Acorn Playgroup & Pre-School

Unique reference number (URN): EY458165

Address: Whitehill, WELWYN, Hertfordshire, AL6 9FN

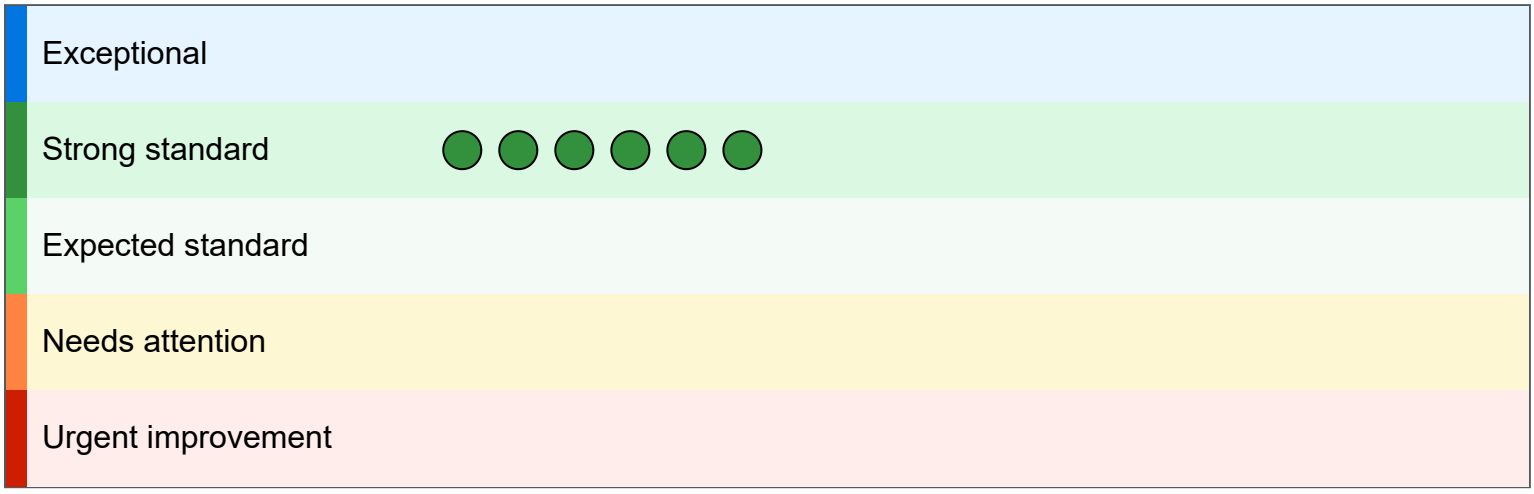
Type: Childcare on non-domestic premises

Registered with Ofsted: 11/04/2013

Registers: EYR, CCR

Registered person: Acorns Playgroup and Pre-school Committee

Inspection report: 5 December 2025



Safeguarding standards met

The safeguarding standards are met. This means that leaders and/or those responsible for governance and oversight fulfil their specific responsibilities and have established an open culture in which safeguarding is everyone's responsibility and concerns are actively identified, acted upon and managed. As a result, children are made safer and feel safe.

How we evaluate safeguarding

When we inspect settings for safeguarding, they can have the following outcomes:

- Met: The setting has an open and positive culture of safeguarding.
- Not met: The setting has not created an open and positive culture of safeguarding. Not all legal requirements are met.

Strong standard

Achievement

Strong standard

All children achieve highly at this setting and they are extremely well prepared for moving on to school and their future learning. Children respond positively to the routines and benefit from a highly focused curriculum. They thrive in a familiar learning environment that mirrors local schools to help prepare them for their new school surroundings when they move on. All children become highly independent. Children take on roles, such as becoming the 'special helper' during snack time. They complete these roles proudly and highly effectively.

All children achieve across all areas of the broad and fully inclusive curriculum. Their communication and language skills develop rapidly. Children who cannot communicate verbally, confidently use alternative methods to communicate their needs. As a result, they make extremely rapid progress in their development.

Behaviour, attitudes and establishing routines

Strong standard

A harmonious and respectful culture is instinctively displayed throughout the setting by staff and children alike. This contributes to a calm atmosphere indoors and outdoors. Staff, children and parents and carers recognise the high expectations for children's behaviour. Children rush to support their friends if needed, reminding them that 'sharing is caring'. Incidents such as these are rare due to the high levels of engagement and children's deep understanding of the routines and expectations in place.

Warm and trusting relationships quickly develop between staff and children. Staff role model for children constantly in all areas of the setting. For instance, they promote collaborative play to children who face barriers to their learning. They do this frequently, and delight in the moment when children can play collaboratively without support. This perseverance and determination from staff results in children becoming highly sociable, kind and helpful individuals.

Expectations in relation to attendance are clearly understood by parents. Leaders work hard to promote their high expectations when children start, ensuring that parents understand the importance of their children attending. Leaders monitor attendance regularly and have clear

plans in place to address any concerns swiftly. As a result, there are high levels of attendance at the setting and positive routines around this are well established.

Children's welfare and wellbeing

Strong standard

Staff consistently promote the values of the setting. They recognise the importance of consistency and the need to prioritise children's safety and welfare. They particularly focus on those children who face barriers to their learning or with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Staff teach children to keep themselves safe. They recognise barriers to this, implementing highly effective strategies to encourage children to learn about eating safely so that they do not choke. This supports all children to build healthy habits and make safe decisions. Children recognise the effect that the cold weather has on their bodies and know that running around will help them to warm up, supporting their understanding of physical development.

The key-person system is highly effective, and children form strong bonds with staff. Children become highly familiar with the routine. Children with SEND feel safe and secure, separating from their parents and carers as they arrive and finding toys that help them to regulate their feelings independently. This is thanks to a responsive and established settling-in process that provides consistent routines and familiarity for children. Staff respond instantly to support changes to children's routines, prioritising their welfare. Collaborative approaches with parents to changes in toileting routines minimise disruption and empower children to be independent.

Curriculum and teaching

Strong standard

Leaders create a broad and inclusive curriculum, which staff implement to a consistently high standard. They make continuous improvements to ensure that all children receive the education to which they are entitled across all areas of the curriculum. As a result, children's levels of engagement are high. Children are confident and independent learners. The curriculum is planned and carefully sequenced to build on children's learning to ensure that they are ready for the next stage of their education.

Support for children's communication is magnificent. Leaders and staff introduce purposeful communication methods for children who cannot communicate verbally. Staff fully embed these reasonable adjustments. As a result, all children successfully communicate their needs. Children are highly sociable and have strong emotional understanding. Staff respond instinctively to children's curiosity, expertly adapting their discussions so that children can learn from every interaction with staff at the setting.

Children enjoy making 'reindeer food'. They develop the small muscles in their hands as they scoop and pour. Staff support mathematical concepts, introducing relevant vocabulary that children readily use in their play. They build on children's prior knowledge and continuously support children to meet their high expectations. Constant assessment and rapid identification of children's next steps help all children to achieve their best from their individual starting points.

Inclusion

Strong standard

The identification of children's needs is swift and takes place from the moment children start at the setting. Staff gather a wealth of information from parents and carers when their children start. For instance, they implement strategies for children who cannot communicate verbally to help them to communicate effectively from the start. These are implemented swiftly and children use these to remain focused and motivated and make the best possible progress. Staff monitor and evaluate children's progress rigorously to ensure that targets are focused and help children to make swift progress. This is particularly beneficial to children with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) or who face barriers to their learning.

Tailored support packages provide focus for children who need help, so that they successfully progress to the next stage of their learning. Regular reviews include parents and staff to ensure that aspirations for children are realised. All staff consistently deliver support for children to a high standard. Staff carefully plan, model and implement experiences. This makes a sustained difference to children being able to access the curriculum independently.

Professional relationships with other agencies provide rich support for staff and children alike. Leaders ensure that staff have a robust understanding of how to support children's differing needs, including medical requirements and strategies to support children with SEND. They vigorously monitor additional funding that the setting receives, providing rich experiences to all children. Leaders frequently review the difference that their spending has on children's opportunities. These carefully considered approaches enable all children to thrive.

Leadership and governance

Strong standard

Leaders are highly reflective, making sustained changes to the provision that benefit staff's wellbeing and the children who attend. Changes to the 'All About Me' forms mean that staff gather more detailed information to help swiftly identify any possible gaps in children's experiences or barriers to their learning. They also support staff's workload, minimising paperwork that staff previously found a burden. Continuous discussions and reflection between staff and leaders result in the best possible experiences for children. Ongoing and meaningful engagement with parents and carers ensures that they are aware of what their children are doing. This results in trusting and open communication to help children to succeed.

Leaders ensure that any changes to legislation or requirements are addressed before they are due to be implemented. They work hard to identify ways to ensure that children will benefit from these changes, keeping children at the heart of everything they do. Staff feel highly valued and included in decisions made at the setting. There is a robust supervision process in place and training for staff is focused around ensuring that staff can provide the best possible support to all children. This includes children who face barriers to their learning and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Compulsory Childcare Register requirements

This setting has met the requirements of the compulsory part of the Childcare Register.

How we check if a provider meets the requirements of the Compulsory Childcare Register

When we check if settings meet the Compulsory Childcare Register requirements, they can have the following outcomes:

- Met
- Not met

What it's like to be a child at this setting

Children thrive in the calm and inviting atmosphere that staff and leaders work tirelessly to create. Children keenly wave goodbye to their parents and carers. They quickly become deeply engaged in the learning opportunities on offer. This contributes towards their high levels of achievement from their various starting points and prepares all children for the next stage in their education. Children with special educational needs and/or disabilities or who face barriers to their learning are a true focus for leaders and staff. The learning environment and curriculum are expertly tailored to children's individual needs, providing them with highly enjoyable experiences. Leaders focus on children's safety and welfare, adapting the opportunities on offer to ensure that everything is fully inclusive and accessible to all children. This helps all children to feel highly valued and included at the setting.

Children are highly independent and helpful individuals. Older children confidently guide younger and newer children to participate in routine tasks, such as tidying up. They take on roles, such as helping at snack time. Staff enthusiastically praise and thank children for their assistance. Children are evidently proud and motivated to continue helping and completing tasks for themselves. Barriers to children's independence are swiftly and compassionately minimised by staff and leaders. Staff deploy themselves to provide sustained encouragement and support to children who face barriers in developing their independence. Children persevere and develop these skills to the very best of their abilities.

Children form strong bonds with one another, instinctively supporting their friends to meet the high expectations of staff on the rare occasion they need to. Parents trust staff implicitly with their children and feel fully included at the setting, with leaders valuing their contributions and feedback. Leaders empower parents to prioritise their children's attendance, and this has resulted in no attendance issues at the setting.

Next steps

- Leaders and those responsible for governance should sustain their work to ensure continued improvement and high standards. They should focus on creating a transformational impact on the outcomes and experiences of disadvantaged children, those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, those who are known, or previously known, to children's social care, and those who may face other barriers to their learning and/or wellbeing.

About this inspection

The inspector spoke with leaders, staff, parents and carers and the special educational needs coordinator during the inspection.

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.

Inspector:
Jenny Hardy

About this setting

Unique reference number (URN): EY458165

Address:
Whitehill
WELWYN
Hertfordshire
AL6 9FN

Type: Childcare on non-domestic premises

Registration date: 11/04/2013

Registered person: Acorns Playgroup and Pre-school Committee

Register(s): EYR, CCR

Operating hours: Monday,Tuesday,Wednesday,Thursday,Friday : 09:00 - 15:00

Local authority: Hertfordshire

Facts and figures used on inspection

This data was available to the inspector at the time of the inspection.

This data is from 5 December 2025

Children numbers

Age range of children at the time of inspection

2 to 4

Total number of places

32

Our grades explained

Exceptional

Practice is exceptional: of the highest standard nationally. Other settings can learn from it.

Strong standard

The setting reaches a strong standard. Leaders are working above the standard expected of them.

Expected standard

The setting is fulfilling the expected standard of education and/or care. This means they are following the standard set out in statutory and non-statutory legislation and the professional standards expected of them.

Needs attention

The expected standards are not met but leaders are likely able to make the necessary improvements.

Urgent improvement

The setting needs to make urgent improvements to provide the expected standard of education and/or care.

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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