

# Acorn Montessori School

Inspection report for early years provision

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	107974
<b>Inspection date</b>	13 November 2007
<b>Inspector</b>	Keriann Belcher
<b>Setting Address</b>	Gerrards Cross Youth Centre, East Common, Gerrards Cross, Buckinghamshire, SL9 7AD
<b>Telephone number</b>	01753 885 448
<b>E-mail</b>	
<b>Registered person</b>	Acorn Montessori School
<b>Type of inspection</b>	Integrated
<b>Type of care</b>	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 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?

Acorn Montessori School opened in 1994, it is a privately owned provision. It operates from the Gerrards Cross Youth Centre, a single storey building. The school have sole use of a large room, a small room, office, kitchen, toilet facilities and an enclosed outside play area. They also have timetabled access to a large hall. It serves the local community and surrounding areas.

There are currently 55 children on roll from two to five years. This includes 30 funded three year olds and five funded four year olds. Children attend for a variety of sessions. The setting supports children with English as a second language and has systems in place to support children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

The group opens five days a week during school term times. Sessions run from 09.15 until 15.15. Morning, afternoon and all day sessions are on offer to parents.

There are currently nine part time/full time staff that work directly with the children. The group has a Montessori ethos and six staff members hold the Montessori Diploma qualification.

## **THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PROVISION**

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

The provision is good.

Children's healthy lifestyles are promoted well. Children learn about healthy foods through a balance of nutritious snacks, discussions with staff and planned activities, such as planting and growing vegetables from the garden. For example, the children grew their own tomato plants. This will help them to make healthy choices as they grow up. Children's independence is beginning to be promoted as older children are able to pour their own drinks at snack time and younger children are supported to do so. However, they are not able to independently access drinks regularly throughout the day.

Children benefit from good hygiene routines to help them learn about personal care and the importance of a clean environment. For example, they wash their hands before lunch and when using the bathroom. There are clear systems in place to prevent cross infection such as, the regular cleaning of furniture and toys. The school has policies in place to ensure that children are kept at home when they are ill. Children benefit from staff having a good knowledge of first aid and understanding the correct administrative procedures to be followed if accidents occur or children require medication. Required documentation such as for emergency treatment, is in place.

Children enjoy a range of physical activity to help them learn about what happens when our bodies are active such as, 'the brain game' which involves concentration, hand and eye co-ordination. All children have regular opportunities to develop their physical skills through access to equipment, where they learn to balance, climb under, over and through tunnels and other equipment with developing confidence and coordination. However, the children's learning is not extended or identified in the plans for outdoor play which results in missed opportunities for both older and younger children.

Older children are gaining extremely good small muscle control and co-ordination through interesting activities such as modelling clay or play dough and the safe handling of tools and materials including pencil sharpeners and scissors.

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

The provision is good.

Children play and learn within premises that are clean, well maintained, warm and welcoming to parents and children. They select activities from a wide range of good quality toys and equipment which meet safety standards.

Children benefit from the staff having a generally good understanding of safety issues and the need to take positive steps to prevent accidents. For example, staff are well deployed, the premises are secure and socket covers are fitted to exposed electric points. Risk assessments are under taken to identify risks and hazards. However, these are not carried out on a regular basis which could compromise children's safety.

The children are learning to share responsibility for their own safety through practical activities, such as taking part in emergency evacuation drills and tidying away resources after use to prevent trip hazards. Children move around the playroom freely, safely and independently.

Children are protected from harm through the staff's sound awareness and understanding of child protection issues. They are clear on the procedures to follow should they have a concern about a child in their care.

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

The provision is good.

Children are happy and secure within the environment. The school follows the Montessori philosophy and younger children are provided with very good opportunities to explore and investigate a wide range of interesting activities. All children are developing their independence as they choose an activity from the low shelves or tables set up around the room and return them when they have finished. They gain good self-esteem as staff praise their efforts and celebrate their achievements. Children enjoy the balance of activities available to them which helps them progress in all areas of development. They spend their time purposefully, for example, they paint, use their imagination as they play in the home corner or with the train set. Children demonstrate high levels of concentration and confidence as they sit sensibly together at circle time joining in the discussion and contributing ideas. Staff work together to plan activities which give all children opportunities to develop their skills. Children have great fun building towers with wooden bricks comparing the height to themselves, staff member and the ceiling. Planned documents show how activities are successfully linked to the Foundation Stage curriculum and the Birth to three matters framework. Children have very good relationships with staff and each other. Children make good progress in their social skills as the staff provide a caring environment which teaches children the importance of being kind and considerate to each other.

The staff team have familiarised themselves with the Birth to three information and this is used to plan suitable activities for younger children and to monitor their progress and achievements.

### **Nursery Education.**

The quality of teaching and learning is good. Children benefit from a well balanced curriculum because staff have a good understanding of the Foundation Stage. They have a very good knowledge of incorporating Montessori teaching methods into the curriculum. Planning of the curriculum is linked to the stepping stones and identifies clear learning intentions for individual children. Staff have developing individual portfolios where children's progress is recorded and the next steps of learning are then identified. Staff provide a good balance of adult directed learning and allowing children time to play alone. Children's vocabulary and language is well supported by the staff who ask open ended questions to make children think and employ good techniques to encourage children to actively listen such as, the use of props at story time and rhythmic clapping to indicate for children to stop what they are doing. Children learn right from wrong, through the school's rules. Staff give clear explanations, reminders to consider each other that involve waiting and turn taking in activities.

Children have sufficient opportunities to gain independence, as they pour their own drinks and are encouraged to do their own coats up and managing their personal care in the bathroom.

Children's attitudes to learning are very positive; they are highly engaged and motivated throughout their time at the school. They spend extended periods of time concentrating on their chosen task. For example, children sit and look intently as they listen to the story of 'The great pet sale'. This was followed by role play activity of a pet shop with toy animals and

accessories, such as cat and dog food and coins for payment. This successfully enabled to children re-enact the story.

Children's personal, social and emotional development is progressing well. They are confident and greet each other with pleasure. Their behaviour is good and disputes are quickly resolved with good staff support. Their self esteem is enhanced by a reward system. For example, children are given a smiley face for good work and a positive behaviour is recorded on 'our kind hands tree' made from children's own hands prints.

They use numbers confidently in their play and when using equipment. For example, children use Montessori beads or cubes to learn about simple addition and subtraction techniques. Children use numbers in practical situations such as counting how many children are sitting in the circle time. Staff provide good examples of mathematical language and thinking when they are interacting with the children consequently the children are developing a very good understanding of such concepts as, more than or less than, heavier, lighter.

Children have many good opportunities to develop their early writing skills; as a result many of the older children are writing recognisable letters and are able to clearly write their own names. However, there are limited chances for children to extend their writing by labelling their own work or writing captions on displays as currently they are all written by staff. Staff are very knowledgeable in teaching children letter sounds and linking this to words.

Children have good opportunities to develop their knowledge of colour and shape whilst painting at the easel. Children participate in a range of art and craft activities such as gluing with different textured papers and materials. Children thoroughly enjoy singing and have the opportunity to learn French songs. They participate in regular music and movement sessions and perform in concerts for their parents.

Children have good opportunities to learn about living things such the life cycle of chicks that were brought into the school and the children observe them hatching. They plant and watch things grow in their outside area, such sunflowers and birds nesting in the bird boxes. The garden plants attract butterflies, which when they fly away the children run across the park to chase.

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

The provision is good.

All children are welcomed and included in the setting because staff know and value them. They are skilled at knowing who may need extra attention, for example, by encouraging shy children to participate at circle time. The school provides a meaningful range of activities and resources to promote a positive view of the world such as books, posters and dolls that show people from different cultures and occupations. They start to learn more about other cultures and the wider world through exciting activities including listening to the Diwali story which children were captivated by, the Diwali story of Rama and Sita. Children were given bangles, Indian sweets and offered a Bindi, which many of the children and staff wore for the whole session.

Children are very well behaved. They learn right from wrong and to respect the needs of others through clear and consistent messages and guidance from staff. Staff are positive role models and remind children of basic rules and expectations to help the children make positive choices. Children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is fostered well.

Partnership with parents is good.

Staff have developed a good working partnership with parents. There are strong levels of communication that enable staff and parents to work well together to positively promote children's individual learning needs and general requirements. A complaints procedure is in place, in line with the new regulations. Parents are welcomed into the setting to discuss their child's progress and are able to contribute to their child's learning when the children take their reading books home. They are not given information about the early learning goals when their child becomes involved in the Foundation Stage curriculum. Parents have constant, easy access to their child's assessment records. Parents become involved with fundraising to support the group with purchasing new equipment, such as fencing for the children's garden. Parents are very pleased the school, describing it as 'fabulous'. Other positive comments received from the parents that their children settle quickly and make good progress.

## **Organisation**

The organisation is good.

Excellent teamwork contributes to children having positive, play and learning experiences at the school. Staff are aware of their roles and responsibilities and work cohesively together to ensure the sessions run smoothly. They are vigilant to children's needs and ensure children are well supervised and ratios met. Staff are efficient, professional and organise a stimulating environment in which children focus well on learning through well supported, purposeful play. They have a good understanding of how children learn and update their skills by regularly attending external training. Policies and procedures work in practice to promote children's health, safety, enjoyment, achievement and ability to make a positive contribution. Most documentation to support these areas is well maintained, except risk assessments are not regularly updated.

The leadership and management of nursery education is good. Staff are experienced and knowledgeable about the Foundation Stage and Montessori curriculum, which has a positive impact on the children's achievements. The manager and deputy have sound leadership qualities and they are supported by a very experienced and skilled team. Staff receive regular appraisals and are encouraged to attend further training to enhance their knowledge and skills.

Children are making good progress towards the early learning goals. However, the garden plans do not reflect the six areas of learning. Staff are committed and dedicated to ensuring good standards are maintained and have identified areas for further improvement. The setting meets the needs of the range of children for whom it provides.

## **Improvements since the last inspection**

At the last care inspection, the school was asked to develop staff's knowledge and understanding of child protection issues. The staff have updated their knowledge and understanding by attending child protection training. The designated named person for child protection ensures that any new information and knowledge, such as safeguarding children is disseminated within the team. They were also asked to ensure the policies and procedures relate to the National Standards for full day care. A full review of the policies and procedures has been undertaken and now relate appropriately to the national Standards for full day care.

This ensures that children's safety and welfare is protected.

At the last nursery education inspection the school was asked to plan opportunities for children to further develop their gross motor and large scale movement skills through activities that encourage them to climb over, under and through. Children now have the opportunity to progress in their physical development as they can access a range of equipment such as, tunnels, hoops and parachute games that they can climb over, under and through. They were also asked to introduce a formal method of sharing and recording how developmental records are shared with all parents of children attending the setting and date records to ensure that children's progress is accurately recorded and monitored. Children's progress records are dated and parents are offered meetings with their child's key worker to discuss their developmental progress. This ensures that children have the maximum opportunities to progress in all areas of their development and parents are fully informed of their child's achievements.

### **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):

- ensure fresh drinking water is available at all times
- ensure risk assessment are carried out regularly.

#### **The quality and standards of the nursery education**

To improve the quality and standards of nursery education further the registered person should take account of the following recommendation(s):

- develop the outdoor play to fully incorporate the six areas of learning (this also applies to childcare)
- ensure children have regular opportunities to label their own work

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)