

# Inspection of Widcombe Acorns Pre-School and Forest School

St Marks Community Centre, St Marks Road, Widcombe, Bath BA2 4PA

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Inspection date: 8 July 2025

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## **Overall effectiveness**

## **Outstanding**

The quality of education

**Outstanding**

Behaviour and attitudes

**Outstanding**

Personal development

**Outstanding**

Leadership and management

**Outstanding**

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Outstanding

## **What is it like to attend this early years setting?**

### **The provision is outstanding**

There is a wonderful atmosphere at 'Acorns'. Staff show genuine interest and affection for the children. They build strong supportive relationships with them, knowing how important these are for children's well-being and confidence. These bonds form an incredibly solid foundation for children's further learning. Children thrive on the attentive support they receive and learn excellent character traits from staff, who value and respect them.

Staff know the children exceptionally well. They align their activities closely with children's abilities, interests and individual needs. The skilled team form a highly progressive curriculum, beneficially sequencing the experiences that they provide for the children. For example, staff offer focused projects to introduce key concepts, such as maps. Children form maps with staff assistance for routes to local venues and their journeys from their homes. They then create their own maps independently, making clear marks to represent the landmarks, such as the pond and forest school base camp.

Staff make learning fun, offering children rich, exciting activities and experiences. Children focus together on the challenge of building with materials in their forest school session. Staff skilfully encourage children to share their thinking and discuss their plans. They then scaffold children's learning even higher with well-timed support and enthusiastic ideas. Children show great confidence and work together, passing each other items to lay down for their walkway. Children develop a keen curiosity, a love of learning and a strong desire to achieve. They show skills well above their age and are exceptionally well prepared for their move on to school.

## **What does the early years setting do well and what does it need to do better?**

- Children make exceptional progress. Each child's key person diligently outlines next steps in children's learning and plans targeted support to help them achieve these. They use customised arrangements, such as home visits, specialist story books and stay-and-play sessions to work in a highly collaborative and successful way with parents. They liaise closely with other settings children attend and outside professionals to get children the help they need. They ensure children with special educational needs and/or disabilities are closely supported to reach their potential. They focus meticulously on preparing children for their move on to school, sharing key information with parents and liaising closely with teachers. Parents say that staff constantly exceed their expectations and that every aspect of staff's support is incredibly well thought out.
- Staff conscientiously implement targeted programmes to ensure all children learn to express themselves and their ideas successfully. They appreciate the impact this has on children's development, particularly their personal, social and

emotional development. Children become confident, fluent communicators at this pre-school, including those who speak English as an additional language. Staff listen to children, show interest in what they have to say and sustain them in conversation. They value and celebrate children's individuality and choices. Children show incredible confidence, eagerly communicating in different ways, using signs and complex vocabulary, such as greetings in many languages.

- Staff set children up to succeed through their very skilful teaching. Children become highly purposeful in their play and exploration. They have fun developing their hand strength, squirting water from bottles. Staff add in challenge for children to aim at chalk numbers at different levels on the wall outside. Staff encourage children to pay attention to details and consider their approach to self-chosen tasks. Children create wonderful paintings, studying examples and discussing characteristics. They form these with care, using lines for stripes on their zebra and curves for its ears.
- Staff place great importance on developing children's confidence in doing things for themselves. Children pour their drinks, spread toppings on their crackers and carefully clear their plates and glasses away after their meal. Staff also encourage their cooperation and collaboration on tasks, such as tidying each area in small groups. Children focus exceptionally well, working together effectively. They develop a strong sense of responsibility and important life skills.
- Children's behaviour is exemplary. Staff patiently help children to negotiate and appreciate other's needs. They post children's thoughtful behaviour on the 'kindness tree', celebrating their achievements. Children understand boundaries, appreciating that blue rope barriers mean 'Stop, go no further'. Staff are skilled at helping children to recognise and manage any risks they encounter, particularly in their forest school sessions. Children show exceptional understanding, using equipment and tools very competently and responsibly. They listen carefully to the staff's tips as they cut thin wood with a small saw and then bang in little nails. They show considerable concentration and gain excellent skills.
- Leaders work tirelessly to lead this highly inspirational pre-school. The close-knit staff team show such passion for the work they do. They are exceptionally reflective and use training very thoughtfully to continue to enhance what they provide for children and families. For example, they have carefully selected and introduced more resources into their continuous provision that children can use in a variety of ways. This has expanded children's exploration, self-led play and thinking even further.

## Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

There is an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts children's interests first.

## Setting details

|                                                    |                                      |
|----------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| <b>Unique reference number</b>                     | 133108                               |
| <b>Local authority</b>                             | Bath and North East Somerset Council |
| <b>Inspection number</b>                           | 10399562                             |
| <b>Type of provision</b>                           | Childcare on non-domestic premises   |
| <b>Registers</b>                                   | Early Years Register                 |
| <b>Day care type</b>                               | Full day care                        |
| <b>Age range of children at time of inspection</b> | 3 to 4                               |
| <b>Total number of places</b>                      | 25                                   |
| <b>Number of children on roll</b>                  | 38                                   |
| <b>Name of registered person</b>                   | Widcombe Acorns Playgroup Committee  |
| <b>Registered person unique reference number</b>   | RP523091                             |
| <b>Telephone number</b>                            | 01225 445446                         |
| <b>Date of previous inspection</b>                 | 5 December 2019                      |

## Information about this early years setting

Widcombe Acorns Pre-School and Forest School has been running since 1975. It is located in Widcombe, Bath. It operates from 8.15am to 4pm, Monday to Friday. There are nine members of staff that work with the children. Two have qualified teacher status, one holds an appropriate qualification at level 6, five staff hold early years qualifications at level 3 and one is unqualified. Two of the staff also hold forest school leader qualifications at level 3. The setting provides government funded places.

## Information about this inspection

### Inspector

Rachel Howell

## Inspection activities

- The inspector viewed all areas and discussed with the managers how these areas are used.
- One of the managers and the inspector evaluated the effectiveness of an activity together.
- The inspector discussed the leadership and management of the pre-school with the managers.
- The inspector met with the chairperson of the committee to discuss how they support the running of the pre-school.
- Parents shared their views of the provision with the inspector.
- Relevant documentation was reviewed by the inspector, including suitability checks and paediatric first-aid qualifications.
- The managers discussed safety and child protection procedures, and safeguarding discussions were undertaken with members of the staff team.

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.

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