

Little Acorns Pre-school

Inspection report for early years provision

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Inspector Robert Greatrex

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Type of setting 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*.

The provider must provide a copy of this report to all parents with children at the setting where reasonably practicable. The provider must provide a copy of the report to any other person who asks for one, but may charge a fee for this service (The Childcare (Inspection) Regulations 2008 regulations 9 and 10).

The setting also makes provision for children older than the early years age group which is registered on the voluntary and/or compulsory part(s) of the Childcare Register. This report does not include an evaluation of that provision, but a comment about compliance with the requirements of the Childcare Register is included in Annex B.

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Description of the setting

Little Acorns Pre-school opened in 1999 and is on the Early Years Register and the voluntary and compulsory parts of the Childcare Register for a maximum of 24 children from two to five years of age, 19 of the 22 children currently on roll receive funding for nursery education. It is run by a manager and operates from a room within Purford Green School, in Harlow. The pre-school can support children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those who speak English as an additional language. The pre-school opens from 9.00am until 12.00pm five days a week during school term times. The accommodation is suitable to cater for children and adults with disabilities. All children share access to a secure enclosed outdoor play area. All of the five staff working with the children have early years qualifications. The pre-school receives support from the local authority.

The overall effectiveness of the early years provision

Overall the quality of the provision is good.

Children's independence is excellent and they have many of the attributes and skills necessary to learn and do well. Inclusion is good because strong emphasis is placed on meeting the needs of each individual within an ethos of mutual respect. Staff are an effective team and safeguarding is given high priority. Self evaluation is good so the pre-school has good capacity to improve further.

What steps need to be taken to improve provision further?

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

- involve staff and parents more formally in a shared vision for the pre-school and analyse and check changes to ensure they are effective
- ensure there are sufficient ICT resources to meet children's needs.

The effectiveness of leadership and management of the early years provision

Little Acorns is well led and managed and children's welfare is seen as paramount. Parents state that their first impressions, of happy children in a warm and welcoming environment, were right. Most cite word of mouth as their reason for choosing the pre-school and say it has lived up to expectations. Risk assessments are much improved from the last inspection, as they are thorough and comprehensive. Clear policies and procedures mean each day runs smoothly. The manager has a clear vision for the pre-school's development, although, this is not shared with all and self evaluation is still in its infancy. Furthermore, there is no system yet for tracking and analysing the effectiveness of changes. Staff's views are considered carefully. Parents' views are regularly sought, particularly regarding planned changes that directly affect them and their children, such as recent improvements in snack time and proposals to extend the opening hours.

Resources are used well. Children make good progress partly because resources are of good quality, suitable for purpose and support children's learning. Both inside and outdoors, children learn in a pleasant environment that offers many interesting opportunities. Annual appraisal and regular training opportunities means staff are a significant reason that the provision is good because they understand how children learn and develop. Parents are right when they say the good staffing levels contribute well to children's progress and personal development. Equipment is generally well cared for and easily accessible to children because of good labelling and storage so that children can access what they choose. However, children's access to the computer is limited and this restricts their use. The pre-school is aware of this and intends improvements when possible.

Equality and diversity is celebrated in many ways and embedded in policies and procedures. Children's different backgrounds are celebrated and valued so all feel they belong in the pre-school. Parents, too, feel this way. Recent improvements in the use of observation to inform planning help tailor the activities provided to match children's interests and needs, so they do well. Staff have good awareness so opportunities are used well. Whether learning about a festival, or answering the register in a different language, children begin to understand the community and society in which they live.

Safeguarding is seen as paramount. All staff and volunteers are fully checked. Systems at the start and end of sessions are rigorous to ensure children are safe. Staff have good first aid training and awareness of health and safety in all aspects of the pre-school.

Partnerships are generally good. The pre-school works very closely with the school. Feedback is sought and activities modified to better prepare children for school. The pre-school has access to the excellent outdoor provision of the school and can use the school hall when appropriate. Pre-school children are invited to school events and included in activities, such as when birds visited the school. Consequently, parents describe their children as, 'moving very smoothly into school'. Local authority support is seen as very useful in guiding and supporting improvement. The manager recognises that membership of a national organisation or association would greatly assist further development and plans to join shortly.

The partnership with parents is good. When children first start, parents complete an easy to use checklist that gleans a very wide range of useful information. The key worker scheme is used very effectively, particularly as staffing is very stable so children generally have only one during their time at pre-school. Parents and key worker meet regularly to discuss progress, using the very extensive information available in the learning journeys. Parents say they have a clear understanding of how their children are doing, where they are progressing best and what they need to focus on. The daily diary is a recent improvement, much appreciated by parents. Parents know what their children have done at pre-school and can support and extend this at home. Likewise, significant family events can be passed on to staff. Consequently, children are aware of the close working relationship between both and this helps give them confidence.

The pre-school meets children's needs well, a significant and important improvement since the last inspection. Planning is much improved and staff are using observations of children much better to decide on the next steps in their learning.

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

Children achieve well and enjoy their learning because tasks are stimulating and relevant to their interests. From when they arrive until the time they leave, children are active in their learning. They soak up learning and become quickly engrossed, for example, when watching snow melt in their hands. Parents feel their children are making good progress, 'my son is learning very fast and enjoying it immensely' is a typical comment.

Children feel safe because they know staff give the highest priority to their care. The bond with their key person is particularly effective because it is close. Parents state, 'staff care for our children as if they were their own'. Children themselves are beginning to develop good habits so they are aware of their safety and that of others. They know they should walk in the room and why. Through staff's good open ended questions children respond thoughtfully when asked, for example, whether they should use the climbing frame on a snowy day.

Because they are taught the importance of exercise and healthy food, children are beginning to adopt healthy lifestyles well. Snack time is excellent, children are fully independent in choosing the drink and food they eat. They decide when to eat and drink and often do so with a close friend with whom they are playing, so it is a very social time. Occasionally, groups visit the local shop so they can select items for snack time themselves. Opportunities to sit and talk with adults are provided on Fridays when staff and parents sit with children and enjoy their snack together.

Children play a large part in choosing what they do at pre-school and so are learning to make a positive contribution. They are happy, settled and display good levels of self esteem. They are very keen to participate, whether in a group imaginatively pretending to be police officers, or practising number or handwriting skills with staff. They sustain interest very well so their learning is of good quality. Children generally collaborate and cooperate very well. When they do not, staff have good techniques to resolve issues. Children are very responsive to adults who use identical systems so that, whoever leads a group, children know what to expect and what is expected of them. Activities are as interesting outside as they are in, because the outside area offers a great variety of interesting opportunities and staff offer a good range of activities that interest children. However, there is insufficient covered area for the full range of activities to be offered in inclement weather.

Children learn skills for the future well partly because activities are relevant to everyday life. Staff's high expectations mean they learn to answer in sentences. Many opportunities are provided for them to learn to be independent. Children

respond to these very well as they make thoughtful choices about what they do. Children fully participate when it is time to tidy up. Staff take every opportunity to reinforce and develop language so children learn to respond well. Children enjoy regular short sessions with adults in which they improve and practise their basic skills, such as handwriting. Staff generally give useful guidance but more could be done, for example, to encourage children into good habits when holding pens.

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

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

The effectiveness of leadership and management of the early years provision

How effectively is the Early Years Foundation Stage led and managed?	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	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding	2
The effectiveness of the setting's self-evaluation, including the steps taken to promote improvement	3
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

Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The extent to which children achieve and enjoy their learning	2
The extent to which children feel safe	2
The extent to which children adopt healthy lifestyles	2
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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Annex B: the Childcare Register

The provider confirms that the requirements of the compulsory part of the Childcare Register are: Met

The provider confirms that the requirements of the voluntary part of the Childcare Register are: Met