**A report on**

**Little Acorns Day Care Nursery Ltd**

**Llynfi Enterprise Park**
**Heol Ty Gwyn**
**Maesteg**
**CF34 0BQ**

**Date of inspection: March 2025**

**by**

**Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW)**

**and**

**Estyn, His Majesty's Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales**

## About Little Acorns Day Care Nursery Ltd

| | |
|---|---|
| Name of setting | Little Acorns Day Care Nursery Ltd |
| Category of care provided | Full Day Care |
| Registered person(s) | Little Acorns Day Care Nursery Ltd |
| Responsible individual (if applicable) | Sarah Stephens |
| Person in charge | Sarah Stephens<br><br>Caroline Fallows |
| Number of places | 57 |
| Age range of children | 6 weeks to 11 years |
| Number of 3 and 4 year old children | 7 |
| Number of children who receive funding for early education | 3 |
| Opening days / times | Monday – Friday7am – 6pm |
| Flying start service | Yes |
| Language of the setting | English |
| Is this setting implementing the Child Care Offer? | Yes |
| Welsh Language Active Offer | This service is making a significant effort to promote the use of the Welsh language and culture. |
| Date of previous CIW inspection | November 2023 |
| Date of previous Estyn inspection | November 2014 |
| Dates of this inspection visit(s) | 04/03/2025 |

## Summary

| Theme | Judgement |
|---|---|
| **Well-being** | **Excellent** |
| **Learning**<br>**(only applies to three and four year old children who do not receive education in a maintained setting)** | |
| **Care and development** | **Excellent** |
| **Teaching and assessment**<br>**(only applies to three and four year old children who do not receive education in a maintained setting)** | **Excellent** |
| **Environment** | **Excellent** |
| **Leadership and management** | **Excellent** |

## Non-compliance

No non-compliance was identified during this inspection.

## Recommendations

R1. The setting should continue on its improvement journey.

## What happens next

The setting will draw up an action plan that shows how it is going to address the recommendations.

CIW and Estyn will invite the setting to prepare a case study on its work in relation to highly effective leadership which facilitates the learning opportunities, well-being and sense of belonging in a safe and stimulating environment for dissemination on their websites.

## Main findings

**Well-being: Excellent**

Nearly all children are exceptionally happy and settled throughout the day. They cope with separation from their parents and caregivers confidently. They form strong emotional attachments with practitioners who they are familiar with. They chat to practitioners happily, invite them into their play and seek out comfort when needed. Nearly all children know their needs will be met and that their ideas will be valued, as practitioners actively listen and show genuine interest in what they say. Children confidently share their opinions and ideas about their learning experiences and practitioners use this information effectively to plan further learning opportunities.

Nearly all children are familiar with the routines and expectations at the setting. For example, they confidently engage in food preparation, justify their choices when selecting different activities and happily engage in self-care routines in readiness for snack and lunch. These familiar routines help them to develop a strong sense of belonging.

Nearly all children make independent decisions around their play and choose confidently from the extensive range of engaging activities on offer to them. They thoroughly enjoy both adult led activities and opportunities to lead their own play. Younger children show delight when exploring sea creatures in foam, whilst older children become highly engaged in messy play opportunities such as making footprints in gloop and cracking open dinosaur eggs with wooden hammers.

Nearly all children are beginning to form friendships. They play happily with or alongside each other and are beginning to co-operate and share resources well. Their interactions with one another are kind and considerate. For example, when playing games outdoors, they help their friends to find a hiding place before starting the game of hide and seek.

Nearly all children show great respect for property and people. They carefully handle real life objects and take notice of the risk that these activities may hold. For example, when using utensils to prepare their snack, they carefully cut through the different fruits and vegetables, observing safety rules and congratulating one another on their achievement when successful.

Nearly all children are active, engaged learners who greatly enjoy the exciting opportunities to play and learn. They are curious about the world around them. For example, they eagerly discuss their ideas about the water droplets melting from the ice on the roof in the outdoor area and how they can best collect them.

Nearly all children develop their independent skills well and demonstrate an increasing level of independence during their time at the setting. For example, they cut fruit independently during supervised snack time and they clear and carry China plates at the end of lunch carefully. Nearly all children serve themselves water from a water station and use age-appropriate cutlery independently when eating their lunch.

**Learning (only applies to three or four year old children who do not receive education in a maintained setting):**

There is no report on children's learning. This is because the number of three or four-year-old children present at the time of the inspection that do not receive funded education elsewhere was too few to report on without identifying individual children.

**Care and development: Excellent**

Practitioners have an excellent understanding of their roles and responsibilities to keep children safe. They have a thorough knowledge of safeguarding issues and follow the setting's safeguarding procedures diligently. There is a highly effective registration system in place, which includes consent and attendance records of children and practitioners. All practitioners have current first aid certificates, they record accidents and incidents accurately and share this information with parents promptly. Leaders maintain a robust system for monitoring these records to identify patterns and trends and pro-actively address any identified. The setting has robust procedures for the administration of medicine, which are followed diligently by practitioners. The setting's arrangements for safeguarding children meet requirements and are not a cause for concern.

Practitioners employ high standards of hygiene practices, encouraging children to engage in handwashing routines before and after eating. They follow intimate care routines thoroughly, with a high regard for infection control. They ensure the dignity and privacy of all children following a highly effective policy.

Practitioners are vigilant and attentive in their care of children to ensure that mealtimes are highly enjoyable, relaxed, sociable and safe. For example, they follow effective procedures to manage children's food allergies, intolerances and individual dietary requirements. In addition, the chef works closely with parents to ensure their child's individual dietary needs are met. Practitioners promote healthy lifestyles well, by providing children with a wide variety of nutritious snacks and freshly prepared meals. They ensure children have access to regular and enjoyable outdoor play experiences throughout the day.

Practitioners are highly responsive to children's attempts to communicate, and value each child's efforts. Practitioners manage children's behaviour through praise and encouragement exceptionally well. This results in a positive ethos throughout the setting. They ensure that children have access to high-quality learning experiences within all areas of the setting. They plan experiences that match children's interests diligently, which results in all children feeling heard and valued.

Practitioners are proactive in supporting children with additional learning needs and work closely with local support officers to ensure children's individual needs are met and support is in place. They undertake regular reviews of children's progress, ensuring the next steps in learning are identified and expertly worked on.

**Teaching and assessment (only applies to three or four year old children who do not receive education in a maintained setting): Excellent**

Practitioners' expert teaching methods motivate children to engage in their learning effectively. Their secure knowledge of child development and their enthusiasm to provide a highly engaging learning environment enables children to access provision which builds on their existing knowledge and extends the learning well. This has a highly effective impact on the development of children's progress, knowledge and understanding.

Practitioners carefully consider children's interests and experiences when planning learning in the language rich environment. This ensures that children benefit from the highly effective range of activities provided and engage in their learning enthusiastically. They provide worthwhile activities that encourage children to work together and develop their social skills effectively. For example, practitioners encourage children to engage in drama workshops, explore the allotments with their friends, take part in massage therapy and experiment with sound baths.

Practitioners engage in conversations with children skilfully. When leading activities or intervening in children's play, they ask thoughtful questions to expand children's vocabulary. For example, when observing children playing with dinosaurs in the dinosaur swamp, they encourage them to describe the different smells and textures.

Practitioners develop children's Welsh oral skills highly effectively through songs and rhymes and by incorporating Welsh sentences in their daily routines. Practitioners provide a wide range of resources to support children's mathematical development successfully. For example, when playing alongside children, they encourage them to use tape measures to measure their construction area creations, the length of their feet and the height of their dinosaurs. They develop children's mathematical vocabulary effectively, for example, encouraging children to count items as they play.

Practitioners use their observations of children's achievements to record their progress and to plan the next steps in their learning exceptionally well. They analyse each observation made and identify how they will extend each child's learning to achieve the next steps. They use this information alongside children's individual interests to plan further experiences and opportunities for learning highly effectively. In addition, practitioners keep parents and carers well informed of their child's progress through a secure communication platform,

daily discussion and parent consultations. This helps practitioners to gather valuable information around children's learning which they use to inform their plans.

Practitioners plan worthwhile experiences for children to develop and strengthen their core muscles and improve their balance and agility. They carefully encourage children to take managed risks as they play. For example, they support children to climb trees of varying heights in the forest, use climbing frames and skillfully manoeuvre bikes in the outdoors. These experiences develop children's physical skills exceptionally well.

Practitioners offer engaging opportunities for children to develop their creative skills. They enrich these experiences by inviting visitors to the setting. For example, a recent experience provided children with the opportunity to explore dance, movement, light and shadow using a light- projecting dome. This provided children with an engaging experience that allowed them to express their imagination through physical activity.

Practitioners promote Welsh culture suitably, by celebrating St David's Day and Shwmae Day. For example, they develop a sense of belonging in their community through local visits, they enjoy singing songs and rhymes and invite theatre groups to perform in both Welsh and English to effectively promote understanding and interest. They provide suitable opportunities for children to develop their spiritual, moral and cultural development through activities such as celebrating Chinese New Year and preparing random acts of kindness for their local community.

**Environment: Excellent**

Leaders ensure the environment is exceptionally safe and secure. The setting is based within a shared building, with its own security access. Leaders ensure a record of all visitors is maintained consistently well. They have developed highly effective risk assessments, for different areas and activities, which are shared with staff and reviewed regularly. Leaders ensure that practitioners follow robust systems to regularly check toys, equipment and resources to ensure that they are clean and in excellent condition.

Leaders ensure fire and security equipment are regularly checked and complete regular fire drills, ensuring practitioners and children understand the procedures in an emergency. Leaders ensure building maintenance records are thorough and up to date.

The indoor environment is extremely cosy and welcoming and provides a highly effective environment for play and learning. Leaders have introduced neutral colours and soft lighting throughout the setting, which creates a calm and soothing atmosphere. Furniture is at a suitably low level, which allows children to access and use resources independently. Base rooms are thoughtfully arranged to provide multiple spaces to stimulate children's interest. For example, each base room leads directly to the outdoors, providing opportunities for free flow play. There are safe relaxing spaces where children can rest quietly. For example, the sensory room transforms from a multisensory space to explore to a quiet and calm area for sleep.

Leaders provide children with a wide range of opportunities within the environment to develop their independent and social skills effectively. For example, the snack area provides children with space to prepare their snacks without affecting the play and learning of others.

The dining area allows children beneficial time to share their lunch together in a calm and social environment.

Leaders have developed an outdoor environment that allows children to enjoy a variety of high-quality experiences. For example, the Fairy Garden has a small cottage on stilts where children enjoy looking at books and listening to stories and rhymes, whilst the physical space encourages children to experiment with a range of movements and balance. Additionally, leaders have secured an allotment in the nearby community space which children visit with their key workers to engage with members of the community, grow vegetables and care for the chickens. This provides excellent opportunities for children to develop social skills, learn about the world around them and to develop a sense of belonging as part of the wider community they live in.

Leaders ensure a mix of high quality natural and manufactured resources are available in all environments. For example, children use real-life resources and natural loose parts in their play to decorate their playdough, support experiments and in their role play. Raising awareness of equality and cultural diversity is expertly done through fully embedding resources in the children's play and learning experiences in all environments.

**Leadership and management: Excellent**

Leaders have a clear vision to ensure the setting provides excellent care and support for its children. They work together conscientiously to ensure the practitioners and the learning opportunities enable development and learning to take place within an environment which expertly fosters a sense of belonging, well-being and respect. As a result of their positive attitudes and robust practices, leaders ensure an exceptional learning environment that provides exemplary experiences for children.

Leaders use highly effective strategies that focus diligently on improving opportunities and children's outcomes. They conduct excellent appraisal and supervision of practitioners, resulting in a high standard of professional development and well-being, which in turn impacts positively on the provision and learning experiences.

Leaders ensure that practitioners provide children with very strong and positive pastoral care. This creates an outstanding sense of belonging within the setting. The caring and nurturing ethos encourages children to do their best and persevere during learning and play sessions. Leaders and practitioners work together expertly as a team and attend training to consistently improve their teaching and care practices. As a result, they are highly motivated and eager to succeed. Leaders ensure that they update the setting's statutory documents, policies, and practices regularly and they follow safe recruitment processes diligently.

Leaders undertake extensive self-evaluation processes, which lead to accurate targets for improvement. This helps them to identify strengths and areas that need attention. They use this information effectively to make well-planned improvements to the setting. For example, the recent focus on improving planning and observation, has had a positive impact on identifying the next steps in children's learning, and how to move the learning forward. In addition, they have improved how they update parents on their child's developmental progress.

Leaders consider the views of all stakeholders involved with the setting to improve the quality of the care and provision. They, act enthusiastically upon advice from external support such as the Local Authority to successfully improve the learning opportunities for the children. As a result, leaders have purposefully adapted their planning to better incorporate children's interests and ideas. Through effective engagement with children and use of worthwhile questions and observations, they are successful in identifying specific interests, which incorporate skilfully into the provision. They use this information to plan engaging learning experiences throughout the indoor and outdoor learning environment, ensuring children are eager to take part in the activities and support development.

Leaders have established a range of highly effective partnerships to help support children's creativity, imagination and social skills. For example, the setting visits the nearby forest for woodland learning sessions and trips to the local beach and parks provide children with creative opportunities to develop their curiosity and imagination. In addition, leaders provide, yoga and massage therapy workshops for children and their families which helps to support their well-being effectively.

Leaders allocate resources effectively and use the budget carefully by prioritising expenditure against the setting's improvement priorities. For example, they have used grants effectively to improve the physical features of the outdoor space and purchase a range of digital resources for children to use in their play.

## Copies of the report

Copies of this report are available from the setting and from CIW and Estyn's websites (http://careinspectorate.wales) (www.estyn.gov.wales)

CIW and Estyn evaluate a provider's effectiveness using a four-point judgement scale:

| | |
|---|---|
| **Excellent** | Very strong, sustained performance and practice |
| **Good** | Many strengths and no important areas requiring significant improvement |
| **Adequate** | Strengths outweigh weaknesses but improvements are required |
| **Poor** | Important weaknesses outweigh strengths and significant improvements are required |

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# Areas identified for improvement

Where we identify **Areas for Improvement** but we have not found outcomes for people to be at immediate or significant risk, we discuss these with the provider. We expect the provider to take action and we will follow this up at the next inspection.

Where we find outcomes for people **require significant improvement** and/or there is risk to people's well-being we identify areas for **Priority Action**. In these circumstances we issue a Priority Action Notice(s) to the Provider, and they must take immediate steps to make improvements. We will inspect again within six months to check improvements have been made and outcomes for people have improved.

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