Arolygiaeth Gofal Cymru
Care Inspectorate Wales

Inspection Report

Acorns USW

University Of South Wales
Treforest
Pontypridd
CF37 1DL



Date Inspection Completed

31/10/2024

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About Acorns USW

Type of care provided	Children's Day Care Full Day Care
Registered Provider	Acorns Nurseries Ltd
Registered places	60
Language of the service	English
Previous Care Inspectorate Wales inspection	2 September 2019
Is this a Flying Start service?	No
Does this service promote Welsh language and culture?	This service is not making a significant effort to promote the use of Welsh language and culture.

Well-being	**Excellent**
Care and Development	**Excellent**
Environment	**Excellent**
Leadership and Management	**Excellent**

For further information on ratings, please see the end of this report

Summary

Children are extremely happy and relaxed at the setting. They have a very strong voice and extensive opportunities to make choices and decisions. They have developed exceptionally strong bonds with staff and receive extremely warm and responsive care. Children learn independence and co-operation skills through a range of high-quality experiences.

Staff are passionate about their roles and work seamlessly together to successfully implement policies and procedures to keep children safe and healthy. They are enthusiastic, always interacting positively with children. They plan and assess purposefully and effectively, and continually ensure that children's skills, interests, and curiosities are developed further. They keep highly valuable records of children's progress.

Leaders and staff implement highly effective measures to ensure the environment is safe, secure and well-maintained. They prioritise children's health, safety and welfare by ensuring comprehensive and effective risk assessments and measures are in place. Children access an extensive range of excellent quality resources and equipment both indoors and outdoors which nurtures their overall development.

Leadership and management of the setting is excellent. The management team are passionate in providing an outstanding service to ensure they offer a very high standard of care to their children. They maintain exceptional partnerships with parents and a range of partners. Parents are highly complementary about the care and opportunities their children receive. Policies and procedures are comprehensive.

Well-being	**Excellent**

Children are confident communicators and have a very strong voice in a setting that is child centred. They choose from an excellent range of developmentally appropriate and stimulating resources, enabling them to follow their own interests with confidence. Children's requests are highly valued and acted upon by staff. For example, children who used rakes to make their own road in the sand asked, *"Can we have cars to put in here?"* and this was granted promptly.

Children are extremely happy, engaged and have a strong sense of belonging. They arrive eagerly and immediately go to areas of their choice, helping themselves to resources of interest. They develop very strong attachments with staff which has a highly beneficial impact on their well-being. We saw children spontaneously approaching staff for cuddles, and babies holding out their arms as they displayed signs of becoming tired. Children receive continuous praise for their efforts, enhancing their self-esteem. For example, a baby became excited when staff encouraged, clapped and cheered as they attempted to walk independently.

Children interact exceptionally well and have developed wonderful friendships. They work cooperatively on tasks and show a strong willingness to share resources and take turns in their play. For example, we heard a child ask another *"Do you want to come and build a tower with me?"* as they gently offer their construction blocks and work together to make the tower as tall as they can. They show kindness to one another as it falls over, saying *"Don't worry, it's okay, I will help you build it again".*

Children gain immense pleasure in the opportunities available to them immersing themselves in their chosen play. For example, outdoors, children thoroughly enjoy using their imagination as they go exploring on their tractors. They invite staff into their play and happily sing about having a very busy day at the farm with their heavy loads. They show fascination as they spend time experimenting with pouring and filling containers with water and become engrossed in searching for various sea creatures. Babies smile and giggle as they explore a variety of sensory items.

Children develop self-help skills superbly. They confidently move around the learning areas, accessing resources to support their interests. At lunchtime the progression of children's skills is clear. Younger children are encouraged and supported in feeding themselves while older children confidently pour their own drinks. We saw many children using mirrors and flannels to wipe their own faces. Older children access the toilet facilities freely, wash their hands independently and capably tidy up after play. Babies are becoming increasingly social as they share positive facial expressions with others. They happily explore their playroom accessing toys they would like to play with.

Care and Development — Excellent

Staff implement policies and procedures consistently and to a very high standard to promote children's safety and wellbeing. Safeguarding is a high priority, and staff have a

thorough understanding of the process to follow should they have any concerns about children's welfare or well-being. They follow agreed procedures for the administration of medication and ensure that there are up to date detailed health-care plans in place where necessary. They are confident in recording accidents, incidents and any pre-existing injuries and evaluate these regularly to identify any trends. All staff hold paediatric first aid training, enabling them to deal with minor accidents confidently. The setting take part in a variety of schemes to promote children's health and well-being, encouraging children to develop healthy habits such as good hand washing, healthy eating and being active. Staff hold food safety training and follow robust procedures to manage children's food allergies, and individual dietary requirements. Staff follow thorough infection control practices successfully to minimise any risks to children's health and safety.

Staff fully understand the behaviour management policy and manage interactions sensitively and with exceptional skill, using gentle tones, distraction methods and lots of meaningful praise for children's efforts and achievements. For example, we heard staff use positive phrases such as *"Fantastic effort, well done", "Wow, that's so kind of you, I'm so proud of you" and "Excellent turn taking and sharing, well done"* often. They act as excellent role models and are warm and engaging, demonstrating a genuine understanding and kindness towards children. They encourage children to be kind to each other and sit with them for their meals and snacks to promote their social skills. As a result, children's behaviour and interactions are very strong, and many are able to successfully manage their own conflict with little adult support.

Staff attend to children's personal needs promptly and discretely, treating children with respect and valuing them as individuals. They support children's learning and development in a highly effective way, engaging positively to facilitate learning naturally and in the moment. For example, we heard staff asking children *"Can you catch water using your hands?"* and *"How can we see our reflections in the water?"* providing children with a sense of wonder. Staff evaluate children's enjoyment and engagement in their play daily and use this information to adapt and plan for further play opportunities. They observe children to identify their strengths and any areas for progression and keep digital records of children's learning and development. Staff are proactive in monitoring and identifying any emerging or additional learning needs children may have. They make effective use of the comprehensive inhouse support available as well as working closely with outside agencies. Most staff are skilful in developing children's Welsh language using simple phrases and singing songs and rhymes consistently throughout the day. They introduce new languages as they sing a variety of other songs from various cultures around the world.

Environment — Excellent

Leaders have comprehensive systems and procedures in place to ensure the environment is safe and secure. Registers clearly record the time staff and children arrive and leave the premises. Staff are vigilant, supervise the children closely and ensure only authorised persons have entry to the setting, maintaining a log of any visitors. Staff follow an extensive

range of comprehensive risk assessments including daily safety checks of the indoor and outdoor area to highlight any risks to children's safety. Routine maintenance checks for the building and appliances are completed promptly. Fire equipment is tested at regular intervals and fire drills are undertaken frequently to ensure children are familiar with the evacuation procedures and know how to leave the building safely.

The environment is exceptionally clean, welcoming and highly maintained. The layout and arrangement of the premises meet's children's needs tremendously well and allows them to confidently access resources with ease. Base rooms provide a warm inviting space with lots of natural light and celebrate children's uniqueness, creativity and successes through a multitude of attractive wall displays. Photographs of children and their families support an exceptional sense of belonging and self-worth among children. Clearly defined areas, both indoors and outdoors ensure rich learning experiences where children can learn, explore and play imaginatively. We observed children moving freely and confidently between these two spaces, relishing in the activities and resources on offer. For example, children develop an array of physical skills using large equipment such as play apparatus, obstacle courses and trikes. Children thoroughly enjoy opportunities to experience nature, including the well-developed forest school area for hands on learning and a sensory garden providing opportunities for planting, mark making and reading as well as a space for children to rest and relax. Sleep spaces are extremely calming, and bathroom facilities are clean and fresh with nappy changing facilities that promote children's privacy, dignity and respect.

Staff ensure that an extensive selection of interesting and exciting resources and equipment are available to children which are clean, highly maintained and of excellent quality. They provide stimulating play and learning areas which enhance children's curiosity and imagination. For example, children experience opportunities to develop their skills during role-play in the home corner using 'real objects' such as cups, saucers, and tea pots. Staff change learning areas regularly to maintain children's interest and extend their skills. For example, staff decorate the setting to reflect the autumn theme and resources such as pumpkins and orange materials, reflect Halloween. There are a beneficial number of resources which help children learn about diversity and promote their cultural awareness such as music, books, dolls, puzzles and a variety of authentic costumes from around the world.

Leadership and Management — Excellent

Leadership and management of the setting is exemplary and there is a strong ethos of child-centred care between management and staff. There is a clear and inspirational vision for the service outlined in the Statement of Purpose and leaders ensure regulations are fully complied with and 'National Minimum Standards' are consistently exceeded. Comprehensive and detailed policies and procedures are implemented successfully, and leaders give staff the opportunity to familiarise themselves with these and ensure that

parents are kept informed of any changes. Staff ensure record keeping systems for essential records are completed to a high standard, including children's contracts.

Children and parents benefit from a service which is committed to providing high-quality care and improving outcomes for children and their families through continuous self-evaluation. Robust and well-established systems ensure regular feedback from parents, children, staff and a range of outside professionals informs the quality-of-care report. Priorities for improvement are identified and tangible improvements are made which have a positive impact upon outcomes for children and their experiences. For example, they have recently introduced a new digital app to help capture children's development, learning stories and special moments for parents. Leaders prepare a clear action plan which has measurable targets and timelines in order to drive improvements.

Leaders manage staff effectively and follow robust recruitment procedures. They ensure staff complete mandatory qualifications and hold a current Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) certificate. Leaders have exceptionally high expectations of staff, always challenging and supporting them to do their best. A thorough induction policy is implemented, and regular supervisions and appraisals are held to support all staff in their professional development. There is a strong ethos of teamwork amongst staff and all staff told us that they are extremely happy working at the setting, feel valued and are very supported by approachable leaders. As a result, staff are confident and extremely passionate about their work and fully value opportunities to further develop their skills to benefit the children in their care.

Partnerships with parents are exceptionally positive and communication with parents is valuable. Staff keep parents well informed via a range of communication methods including detailed verbal feedback and regular updates through an electronic 'app'. Parent evenings help to further enhance links and improve the care offered to children and support their development. Feedback received from parents was overwhelmingly positive. All parents said they are extremely happy with the care their children receive and many commented on the expertise of staff and the invaluable support they provide. Comments included *"We cannot be more delighted with the breadth of opportunities our children receive"* and *"The care is incredible, nothing you ask for is too much and staff are so caring and loving"*. Leaders have outstanding links with a wide range of key professionals and external organisations including a variety of childcare support organisations.

Summary of Non-Compliance	
Status	**What each means**
New	This non-compliance was identified at this inspection.
Reviewed	Compliance was reviewed at this inspection and was not achieved. The target date for compliance is in the future and will be tested at next inspection.
Not Achieved	Compliance was tested at this inspection and was not achieved.
Achieved	Compliance was tested at this inspection and was achieved.

We respond to non-compliance with regulations where poor outcomes for people, and / or risk to people's well-being are identified by issuing Priority Action Notice (s).

The provider must take immediate steps to address this and make improvements. Where providers fail to take priority action by the target date we may escalate the matter to an Improvement and Enforcement Panel.

Priority Action Notice(s)		
Regulation	Summary	Status
N/A	No non-compliance of this type was identified at this inspection	N/A

Where we find non-compliance with regulations but no immediate or significant risk for people using the service is identified we highlight these as Areas for Improvement.

We expect the provider to take action to rectify this and we will follow this up at the next inspection.

Area(s) for Improvement		
Regulation	Summary	Status
N/A	No non-compliance of this type was identified at this	N/A

	inspection	

Where we find the provider is not meeting the National Minimum Standards for Regulated Child Care but there is no immediate or significant risk for people using the service, we highlight these as Recommendations to Meet National Minimum Standards.

We expect the provider to take action to address these and we will follow these up at the next inspection.

National Minimum Standards	
Standard	Recommendation(s)
	No NMS Recommendations were identified at this inspection

Ratings	What the ratings mean
Excellent	These are services which are committed to ongoing improvement with many strengths, including significant examples of sector leading practice and innovation. These services deliver high quality care and support and are able to demonstrate that they make a strong contribution to improving children's well-being.
Good	These are services with strengths and no important areas requiring significant improvement. They consistently exceed basic requirements, delivering positive outcomes for children and actively promote their well-being.
Adequate	These are services where strengths outweigh areas for improvement. They are safe and meet basic requirements but improvements are required to promote well-being and improve outcomes for children.
Poor	These are services where important areas for improvement outweigh strengths and there are significant examples of non-compliance that impact negatively on children's well-being. Where services are poor we will take enforcement action and issue a non-compliance notice.

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