nursery education. Children come from the local area.

The pre-school employs ten members of staff. Of these, eight hold appropriate early years qualifications, two are working towards a qualification and three are working towards a further qualification.

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PROVISION

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

The play environment is kept in a very hygienic condition for children as staff ensure it is clean and well maintained for them, cleaning areas regularly to help minimise the spread of germs to children. Some staff have undertaken food preparation training and the kitchen has been refitted recently in accordance with Environmental Health Standards. Staff use kitchen cleaning and food preparation assessment forms everyday to ensure their food preparation is of a high standard to help keep children healthy.

Staff are very aware of children's health history, any present needs and have current first aid certificates so they can care for children properly if they are taken ill or have an accident. There are clear policies and procedures relating to children's health and accident and medication records are kept well.

Children are learning some healthy practices through the teaching of staff and related activities. They know they need to wash their hands before eating, for example, and staff indicate which children have washed their hands by putting a small sticker on them. Children learn about healthy bodies, for example, how to keep their teeth clean, through effective support by staff in role play areas such as the dentist or doctor's surgery.

Children are well nourished with appetising and healthy foods everyday. The snack bar system operates throughout the session so children can choose when to eat and therefore respond to their own hunger and thirst. Staff carefully prepare a range of foods such as carrots, rice cakes and hummus which reflects the policy of always offering fresh fruit or vegetables as well as a carbohydrate such as bread to sustain children throughout the morning. Children have a choice of milk or water and can pour drinks from a jug helping their independence and co-ordination.

Parents are aware of what their children will be offered each day as the menu is displayed and there are sometimes foods offered such as mango chutney and poppadsoms to coincide with particular festivals and celebrations helping children to try different tastes.

There are regular opportunities for children to use the small enclosed outdoor area which offers a range of healthy activities such as the use of a climbing frame and slide to help children develop their large muscle skills. Staff offer children free choice to go outside in small groups to play in the fresh air in most weathers as there is an all weather safety surface. In addition, a good range of equipment such as hoops and stilts are offered indoors to help children develop their balance and co-ordination.

Staff organise lively music and movement sessions and physical exercise indoors to help children warm up such as stretching up tall or crouching down small. As a result, children learn some new movements and use their bodies in different ways.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

Staff work hard to provide children with a safe and comfortable play environment which they risk assess every day. The hall is brightly decorated even though staff have to decorate it with posters and children's work at every session, as they cannot leave these things out. The toilet areas have been refurbished recently and there are ongoing plans to continue with the

improvements to make them easier to keep clean and safe. There are also action plans in place relating to the heating to ensure the temperature is constant for children.

The supervisor has undertaken a fire safety risk assessment and fire safety training, regular fire drills are practised and recorded and staff have been trained to operate the fire safety equipment to help keep children safe. However, the door separating the kitchen from the main hall has recently been removed by the owners of the hall so potentially a fire starting in the kitchen may spread. In addition, with no door on the kitchen, one escape route may be cut off and these issues may pose a safety risk to children.

Equipment is of good quality, clean and meets the needs of the children attending. The staff clean equipment regularly and assess carefully the need for further equipment through the use of an inventory.

Staff use a series of regular risk assessments to ensure children are safe both inside and outside the premises and on outings and follow clearly written procedures regarding outings to help keep children safe. The hall is kept secure with staff monitoring who enters and leaves the premises and the accident book is used as part of the ongoing risk assessments to identify patterns of accidents and hazards to children. Staff talk to children as a matter of course and during planned activities about safety to help them understand some ways they can help keep themselves safe.

Most staff have had recent training in safeguarding children so they are aware of their responsibilities and there is a comprehensive policy for child protection which relates to the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB). The information contains relevant contact details for the LSCB and information in the event that any allegations are made against staff. Staff take the safety of children very seriously and have additional policies such as an intruder policy. Existing injuries are consistently recorded and all staff in contact with children have been through a relevant vetting procedure. As a result, children are safeguarded and protected in the setting.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

Staff plan clearly using the 'Birth to three matters' framework for children aged between two and three years and effectively take account of children's individual stages of development using relevant observations, to help their development. There is a detailed settling in policy and parents are made very welcome and able to stay with their children as long as necessary to help them feel self-assured and supported, aiding their own and their children's confidence in the setting.

There are interesting planned activities to help children develop their curiosity as learners as they use their senses to explore new textures such as shaving foam, or to be resourceful with the toys, finding out what they can do. Children are learning to imitate and mirror the older children and staff and explore and re-enact situations in the role play areas helping them to be imaginative.

Staff enable children to develop into skilful communicators as they enjoy being together and becoming confident and competent language users. They listen and respond appropriately to small group stories and songs and learn about words and meanings through regular interaction with staff.

Children between two and three years also take part in whole group story times which may not suit their level of development in communication or concentration. As a result, a minority may not get the full benefit of the activity and may disrupt the concentration and enjoyment of more able children.

Early Education

The quality of teaching and learning is good. Staff have a thorough knowledge and understanding of the Foundation Stage gained through training and experience. Their understanding is demonstrated through the clearly detailed plans which take account of the stepping stones and early learning goals as learning intentions. Staff take turns in developing the plans which show details such as grouping, resources, key words and evaluation and these are carried out effectively to help children learn through practical and immediate experiences. Staff are aware of the importance of challenging children, for example, noting when new puzzles are needed to stretch children's learning.

There are individual set targets for children's progress in each area of learning and development and staff identify activities to include in the planning to help children achieve these targets. Forms are completed by the key person regarding each child at least once every half term to address the children's next steps. Each child has a development folder with observations, photographic evidence and examples of the child's work and achievements which is used to monitor how children are progressing towards the early learning goals.

Staff use their knowledge of how children learn when presenting them with new experiences or information and support them in areas such as the role play area so they begin to understand new concepts. They provide opportunities to encourage children to think and to demonstrate what they know and understand and often record this as observations to evidence what children already know. The inclusion of all children is carefully planned and monitored so they can benefit from the wide range of activities and learn at their own pace.

Children are busy and motivated showing positive dispositions and attitudes in their learning and develop their self-confidence and self-esteem through gaining more independence in activities such as pouring their own drinks. Children make relationships well with staff and their peers, approaching them easily to play or for support and make independent choices, for example, choosing when to play outside.

Children use their language for communication throughout the session, to ask simple questions and interact with others. They use their language for thinking by talking activities through and in imaginary situations, such as when they use the persona doll. Staff encourage children to link sounds and letters as they phonetically sound out a name and pretend to write it down and staff ask them to think of more words that begin with the initial sound. This helps them to hear and sound out words. Children use writing for a purpose, for example, writing out 'library cards' or passing 'messages' to each other in the role play area.

Children use numbers as labels and for counting in different situations, for example, counting how many children there are at registration time or using numbers spontaneously during their play. Staff ask them relevant questions to help them think and use their emerging calculation skills, for example, what is one more than seven? Children enjoy number songs and rhymes to further help their concept of simple calculation. They use scales to weigh items such as shells and have weighing activities in cookery and some role play areas to help with their understanding

of measure. In addition, children use size and positional language in planned and free play activities.

Children have strong exploration and investigation skills which are encouraged by staff and the activities they offer. Children use magnetic construction and learn which ones 'stick' together, excitedly showing staff who explain simply how this happens. Children confidently use a computer with different learning programmes and often take photographs of their friends, learning how to operate simple equipment. Staff encourage children to gain a sense of time as they talk about things that they have done in the past and look at life cycles of insects such as butterflies. Children sometimes keep a butterfly farm, watching the butterflies as they hatch from caterpillars. Activities such as caring for snails and planting bulbs help children to appreciate and find out some aspects of the natural world. In contrast, they learn about their immediate man-made environment by taking trips to the library or the fire station.

In addition to developing large muscle skills, stamina and balance both in the garden and indoors, children become competent in using equipment, such as a small pulley on the garage or constructing with materials such as large wooden blocks and cardboard boxes. They begin to be more accurate in using their fine motor skills, practising using sticky tape accurately for example, to connect materials together. They demonstrate increasing skill and control in use of mark-making implements and small world activities.

Children enjoy exploring media and materials using different techniques to express their own ideas such as using string, fingers, bubbles and hands to paint, exploring what happens when they mix colours. Staff encourage children to join in with favourite songs and investigate different instrument sounds with real and made instruments. Outdoors the children have different sized saucepans and pipes to bang to make different notes and sounds. There are exciting opportunities for children to use their imagination through role play as staff plan the use of the area to represent different places such as the veterinary surgery to act out real and imagined situations.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

Children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is fostered. Staff encourage children to learn about others that need help and they collect money for disadvantaged children. They learn a little about why we wear poppies for Remembrance whilst making their own poppies, beginning to have a developing awareness of the needs of others. Children talk freely about their homes and families so they can compare and contrast their own similarities and differences, for example, talking about what they do at home on Christmas day. Furthermore, staff plan interesting activities based around festivals and celebrations such as Diwali when children dance to Indian music and make flower garlands. Staff are able to easily identify and access a good range of multicultural equipment and resources by consulting their own equality and diversity inventory. They plan activities throughout the year to help children understand and appreciate our diverse culture.

This setting has a well written policy to follow when caring for children with learning difficulties/and or disabilities (LDD). It has regard for the code of practice and there is further information on the Common Assessment Framework to help staff identify and address any particular needs children may have. Children with LDD may have a one to one worker to help with their inclusion in all parts of the session and there is a trained worker to write individual

learning plans for children. Staff liaise closely with parents and other professionals involved with children to ensure they are getting the best help so they can progress in their development.

Children behave well in response to staff's high expectations which they reiterate with children in circle time. These are simple rules such as being kind to one another which children are beginning to understand and carry out for themselves. They are learning to share and take turns by using the egg timers to wait for popular activities and they respond to a signal by stopping and listening to staff. Children actively help to tidy up and co-operate amongst themselves and are praised constantly by staff to reinforce their positive behaviour.

Partnership with parents and carers is good. Parents are provided with good quality information about the setting and its provision for nursery education. There is information about the Foundation Stage and the planning is clearly displayed on a notice board so parents are able to see what their children will be learning. There are effective informal and formal channels of communication with parents to discuss children's progress and any concerns, for example, speaking to the key worker confidentially. Staff invite parents to look at children's folders at least three times a year so parents are kept well informed of their children's progress towards the early learning goals. However, there are currently no written reports for parents to keep as a reference of their child's progress and achievements.

Parents are encouraged to share what they know about their children by exchanging information and staff give parents daily access to children's observations and invite them to make written comments. Staff take steps to encourage parents to be involved with their child's learning through sharing library books with them at home and inviting them to write their comments in their shared book record. Furthermore, there are opportunities for parents and children to undertake some activities at home which are instigated by the setting such as monitoring the rainfall with rain gauges they have made.

Parents are informed about policies and procedures and have a chance to read through them on their settling in visit, signing to say they have read them. Staff complete initial visit forms for children asking parents vital questions that will help their children to settle in more easily. The notice board and newsletters give parents relevant information about the themes, celebrations and food that children will be offered so they can make choices in advance for their children. There is a complaints procedure which is clearly written and consistent with the Addendum to the National Standards so that any concerns can be managed in a timely manner.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

Leadership and management is good. The setting is highly able to assess its own strengths and weaknesses, reviewing the effectiveness of the overall provision for nursery education. Staff have effective systems to evaluate the activities to make improvements to teaching and learning and feedback from parents is gathered through questionnaires and verbally to use to make changes. Weaknesses in previous inspections have been addressed and improvements made which have a direct impact on children. The setting monitors and evaluates the provision for nursery education through different methods, for example, the supervisor oversees the planning and checks that the teaching is effective. She monitors how staff gather information about their key children and record it to ensure it is consistent and of good quality. The supervisor is motivated and committed to improving care and education for all its children through ensuring staff are enthusiastic and embracing changes.

Records are kept well to ensure children are cared for properly and the setting constantly reviews their policies and procedures to meet the requirements of the National Standards. There are written action plans in place to make changes which will positively impact on the quality of care for children. These are reviewed regularly and illustrate the steps being taken, for example, to improve the toilet area. Staff know what their roles are and take pride in what they do and they are encouraged to attend training to update their skills and bring new ideas into the setting. The supervisor is currently on Level 4 training and has introduced a vision statement to work towards. The operational plan is a living and working document which accurately reflects practice.

There are robust procedures for the recruitment and vetting of staff, this includes checks through the Criminal Record Bureau and health declarations. Staff have a thorough induction to ensure they are responsible and follow the setting's procedures. Time, space and resources are used very well in this setting. Overall, children's needs are met.

Improvements since the last inspection

Care

At the last inspection, to improve the standards of care, the setting was asked to ensure the detail within documentation, policies and procedures provides sufficient clarity for effective implementation by staff. (This particularly refers to detail within the lost child policy, consents to seek emergency medical advice or treatment, accident book, visitors book, and child protection policy)

The management team have reviewed all policies and procedures so that they accurately reflect practice. This includes the lost child policy, consents to seek emergency medical advice or treatment, the accident book, the visitors book and the child protection policy.

Early Education

At the last inspection the setting was asked to; use identified next steps to inform planning and maintain progression by providing sufficient challenge for four-year-olds; particularly in developing independence, cooperation, physical development, handwriting and calculation and to further involve parents/carers in children's learning through making them aware of activities and topics, and sharing observations of their children to contribute to their assessment and development records.

The staff now plan for children's next steps in learning effectively so that children progress well towards the early learning goals. There are sufficient challenges for four-year-olds in all six areas of learning.

Parents are given a wealth of information about their children's activities and topics and are able to regularly share observations and contribute to their assessment and development records.

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):

- seek advice from the Fire Safety Officer regarding the absence of a door between the kitchen and the main hall and follow any recommendations that are given
- consider the needs of younger children during whole group activities such as story time and offer alternatives or smaller groups for those who are less able to concentrate.

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):

- introduce ways of providing parents with written information to retain about their children's progress and achievements.

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