



Little Acorns

Inspection report for early years provision

Unique Reference Number	509573
Inspection date	19 October 2005
Inspector	Anne Gunston
Setting Address	St John's Room, 19 St John's Road, Hedge End, Southampton, Hampshire, SO30 4AF
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Registered person	Kevin Crowley
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 inadequate - notice of action to improve.

WHAT SORT OF SETTING IS IT?

Little Acorns Day Nursery opened in 1997. It operates from three rooms on two floors of a converted Parish Hall. The nursery is located near to the town centre of Hedge End, Southampton; it is privately owned and serves the local area.

The nursery is registered for 60 children from birth to under 5 years; there are

currently

65 children from 3 months to 5 years on roll. This includes 15 children who are in receipt of funding for nursery education. The nursery is open from Monday to Friday for 51 weeks of the year, closing only for the week of Christmas. Children may attend for a variety of sessions, between the hours of 07:30 and 18:00 each day. The nursery supports children who have English as an additional language or who may have special educational needs.

There are currently 17 permanent staff employed to work with the children. The majority have relevant early years qualifications. The nursery receives support from the local authority early years development worker.

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PROVISION

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is satisfactory.

All children have their dietary needs met correctly; staff have particularly good procedures in place to ensure children with complex dietary needs stay healthy. The nursery adheres to the detailed guidance provided by parents and make sure that all staff involved with the children are fully informed. Children enjoy nourishing meals and snacks at nursery; these are freshly prepared on site and contain a good proportion of healthy ingredients, such as fruit and vegetables. Older children take part in daily physical exercise in the nursery garden, and all enjoy fresh air on occasional walks in the locality. More than adequate members of staff hold relevant first aid qualifications and the nursery maintains a well-stocked first aid box, protecting children's health. The staff's practice protects children's health in most instances. For example, staff use antibacterial sprays to clean surfaces, and aprons and gloves when nappies are changed. However, many children are able to use the musical instruments and staff do not intervene to clean items between each use, putting children at risk of illness and infection. Children follow acceptable hygiene routines and some are independent in personal care, for example, they wash hands independently after using the toilet. Staff do not consistently encourage children to learn these simple hygiene practices; for example, they do not always expect children to wash hands before enjoying snack time.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is satisfactory.

Children benefit from being able to move freely and safely during their time at nursery. They use an environment which is appropriately maintained and decorated, and provides sufficient space for play. Older children have independent access to toilet and washing facilities; all children's access to play materials is safe, although storage of these for older children does not encourage self-selection. There is an acceptable range of equipment, staff use this appropriately, enabling younger children to rest comfortably; ensuring older children can come together for sociable

meal times. There are good systems in place to ensure all resources remain in a safe condition and that safety equipment, such as stairgates and socket covers are continually in place. Staff keep the premises very safe and secure for the benefit of all children. The use of a close circuit television system and a password protects children, and makes sure they are collected each day by appropriate adults. Staff communicate well with each other throughout the day. They ensure children are monitored and kept safe, for example, if they move between rooms in the nursery to spend time with brothers or sisters. Staff have a satisfactory understanding of child protection procedures. They are aware of the signs and symptoms, which may indicate harm or neglect, however they do not record existing injuries. This means children are potentially at risk, as staff may not identify a pattern of concerns.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is satisfactory.

Young children enjoy a satisfactory range of interesting and stimulating activities while at the nursery. Staff are beginning to make relevant use of the Birth-3 matters framework to ensure that these are developmentally appropriate. The structure of the babies' day is determined by the child's own routine as discussed with parents. They settle well on arrival as the handover from parents is calm and unhurried, children are warmly welcomed with a cuddle by familiar staff. During periods of play, babies become competent learners; they show curiosity and interest in their surroundings and toy provision, which staff ensure is always within their reach. For example, they practise and learn how to post shapes, eagerly wiggle or dance along to favourite songs and experiment with sounds made by musical instruments or activity frames. Toddlers and younger children also play with a varied selection of toys, staff make sure these are kept at child height in their rooms, encouraging them to make choices. They are becoming skilful communicators, confident in expressing their wishes, to adults and each other. They are happily engaged in purposeful play throughout their time in nursery. Staff in the baby unit and Piglets work closely together, records of children's achievements follow the child and therefore ensure that development is continuous.

Nursery education

The quality of teaching and learning is inadequate. A broad curriculum is planned which, over the longer term, covers all areas of learning. Short-term plans are prepared, which also link closely to the early learning goals and show what children can be expected to learn from activities. Some staff show knowledge of how children learn and intervene with appropriate questioning techniques to extend the children's learning. However, others lack skill in spontaneously developing activities to encourage children to think. They rely a great deal on the guidance given by senior staff, for example, on key language to use as they interact with the children in play. More able children are often bored and aimless, and not effectively challenged by staff. Children's behaviour is managed appropriately; any reminders needed are given by staff using positive language. Staff do not make good use of the resources, accommodation or their time for the benefit of the children. Little labelling of resources exists and curtains over open shelving means older children are not invited

to select their own resources. Key staff spend time in activities not directly related to the children's learning, and often need to support the care of younger children in the group. Some of the day's activities are not prepared well in advance, and limited use is made of the outdoor play area as a learning experience. This time is set aside for children to let off steam and have fresh air only. Staff complete assessments of children's progress as an ongoing activity, but they are not used to inform planning of future activities. Many aspects of children's learning are not monitored; therefore, staff cannot plan to ensure children make progress in all areas.

Children generally settle well and are happy to part from their parents and carers. They are aware of the routine and know how to behave acceptably. Many have a positive attitude towards the activities on offer and look forward to beginning their play. However this enthusiasm is often deterred as staff do not always notice some children's achievements and are therefore not able to offer praise at an early enough opportunity. This means that children often lose interest and concentration, and wander away from activities.

Children are using language confidently to express their wishes; some opportunities exist for them to write, for example in the sand tray or the home corner. However, this corner area is poorly resourced and infrequently used by children. Staff do not position themselves well to be able to support children, for example, in use of the writing materials. The environment contains little labelling to encourage children to recognise or recreate simple words. Few opportunities exist in the daily routine for children to link sounds and letters. Children's appreciation of books is not encouraged; little time exists in the daily routine for children to select books independently. When children show interest, staff are not always on hand to support and encourage this, and the activities of younger children break concentration.

Children's mathematical development is limited. Some are using their problem solving skills and using mathematical language, for example, when deciding that containers are too full. Children are using language to describe and compare shapes, although not always correctly. Children can count up to 10 with support, but staff rarely use incidental opportunities to develop children's mathematical understanding fully. For example, staff do not introduce positional language as when children line up for outdoor play, or suggest that children calculate the correct number of cups for children needing a drink at snack time.

Children have little time to discuss important events or experiences in their lives. Circle time takes place, when children are encouraged to talk about favourite toys they have brought to nursery. However, this occasion is often disrupted by the needs of younger children, and the fact that many children have not arrived when this occurs. Activities are intended which make children aware of the wider world, but often do not take place as staff are not able to plan ahead to ensure their knowledge is sufficient and resources are available. During walks within the local community, or when meeting visitors invited to the nursery children learn about their own environment. They have access to information technology equipment, such as a computer, though receive insufficient support from staff in its use. Many simple pieces of equipment, such as a till and tape recorder, are stored at a high level; children are not able to increase their understanding of the purposes of such resources.

Children are able to use a range of small equipment, such as scissors and glue sticks competently, and when staff are on hand, less able children receive appropriate support. They enjoy regular physical exercise in the garden, but have too few opportunities to learn about health and bodily awareness. Children show some awareness of others' presence, particularly in outdoor play, and develop their physical skills and dexterity by using climbing equipment or peddling bicycles. However, when indoors, some children are clumsy and fall over each other during music and movement activities, as space identified for this is restricted.

Children are able to be creative in art and craft. They access an interesting range of junk modelling and collage materials to create pictures and models of their own design, although they cannot choose from materials other than those pre-selected by staff. Children do take part in role-play, in particular with small world and floor activities. However, they use the home corner infrequently for imaginative play, as this contains limited resources of interest to them, and staff do not always intervene to maximise the children's experiences. Children enjoy expressing themselves during songs and with musical instruments, however, they become easily distracted and move away as staff are involved in ensuring that the activity meets the needs of too great an age range of children.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is satisfactory.

The nursery staff maintain daily verbal communication with parents, and share information about practical issues, which ensures the children are cared for according to their parents' wishes. In particular, younger children settle well because staff are flexible about when transfer to another room takes place. For example, if a child makes particular attachments to another, staff will ensure that children move through the nursery together. The nursery has a positive attitude towards care of children with special needs; the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator has appropriate qualifications and an interest in her role. The nursery work closely with parents and other professionals, which ensures children are integrated and included in nursery life. Staff manage children's behaviour competently, for example, younger children are distracted to safer options for play and spoken to in a gentle, but firm tone to encourage sharing of toys. Older children's behaviour is generally good; they are aware of the rules, show respect for the staff and are helpful to each other. However, these children make little additional progress towards the early learning goals. They have little opportunity to talk or share their feelings and receive a limited range of activities to raise their awareness of other cultures. They receive few opportunities to express themselves spontaneously. The daily routine and organisation of the environment provides children with little opportunity for uninterrupted, quiet, reflective play. Children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is not fostered.

The partnership with parents and carers is satisfactory. Parents receive information on the nursery's policies and procedures, and noticeboards make them aware of the programme of learning each child will follow. Parents are comfortable and relaxed in talking to staff; they are encouraged to play a part in nursery life by fund raising or sharing any skills and interests they may have.

Organisation

The organisation is satisfactory.

The owner of the nursery has a positive attitude towards continuing to improve the quality of care offered to children. High levels of qualified staff are employed and the owner is committed to ensuring the staff team undertake ongoing training for the benefit of the children. Appraisals of staff performance do take place, this meeting is used jointly by individual staff and managers to agree training needs and identify particular skills to be used for the eventual benefit of the children. Satisfactory arrangements exist for the recruitment, vetting and induction of new staff. The owner and manager expect that each staff member reads and acknowledges their understanding of all nursery policies and procedures, so the care of the children is consistent. The children are appropriately protected, as unvetted personnel are not allowed to work in isolation. The owner has a good understanding of the requirements of registration, with particular regard to his responsibility to ensure the continued suitability of staff.

Leadership and management of nursery education is inadequate

Staff deployment and grouping of children does not ensure that funded children receive sufficient, high quality support. These children make insufficient progress towards the early learning goals. Staff do not monitor use of the space and resources to ensure these children have appropriate, clearly identified areas for quiet or energetic play. Assessments of children's progress do not clearly identify what the child can do, and are not used to plan activities for individual children. The owner and manager do not monitor the effectiveness of the provision for nursery education. The nursery does not meet the needs of the range of children for whom it provides.

Improvements since the last inspection

At the last inspection of care provided by the nursery, one action and several recommendations were made. The nursery were asked to ensure that a complaints procedure is in place and ensure that children have access to sufficient toilet facilities. Recommendations also related to the creation and implementation of policies and procedures for special needs, child protection, lost or un-collected children and the curriculum. It was also recommended that the nursery improve the labelling of fire exits, implement risk assessments, devise an operational plan and ensure that babies are held whilst being fed.

A full operational plan is in place, containing all necessary policies relevant to provision of nursery care. The manager and staff use these as a basis for discussion at regular meetings, so the care of children through the nursery is consistent and children are protected. A complaints procedure is in place, and made available to parents, which ensures an open working relationship between all involved with the child's care. Children have access to sufficient toilet facilities, the fire exits throughout the building are clearly labelled. Daily risk assessments take place of all areas of the nursery, ensuring children's safety and well-being. The younger children are held comfortably by staff for feeding, enabling them to feel secure and relaxed.

With regard to the previous inspection of nursery education, the nursery were asked to improve staff's knowledge of the Foundation Stage, to enable them to plan and implement an effective programme of learning for all children. In addition, they were asked to improve the quality of individual assessment of children's progress and to ensure that this information was shared with parents. Other areas for improvement were identified, relating to children's ability to recognise letter sounds, simple words and practise writing skills. An area of improvement was identified relating to children's ability to understand simple mathematical concepts and solve problems. In addition, it was recommended that children be given more opportunity to create pictures and models of their own designs.

The staff's knowledge of the Foundation Stage of learning is increasing, as senior staff work together to plan the curriculum, and provide guidance for less able staff. Prompts concerning the intended learning outcome and language to be used are given on the weekly plan, however some staff lack confidence in delivering the activities effectively. Assessments of children's progress are not completed fully, many areas of learning contain no comment on the child's ability, although observation of the children indicates that they are competent in these areas. The nursery have recently begun a programme of parents' evenings, and intend that parents have the opportunity to discuss their child's progress on a one-to-one basis with key staff. Children now have more opportunities to create their own designs, for example, using recycled materials. However, children's progress in mathematical understanding and some areas of communication, language and literacy is limited.

Complaints since the last inspection

There are no complaints to report.

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):

- ensure children are consistently taught good hygiene practice and that cleaning of toy provision adequately protects children's health
- ensure all existing injuries are recorded

The quality and standards of the nursery education

To improve the quality and standards of nursery education, the registered person **must** take the following actions:

- ensure the provision for nursery education is effectively monitored

These actions are set out in a ***notice of action to improve*** and must be completed by the date specified in the notice.

The Department for Education and Skills and the local authority have been informed.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the leaflet *Building better childcare: Compliments and concerns about inspectors' judgements* which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk