

The Ark

Inspection report for early years provision

Unique Reference Number	133627
Inspection date	21 January 2008
Inspector	Angela Cole
Setting Address	The Orchard, Birds Lane, Epwell, Banbury, Oxfordshire, OX15 6LQ
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Registered person	Julia Neal
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 satisfactory. 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?

The Ark nursery opened in 1997 and is a privately owned nursery set in the rural village of Epwell near Banbury in Oxfordshire. It operates from a purpose-built building with its own enclosed, outdoor area near to the proprietor's premises and the children also have use of her garden. A maximum of twenty children may attend the nursery at any one time. The nursery is open each weekday from 09.00 to 16.00 during term times for approximately 48 weeks of the year.

There are currently 35 children aged from two years to under eight years on roll. Of these, 19 children receive funding for early education. Children come from the local area and from surrounding villages. The nursery currently supports a small number of children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

The nursery employs four members of staff to work alongside the owner-manager and they are supported by a regular, voluntary helper. Of these, four hold appropriate early years qualifications. The nursery has close links with the local primary school and church.

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PROVISION

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is satisfactory.

The children learn the importance of personal hygiene through well planned routines so that, for example, they do not forget to wash their hands before handling food. Staff follow some effective procedures and practices which meet children's health needs, including use of protective gloves for changing nappies. In practice, children receive consistent care, for example, regarding accidents and when they become ill. However, staff do not always obtain signed consent from the parent before medication is administered.

Children have effective opportunities for exercise and fresh air as they play indoors or outdoors and go on walks in all weathers. They repeat sequences of movement to action songs, carefully control wheeled toys on the patio and dig in a large, gravelled area. They balance on crates and planks and, when the grass is dryer, have access to larger equipment, including a slide, den and huge tyre. Children gain skill using small tools, such as pens and scissors. When encouraged, they become independent in toileting, dressing and eating and are careful as they tidy the room after their play.

The children have free access to fresh drinking water throughout the sessions. The nursery takes close account of children's choices and parents' information to provide healthy snacks that appeal to children and meet their dietary needs. Children gain a good understanding of healthy eating and tell each other why they eat fruit and drink milk. They enjoy nutritious meals as parents willingly follow clear guidance on the contents of lunch boxes to ensure children remain healthy.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

The children play safely in secure, maintained premises that are well organised. The playroom is bright with adaptable space between different play areas so that children can spread their activities. The immediate outdoor environment with partial covering for wet weather play is well resourced; the lawn with sensory and 'mini beast' areas and larger physical equipment is available in dryer weather. Children use a wide range of resources that is appropriate to their age and stage of development. They independently access much of the good quality equipment that meets safety standards. Those with additional needs benefit from well planned adaptations to activities, such as arrangements for pouring water.

Children move freely and safely within the child-orientated environment as possible risks are identified and minimised. Staff are vigilant and supervise the children constantly, reminding them of reasons for potential risks within their play. Children begin to think of their own safety as they regularly practise leaving the premises in an emergency and learn road safety on walks around the village. The staff safeguard and promote children's welfare and have a suitable knowledge of the local procedures. Key staff hold current first aid certificates and have attended relevant training to develop their understanding of how to protect children and respond to any child protection concern.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

Children enjoy their time at the nursery. The routine is varied to include times for free, indoor and outdoor play, as well as catering for the children's personal care and rest needs. There is a stimulating range and balance of activities that helps children to make progress in all areas of their development, including daily use of natural materials such as pebbles, wood and sand. Staff effectively use their good knowledge of the 'Birth to three matters' and Foundation Stage frameworks to plan for the children's developmental requirements and interests. Children develop confidence to make their needs known as they can be sure of a kind response from the adults working with them. Younger ones effectively gain early language skills as staff are attentive to their different ways of communicating and make very good use of signing to support their understanding. All children develop a heightened sense of the world about them to feel part of the local community, for example, as they go out on a 'wet, windy walk'.

Nursery Education

The quality of teaching and learning is good. Staff have, overall, a very good understanding of the Foundation Stage and of how children learn. The setting is planned to provide broad and balanced range of experiences across the six areas of learning with many different types of play offered outdoors and well as indoors, including, role play, books and 'writing' materials. Good use is made of free play times, though the length is decided by adults, rather than extending children's concentration and opportunities for them to become independent learners. The learning environment and activities are effectively planned to suit the needs of the children based on detailed assessment of their learning. Staff provide interesting resources to extend the learning of children as groups or individual, including activities based around different colours. Children are well supported by the staff's teaching methods, including interest in how they play with, and talk about, the available resources. For example, a child made 'binoculars' from blocks and talked about clay pigeon shooting, and staff are aware of the need to take such interests further within the session. All staff skilfully challenge and support children to achieve as much as they can, for example, through questions about how many cupfuls a beaker will hold.

Children use language confidently, learn to negotiate and build up a wider vocabulary, including the use of their surnames. Older ones listen intently in whole group activities and confidently express their needs and preferences. Children enjoy rhyming activities and distinguish different sounds of their initials. They eagerly join in with stories, including 'Don't climb out of the window', and know words have meaning. They recognise their names and make good use of writing materials, for example, to copy their names and create 'prescriptions' in the 'surgery'. Children show a good interest in numbers and use some in their play, for example, to say that 'water is up to the 900 mark.' They group safari animals and enjoy joining in with number songs, for example, eager to say the numbers of 'current buns' remaining. They are keen to compare numbers of objects in different-sized containers and count to high numbers, including 30 pebbles in a jar.

Children often recall and describe significant family events. They investigate a wide range of objects and changing materials, for example, to make rock cakes for a 'Tiger who came to tea'. They use a range of tools for different purposes and make their own designs, including walkways from planks and crates. They show a keen interest in technology, choosing and operating appropriate computer programs to extend their learning. They show significant interest in the environment, discussing the effect of the weather on their routine and activities. Children's

creativity is highly valued. Great interest is shown in what they see, hear, smell and taste, for example, to make soup from home-grown vegetables and talk about fruit drinks. They increasingly join in both actions and words of an increasing range of songs chosen from items in a bag. They learn to move with the beat and explore music as they wave coloured ribbons. Their role-play is consistently supported as they learn through a wide range of attractive resources, including x-rays in the 'surgery'.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

All children are fully included with their differences being highly acknowledged and valued. The staff ensure that photographs and art work are attractively displayed throughout the nursery which helps children to feel valued and gives them a strong sense of pride. Children are frequently consulted about what they want to do which enables them to make decisions and use their own ideas. They have extensive opportunities to learn about themselves, each other and the world around them. For example, they are paired with younger children to show them what to do, take care for the pets in the nursery and enjoy helping with everyday tasks that give them responsibility, such as preparing the snack foods.

Staff consistently use sensitive and effective methods to manage children's behaviour and help them to learn and follow agreed boundaries. As a result, children are polite and take turns by themselves, for example, to use the computer. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is fostered. Children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are superbly supported through the staff's expert practice and their joint commitment to the development of each child. The nursery works very closely with parents and external agencies to ensure children are happy and make the maximum, possible progress. Staff have high expectations of children and attend training that supports individuals with additional needs as well as others in the group, for example, for signing.

Partnership with parents is outstanding. The excellent relationships developed with parents and carers contribute significantly to children's well-being in the nursery. Families choose to receive high quality information through a variety of media, including detailed policies and home-nursery diaries. Staff have also produced books of photographs for families to use to ease the children's transition from home to nursery and from nursery to school. Adults actively seek parents' views about their children's needs and interests before starting and regularly throughout their time at the group, for example, in home visits and review discussions. Staff make sure that parents know how their children are progressing through verbal exchanges and shared learning records. These steps ensure extremely effective continuity of care for the children.

Organisation

The organisation is satisfactory.

Most regulatory documentation is in place and is, generally, used well to promote children's health, safety and well-being. However, not all parents are requested to give prior written permission for staff to administer medication to ensure consistency of the children's care. Overall, the operational plans are well developed, regularly reviewed and shared with parents. For example, many of the nursery's policies are comprehensive and accurately reflect the children's welfare, though procedures to follow in case of an accusation against staff, or of a child being lost, are not detailed. The setting has sheets to set up a log to record any complaint

to include the necessary information. There is a system for registering children and staff daily attendance that shows the hours of attendance for later arrivals and for those who leave earlier than the usual, session times.

The setting meets the needs of the range of children for whom it provides. Individual children are highly supported by attentive, responsive staff who are well qualified and, overall, experienced. They enjoy the family grouping with familiar keyworkers who enables them to play alongside their peers and to learn from those both younger and older than themselves. The inside and outside environments include attractive, smaller play areas that are well resourced for children's development. There is a high ratio of familiar adults throughout the day to effectively meet children's care and learning requirements.

Leadership and management are outstanding. Staff are guided by the knowledgeable, active manager who inspires, encourages and values their contributions. Regular appraisals support staff to foster their own professional development and well as to further improve the provision for children. Training and staff's willingness to audit and improve practice ensure that their day-to-day teaching is, increasingly, up-to-date and well informed. Children are highly motivated to make progress and the leaders accurately monitor their learning to support their achievements. The nursery is highly committed to promoting an inclusive environment in which every child matters.

Improvements since the last inspection

The previous care inspection required the setting to improve an aspect of safety and the documentation for behaviour management. The adults now ensure that the staff toilet door lock is made inaccessible to children at all times and this has improved children's safety. The documentation for behaviour management now includes procedures for responding to bullying and a designated person responsible for behaviour management. As a result, the documentation better supports the children's welfare.

In the previous education inspection, no significant weaknesses were noted and the nursery was asked to further consider an aspect of children's mathematical development. Staff have further developed naturally- arising opportunities for children to show an awareness of number operations, such as addition and subtraction, for example, during snack time when they count their pieces of fruit. As a result children's learning is enhanced.

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.

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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):

- obtain written permission from parents before administering medication to children
- ensure all policies are up-to-date in order to promote the children's safety.

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):

- review the routine to provide long periods of free play to extend children's concentration and opportunities for them to become independent learners.

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