

# Squirrels @ Ludwick Nursery School

Inspection report for early years provision

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<b>Unique reference number</b>	EY276945
<b>Inspection date</b>	21/09/2010
<b>Inspector</b>	Martyn Richards

<b>Setting address</b>	Holwell Road, Welwyn Garden City, Hertfordshire, AL7 3RP
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<b>Telephone number</b>	01707 391797
<b>Email</b>	squirrelsudwick@aol.com
<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*.

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

Squirrels at Ludwick opened in January 2004. It operates from four large rooms in a purpose built building on a shared site with Ludwick Nursery School which is situated in Welwyn Garden City, Hertfordshire. A maximum of 80 children may attend at any one time. The nursery is open each weekday from 8.00am to 6.00pm for 48 weeks of the year. All children have access to a secure enclosed outside play and garden area. The nursery has very close links with Ludwick Nursery School and with its local community.

There are currently 112 children aged from three months to five years on roll. On the day of the inspection, 76 children were present. The baby unit is part of the Neighbourhood Nursery scheme which gives babies from the local area priority. Older children also come from the local catchment area. The nursery supports children with special educational needs and those who speak English as an additional language. It has wheelchair access, and is able to support children with disabilities.

The nursery employs 24 staff. The manager and her deputy both hold degrees in early years development, as well as Early Years Professional Status. The majority of the staff hold appropriate early years qualifications and several are working towards higher level qualifications. The nursery is linked with a Sure Start Children's Centre, providing a range of support services for children and their families. It receives additional input from a qualified teacher. It is a member of the Pre School Learning Alliance and has obtained the Hertfordshire Quality Standards award.

The nursery is registered by Ofsted on the Early Years Register, and the compulsory and voluntary parts of the Childcare Register.

## The overall effectiveness of the early years provision

Overall the quality of the provision is outstanding.

This exceptional nursery provides a very high level of care for its children, creating the secure environment in which their individual welfare and learning needs are very well met. It welcomes children from all backgrounds, and through perceptive observation of each child, provides learning activities accurately matched to their varied abilities and interests. Since the last inspection there has been a sharp increase in the number of children attending who are learning English as an additional language. The nursery's excellent focus on spoken language learning underpins the progress of all children, but is especially helpful to those at an early stage. It has excellent links with the Children's Centre and with its adjacent nursery school, and this results in consistent social and educational support for children and their parents. Staff are highly qualified, and the leadership is imaginative and energetic. The nursery has an outstanding capacity to continue improving in the future.

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

To further improve the high quality early years provision the registered person should consider:

- refining the self-evaluation process by sharpening its focus on the impact of nursery provision on the children's learning and development.

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

Keeping the children safe is given the highest priority by the staff. Rigorous checks are made on the suitability of adults seeking to work in the nursery, and the accommodation itself is secure from intrusion and from children slipping out unseen. In addition to high handles and coded locks, internal security has been enhanced by the installation of fingerprint recognition locks. Staff check the accommodation and facilities frequently and thoroughly to make sure there are no risks facing the children, and there are regular evacuation practices. All staff have regular training in child protection. They know how to recognise indications of possible mistreatment, and what action to take if they have concerns.

The nursery has greatly improved since its last inspection, when it was found to be good in all areas of its work. An important example is the raised level of staff training and qualification, leading to a more reflective and self-critical approach to nursery practice. The process of identifying each child's learning and welfare needs has been refined, and staff observations of children's achievements are more precise. Parent partnerships have developed further, and parents are particularly appreciative of the key person scheme. They feel this provides a named member of staff with a particularly close knowledge of, and relationship with, their child. They value the ease of contact they have with staff, and comment on how happy the children are on the days they come to nursery. The nursery's excellent relationship with children's parents, and the network of services it helps them access, is a significant strength, and one recognised and appreciated by the parents.

The children enjoy excellent resources in the nursery. The covered outdoor areas allow energetic play even in poor weather, while the garden provides the chance to learn about how plants grow and thrive. Large buggies - one seating six children - enable whole groups of the youngest children to be taken on walks in the neighbourhood. Speech buttons, which play one of the children explaining his or her activity - illustrated by a photograph - are popular with parents as well as with children. The main resource, however, is the high quality of staff. Through training, and reflection on their own practice, staff know how to support and enrich children's self-chosen learning - in rolling out play dough shapes, for example - without taking the initiative away from the children. They have the skill to understand each child's thinking, and to provide a 'next step' in learning pitched at exactly the right level. This is a major factor in bringing about the excellent

progress the children make. The staff commitment to improving their own professional skills is evidenced by the large number of them working towards higher-level qualifications in child care and early education.

Excellent links, and immediate proximity, with the Children's Centre mean the nursery can work effectively with others to support children and families with particular needs. Several staff have additional training in working with children for whom English is an additional language. This is good management, since the numbers of children needing this support have grown sharply in recent years, and they now represent about twenty percent of the number on roll. Children who are learning English as an additional language are helped to settle in because staff take the trouble to learn some basic vocabulary in the children's community languages, and to engage their families in supporting them. In one instance staff worked with the parents of a very young new overseas child, to produce a list of words and phrases in the family language which the child understood. The nursery provided dual language books and song tapes for the family to use at home, and a dictaphone to record the child's singing and early speech. A story the child has recently recorded in the family language was sent home to delighted grandparents. The nursery manager has undertaken research in boys' learning, and ensures the activity programme includes themes - such as the World Cup, and a classroom space rocket - likely to excite them. Similarly the staff recognise that some children learn very quickly, and need to be able to extend themselves - for example, in writing name badges or pretend letters.

Self-evaluation allows the setting to engage in highly effective reflective practice. A highly detailed report sets out its strengths and areas for improvement very rigorously. The most recent such evaluation took place four months before the inspection, and identified the need to increase the setting's focus on how best to improve the children's learning and development. This typifies the staff's determination to make an outstanding nursery even better.

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

Children's enjoyment of the nursery is evident from their happy and absorbed behaviour, both indoors and outside. The babies like to stay close to their key person, and love curling up on the carpet, cushion or a convenient knee to sing songs. While too young to know the words of the simple action songs, several - including one very recent arrival - watch the singing adult closely, and begin to try to imitate her gestures. The babies' room is welcoming and comfortable, with shaded cots in one corner and appealing displays on the walls. One display shows treasure baskets - baskets of interesting objects to feel, rattle and explore - accompanied by photographs of the older babies handling them. The display includes suggestions for parents about the learning that can come from an activity such as this, and how they could set up a safe treasure box in their own homes. Throughout the nursery there are excellent displays aimed to help parents build on the productive play experiences provided in the nursery.

Staff plan children's activities in detail. They strike a very good balance between

new activities they want to introduce themselves, and opportunities for the children to initiate their own play. Some children's interest in pirates led to the setting planning a range of themed events, such as a pirate ship being built in the home corner, dressing up days, letter writing to fictional characters, cooking, and a visit from a parent with a talking parrot. Staff plans also make excellent use of the outdoor areas. Adults, and especially the key person for each child, make careful observations of a child's reaction to an activity so that future play can be adjusted in the light of his or her interests and abilities. These observations form the basis for the Learning Journey booklets which accompany each child through the nursery. The booklets show, through photographs and written texts, some examples of the high points of the child's development. These collections allow staff to make a record of how each child is progressing over time in each main area of early years learning, and to identify and correct any imbalances. Taken together they provide strong evidence of the excellent headway most children make by the time they leave the nursery.

Children behave very well indeed. They are safe and sensible in moving around their activity areas, and in their use of equipment. Recently they were set the puzzle of how a dinosaur mother could ensure her eggs were safe. They thought of places where they themselves feel safe, and others where they are less comfortable. They took photographs of these places for a large display, which includes suggestions for parents about how they can tell when their children feel safe or unsafe. The children learn to take turns, to help each other, and to put toys away. They have taken part in a sponsored dance to raise money for Haiti after its earthquake, becoming aware of the importance of helping others even when they are far away. Some older children have begun to play well in groups, sharing out roles, in the pretend spaceship for instance. They show good levels of independence, and a confiding relationship with staff. All of this adds to the gentle and caring ethos of the nursery.

The strong emphasis on spoken language, illustrated by the nursery's participation in Talking to Children projects, recognises the importance of language in all learning. Children are given the time to find words - sometimes haltingly - to express what they want to say. Staff's use of language demonstrates good speech, and daily play activities are permeated with lively conversation. From early on the children learn to hold brushes or pencils, to make marks, to keep lines within a given space and to make simulation writing - which increasingly includes recognisable letters. They learn how to hold a book, and they comment on the pictures. They count small collections of objects, and recognise common shapes such as circles. They have learned from the garden what living elements things need to grow, and how it feels when a snail walks across their hand. They explore colour and texture in painting, printing and in making their excellent woven depiction of a 'Gruffalo'. Drawing, writing, play with construction toys and manipulating the computer mouse all help develop their fine motor skills. Outdoors they guide wheeled toys with precision, and run, jump and balance well and safely. The children enjoy the excellent healthy snacks and lunches provided. The many skills and personal attributes they acquire in this outstanding nursery equip them very well for their future education.

## 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>	1
The capacity of the provision to maintain continuous improvement	1

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

<b>The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage</b>	1
The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	1
The effectiveness with which the setting deploys resources	1
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	1
The effectiveness of partnerships	1
The effectiveness of the setting's engagement with parents and carers	1

### 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>	1
The extent to which children achieve and enjoy their learning	1
The extent to which children feel safe	1
The extent to which children adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which children make a positive contribution	1
The extent to which children develop skills for the future	1

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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