

The Acorns Nursery and Forest School

Unique reference number (URN): 113349

Address: 59 Denmans Lane, Lindfield, Haywards Heath, West Sussex, RH16 2JN

Type: Childcare on domestic premises

Registered with Ofsted: 14/10/1992

Registers: EYR, CCR, VCR

Registered person: Sussex Acorns Ltd

Inspection report: 12 February 2026

Exceptional

Strong standard



Expected standard

Needs attention

Urgent improvement

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 ●

Children develop a wealth of skills that support them well for later learning. They develop strong levels of confidence and independence and a natural inquisitiveness to learn. Children listen attentively and ask questions, supporting their communication skills. They link their learning particularly effectively with previous activities. For instance, when staff talk about honey, children confidently explain how bees make honey from nectar.

Leaders use their strong links with the local community to enhance children's social skills. For instance, children regularly look after the local doctor's surgery garden and confidently meet with people in the community. These experiences help children understand where they live and enable them to build positive relationships with others.

Every child, including those with potential barriers to their learning, accesses the full range of learning opportunities. Children continually strengthen their skills and knowledge. Children's achievements and progress are widely celebrated. This contributes towards children leaving for school as extremely competent, inquisitive learners.

Behaviour, attitudes and establishing routines

Strong standard ●

Children benefit from the homely, caring environment. Staff demonstrate kindness in their gentle interactions with children, so children reflect these behaviours in their play. Staff expectations of children are fair and realistic, based on children's ages and abilities. Routines are organised extremely well so that children have ample time to become deeply involved in their play and learning. Children play together happily. They willingly take turns, listen to others and show respect for their friends and the nursery environment.

Children's calm behaviour demonstrates how secure they feel in the nursery. They are increasingly confident in taking care of their own needs. Mealtimes are regarded as a favourite part of the day. Staff and children sit together and share the social experience. Children learn about the food they are eating and how it supports their healthy development.

Leaders ensure children attend regularly and help parents fully understand the importance of this for children's learning and wellbeing.

When needed, staff adapt the routine to take account of the needs of children with special educational needs and/or disabilities. For instance, they prepare children well for change and sensitively help children to learn to understand their feelings and emotions in a supportive way.

Children's welfare and wellbeing

Strong standard ●

Children's emotional needs are given high priority. Staff know children exceedingly well and form strong, trusting relationships with them. Children confidently invite staff into their play. Staff respond with enthusiasm, creating a very happy environment. Leaders work closely

with parents to fully understand children's care and wellbeing needs. Regular information is exchanged so staff can support children fully through any significant changes, such as starting school.

Care routines are carried out sensitively and with children's consent. Children feel emotionally secure as they know the adults well and turn to them confidently for guidance and reassurance if needed.

Children benefit from many opportunities throughout the day to be physically active. They undertake frequent walks in the village and enjoy challenging physical play in the garden, where they can take managed risks. Staff teach children about safety. Children quickly become competent in using climbing frames and understand simple rules to keep themselves safe. The daily opportunities for outside activities, fresh air and exercise contribute well towards children's healthy development.

Children with special educational needs and/or disabilities benefit from a personalised level of care and support that is carefully matched to what helps them most.

Curriculum and teaching

Strong standard 

Staff are highly skilled in extending children's learning. For instance, as children play with bricks and farm animals, staff gently encourage children to recall familiar stories, such as 'The Three Billy Goats Gruff'. Additionally, staff use these incidental opportunities extremely well to encourage children to think about how to make a bridge.

Children's language, literacy and mathematical understanding are successfully embedded across all activities. Staff frequently introduce children to new vocabulary. For instance, they teach children what a 'dibber' is used for, and children confidently recall how to use one when planting bulbs. Staff skilfully incorporate mathematical concepts into children's play. Children work out how to build a 'strong bridge', and they accurately count the numbers of bricks they use when making models.

Staff use frequent visits in the village to enrich children's learning. For instance, children often visit shops to use money and develop their social skills. Leaders prioritise children's physical development. Children have ample opportunities to climb, use tricycles and dig in the garden to support their healthy development.

Teaching is adapted skilfully to take account of children's varied learning needs, including children with special educational needs and/or disabilities. For instance, key staff know exactly how their children respond to different activities. They fully understand that some children learn and retain information much better in the outside environment and plan for this consistently across the day.

Staff value and celebrate each child's cultural and linguistic background. Children learn new words in languages their friends speak at home, and parents come into the nursery to read stories in their home language and talk about other family customs. Leaders carefully plan the programme of learning to consider different cultural events. For instance, children

celebrate Chinese New Year and talk excitedly about the dragon they made and what it represents.

Inclusion

Strong standard ●

Leaders demonstrate a tireless approach towards offering provision that is matched accurately to what every child needs. This includes children with funding, special educational needs and/or disabilities or who face other barriers to their learning. Staff work closely with parents to precisely understand each child's preferred ways of learning, their individual behaviour traits and their likes and dislikes. Staff plan an extremely well-organised programme of activities that takes full account of every child's needs, so every child benefits.

Leaders make sure that staff training is consistently matched precisely to improve the learning programme and sequence of learning for every child. Leaders monitor the impact of this closely and continually ensure that every child achieves well from their individual starting point.

There is a fully inclusive programme of learning. Leaders recognise children who learn better outdoors and provide for this throughout the day. Teaching times and small-group activities are planned precisely to ensure children are challenged appropriately. The carefully planned approach means every child thrives from their individual starting points.

Leadership and governance

Strong standard ●

Relevant, targeted improvements have been made since the last inspection to make sure recruitment procedures meet the requirements for registration. Vetting checks are completed rigorously, and leaders implement highly effective procedures to make sure all staff remain suitable for their role.

Leaders demonstrate a tireless dedication to their role. They frequently review the provision to ensure it consistently meets the needs of every child, including those who face potential barriers to their learning. Staff wellbeing is given the highest priority, and staff work together exceedingly well as a small, supportive team.

All staff reflect clearly on what it is they want children to learn. Leaders review the curriculum and programme of learning incisively and continually review the progress all children make. This includes children with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Leaders are robust in their approach towards providing the highest standards of provision and preparing all children exceedingly well with the skills and knowledge they need for starting school.

Leaders work collaboratively with other professionals to provide a well-organised, coordinated approach in which every child's care and learning needs are always prioritised.

Staff have frequent opportunities to update their training through a comprehensive programme of professional development. Training is carefully planned to ensure the curriculum intentions are consistently met and adapted for every child's needs. For instance, a recent focus on learning in the outdoor environment has sharpened all staff's awareness

of the potential for learning outside and the exceedingly positive impact it has on some children's learning.

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
-

Voluntary Childcare Register requirements

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

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

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

- Met
 - Not met
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What it's like to be a child at this setting

Children benefit from a very positive start to their learning in this homely, nurturing nursery. Parents particularly like the caring, home-based environment and the strong, trusting

relationships children build with staff. Children attend regularly. Leaders work closely with parents to help them understand the importance of regular attendance to support learning.

Leaders have created a curriculum that builds on children's natural curiosity and lays the foundations for future learning. Particularly, good use is made of the garden and outdoor environment to enrich children's learning experiences. Children have ample opportunities to explore and investigate and develop a natural inquisitiveness for learning. For instance, children are excited to water the seeds and bulbs they have planted and note how much they have grown.

Children develop a strong sense of belonging in the nursery. There is a family atmosphere where every child is included and helped to reach their full potential. Any barriers to children's learning are identified at the earliest stage. Staff use their in-depth knowledge of each child and closely monitor the progress every child makes. Additional help is put in place promptly so gaps in children's learning close. Detailed information about every child is gathered from parents when children first start. This helps staff get to know children well and understand their personal needs.

Children show how safe and secure they feel. They form close attachments to the staff and look to them confidently for reassurance when needed. They talk about things that might be worrying them, and staff are kind and reassuring. Key staff know their children exceedingly well. This enables teaching and support for individual children's learning to be personalised and focused on what each child needs to learn next. The curriculum is fully inclusive, enabling every child to take part and be challenged appropriately.

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.
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About this inspection

The inspector spoke with leaders, staff, the special educational needs coordinator, parents and children 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:

Jo Caswell

About this setting

Unique reference number (URN): 113349

Address:

59 Denmans Lane
Lindfield
Haywards Heath
West Sussex
RH16 2JN

Type: Childcare on domestic premises

Registration date: 14/10/1992

Registered person: Sussex Acorns Ltd

Register(s): EYR, CCR, VCR

Operating hours: Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday : 08:00 - 18:00

Local authority: West Sussex

Facts and figures used on inspection

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



This data is from 12 February 2026

Children numbers

Age range of children at the time of inspection

2 to 4

Total number of places

21

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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