

Acorn Playgroup & Pre-School

Acorn Playgroup & Pre-School, Whitehill Lane, WELWYN, Herts, AL6 9AF

Inspection date	18/10/2013
Previous inspection date	Not Applicable

The quality and standards of the early years provision	This inspection:	
	Previous inspection:	
How well the early years provision meets the needs of the range of children who attend		1
The contribution of the early years provision to the well-being of children		1
The effectiveness of the leadership and management of the early years provision		1

The quality and standards of the early years provision

This provision is outstanding

- Children are very happy, content and busy as they have easy access to all areas of the setting. They benefit from a highly motivated and experienced staff team who know the children well. Staff build on the children's recently acquired skills, they extend their learning through an exceptionally broad range of focused and well planned activities and interesting play experiences.
- Children show very high levels of confidence, a strong sense of belonging and self-esteem. They have an excellent understanding of what is expected of them as staff give consistent and appropriate support. The well-qualified staff team work extremely well together. They understand how children learn through well planned activities which are based on their ages and stages of development.
- The leadership and management is exceptionally strong. The staff team regularly reflect on their practice, they are extremely well supported through appraisals, staff meetings and an excellent working relationship with the trustees. A strong partnership with parents ensures all children thrive and enjoy an outstanding learning and play experience at all times.

Information about this inspection

Inspections of registered early years provision are:

- scheduled at least once in every inspection cycle – the current cycle ends on 31 July 2016
- scheduled more frequently where Ofsted identifies a need to do so, for example where provision was previously judged inadequate
- brought forward in the inspection cycle where Ofsted has received information that suggests the provision may not be meeting the legal requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage or where assessment of the provision identifies a need for early inspection
- prioritised where we have received information that the provision is not meeting the requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage and which suggests children may not be safe
- scheduled at the completion of an investigation into failure to comply with the requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage.

The provision is also registered on the compulsory part of the Childcare Register. This report includes a judgment about compliance with the requirements of that register.

Inspection activities

- The inspector observed children attending the morning and afternoon sessions and during the lunch club.
- The inspector joined in some of the play within the play rooms, she watched children play outside.
- The inspector looked at a selection of documents for the welfare of the children and the management of the setting.
- The inspector spoke to parents and staff about the children's care, development and the daily routines.

Inspector

Tina Kelly

Full Report

Information about the setting

Acorns Playgroup and Pre-School has been in operation in this area since 1994. It was re-registered in 2013 on the Early Years Register and the compulsory part of the Childcare Register at the current premises. It is a community group, run as a charity and managed by a board of trustees. Acorns Playgroup and Pre-School operates from a self-contained unit close to Welwyn village centre in Hertfordshire. Children have direct access to an enclosed outside play space. The setting serves the local area and is accessible to all children.

The setting opens Monday to Friday during term time from 9am until 4pm. They provide playgroup sessions for children aged from two years between 9am and 12 noon. The pre-school sessions for older children runs from 1pm until 4pm. Children may attend all day or for a variety of sessions. A lunch club caters for children staying the full day.

The registered provider works as the day-to-day manager, she holds an early years foundation degree, the deputy also has an early years foundation degree. In addition, the setting employs four members of childcare staff who hold early years qualifications at level 3 in early years care and education.

The setting provides funded early education for two-, three- and four-year-old children. It supports children who speak English as an additional language. The setting is a member of the Pre-school Learning Alliance.

What the setting needs to do to improve further

To further improve the quality of the early years provision the provider should:

- build on the opportunities for children to further develop their independence by becoming more involved in preparation and tidying away throughout the sessions.

Inspection judgements

How well the early years provision meets the needs of the range of children who attend

Children are happy and busy throughout the setting. They are supported by the well-qualified and experienced teachers who have an excellent understanding of how children learn through play. The open plan rooms are thoughtfully set out to provide easy access to a wide variety of excellent quality toys and resources. The setting provides a very interesting environment which promotes children's curiosity and interest. Planning shows an in depth, broad educational programme, which is used flexibly to provide a highly

challenging learning experience for all children. Children are supported well in practising their newly acquired skills, subsequently all children are keen and active learners. Well established links with parents ensure all children are supported extremely well at home. Parents share personal experiences with their key person. Detail about activities and special events at home are shared in children's learning journals. These show children benefit from the excellent working relationship the setting has with parents who support and extend their children's learning experiences at home.

The afternoon pre-school sessions are mainly for older children. Focused, adult-led activities are adapted for this key group of children. They are introduced to challenging games, which teaches them to think about numbers and letters. Teachers encourage children to explore, to try new things and take risks to succeed. When matching patterns and sizes teachers give children time to decide if they have the correct match, children learn by getting things wrong, they are then helped to try again. The morning playgroup sessions cater for younger children with the prime areas of learning the priority for the planning and assessments. The progress check at age two is well established. When the progress check has been completed by other early years professionals, such as a childminder, the information is used in assessing the starting points and the next steps in the children's learning. Comprehensive and effective planning by each child's key person ensures all children; especially those who stay all day have their individual needs met to an exceptionally high level. High staff ratios ensure children of all ages have equal opportunities and access to the age-appropriate resources. Interesting areas for free play and appropriate planned activities extend and promote children's learning to an outstanding level.

Themes within the setting are based on simple topics. Planning is tailored to ensure children's individual likes and interests are taken into account. For example, the theme of opposites includes tall and small. Teachers talk to pre-school children in a small group set at a table to find out what they know; staff then extend their understanding with appropriate activities which promotes all areas of learning. The collage picture of a tall giraffe was prompted by discussion with children and the opposite is a small mouse. Children select paper and materials from the nearby storage. They are helped to decide on the shapes they need to cut out to form the basis of the giraffe. Children are beginning to use the safety scissors and they show great concentration as the teacher helps to manipulate the card for them to cut. All children can take part as scissors are provided for left-handed children to ensure they learn this important skill. Children are asked about the different textures and they talk about the bumpy card and the soft felt. They are free to add to the artwork, often adding their own ideas of extra legs to the giraffe and flowers all over the picture. Children are encouraged to talk about the art work with the teachers supporting new words, such as oval and oblong to describe the shape of the giraffe's round face and long legs.

Children's language is developing extremely well. Staff have a very good understanding of how to support children's developing skills as they have attended the 'Every Child a Talker' course. This promotes understanding of language development for young children and those with English as an additional language. Home languages are highly valued and parents share important words from home to help children feel secure as they take part in new experiences. Teachers use Makaton hand signs and pictorial signs to support

children's understanding of the daily routines. Children are given opportunities to make decisions about what they want to do. Children are keen to share their play ideas with the teachers and the inspector. They are confident in asking questions they draw adults and other children into their play with ease.

Pre-school children are excited about the show and tell group session. They sit together on the carpet and wait as the teachers ask what special items they have to share with their friends. Sign language is used to support simple rules, such as reminding them to listen for their names that are called out for the register. Children enjoy being part of the group. They are beginning to take turns in answering open-ended questions from staff who extend and challenge children language. Children are keen to show their new shoes and socks and they use interesting words, such as sparkly and glittery to describe their socks. Teachers extend the discussion about popular children's characters on socks and other pieces of clothing. This supports the children's interests and encourages links and conversations about events at home.

The outside play space is exceptionally well laid out. The area is divided into three sections which are used to support different styles of learning. Children have easy access to the well-resourced area directly outside the classroom. This is set up with activities linked to the theme or topic. Children are encouraged by staff to bring toys from inside to extend their own play ideas, to use the additional resources and extra space. A large grassed sloped area provides space for children to explore and provides challenge for their developing physical skills. The area with a soft surface enables children to climb and use the slides in an appropriate area away from the other activities.

The setting has well established assessments that clearly show that all children are making outstanding progress in relation to their starting points. This detail shows children are learning all the important skills they need to move onto nursery or reception class with confidence.

The contribution of the early years provision to the well-being of children

All children build strong bonds and attachments to their key person, members of staff and other children. Information gained from parents on the 'All about me' form as the children come into the setting forms the basis of individual care routines. Children behave well; they are cooperative and are learning to take turns and share with excellent support from teachers and through the well managed routines. They show a strong sense of independence which means they are keen to explore and learn new skills. Children are beginning to understand the simple rules, which are in place to teach them about their own and others safety. They are becoming aware how to manage risk when they take part in physical play outside and how their actions impact on other children playing nearby.

Children show great consideration and respond quickly to the clear and concise guidance from staff as they are helped to put on their coats and shoes when they are getting ready to play outside. They are given responsibilities as they are asked by teachers to help at tidy up time and children are keen and helpful they are beginning to take pride in their environment.

Children learn about a healthy lifestyle through the snack and lunchtimes, which are managed extremely well. Teachers sit with children to support them in decision making and talking about the fruits and foods they like. Children's social skills and good manners are supported to a high level at this time. Pictures of foods, words from home languages and the use of Makaton signs to name fruit and ask children what they would like and if they would like to choose further promotes their personal and social skills to a very high level.

Children's confidence is promoted to a very good level. They are beginning to self-select activities and resources, at snack times they pour their own drinks. However, some aspects of their independence, such as, serving each other and taking responsibility for tidying away at the end of activities could be further promoted. The nursery has strong links with the local nurseries and schools and children are well prepared to move onto new settings. Children in the pre-school group are shown samples of uniforms, staff talk to them about new adventures and remember other children who have gone on to school, such as older brothers and sisters. Photographs and visits further help children to be able to move on with confidence and to settle well.

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

The leadership of the staff team is inspirational. The registered provider who works as the manager has excellent support from the trustees who take full responsibility for the overall running of the setting, safeguarding and complaints. Parents know who to talk to if they need advice or have concerns as the detail of the staff team and the trustees are on display in the foyer. Policies and procedures are regularly reviewed to ensure they are relevant and meet the needs of the families using the setting. Robust recruitment, appraisals, regular training opportunities and team meetings ensure all staff have an excellent understanding of the Statutory framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage.

The long established and well-qualified staff team have an extremely strong commitment to continually improving the opportunities for children in their care. The setting has excellent working links with the local children's centre to provide support for children and their families when needed. Staff attend cluster meetings for early years professionals, such as, other local pre-school and nurseries. They use this opportunity to share good practice and experiences to consistently promote and improve their own practice. The setting continually reflects and evaluates the service they offer to parents and the educational and learning opportunities for children. A very effective evaluation process is based on the Early Years Foundation Stage and the supporting documents for registered providers.

Safeguarding is of a very high priority within the setting. Staff are very knowledgeable; they update their knowledge of child protection through regular training. The setting has effective policies based on the Local Safeguarding Children Board code of practice. The manager is the designated person, but the trustees understand their responsibility for safeguarding issues.

The setting has very strong partnerships with parents, some over many years. Parents have been very supportive in the recent move to new premises. Working parties have helped with some of the groundwork and ongoing fund raising and social events are also well attended. Parents spoken to at the time of the inspection all expressed a very high regard for the staff and say they feel staff know their children really well. They are full of praise at the progress their children have made. Parents are kept well informed about local events and support groups with posters and leaflets within the pre-school room. They find out about current information on the setting by using the very comprehensive web page and social networking site. Parents' views are sought through a regular questionnaire, this information is available on the web site so all parents can see the action plans and improvements planned for the setting. Children's individual needs are quickly identified and exceptionally well met. Very effective partnerships between the key person, parents, external agencies and other early years providers support all children extremely well. This demonstrates the setting has high expectations of the learning and education they provide to all children.

The Childcare Register

The requirements for the compulsory part of the Childcare Register are **Met**

What inspection judgements mean

Registered early years provision

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	Outstanding provision is highly effective in meeting the needs of all children exceptionally well. This ensures that children are very well prepared for the next stage of their learning.
Grade 2	Good	Good provision is effective in delivering provision that meets the needs of all children well. This ensures children are ready for the next stage of their learning.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	Satisfactory provision is performing less well than expectations in one or more of the key areas. It requires improvement in order to be good.
Grade 4	Inadequate	Provision that is inadequate requires significant improvement and/or enforcement action. The provision is failing to give children an acceptable standard of early years education and/or is not meeting the safeguarding and welfare requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage. It will be inspected again within 12 months of the date of this inspection.
Met		The provision has no children on roll. The inspection judgement is that the provider continues to meet the requirements for registration.
Not met		The provision has no children on roll. The inspection judgement is that the provider does not meet the requirements for registration.

Inspection

This inspection was carried out by Ofsted under sections 49 and 50 of the Childcare Act 2006 on the quality and standards of provision that is registered on the Early Years Register. The registered person must ensure that this provision complies with the statutory framework for children's learning, development and care, known as the Early Years Foundation Stage.

Setting details

Unique reference number	EY458165
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	913319
Type of provision	
Registration category	Childcare - Non-Domestic
Age range of children	0 - 8
Total number of places	24
Number of children on roll	30
Name of provider	Acorns Playgroup and Pre-school Committee
Date of previous inspection	not applicable
Telephone number	01438 840 132

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Type of provision

For the purposes of this inspection the following definitions apply:

Full-time provision is that which operates for more than three hours. These are usually known as nurseries, nursery schools and pre-schools and must deliver the Early Years Foundation Stage. They are registered on the Early Years Register and pay the higher fee for registration.

Sessional provision operates for more than two hours but does not exceed three hours in any one day. These are usually known as pre-schools, kindergartens or nursery schools

and must deliver the Early Years Foundation Stage. They are registered on the Early Years Register and pay the lower fee for registration.

Childminders care for one or more children where individual children attend for a period of more than two hours in any one day. They operate from domestic premises, which are usually the childminder's own home. They are registered on the Early Years Register and must deliver the Early Years Foundation Stage.

Out of school provision may be sessional or full-time provision and is delivered before or after school and/or in the summer holidays. They are registered on the Early Years Register and must deliver the Early Years Foundation Stage. Where children receive their Early Years Foundation Stage in school these providers do not have to deliver the learning and development requirements in full but should complement the experiences children receive in school.

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