

# Little Acorns

Inspection report for early years provision

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<b>Inspector</b>	Veronica Sharpe

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<b>Type of setting</b>	Childcare on non-domestic premises

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## Introduction

This inspection was carried out by Ofsted under Sections 49 and 50 of the Childcare Act 2006 on the quality and standards of the registered early years provision. 'Early years provision' refers to provision regulated by Ofsted for children from birth to 31 August following their fifth birthday (the early years age group). The registered person must ensure that this provision complies with the statutory framework for children's learning, development and welfare, known as the *Early Years Foundation Stage*.

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## Description of the setting

Little Acorns Pre-school is a well established setting located within the St Neots Community College, Eynesbury, Cambridgeshire. In 2009 the setting became the responsibility of the governing body of the college. The pre-school is on the Early Years Register and accepts up to 29 children aged from two to five years of age. There are currently 64 children on roll, of these, 55 receive funding for early education. There are small number of children on roll with special education needs and/or disabilities and there are systems to support families who have English as an additional language.

Little Acorns is open each weekday during term time from 9.00am to 12.00pm on Monday and 9.00am to 3.00pm Tuesday to Friday. Morning sessions run from 9.00am to 12.00pm and afternoon sessions from 12.00pm to 3.00pm. Children attend a variety of sessions. On Monday from 1.15pm to 2.45pm there is a 'Seedlings' toddler session for parents and younger children, which acts as a feeder group into the pre-school. The premises includes a main room with adjacent kitchen and toilets and there is an enclosed outdoor play area. The pre-school is sited in a secure area with entry being only via the St Neots College reception. Children use the college facilities, including a sports hall.

There are 11 members of staff employed, of these, eight have appropriate early years qualifications. Little Acorns is part of a first pilot phase of the Government's extended flexible hours programme and offers 15 hours of funded childcare per week. The setting is a member of the Pre-School Learning Alliance and has achieved the Pre-school Learning Alliance 'Reflecting on Quality' stage one.

## The overall effectiveness of the early years provision

Overall the quality of the provision is good.

Children are happy in the setting and show high levels of confidence and self-esteem. They develop good relationships with staff and each other and clearly feel exceptionally safe and secure. Effective partnership working, both with parents and other agencies, means children's individual needs are well met. Staff show positive attitudes to inclusion and promote children's knowledge and understanding of diversity extremely well, ensuring children thrive in an environment where their unique natures, abilities and backgrounds are celebrated and taken account of. Safeguarding is given very high priority and staff are vigilant and well informed. Systems for self evaluation are evolving.

## What steps need to be taken to improve provision further?

To further improve the early years provision the registered person should:

- improve and develop further ways to increase children's knowledge and understanding of sounds and letters using practical and meaningful

- experiences
- improve the daily routines to further increase children's opportunities to make independent choices about their play and learning.

## **The effectiveness of leadership and management of the early years provision**

Recruitment procedures are very secure, with a sound induction process that ensures staff have the skills and knowledge they need to keep children safe from harm. Staff are vigilant and supervise new staff on probation and other unvetted adults rigorously. They guard the children very well but with sensitivity and as a result children welcome visitors into the setting with happy confidence. All staff attend child protection courses regularly to update and refresh their knowledge. Any potential hazards are minimised due to thorough risk assessments and the diligence of the staff. The setting is located in a secure area, but staff constantly assess children's safety and remain alert to any potential dangers as they move around the college grounds.

Formal systems for self evaluation are evolving and the setting has recently completed the local authority quality framework. The manager and staff team have a well developed understanding of their strengths and have put into place strategies that successfully improve the provision, such as, extending the outdoor environment. All of the staff are very competent, they are fully aware of their roles and responsibilities and, therefore, effectively support children's welfare and learning. Positive attitudes to ongoing professional development means they have a secure and increasing knowledge of the Early Years Foundation Stage. Space and resources are used well to create an interesting play environment that enables all children to access a good variety of safe, suitable play materials. In particular, the outdoor area is a vibrant and varied environment where children can use all their senses and develop positive attitudes to healthy outdoor exercise. Although, children have periods of free flow play, daily routines do not always allow children to fully develop their independence and make individual decisions about their own learning.

The setting has established strong partnerships with local primary schools and regular visits take place to ensure children make their transition from pre-school into reception with confidence. Links with other professionals, such as, specialist teachers or health visitors have been developed to ensure children receive continuity of care. Parents are positive about the setting and express their confidence in the abilities of the staff. They contribute their ideas and opinions about the quality of the provision through regular questionnaires and shared daily communication books. Newsletters and frequent meetings with their child's key person keeps them up to date with changes and events. Recently access to the site has been restricted due to new security strategies by the college. Some parents have expressed their reservations as this hinders their ability to communicate daily with staff as they have done previously. However, the manager is very aware of these anxieties and is developing additional ways to share information effectively, such as, home visits or increasing the number of arranged one to one meetings.

## **The quality and standards of the early years provision and outcomes for children**

This is a welcoming and friendly group, where children clearly enjoy all aspects of the provision. Staff are enthusiastic as they go about their work, motivating children with smiles and cheerful conversation. As a consequence children feel valued and demonstrate high levels of self-esteem. Children have clear ideas about how they wish to spend their time, they express themselves confidently and have a good capacity to concentrate intently on their chosen activities. Behaviour is very good and children show they have strong bonds with staff and each other. Celebrating their own personal events, such as, birthdays together also fosters a sense of belonging.

Staff know the children well and take account of their individual interests and abilities. They support children's learning and development effectively and provide them with a good range of opportunities and experiences that help them make good progress in all areas of learning. Information gained from observation and assessments is used to ensure that planned activities build on children's existing skills and knowledge and help them progress towards the next steps in their learning. Generally children's learning is promoted through practical activities, such as, developing problem solving skills using puzzles or building bricks. However, some aspects of communication, language and literacy consist of adult devised work sheets and exercises, which hinder children's ability to freely develop their early reading and writing skills in meaningful ways.

Children make good use of books and listen attentively whilst stories are read to them. They count well and confidently identify different shapes and colours. They can sequence written numbers one to five and recognise there is 'just one more grape to cut up' for snack time. They show much interest in problem solving, such as, how to make a seesaw from planks of wood and a large tyre. Children develop their understanding of cause and effect as they find out what happens when water is poured down a drain pipe. They help to water plants and make sure seeds have enough water to grow big and strong. Children listen to many types of music including songs from other lands. They sing familiar nursery songs and learn about volume and rhythm with percussion instruments. Activities, such as, dressing up and role play help them express their imaginations. Materials, such as, sand, water and dough enable children to use their senses and develop their muscle control, for example, as they knead dough or pour sand into various containers.

Staff work hard to ensure children thrive in an inclusive environment. There are clear strategies in place to support children who have English as an additional language, including visual images and dual language labelling. Staff learn key words and have phonetic translations of those that help children feel at home, such as, their word for a favourite comforter. Proactive thinking means that children who have special educational needs and/or disabilities have their individual needs met very well. Strong links with support teachers and parents as well as a positive attitude towards training and problem solving ensures each child receives appropriate, tailored care and support. In addition, there are many

activities that help children develop their knowledge of the wider world, for example, they look at maps and a globe to find out where granny went on holiday, or where a staff member's friend lives. This brings other countries to life and provides children with an incentive to learn about the food, customs and cultures of others.

Children benefit from exceptionally healthy choices at snack time, enjoying varied foods, such as, fruit, cereals, wraps and crumpets. Their independence is promoted well by the recent implementation of a rolling snack programme. This gives children additional ways to make choices as they decide when to eat and take an active part in choosing and preparing their food. Staff, who sit with the children as they eat, extend children's understanding of healthy diets as they talk about the foods on offer. Lunches are provided by parents and the setting's healthy eating policies encourage them to offer nutritious choices. Water is freely available and children know that on hot days they need more to drink to keep themselves cool and healthy. Children learn about safety and how to keep themselves safe as they practise the fire drill, or put away resources when they have finished. All the children show they know they must wash their hands and clean the tables before eating.

## Annex A: record of inspection judgements

### The key inspection judgements and what they mean

*Grade 1 is Outstanding: this aspect of the provision is of exceptionally high quality*  
*Grade 2 is Good: this aspect of the provision is strong*  
*Grade 3 is Satisfactory: this aspect of the provision is sound*  
*Grade 4 is Inadequate: this aspect of the provision is not good enough*

### The overall effectiveness of the early years provision

<b>How well does the setting meet the needs of the children in the Early Years Foundation Stage?</b>	2
The capacity of the provision to maintain continuous improvement	2

### The effectiveness of leadership and management of the early years provision

<b>How effectively is the Early Years Foundation Stage led and managed?</b>	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
The effectiveness with which the setting deploys resources	2
The effectiveness with which the setting promotes equality and diversity	1
The effectiveness of safeguarding	1
The effectiveness of the setting's self-evaluation, including the steps taken to promote improvement	2
The effectiveness of partnerships	2
The effectiveness of the setting's engagement with parents and carers	2

### The quality of the provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage

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### Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage

<b>Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage</b>	2
The extent to which children achieve and enjoy their learning	2
The extent to which children feel safe	1
The extent to which children adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which children make a positive contribution	2
The extent to which children develop skills for the future	2

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