

Inspection of The Ark at Thomas Hall

Thomas Hall, Cowley Bridge Road, Exeter EX4 5AD

Inspection date: 15 May 2023

Overall effectiveness	Outstanding
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The quality of education	Outstanding
Behaviour and attitudes	Outstanding
Personal development	Outstanding
Leadership and management	Outstanding
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

What is it like to attend this early years setting?

The provision is outstanding

Children flourish in this friendly setting. Staff expertly support children with learning and development. The confidence and independence that children demonstrate when exploring their environment are impressive. Staff build superb relationships with the children and are partners in children's play. Children thrive in learning and development. They are eager to share their ideas and opinions with staff and they beam as adults praise and value their ideas. Children show levels of care and respect for staff and their friends that are impressive for their age. Children play cooperatively and listen exceptionally well to each other when making choices about what happens in their play.

Children benefit from a curriculum with clear learning intentions and a learning environment that is inviting and is carefully set up to meet the children's needs. Curriculum activities support children's next steps in learning. Children enjoy a daily routine that offers them familiarity and helps them feel in control of their own learning. Children have lots of opportunities to develop their physical skills in a dedicated, age-appropriate outside area. It is used for play and for learning about living things and their habitats. Children enjoy a wide range of activities that help them greatly extend their knowledge across all areas of the Early Years Foundation Stage.

What does the early years setting do well and what does it need to do better?

- Staff have a clear intent for their curriculum and prioritise supporting children to flourish with their social and communication skills. They provide a wealth of ambitious learning experiences and activities that build on prior knowledge and follow children's interests. Staff use assessment effectively, to identify and address any gaps in learning, ensuring that children make rapid progress in all areas of learning and development. Children are exceptionally well prepared for their future learning.
- Staff spend quality time engaging with children. Children thoroughly enjoy making fat balls with the staff. They then hang the balls in the bird feeder. Children are eager to explain the ingredients they use to create the bird food. They show real skill in recalling prior learning and using the knowledge to impact positively on new learning experiences.
- Partnerships with parents are impressive. Managers take every opportunity to engage parents in their children's learning and regularly provide guidance on how parents can support learning at home. Parents speak of the strong bonds formed between staff and their children and how their children prosper at the setting. Parents feel exceptionally well supported by the settling-in procedures at the setting. They feel these allow children to settle at their own pace and give parents confidence in the care provided.

- Staff support children's early language development superbly. They engage children in meaningful conversations during play. Staff introduce new language when they talk with children, read stories, sit with children at snack time and when playing games with them. For example, the children are captivated by the pirate treasure game and learn to develop their knowledge of descriptive words when describing hidden objects to their friends. Staff model words such as smooth, rough, pointed, and bobbly. Children eagerly participate. As their friends guess the hidden objects, the children giggle and praise each other for their descriptions.
- Children with special educational needs and/or disabilities are supported to the highest level. The special educational needs coordinator applies her comprehensive knowledge to ensuring individual support plans for children have an impact. Staff work with other professionals, such as occupational therapists, to ensure all children thrive. As a result, children make excellent progress in their learning and development.
- Staff complete a broad range of professional development activities. Recent training has helped staff develop a comprehensive knowledge of communication-friendly spaces. Staff have skilfully used the knowledge gained from training to develop their setting even further. They have made an inviting bird-watching area with identification cards for children to refer to and discuss when observing birds. The training also inspired staff to create a tepee reading area outside that children thoroughly enjoy using to share stories.
- Staff use their comprehensive knowledge of each child's learning needs to provide challenge in the curriculum they provide for children. They expertly introduce new learning and use questioning effectively to further children's understanding. For example, staff questioned the description children gave of foods their families eat. Children exclaimed, 'Mummy is a herbivore.' Staff questioned what this means. Staff extended learning by asking, 'What does a carnivore eat?' Children were unsure. They shared their thoughts and were excited to hear if their ideas were correct. They then moved away from the activity and eagerly sought out friends and shared their new knowledge with them.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Staff have a good understanding of their roles and responsibilities to keep children safe. They are familiar with the signs and symptoms that may indicate that a child may be more vulnerable to abuse or neglect. Staff receive regular training and are clear about the importance of making prompt referrals should they have any concerns about a child. The premises are secure, and staff carry out effective risk assessments, indoors and outdoors, to minimise risks to children and keep them safe. Children are superbly supported in managing risks. Staff speak with children about how to use new climbing equipment safely and the children enjoy reminding each other of how to keep safe.

Setting details

Unique reference number	EY491187
Local authority	Devon
Inspection number	10289113
Type of provision	Childcare on non-domestic premises
Registers	Early Years Register, Compulsory Childcare Register, Voluntary Childcare Register
Day care type	Full day care
Age range of children at time of inspection	2 to 15
Total number of places	20
Number of children on roll	37
Name of registered person	The Exwick Ark Limited
Registered person unique reference number	RP903483
Telephone number	01392 757371
Date of previous inspection	13 November 2017

Information about this early years setting

The Ark At Avanti Hall registered in 2015. It is privately owned, operating from the grounds of Avanti School Exeter. The pre-school is open between 9am and midday on Monday and 9am to 3pm Tuesday to Thursday, during term time only. The breakfast club and after-school club are available only for school-aged children who are pupils of Avanti School Exeter. The breakfast club is open from 7.45am to 9am, and the after-school club opens from 3pm to 6pm, during term time only. The setting operates a holiday club during school holidays. The pre-school employs five members of staff, all of whom are qualified to level 2 or above in childcare and education. The setting also has one level 2 apprentice. It receives funding to provide free early education to children aged three and four years old.

Information about this inspection

Inspector
Shirley Evel

Inspection activities

- This was the first routine inspection the provider received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. The inspector discussed the impact of the pandemic with the provider and has taken that into account in their evaluation of the provider.
- The inspector viewed the provision and discussed the safety and suitability of the premises.
- The inspector observed the quality of teaching during activities and assessed the impact this has on children's learning.
- The manager and inspector completed a learning walk together of all areas of the setting and discussed the early years curriculum.
- Children spoke to the inspector during the inspection.
- Staff spoke to the inspector during the inspection.
- The inspector spoke with the nominated individual and the manager about the leadership and management of the setting.

We carried out this inspection 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.

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