

St Andrews Montessori

Inspection report for early years provision

Unique Reference Number	131736
Inspection date	30 January 2008
Inspector	Tom Radcliffe
Setting Address	Little Acorn Nursery Schools Ltd, St Andrews Church, Thornhill Square, Islington, London, N1 1BQ
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Registered person	Little Acorn Nursery Schools Ltd
Type of inspection	Integrated
Type of care	Full day care

ABOUT THIS INSPECTION

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

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

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

The key inspection judgements and what they mean

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

Good: this aspect of the provision is strong

Satisfactory: this aspect of the provision is sound

Inadequate: this aspect of the provision is not good enough

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

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?

St Andrew's Montessori is a nursery run by Little Acorn Nursery Schools Ltd. It opened in 1999 and operates from several rooms in an extensively modified church hall. It is situated in a residential area in Thornhill in the London borough of Islington. A maximum of 48 children may attend the nursery at any one time. The nursery is open each weekday throughout the year for morning, afternoon or full day sessions. Morning sessions are from 08.45 to 12.00 and afternoon sessions are from 13.00 to 15.00 except on Fridays when afternoon sessions are not available. All children share access to a secure enclosed outdoor play area.

There are currently 60 children aged from two to five years on roll. Of these, 43 receive funding for early education. Children come from a wide catchment area. The nursery currently supports children with learning difficulties or disabilities and also supports children who speak English as an additional language.

The nursery employs eight members of staff including the Principal and the Head of Nursery. All hold appropriate early years qualifications and all staff hold the Montessori Diploma. The

Head of Nursery holds the advanced Montessori diploma. The setting is a Montessori accredited nursery.

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PROVISION

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

The nursery has a very well organised and hygienic learning and play environment available for children. Staff ensure that the setting is ready for the children as they arrive, all facilities being maintained to a very high standard of cleanliness and hygiene. The nursery has very good procedures in place to ensure that necessary medication is administered safely and that accidents are dealt with effectively and sensitively. Staff follow clear guidelines to ensure that written records are maintained to share with parents and allow processes of self review to take place in order to modify future practice. All staff in the nursery are qualified in First Aid and have access to appropriate equipment which allows them to care for children well if they sustain a minor injury. The setting ensures that first aid equipment is always available; for example, when the children play outside or undertake outings. The spread of infection within the nursery is reduced as the setting has an active and well understood exclusion policy of children who may be infectious. The nursery also promotes effective hygienic practice during the day; for example, children are able to maintain their personal hygiene by washing their hands regularly and staff undertake surface cleaning as children play within the setting. The setting has written parental permission to obtain emergency medical treatment or advice, should it prove necessary, thereby promoting children's good health.

Physical development is good. Children have access to a very good range of well designed and planned activities that promote and enhance physical development. Indoors, children can use mark making equipment, practise early writing skills, play with musical instruments, utilise role play resources and partake in several art and craft activities. The setting also provides activities that focus upon the development of fine motor skills as children handle mathematics equipment, sort shapes and manipulate everyday objects. To enhance this provision all children take part in activities led by visiting teachers; for example, all children enthusiastically joined in a ballet lesson where they were able to undertake more vigorous exercise. The nursery uses its outdoor space to provide children with opportunities to use small apparatus, have fresh air and take exercise in games in small groups or individually. These opportunities are limited and the setting is reviewing its provision in this area. Staff support children very well as they undertake their activities which enables the children to make steady and significant progress. Children show very high degrees of independence and confidence as they select appropriate activities, use them well and store them after use. They will also take responsibility for ensuring that their play environment is tidy by using equipment such as a dust pan and brush after messy play activities. The setting augments its provision for physical development by regularly taking children on walks to local amenities; for example, to the local library. Children are able to take part in a range of activities that support activity or rest according to their individual needs. The nursery provides children with healthy snacks of fruit and free access to fresh drinking water during their time in the setting. The nursery staff are qualified in food handling and the setting is recognised as being compliant with food safety regulations and maintaining high standards of food safety management in a scheme operated by the Local Authority. Children staying in the nursery all day bring in packed lunches from home which they eat in their rooms which have been hygienically prepared for them. The setting advises parents about healthy eating and gives them guidelines about acceptable food for their children. The parents value this advice and act upon it fully and staff ensure that individual children's dietary requirements are

met. Staff in the nursery ensure that all the children's packed lunches are stored appropriately as they regularly monitor the temperature of all stored food.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

The nursery ensures that its procedures and practices make a very safe and secure environment for children. Access to the building is only with the authorisation of staff and all external doors are kept securely locked. The setting has very effective procedures in place for the arrival and collection of children. Parents are welcomed into the setting at the start of each session where staff conduct important informal conversation with them while ensuring that all children are supervised properly. Children in the setting benefit from a clear safeguarding children policy. All staff are familiar with this and are able to protect children as they can confidently recognise signs of abuse and are familiar with processes of accurate record keeping and how to deal with any concerns. Children are kept safe in the case of an emergency as the setting regularly undertakes and records practise fire evacuations, has clearly marked fire exits and has in place very well maintained fire detection and control equipment. The nursery ensures that it conducts regular and effective risk assessments so that children and staff do not face unnecessary hazards. It has a nominated Health Hygiene Officer who monitors the safe storage of all foods, uses weekly visual inspections of safety equipment, maintains all electrical apparatus in a safe condition and risk assesses all aspects of its work both within the building and outside. Consequently before children use the outdoor play area its suitability and safety is properly checked. The setting maintains all its facilities to very high standards; for example, where children can access drinking water, take snacks or independently access the toilet facilities.

The nursery enjoys very spacious accommodation which is very well organised with good activities areas for children and thoughtful storage of resources. These factors bring about an environment where there is free movement between areas and activities, where children can independently access activities and where the uncluttered play areas offer high standards of safety. Staff support children very well at all times and offer appropriate levels of supervision to further promote children's safety; for example, as children play outside, work with visiting teachers or move between activities. The nursery also a very good range of furniture which accommodates a good range of activities and the different ages and sizes of the children. There is a very good range of age and developmentally appropriate play equipment and resources which are well maintained, hygienic and which promote children's development in all areas. The nursery provides the children with a stimulating, challenging and safe environment which has a very positive visual impact. Resources and equipment are attractively arranged, there is good use of displays to celebrate children's work and there is a considerable amount of information available to the children as learners and parents as users of the nursery.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

The older children in the setting are grouped into two small classes and generally stay in the setting all day with all other children being in mixed aged groups in the main activity room. All children undertake a range of very stimulating and challenging activities in very well resourced and equipped premises. The younger children belong to family groups that have a planned thematic focus; for example, dinosaurs or animals and they are given the opportunity to work on a group activity or work independently on a child chosen activity. There is a very good balance between these types of activity and even the youngest children demonstrate the ability

to make decisions about how they spend their time while in the setting. Staff work very effectively to ensure that children use their time well by planning and leading interesting group activities, such as collage or clay work, or facilitating individual activities; for example, role play activities, work on the technology table or use of the library area. Children's self esteem is raised through the displays of their work and by staff allowing the children to be responsible and independent. As staff facilitate free flow and independence, as well as providing group activities, children spend their time engaged in activities that include; ballet with a visiting teacher, outdoor play, mark making and a range of language or mathematics based tasks. Staff interventions are timely and appropriate and based on their understanding of the needs of individual children. This approach ensures that children stay on task for appropriate amounts of time and that children's needs are met; for example, when children were slow to choose an activity or required reassurance as they played. As the children learn and play together there is a very good atmosphere in the setting with staff and children being in meaningful conversations, children demonstrating good levels of independence and all children playing cooperatively with each other. Children make good use of books and written material in the nursery and there is a good range of material available to them. Children undertake work that is carefully planned for them and which is based upon Birth to three matters framework. Staff assess children in the main activity room very effectively on observations that are collated to form a range of comprehensive written development records which are regularly shared with parents and used to inform future planning. Children's development is very well planned for with children being prepared for future work bases on the Foundation Stage curriculum. The setting makes very effective use of the Montessori methods of education which impacts positively on children of all ages within the nursery.

Nursery Education.

The quality of teaching and learning is good. Staff have a very good understanding of how young children learn and a very good understanding of the Foundation Stage curriculum. Staff are very aware of the development of the children and are careful to build upon previous experiences and existing skills and abilities. Children work in one of two small groups each having a focus, Egypt and Castles, with children having a balance of adult led activity and activity where they can follow their own interests. Where an activity has an adult lead, one staff show an ability to follow the interests of children while still ensuring that they reach their planned learning intentions. For example; during a conversation about Castles the member of staff answered all the questions raised by the children while still ensuring that their understanding was enhanced of life in those times. Staff support children very well at all times in group activities; for example, when one group of children made paper as part of their work on Egypt or where children individually worked on castles making crowns and gaining a greater understanding through the use of books and other written material. Children develop very well with this level of support and apply themselves for appropriate amounts of time. Staff undertake on going assessments of children's achievements which inform written development records, that parents have regular access to, and are used to mould future plans.

The children form very positive relationships as they learn and play together, they will share all equipment, take turns and patiently listen to each other as they share opinions and answer questions. During a news activity a group of children worked with an adult and listened for long periods of time as each child contributed to the very good discussion. Children in the nursery are very confident speakers and are able to use appropriate vocabulary to describe their ideas; for example, when they were decorating their crowns with shiny objects or describing how the paper felt when they were making it. All children are developing well in a very language rich environment, in addition to their ability as speakers, children readily use books, label their

own work and that for display and are developing their abilities as early writers. The setting has a very good range of practical mathematics equipment, which children enjoy using, and makes opportunities available for children to understand more about numbers and their values. Children also have a good understanding of quantity, as they made their paper, of time and of the value of numbers. Some children discussed about how long ago some castles were built and were able to use their reason and understanding to realise that it was a long time ago. Children have access to a wide range of activities that develop their physical skills and also have access to a range of creative experiences in art and music. Children's understanding of the world is enhanced by activities about the world, with a good use of maps and globes, and by the use of everyday technology. However the children only have limited experiences to enhance their technological awareness and skills in specific areas, such as in computers. The setting is reviewing its level of provision in this area. Overall the nursery supports children's learning very well in the Foundation Stage.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

The nursery enjoys a very good working relationship with its parents which helps to ensure that all necessary detailed background information is provided from home and acted upon by the setting. The nursery responds positively and effectively to meet the needs of the children and acts in the interest of parents where appropriate. Staff have a good understanding of the children as individuals and respond to their needs; for example, parents feel that the nursery knows each child and has a good understanding of their background, medical and dietary needs. The nursery works very well with children who are bilingual and parents feel that children's attitudes and behaviour that are formed within the nursery have a very positive effect on their children's life outside the setting. The nursery works effectively with children who have learning difficulties, disabilities or specific medical needs. They provide an inclusive environment for learning and play, a suitable physical environment with appropriate resources and good links with parents. The atmosphere in the nursery is very good, the staff and children together create positive relationships where children are well supported and respected and where they face challenge and a very good range of interesting activities. All staff are consistent role models who apply simple rules that children both understand and follow. Staff manage behaviour very well by engaging them, meeting their needs and facilitating a sense of their own responsibility within the setting. Staff also engage children in developmentally appropriate conversations as children play, take food or share activities together. Staff actively give children responsibility for themselves and have very high expectations that they will use this properly. Children thrive in the setting as a result of this showing very high standards of co-operative behaviour, exceptional independence and maturity. The nursery uses resources that reflect positive images of diversity; these include dolls, books, photographs and artefacts. Children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is fostered.

The partnership with parents and carers is outstanding. Parents praise the work of the nursery and feel that they have profitable relationships that ensure the very highest standards of care for children; for example, parents value that the oldest children start to enjoy the idea of doing small appropriate amounts of work at home. Parents enjoy all levels of contact with the setting from informal daily interactions to planned meetings where they can discuss children's progress in detail. They also value the children's written development records and that staff are always available to discuss their child's development. Parents consider that the setting knows their children very well and that their children develop so well as they face challenge in their daily activities. In addition the parents consider that senior staff ensure that any queries or concerns

are effectively and speedily resolved. The parents have a complete understanding of the work of the setting as it also provides them with a very good range of information about its policies and procedures. However several parents consider that the strength of the nursery is the way that their children become confident, articulate and responsible in an environment where they are happy and learning is fun.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

The provider has established very robust recruitment procedures that help to ensure that staff employed at the nursery are suitable to work with children. The staff at the nursery are very well qualified, experienced and most have a long association with the setting. All staff are very committed to caring for and helping children develop well, they have a very good understanding of how young children learn. This is a consequence of their very high level of relevant qualifications and the very good levels of training and development that is made available to them. The setting has policies and procedures in place to ensure the effective and safe management of the nursery. Staff deployment is good, the resources available are of a high standard and the accommodation is very spacious and very well used. Children's well being and care is given very good attention. Children achieve well and are learning importance lessons about healthy life choices and how to stay safe. The nursery is a very reflective setting and uses processes of self review to enhance its level of provision and improve on its previous best. However children are not always given sufficient opportunities to take part in outdoor activities or develop their technological awareness.

The leadership and management is good. Senior staff have a clear vision for the nursery and have shown a drive to improve all aspects of its provision. All staff members have a clear idea of their roles and responsibilities within the nursery and all staff are well led and discharge their duties conscientiously with a great passion for the development of children. Staff have very good on-going training and their performance is appraised professionally to ensure that their skills are up to date and their practice meets the needs of all children. The setting has very effective planning and assessments procedures in place. The setting meets the needs of the range of children for whom it provides.

Improvements since the last inspection

The last inspection made the following recommendations: that daily attendance registers were maintained with more detail, that the setting's Equal Opportunities policy was updated and that recommendations from the Fire Safety and Environmental Health Officers were complied with. Since that time the nursery has ensured that attendance registers contain all required detail, that their Equal Opportunities policy is up to date and that there has been compliance with any recommendations from Fire Safety and Environmental Health Officers.

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 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 that children are given greater opportunities to take part in outdoor play.

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):

- ensure that children are given greater opportunities to develop technological awareness and skills.

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