

PROSPECTUS

Registered Charity N0: 1054698

Welcome to Acorn Playgroup and pre-School! This prospectus will tell you all about us.

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Section I: Our Origins

Acorn Playgroup and pre-School started as a playgroup in 1993, after initially being set up by a group of parents who required a playgroup to serve Welwyn and the surrounding areas for their younger children. The playgroup went from strength to strength and our pre-school began when the need arose for our older children preparing for primary school.

In September 2012, Acorn temporarily relocated to the Whitehill Centre in Welwyn, whilst awaiting planning permission for the building of our permanent home in Whitehill - which we received in November 2012. We moved into our lovely new setting in April 2013.

Our most recent Ofsted was in December 2025, and we were awarded 'STRONG' in all areas.

Section 2: Our Aims

At Acorn Playgroup and Pre-school, we strive to create a warm, friendly and nurturing environment in which children can build confidence in their first steps into education. Our activities are designed to promote children's interest and curiosity which enables us to maximise teaching opportunities for every child.

Our primary focus is learning through play. Our stimulating environment, both inside and out encourages children to explore and learn through child initiated paly and adult led activities. The role of Key Person is vital to each child's learning experience. Children are encouraged to grow in confidence, self-esteem, and independence so that when they leave us and move onto school, they are ready and able to manage their basic self hep skills.

We value each child and their family's individuality, whose needs are met in an open and welcoming atmosphere that celebrates diversity. Nurturing every child's social skills will enable them to reach their full potential in their immediate and wider community. We want children, parents, and staff to learn together and for all to develop to their maximum potential**.**

<u>Aims:</u>

- To keep children in our care safe
- To provide a welcoming environment where every person matters.
- To ensure children feel safe, secure and valued in our care.
- To enable children to form positive and trusting relationships with their peers and with adults.
- To provide experiences for children to explore and learn from.
- To provide a range of learning opportunities which support the development of each individual child, enabling them to reach their full potential.
- To ensure children, staff and parents have a good understanding of healthy lifestyles.
- To work with parents and carers and value their contribution.
- To promote a brighter future for us all by developing the potential of the children, parents, staff and our community.
- To encourage each child to be polite and considerate of all others, to have a sense of fairness and equality for everyone regardless of gender, race, religion or ethnicity.

Section 3: The Early Years Foundation Stage

The Early Years Foundation Stages is a framework for learning, development and care for children from birth to five.

Play is vital for children.

It is through play that babies and young children learn, grow and have fun. It helps them to understand the world around them and to develop both socially and emotionally. By singing songs, reading together, playing games with letters and numbers, and having fun with friends they are given a head start. This means not just a happy childhood but also helps them with their confidence, so they can handle what life may bring.

It is not about introducing a curriculum for young children or making them read or write before they're ready……quite the reverse. It means being sure each individual child is learning through high quality play, that's tailored to them to enable them to develop at their own pace, having fun, making friends and learning as they play. Becoming confident and secure children who, when the time comes, are better prepared for school. Not pushed, not pressured. But ready to reach their full potential!

How does the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) work?

The EYFS has been developed with parents, carers, early years and childcare providers and academics. It brings together their experience in a clear, straightforward way.

The child is at the centre of the Early Years Foundation Stage. The people who work with your child will notice their interests and abilities and build on them through play. For instance, they will think about fun ways to help them develop their language skills; how to encourage their creativity or how they tackle small challenges.

All the while, they'll make sure that each child in their care is getting the support they need, and above all is enjoying learning through play.

How do you know how your child's doing?

At Acorn Playgroup and Pre-school we are continually gathering information on how each child is progressing. We conduct observations in the form of notes and photographs which describe what they have been doing during the session, week or term. We keep a folder for each child called a 'Learning journal'. This shows our observations on your child and any special pieces of artwork or writing they may have done. Your child's journal helps us to celebrate their achievements and to work together to provide what your child needs for their well-being and development. Assessments on how your child is progressing within the Early Years Foundation Stage are carried out regularly by their allocated Key Person. After your child's first five sessions, you will be given a Settling In Report which gives you an insight into what your child does at Acorn as well as an assessment of which age range your child's Key Person believes they are currently achieving and functioning at.

Once your child is settled at Acorn, your child's Key Person will carry out a half termly review of your child's development and achievement which will be discussed with you. Two next steps, per child, will be set for the following Half Term. Your child's Key Person will plan activities that will provide your child with a chance to learn and achieve these steps. This is a continual process and at Acorn we always operate an Open-Door Policy where you can request to speak to your child's Key Person at any time and they will be happy to update you on how your child is progressing. Busy times are drop off or pick up times, but they are often ideal times for a quick catch up. If you need more time to talk, an appointment can be made at a mutually convenient time.

The **EYFS Progress check at Age Two** has been introduced in the 2012 framework. The Key Person will provide the parent/carer information about their child's needs, activities, interests and development in the prime areas of learning of the EYFS i.e.: personal, social and emotional development; physical development; and communication and language. This information will enable the Key Person to identify your child's stage of progress.

Section 4: Educational Programme Policy

At Acorn Playgroup and Pre-school, we consider that all children are individuals with their own characteristics and temperament. All children develop and mature at different rates making their progress unique to them. Every area of development – physical, cognitive, linguistic, spiritual, social and emotional, is equally important. Warm, trusting relationships with knowledgeable adult's support children's learning more effectively than any number of resources.

Unique Child

We understand the processes involved in children's growth, development and learning, acknowledging that this is a process which cannot be rushed. Children are supported by all our practitioners to develop a positive sense of their own identity and culture; this enables them to develop a positive self-image entitling them to enjoy a full life which helps them to take part in society. Practitioners recognise and praise effort as well as achievement so that all children develop positive attitudes to themselves as learners.
When children receive warm, responsive care they are more likely to feel secure and valued and to want to contribute to making the rules which make things 'fair' for everybody.

Positive Relationships

Parents are children's first and most enduring educators. When parents and practitioners work together at Acorn, the results have a positive impact on children's development and learning. Parents are invited to add to planning by informing practitioners of their child's current interests, visits or events verbally or by adding the information to the 'Parent/child/other comments' page in their child's learning journal file. Parent are invited to share their knowledge and understanding of their child in their 2-year check, Termly Reports and at Parents Evenings.

Children feel a sense of belonging when their parents are also involved within the Playgroup and Pre-school.

We strongly believe that a two-way flow of information, knowledge and expertise between parents and practitioners means effective communication. To enable this process to take place we create a warm welcoming environment with approachable practitioners.

Effective Teaching

Teaching means systematically helping children to learn so that they make connections in their learning, are actively led forward, and can reflect on their learning. The more practitioners know about each child, the better they can support and extend each child's learning. Children need and will respond positively to challenges if they have a good relationship with the practitioner and feel confident to try things out. They shouldn't fear failure or ridicule. Practitioners who really know the children can judge when they are ready to be taught new skills.
Practitioners make time to really listen to children's views and act on them even when they do not match their own, identifying the right moment to intervene and move children's learning on, by perhaps joining in or asking a question.

Observation, Assessment and Planning

Children are individuals first, each with a unique profile of abilities. Schedules and routines flow with the child's needs. All planning starts with observing children to understand and consider their current interests, development and learning. At Acorn we always follow the same pattern of planning- assess, plan, do review - and use what we have found out about the children so that we are able to plan for the next steps in their learning. This is a continual process.
Each child's learning and development is recorded in their 'Learning journal' which parents and children are welcome to contribute to. Every child's learning takes a personal path based on their own individual interests, experiences and is further extended by the learning opportunities that are made available to them at Acorn.

Enabling Environments

The environment supports every child's learning style through experiences and activities that are challenging but achievable. Children benefit from direct personal participation of activities including those which are predictable, comforting and challenging. Learning is a continuous journey through which children build on all the things they have already experienced and come across new and interesting challenges. Acorn Playgroup and Pre-School offer a rich and varied environment which supports children's learning and development. It gives them the confidence to explore and learn in secure and safe, yet challenging, indoor and outdoor spaces. Being outdoors has a positive impact on children's sense of well-being and helps all aspects of children's development.

Learning and Development

Children's play reflects their wide ranging and varied interests. Play is important for children's development for both their social and emotional well-being. In their play children learn at their highest level whether alone, alongside or as part of a group.
Children develop and learn in different ways. The Early Years Foundation Stage Framework covers the education and care of all children in Early Years provision, including children with special educational needs and disabilities.

Children need time to process their thinking, reflect and modify their learning, whether indoors or outdoors, to enable them to begin problem solving and making their experiences meaningful. When children have opportunities to play with ideas in different situations and with a variety of resources, they discover connections and come to new and better understandings and ways of doing things. Learning and development will be facilitated using flexible resources, and sensitive intervention of a knowledgeable adult, who will scaffold the child's learning building on what they already know, enhancing their ability to think critically and ask questions.

At Acorn Playgroup and Pre-School play is valued and seen as an opportunity for children to rehearse, reorder, and develop ideas and experiences, enabling them to gain the necessary skills required for their future economic well-being. We recognise that children learn through active participation by being engaged with other people, objects, ideas and events for sustained periods of time. As active learners, children need to have some independence and control over their learning to keep their interest and to develop their creativity. As children become absorbed in finding out about the world around them through their explorations, investigation and questions they feel a sense of achievement and their self-esteem and confidence grows. As children grow in confidence, they learn to make decisions.

Areas of Learning and Development

Acorn's ethos is that children learn through play.

The ways in which the child engages with other people and their environment, playing and exploring, active learning, creating and thinking critically – underpin learning and development across all areas and support the child to remain an effective and motivated learner. These are described as the Characteristics of Learning.
During their play children will experience and develop their skills under Prime areas which are fundamental, work together to move through to support development in all other areas.

Prime areas are:

- Personal, Social and Emotional Development
- Communication and Language
- Physical Development

As the child becomes confident with their knowledge and skills a natural progression occurs where the child moves on to more specific learning and development areas.
Specific areas include essential skills and knowledge for children to participate successfully in society.
Specific areas are:

- Literacy
- Mathematics
- Understanding the World
- Expressive Arts and Design

Every child has their own characteristic of effective learning which moves through all areas of learning. It is their own unique method of learning that motivates them.

Characteristics of Effective Learning are:

- Playing and Exploring (engagement)
- Active Learning (motivation)
- Creating and Thinking Critically (thinking)

Section 5: Your child's Keyperson

A keyperson has special responsibility for a particular child. The keyperson will work with the child and his/her parents/carers to ensure the child's care and educational needs are met. The keyperson's aim is to ensure the child is happy and feels secure at Acorn and to observe, encourage and extend the child's learning experiences.

Main duties of a keyperson

- To provide for the emotional needs of the child, to comfort and reassure
- To care for the child and keep the child safe
- To contribute to and ensure that our provision considers each child's race, culture, religion, language and family values
- To build a strong partnership with parents to try and ensure the best possible outcome for their child
- To observe the child's progress and with parent's/carers permission, keep records of their child's interests and development
- To meet the parents/carers during each academic year and at other times when required.
- To be available to speak to the parents/carers where needed.
- If necessary, to liaise with the allocated member of staff who is responsible for Child Protection.

- To liaise with the parents/carers and Special Education Needs Co-ordinators if there is any concern such as language, hearing or other areas of development.
- The keyworker will ensure parents/carers are always contacted about any concerns involving their child.
- The keyworker will respect confidentiality

The key worker is always aware of being a member of the Acorn team of staff and will work with, care for, look after and be responsible for other children attending sessions in addition to their key children.

Section 6: Hours and Sessions

Acorn Playgroup and Pre-school operates during term time only and is open Monday to Friday, from 9:00 am to 3:00 pm, form September 2024

Our sessions are organised as follows:

- Playgroup 9:00am – 12:00pm (2 year olds and 3-4 year olds)
- Lunch Club 12:00pm – 1:00pm (3-4 year olds)
- Pre-School 1:00pm – 3:00pm (3-4 year olds)
- Full Day sessions – 9am-3pm (3-4 year olds)

Parents will be able to pick up and/or drop off at 9.00am, 12:00pm, 1:00pm, 3:00pm.

Please note our Pre-school (afternoon sessions) are available from the term after your child turns 3 years of age. Lunch Club sessions are available from your child's 3rd birthday, subject to availability.

The term following your child's 3rd birthday, they become eligible to claim 3 and 4 year old funding. This will provide you with 15 hours free, government funded childcare per week. If you are a working parent and meet the criteria set out by Hertfordshire County Council, these hours can be topped up with an additional 15 hours (totalling 30 hours per week).

Once children are in receipt of 3 and 4 year old government funding, they are automatically moved into our afternoon Pre-school.

As a setting we do have a limited number of playgroup morning sessions available for children accessing 2 year old funding for working and vulnerable families and 3 and 4 year old funding for our 30 hour funded children. All of our afternoon Pre-school sessions are solely for our 3 and 4 year old children. Our Pre-school (or nursery as you may know it) offers more structured sessions suitable for this age group.

Lunch Club

Acorn offers Lunch Club every day for children who are 3 to rising 5 years.

Children can attend lunch club from 12-1pm at a cost of £7.70 per session. Lunch club can also be incorporated into a full day session or added to the start/end of the morning and afternoon sessions (depending on availability).

Acorn regards snack time and lunch time as an important part of the day. We will use the lunch club to help children to develop independence and social skills by encouraging them to sit at a table, chat and have fun with their friends and staff whilst eating their lunch. Staff will also help the children to develop good table manners and an understanding of healthy eating. Lunch club is good preparation for older children who will be staying for lunch at primary school.

At the start of lunch club all children will be asked to wash their hands. The children will then eat their picnic style lunches (supplied daily by parents) together, around the tables with the staff. Please send the lunch in a named, insulated, chilled (if possible) lunch bag. The food will not be refrigerated at Acorn but will be placed in a designated area until lunch time. During the summer month's we would recommend placing an ice or cool pack into your child's lunchbox to ensure the contents remain at a suitable temperature. There will be the opportunity for the children to play inside or outside once they have finished their lunch.

In keeping with the Acorn's 'healthy eating' and 'nut free' policies, we would be grateful if you could provide your child with a healthy packed lunch therefore, please adhere to the following - **no fizzy drinks; nuts; sweets; chocolate or products containing chocolate**. In addition, we ask that grapes are cut in half (lengthwise) prior to being placed into your child's lunchbox as they can pose a choking risk when eaten whole.

We may at any time have several children attending Acorn with food allergies, therefore we need to be extra vigilant about snacks and lunches that are brought into the setting. An allergic reaction could result in a child becoming extremely ill and, in some circumstances, can be life threatening if a child touches or ingests certain foods.

Please note that if a child has any food items that contain any of the above ingredients; confectionery that has either been removed from the original packaging; states that it has been manufactured in a nut environment or where **we cannot be certain** that it does not contain nuts or manufactured in a nut free environment, **the item will be removed from your child's lunch box and sent home** with you to consume off of Acorn's premises.

For funded children the lunch session will be part of the educational hours and will be funded, providing the additional session does not take you outside of your funded hours entitlement. For other children the lunch session will be charged at our normal hourly rates (please refer to our fees policy).

Changing hours policy

Each term you will be offered a choice of sessions for the following term. These sessions will be subject to availability and confirmed on a first come, first served basis. Once you have chosen your required sessions these will become your agreed sessions. Changes to these sessions can again be made at the end of the term for the following term if available spaces permit.

Extra sessions: If you need to book occasional extra sessions for additional childcare needs such as appointments or emergencies, this may be possible according to our availability and at the discretion of our manager. Some sessions may have spaces in them, so please speak to Mrs Birtles as soon as possible. Extra sessions will be charged at our normal hourly rates (please refer to our fees policy).

Section 7: Fees Policy

Standard Fees

Each session at Acorn Playgroup and Pre-School are charged at the following rates:

- Playgroup 9:00am – 12:00pm - £7.70 per hour, £23.10 per session
- Lunch Club 12:00pm – 1:00pm - £7.70 per session
- Pre-School 1:00pm – 3.00 pm - £7.70 per hour, £23.10 per session
- Children aged up to 3 years old: £7.70 per hour.
- Children aged 3 years and above for hours not covered by Government funding: £7.70 per hour.

For children receiving government funding

The term after their third birthday, children become entitled to 570 hours over a period of 38 weeks a year (which is 15 hours per week). Acorn Playgroup and Pre-school will provide and complete the relevant forms and the funding will come directly to us from Hertfordshire County Council. Any hours or sessions attended outside of your funded hours will be charged, half termly, at the rates listed above.

'Free Childcare for Two- Year-Olds' scheme

There is an offer of free childcare for two-year-olds in Hertfordshire who meet the requirement conditions. The aims of this offer include providing childcare to the most disadvantaged two-year-olds and to narrow the gap in educational achievement between disadvantaged children and other children in the County.

You must be in receipt of one of a list of benefits, such as Income Support. A full list of the required benefits, additional criteria and information about how to apply for the funding can be obtained from the Acorn Playgroup and Pre-School office.

30 Hours Free Childcare for Two to Five Year Olds

All 3- and 4-year-old children can get 15 hours free early education (570 hours per year). This can be used with a **school**, **childminder**, **day nursery** or **pre-school**. From September 2024, some 2 year old and 3- and 4-year-old children can receive an extra 15 hours childcare (570 hours per year). The aims of this offer are to provide free childcare to children of working parents and will depend on your circumstances and assessed individually by Hertfordshire County Council. A full list of the required benefits, additional criteria and information about how to apply for the funding can be obtained from the Acorn Playgroup and Pre-School office.

Please note that although Acorn Playgroup and Pre-school offer 30 hours free childcare to eligible children, these places are limited.

Vouchers

We are registered with several voucher schemes; please contact administrative staff for details.

Contract

Once the contract with Acorn Playgroup and Pre-School is signed you are liable for the full amount. Should sessions need to be changed this must be done in accordance with our Changing Hour policy listed above.

Invoices and Payments

Invoices will be distributed via your child's Tapestry account during each half term. If payments are not made by the due date stated on your invoice, your place for the following term may be withdrawn.
Fees are payable if your child is on holiday, sick or absent.

Payments

Payments should be made within two weeks of the issue date on the invoice. If you are having trouble with payments, please speak to our manager or administrator as soon as possible.

Leaving

If your child is leaving Acorn Playgroup and Pre-School, for any reason other than that of natural progression to primary school, a minimum of 6 weeks written notice must be given. When a child leaves in the middle of a term, fees must be paid for the remainder of that half term. (For government funded children transferring to another setting please ask for advice from our manager or deputy manager)

Section 8: Food at Acorn Playgroup and Pre-School

Snack Time

Snack times occur at 10:30am and 10:45am for our playgroup sessions and 2:30pm for our pre-school sessions. During snack time, children will be offered a snack of either fruit or vegetables that has been provided from home. If your child attends a full day session, you will be asked to provide two snacks, one for each snack time.

Lunch

If you wish your child to stay for lunch, a packed lunch must be supplied. The lunch hour is from 12:00pm to 1:00pm daily.

Allergies

If your child has an allergy to any food, staff must be informed. We have a long experience of dealing with serious allergies. Members of staff are Epi-Pen and Jext pen trained although training must be carried out for each individual child. We do not allow children to share food from their lunchboxes, but to protect those children with allergies, please do not pack any nuts or nut products (including pesto containing nuts and peanut butter) in your child's lunch. We may also have other restrictions from time to time, depending on the allergies of specific children at that time.

Section 9: Admission Policy

Statement of intent

At Acorn Playgroup and Pre-school, we offer a welcoming and inclusive environment that values diversity within the community, listening and responding to the needs of the families who attend.

At Acorn Playgroup and Pre-school priority of admission will be given to:

1) length of time on the waiting list,
2) admission to three and four-year-old Pre-School sessions: priority will be given to those children currently attending sessions with us.

Admission of Children with Special Educational Needs:

A child with special educational needs who wishes to attend Acorn Playgroup and Pre-school will be able to have a flexible introduction period to ensure that we are able to meet their needs effectively and ensure progress is made in all areas of development. This allows time to make any reasonable adjustments, obtain funding (if required) and to provide any additional resources including one to one support.

The length of the introductory period will be assessed on an individual basis and any necessary changes that need to be made. If necessary, a risk assessment will take place to ensure the safety of the child and everyone who attends the setting.

Additional Information

Parents are invited and encouraged to visit Acorn Playgroup and Pre-school, prior to completing our registration form to meet the Acorn team and discuss their child's needs with or manager.

As each child is unique, a flexible approach is taken to settling in.

Once a visit to our setting has been undertaken and you wish to pursue registering your child to attend Acorn, Parent/carers will be required to complete registration form and state a preferred starting date. A valid birth certificate or passport must be shown at the time the child is registered and this will be noted on your registration form.

A non-refundable £30 registration fee is charged if:

1. Your child wants to start at Acorn Playgroup and Pre-School at the age of two years old or above and is not eligible for government funding.

2. Your child is on the waiting list to start when he/she is eligible for government funding, but parents change their mind and want him/her to start earlier.

Please note as in option 1) the child is on our waiting list prior to his/her eligibility for government funding and when offered sessions you decide to defer until he/she is funded, the registration fee remains non-refundable.

Requests for places in specific sessions later in the term or academic year will be placed on an individual waiting list for that session in the event of no availability being immediate.

Acorn Playgroup and Pre-School reserves the right to make any decision on individual admissions.

Section 10: Other Policies

Acorn Playgroup and Pre-school has policies covering every aspect of our care and education. These policies are available to view on the Acorn premises. Copies can be produced upon request.

Section 11: Staff List

All staff are required to have relevant training and regularly attend courses, seminars, conferences and day schools. Each member of staff brings their own talents, interests, and enthusiasm to the team.

PLAYGROUP AND PRE-SCHOOL MANAGER	Roxanne Speede
DEPUTY MANAGER AND EARLY YEARS ADMINISTRATOR:	Delia Alves
SENCo:	Linda McLellan
EARLY YEARS PRACTITIONERS:	Lisa Johnson Sonia Wilsher Tara White Hollie Bloom

Section 12: Trustees

Acorn Playgroup md Pre-School is a registered charity. The Trustees are a group who help to oversee Acorn, in much the same way as a Board of Governors does for a school. They are composed of a Chair, a Secretary and a Treasurer, as well as general Trustees.

Membership of the Trustees provides:

- Opportunities to help Acorn Playgroup and Pre-School
- Insight into the way that Early Years settings are run

- Experience of managing a charity
- Fun and friendship

CHAIRPERSON:	Annie Fitt
TREASURER:	Ciara Sheridan
SECRETARY:	Charlene Jones
GENERAL TRUSTEES:	Joanne Codd Delia Alves

In addition, the Trustees are a Fundraising Committee that organises year-round events to raise much-needed funds. And if joining a committee isn't for you, there are lots of ways to get involved.

- Help out at an event
- Lend us your skills
- Donate items
- Make a donation

Finally, please don't hesitate to get in touch. If you want to get involved in any way, you will be helping to keep Acorn Playgroup and Pre-School a high-standard childcare setting for your child and future children.