



The Acorns Nursery School

Inspection report for early years provision

Unique Reference Number EY218724
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Inspector Susan McCourt

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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 good. The registered person meets the National Standards for under 8s day care and childminding.

The quality and standards of the nursery education are outstanding.

WHAT SORT OF SETTING IS IT?

The Acorns Nursery School at Westmeston was registered in 2002. It is privately owned and runs in conjunction with the original Acorns Nursery School in Lindfield. The nursery school occupies the Parish Hall in Westmeston on the Ditchling to Lewes Road. It opens term times only on Monday, Wednesday and Thursday from 09:00 to 13:00, with an extended day from 09:00 to 17:00 on Fridays.

The setting is registered to provide full day care for 24 children and there are

currently 31 children on roll, with 17 receiving funding for nursery education, one of whom has English as an additional language. Children have access to a large main hall, a smaller room, toilet and hand-washing facilities, plus the use of a secure outdoor area with large areas of grass and tarmac.

There are six members of staff, four of whom are qualified for their role. One member of staff is currently training. The setting receives support from the Local Authority.

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PROVISION

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

Children play in a clean environment which staff maintain to a high standard. Children learn good personal hygiene routines and have easy access to liquid soap and paper towels. They enjoy helping to wipe down the tables before eating and carry out other simple cleaning tasks. This helps children to begin to take responsibility for general cleanliness and reduces the risk of contamination. Medication and accident records are correctly maintained and staff ensure that they have all the relevant parental consents to safeguard children's health and well-being.

Children eat a wide variety of healthy foods, supporting their healthy growth and providing them with an excellent choice of flavours to try. Children sit with staff in a sociable atmosphere, and they help to pass food around and learn good table manners in a relaxed environment. Children with allergies or food intolerances are well-provided for and parents can provide food if they prefer. Children can be very independent; taking part in getting food ready, choosing what they want to eat from the choices offered as well as helping themselves to drinks of water through the morning. Children also have occasional treats such as birthday cake, and try foods from around the world on a regular basis. Staff chat with children and are skilled at extending children's learning from practical activities such as counting the cups and discussing where food comes from.

Children's physical development is very well fostered. They use a wide range of small objects such as needles and thread, paint brushes and scissors to develop their small muscle control. Children also make effective use of a wide variety of physical games and sporting equipment which fosters their large muscle growth. Children may spontaneously start dancing and demonstrating roly-polies as they relish the opportunities to move freely in the space. Staff take lots of opportunities to talk with children about how their bodies work and how to take care of themselves, particularly in hot weather.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

Children play in a good learning environment and the hall is made to look attractive and inviting. There are ample choices of activity for the numbers and ages of children present at the start of the session, however, children's independence is somewhat

limited by having to ask staff for further resources or having less to choose from as activities are packed away through the morning. Children have fully independent access to the toilets and wash basins. The outdoor area is securely fenced and encircles the hall providing large grassy areas, some hard-surfacing and a shady wooded area, affording lots of opportunities to explore their natural surroundings as well as play more conventional games.

Staff use a rigorous risk assessment process for activities and outings which means that children are kept safe. Daily checks by staff ensure that any hazards are immediately identified and noted along with the action taken to minimise the hazard. Regular fire drills show how effectively the building has been vacated and action is taken to improve response times, which ensures children's safety in an emergency. Staff transport children between settings and all related documentation is held on site. Staff ensure that children are always well-supervised and give clear and simple explanations about safety so that children can learn how to keep themselves safe. Children remind each other about where they can and cannot go, and know what they have to do to be safe in the sun.

Staff are aware that the welfare of children is paramount and the child protection procedures are known to all staff. Their training is updated as part of their ongoing professional development and they have access to written guidance as to how to report and record any concerns about a child in their care.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

Children settle in quickly and are warmly welcomed by staff. Children gain a strong sense of belonging as they wear their nursery T-shirt with pride and can see numerous photographs of themselves on a child-height display of recent events. The routine is familiar to the children as they start with free play and book time, before having a snack, outdoor play and then lunch. Children can choose freely from the range of activities on offer and can take part at their own level, with skilled staff who play alongside and get to know each child very well. Children greatly benefit from having staff who understand their personalities and preferences and who can support them through new challenges and celebrate their strengths. Staff are familiar with the Birth to three matters guidance and plan accordingly, basing their interventions and observations on where each child is at in their development.

Nursery Education

The teaching and learning is outstanding. Staff plan a rolling three year programme to ensure that children are always presented with fresh themes and topics, and planning is monitored to ensure that all aspects of the Foundation Stage are covered. Staff are exceptionally skilled at bringing out the natural learning opportunities in any activity, and can quickly see where a child is particularly absorbed, before following that child's own curiosity to extend his learning. Staff ask open questions that help children to think, reason and devise their own solutions to what they are trying to achieve. Children's development is therefore maximised; learning as they play in a very natural and unforced atmosphere. Staff make notes of children's achievements

through the stepping stones and use these to provide a record of development which gives a full picture of the child and feeds into the next set of plans to ensure that learning progresses.

A special feature of this setting is the regular Friday outing for all children to explore the rural surroundings on a long walk into the downs and surrounding area. Children are free to explore this natural learning environment and their independence is further developed because as their natural curiosity leads them to explore, staff bring along the science box and other equipment, which can help them examine further the animals and objects they find.

Children are very independent and curious, with good concentration skills enabling them to play at self-chosen activities for lengthy periods. They persist with new skills and show pride in their achievements. Children make good friendships and greet each other warmly. They are well-behaved and are assertive with each other in disputes over toys or rules, sorting out any arguments calmly and effectively. Children enjoy helping adults to get the snack ready and join in with social chat about their lives and recent events. Children are skilled communicators and frequently initiate conversations with staff and each other. They quickly learn to negotiate with each other and plan what they want to do, inviting others to take part in their games. Children enjoy their book times and are skilled at understanding stories from the pictures before building their knowledge of phonics to help them link sounds and letters. Some children are fluent readers and all children enjoy story times and looking at the excellent variety of books placed within easy reach. Children have lots of opportunities to make marks, and write significant words such as their names. Writing is included in a variety of role play activities.

Children have excellent opportunities to solve problems because staff are skilled at asking problem-solving questions and helping the children to devise their own solutions. Children can count up to 20 and beyond, and take part in practical activities such as matching the number of cups and chairs to people, or singing counting songs. Children learn to measure and compare sizes, weights and lengths and learn about shapes in two and three dimensions. Children use mathematical language confidently in their play. Children have a good knowledge and understanding of the world and have exceptional opportunities to learn about the natural environment as well as technological equipment. Staff are imaginative in introducing children to how things work such as showing them a car engine, or looking at water pipes being replaced while out walking. Staff are skilled at engaging children in conversations about their lives, and the lives of other people, and the setting takes part in a local carnival every year. Children's creative development is very good and they use a wide range of materials in their art and craft activities. Children bring role play into their games and enjoy dressing up. They sing spontaneously as they play and have several favourite songs. Children are very expressive when describing what they are doing, especially in messy play such as finger painting.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

Children learn about the wider world through an excellent variety of books and stories from other cultures. They learn some French words alongside the English and know some songs in other languages. Staff have an imaginative approach to diversity and incorporate ideas from other cultures into regular events such as sports day. Children have good self esteem and have a positive attitude to new experiences. There is a balance of male and female staff which helps to address stereotypical views of role. Staff are skilled at getting to know children's individual needs and the supervisor at the setting is also the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator.

Children's behaviour is excellent. Children learn to share and take turns and are calmly assertive in disagreements, taking responsibility for their actions. They co-operate well in their play and stick to the rules in simple sports games. Staff are knowledgeable about individual personalities and ensure that when they intervene, they do so gently, firmly and with great insight into what lies behind the behaviour. Staff are consistent in their rule-setting and children feel secure because they know what the boundaries are.

The partnership with parents is outstanding. Parents are given excellent information about the setting and staff are always open to talk with parents at any time. The setting gathers essential information as well as preferences and family details which helps to settle the child in. There are several open days through the year which the families attend as well as parent information evenings about any new initiatives. Parents have a record book of their child's time in the nursery which they build up with photographs and samples of work. They can be brought into the nursery at any time and staff also add notes about the child's achievements and anecdotes about activities. Children enjoy looking at these books and it gives a valuable record of the child's development through their time in the setting, keeping the parents immediately informed. Parents see copies of plans and can provide items for show-and-tell, and they are regularly consulted as to their views about the setting.

Children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is fostered. Children are part of a group and take part in social aspects such as greeting each other and sharing tasks to get things done. They learn about right and wrong and how to treat each other with respect and empathy. Staff place great value on children's experiences and allow them the time to be absorbed and fascinated by what they do.

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

The setting meets the needs of the range of children for whom it provides. All recruitment and staff checks are undertaken systematically to ensure that staff are suitable to have contact with children. Good systems are in place to ensure that children do not come into contact with unvetted people and are only released to authorised collectors. Staff are deployed effectively to maximise supervision and contact with the children and staff ratios are always surpassed. The register is an accurate record of all those present in the setting and is completed as soon as any child arrives or departs. Policies and procedures are reviewed regularly to ensure that they reflect best practice. All information is kept secure and confidential. Staff

meet regularly to discuss any issues and contribute ideas regularly, taking responsibility for different jobs according to their strengths.

The leadership and management is outstanding. The owner and staff have a clear, shared vision of what they want to achieve in childcare and it is evident that they take their responsibilities very seriously. The owner and senior staff work alongside all colleagues at all levels of the setting ensuring that tasks are shared equally and acting as mentors and role models. Staff receive support and further training via the appraisal system to ensure that they can meet the high expectations placed upon them. The staff team work very closely together and their commitment to the children is exceptional. The owner and senior staff evaluate and monitor the provision to make continual improvements.

Improvements since the last inspection

One recommendation was raised at the last inspection regarding the level of detail in the fire drill record. It now records how long it took for everyone to vacate the building as well as the numbers of adults and children involved. This helps to safeguard children in an emergency.

A further recommendation was made as a result of an investigation regarding procedures for dealing with any behaviour incidents. The provider records all relevant behaviour management incidents and shares them with the parent on the same day. The behaviour management policy is very clear about what sort of incidents will be noted so that parents are kept informed. Parents can sign to agree the entry in the incident book and staff take great care to discuss any issues to ensure that children receive consistent care, which safeguards their well-being.

Complaints since the last inspection

One concern has been raised since the last inspection, logged under standards 1 & 11. Ofsted inspectors made an unannounced visit to the setting to carry out an investigation. As a result of this visit the following recommendation was made under standard 11: behaviour management- review the procedures for dealing with any incidents and ensure that all incidents are appropriately recorded and shared with parents. The provider remains qualified for registration.

The provider is required to make 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):

- further enrich the indoor learning environment to promote the independence of children

The quality and standards of the nursery education

No recommendations for improvement are made because the quality and standards of nursery education are outstanding.

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