

# Little Acorns Pre-School

Inspection report for early years provision

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	221640
<b>Inspection date</b>	07 March 2008
<b>Inspector</b>	Caroline Wright

<b>Setting Address</b>	The Community Room, Stukeley Meadows Primary School, Wertheim Way, Stukeley Meadows, Huntingdon, Cambridgeshire, PE29 6UH
<b>Telephone number</b>	07914 918629
<b>E-mail</b>	School num 01480 398060
<b>Registered person</b>	Little Acorns Pre-School
<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 satisfactory.

### WHAT SORT OF SETTING IS IT?

Little Acorns Pre-school is run by a voluntary management committee made up of parents of children at the pre-school. It opened in 1995 and operates from the community room in Stukeley Meadows Primary School. The school is situated on housing estate on the outskirts of Huntingdon, Cambridgeshire. A maximum of 24 children may attend the pre-school at any one time. The pre-school is open each weekday from 09:15 to 11:45 and 12:30 to 15:00 during school term times only. All children share access to an enclosed outdoor play area.

There are currently 62 children aged from two to under five-years on roll. Of these, 37 children receive funding for early education. Children come from the local area. The pre-school currently supports a number of children who speak English as an additional language.

The pre-school employs six members of staff. Five of the staff, including the manager, hold appropriate early years qualifications.

## THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PROVISION

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

The provision is good.

Children learn about personal hygiene through regular routines such as washing their hands before eating and they know that they need to wash their hands 'to stop germs.' Staff act as good role models, wiping down surfaces before serving snack and after children have eaten to help children to stay healthy. Children learn about leading a healthy lifestyle through everyday, practical experiences. For example, they are able to run around and exert themselves in the outdoor play area, so that they learn the importance of regular fresh air and exercise. They develop new physical skills such as running, pushing, pulling and climbing using the outdoor equipment and regular opportunities for large physical activities are provided indoors. Children are aware of changes that occur in their bodies due to physical exertion and comment 'I'm hot' when they have been running around. Staff invite other professionals such as the health visitor and the dentist into the setting and visits to the Life Education bus further develop children's understanding of how their bodies work. Children take part in 'first aid is fun' training and learn how to care for themselves or others in the event of an emergency.

In addition, children learn about healthy eating during discussion with staff at snack time. Staff have developed a healthy eating policy and provide fresh fruit or other healthy options, such as wraps with tomatoes and cucumber fillings, for snack. Children are able to choose when they want to eat their snack, and meaningful activities such as making their own sandwiches or spreading their own toppings on hot cross buns enables them to learn new physical skills and develop their understanding of mathematical terms, such as 'enough' or 'too much.' Children pour themselves a drink of milk or water at snack time to help them to remain hydrated so that they can think effectively. In addition, children learn about healthy eating through play activities such as the role play shop or play cooking in the home corner.

The needs of children are well met by adults who have a sound understanding of their developmental needs. If the children become unwell or have an accident whilst they are in the care of the pre-school, up to date records are in place to make sure that good care is given. Good information is maintained regarding children's special diets or any allergies so that their dietary needs are well met. Staff are well qualified in first aid so that they can take appropriate action to promote children's welfare in the event of an accident or emergency.

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

The provision is good.

Children move around safely under the constant supervision of the pre-school staff. Children learn how to keep themselves safe when using scissors or sitting on chairs, helped by the gentle reminders from their key workers. High locks prevent children from opening the door in the entrance area and coded key pads prevent them from leaving the community rooms and going into the main school without adult supervision. Children show their knowledge and understanding of personal safety when they play together in the sand: 'you have to be careful not to throw it... if it gets in your eyes it makes them sore.' Adults further support children's learning about safety when they provide 'road safety' activities, such as the traffic light game or playing with the zebra crossing, both indoors and out. This helps children to extend their knowledge of personal safety in play situations. Visits to the setting by the fire safety officer help children to learn about the dangers of fire and regular 'fire drills' are carried out by staff to help children to know what to do in the case of an emergency evacuation of the premises.

Children's welfare is safeguarded and promoted by staff who have a good understanding of child protection procedures, which are in line with those set out by the Local Safeguarding Children Board. Training in child protection is provided for all staff when they start to work at the pre-school and a designated person ensures that any concerns are dealt with effectively so that children's best interests are maintained.

A record of visitors is maintained and the daily register of attendance is clear and up to date. Children use suitable resources, which are appropriate for their age and stage of development, and these are checked daily by the pre-school staff as they set up each session, to ensure they are in good condition and are safe. Safety surfaces and good adult supervision of climbing apparatus keep children safe, both indoors and out. Staff have set up a suitable system to ensure that children do not leave the premises unaccompanied at the end of the session. The pre-school also have additional plans in place to improve on the existing arrangements for maintaining the security of the outdoor play area. This will further improve children's safety in the future.

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

The provision is satisfactory.

Children are happy at the pre-school and enjoy their play. They use a satisfactory range of construction materials, such as duplo and mobilo to make cars and houses with the help of their key workers. They use tools such as paint brushes to paint pictures and pastry cutters or rolling pins in the dough. Children enjoy drawing with pencils and felt-tip pens, making meaningful marks and developing new physical skills. Staff plan interesting activities to help children to learn about new textures and materials through their play. For example, staff provide wet or dry sand with diggers and scoops, ice cubes or shaving foam for children to explore.

Adults working with the under-three's are beginning to make changes to the way they plan activities so that they will be skilled in implementing the new Early Years Foundation Stage when it comes into effect. However, key workers do not maintain observations of children neither do they keep records of younger children's progress. This affects staff's ability to plan activities that meet children's individual learning needs.

### **Nursery Education**

The quality of teaching and children's learning is satisfactory. Staff's ability to plan activities that build effectively on children's interests and existing skills is limited because they do not monitor children's progress until the year they are due to go to school. Furthermore, assessment records that are used do not cover all of the stepping stones, this limits staff's ability to extend children's learning by building on what they already know, affecting children's progress.

Although planning is clear and well linked to the early learning goals and stepping stones, play opportunities are not informed by observations of what children enjoy. As a result, some activities lack adequate challenge for older or more able children and some children's interests are not met. Opportunities for children to extend their learning through everyday activities and routines are missed. For example, staff do not always provide mark-making in the role play area and they do not ask children to attempt to write their own names on their artwork. Adults sometimes use pre-cut templates for children in art and craft activities, for example when they make snowflakes, hot air balloons or robins. This limits challenge and affects children's creativity.

However, staff working with funded children are suitably qualified and are secure in their understanding of the Foundation Stage. They engage in conversations with children and ask challenging questions, to make children think and to enable them to extend their ideas through discussions as they play. Staff plan a wide range of interesting first hand activities for the children and have a clear understanding of how they contribute to children's progress towards the early learning goals. For example, they organise visits by specialist entertainers, such as Mr Marvel, to extend children's learning through interesting experiences. Children eagerly engage in his 'tricks', using their existing knowledge of how things work to identify how the magic was done.

Children play together in groups and engage in conversations, listening to each other's ideas. For example, when playing with the dough they talk together about the 'little sweets' and 'cherry cake' that they have made. They use number names and mathematical language such as 'more' and 'enough' as they make their own sandwiches at snack time. They talk about the 'massive' sand castle and the 'big' bucket as they play together in the sand. They learn about shape, space and measure when they play with the tape measures or the balancing scales, talking about 'the biggest' or 'the heaviest' as they play. Staff provide interesting opportunities for children to develop their skills further making cakes or weighing and measure ingredients to make the play dough each week. Children use calculators and telephones, expertly identifying numbers and using number names as they play.

Children eagerly join in with singing familiar songs and clap their hands to follow a rhythm. Staff provide them with good opportunities to develop their knowledge of sounds and letters. For example, they play music behind a screen and ask children to identify which instrument is making the sound. In addition, children learn about initial sounds in words when they talk about the letter of the week at circle time. Children demonstrate that they recognise familiar words such as their own name when they find their name card at self-registration each morning. Children make marks on paper and paint with water on the walls in the outside play area to help them to learn early writing skills.

Children explore a suitable range of media and materials over time. Adults plan art and craft activities into the programme regularly. Children have opportunities to paint with their hands and make prints with their Wellington boots. They stick sequins, feathers and other interesting materials onto paper using glue and cutting with scissors. Children tell their own stories and use the available dressing up materials to extend their narratives. They enjoy playing in the tents in the garden and caring for their 'babies' in the role play area. Children enjoy using the everyday technology such as, computer, magnets and magnifying glasses in their play. They take part in activities that help them to learn about patterns and changes in the natural environment. For example, they play with leaves indoors and use them to make their own art work. Staff organise suitable activities to promote children's interest in books. They use their skills to tell interesting stories to children at the end of the session and children listen well. Children celebrate World Book Week dressing up as their favourite story book characters. This encourages them to develop early reading skills for the future.

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

The provision is good.

Children show a strong sense of belonging as they greet key-workers and each other upon arrival at the pre-school. Children work together co-operatively during group activities; they take turns on the slide and help each other to wind the tape measure back into its case. They confidently demonstrate their skills as 'cheer leaders' and join in with group discussions about

what they do at home. Children are generally well motivated by the activities provided and spend time at self-chosen activities, engaging in long periods of sustained thinking.

Children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is fostered. Adults carefully explain what they expect children to do in a way that they can understand and as a result, children behave well. Staff encourage children to respect each other's needs and to use conventions such as 'please' and 'thank-you', acting as positive role models themselves. Children access a suitable range of resources that reflect diversity, to help them to learn about other members of society through their play. They talk with each other about their families and engage in activities, such as celebrating Diwali and Chinese New Year, which helps them to learn about other life-styles. Circle time discussions enable them to talk about what they do at home so that they learn about each other's family cultures and traditions.

Good support is in place to help children who speak English as an additional language to become confident communicators. Key workers learn key words in a child's home language to help them to build on what children already know. Children greet each other at circle time, using the various languages spoken by the children who attend the setting. In addition, staff attend specialist training to enable them to implement new strategies to help children to communicate effectively and to take part in the full range of activities. A suitable system is in place to support children with disabilities and/or learning difficulties.

Children are generally free to choose which of the indoor activities provided that they will take part in, and select resources from the trolley to enable them to learn to make decisions. However, they are not able to explore the outdoor environment freely during the winter, instead they are limited to playing outdoors according to the daily sessional plan. If children then want to come indoors, because they are not interested in the resources provided outside, they have to wait until adults decide that they can. Although adults provide children with opportunities to engage in large physical activities, such as the climbing frame, indoors, they are unable to access these resources freely. As a result, children are unable to pursue their own interest or to explore their preferred learning environment freely. This affects their ability to develop new skills independently.

A successful key-worker system enables parents and carers to share information informally on a daily basis and comment on what their children do at home. Examples of children's work are kept in 'My special book' and given to parents so that they can celebrate their children's achievements. Parents are encouraged to share their views about the provision and comments that they make in the questionnaire are used to improve practice. For example, in response to parents' feedback, a system is being developed to gather information about children's skills and what they enjoy doing at home to help key workers to meet children's individual needs when they start at the setting. A parent helper rota enables parents and carers to work alongside their children in the setting so that they can help children to feel confident and secure.

The partnership with parents and carers is good. Positive relationships contribute to the progress of children who receive funded early education. Parents receive good information in the prospectus and Welcome Pack and further information is available on the notice-boards, so that they can support their child's learning at home. They receive good information about forthcoming activities and how these activities contribute towards children's progress towards the early learning goals. Parents contribute to the day to day running of the pre-school by serving on the management committee and attending committee meetings. A good system is in place to enable parents to raise any concerns about the provision. This helps parents to ensure that their child's individual needs are well met.

## **Organisation**

The organisation is satisfactory.

All areas of the pre-school environment are well organised, attractive and provide plenty of space for children to move around safely and independently. Children and their families are warmly welcomed into the setting each day by staff who greet them with smiles and encouraging comments. The management committee uses successful recruitment procedures, which ensure that the staff are well experienced and hold the necessary qualifications to carry out their role effectively. All staff are rigorously vetted to ensure that they are suitable to work with children. The induction procedure and comprehensive operational plan, with up to date information for staff, makes sure that all members of the team are secure in their knowledge of procedures for child protection and maintaining children's overall welfare.

The pre-school staff are well supported by regular meetings with the manager, who works with the chair of the committee to ensure that their ongoing training needs are well met. A good system has been established to enable staff to take responsibility for sharing their skills and supporting their colleagues. For example, an administrator liaises between pre-school staff and the committee, a deputy manager assists in day-to-day supervision of staff. Consequently, all of the legally required documents, which contribute to children's health, safety and well-being, including a procedure to record complaints or concerns, are in place and regularly reviewed.

Leadership and management of early education is satisfactory. Regular meetings enable staff to work effectively as a team. Ongoing training and development is identified by a good system of appraisal and all staff are committed to their ongoing professional development. However, the system for monitoring the programme for early education does not successfully identify minor weaknesses in teaching or in the system of planning for children's next steps. As a result opportunities for children to extend their learning independently, both indoors and out, are missed and some activities lack interest and challenge for children. This impacts upon children's learning.

Overall, children's needs are met.

## **Improvements since the last inspection**

At the last inspection the pre-school agreed to ensure that all the documents and policies contain the necessary details (with particular regard to the register, complaints policy and child protection procedure); give consideration to extending the range of provision that addresses diversity issues and to provide child-accessible storage of resources. Since the last inspection all documents, written policies and procedures have been updated and revised to meet requirements. A member of staff now has specific responsibility for ensuring that documents meet requirements in the National Standards and are regularly reviewed to keep abreast of any changes in practice. Children have access to a suitable range of resources and activities, such as celebrating Chinese New Year or Diwali, helping them to develop positive attitudes towards diversity. A trolley has been purchased to provide children with easy access to additional resources, such as puzzles and construction materials and this has improved their ability to make decisions about what they will play with.

At the last inspection of nursery education, the pre-school agreed to continue to improve children's opportunity to calculate and compare numbers. Staff now take advantage of opportunities to count and compare numbers in daily routines and play situations. For example,

they count how many pieces of banana children eat at snack time and calculate 'how many' children are sitting at the table 'all together.'

### **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 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 satisfactory.

### **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):

- set up a system to monitor practice, evaluate all aspects of the provision and to identify areas for further development (this also applies to nursery education).

#### **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):

- improve the system for planning and assessment: make effective use of the stepping stones in assessing children's progress; carry out regular observations to identify what children enjoy and do well; use these to plan activities indoors and out, which provide adequate challenge and interest for all children (this also applies to care)
- improve children's ability to make decisions about their use of the outdoor play area and indoor large physical apparatus so that they can explore their preferred learning environment, pursue their own interests and learn new skills independently (this also applies to care).

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)