

Inspection of Woodentots Forest School

Belsize Wood Nature Reserve, Woodland Walk, London NW3 2BZ

Inspection date:

16 September 2024

Overall effectiveness

Outstanding

The quality of education

Outstanding

Behaviour and attitudes

Outstanding

Personal development

Outstanding

Leadership and management

Outstanding

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Not applicable

What is it like to attend this early years setting?

The provision is outstanding

Children are deeply nurtured and cared for by dedicated staff in this warm forest school setting. Staff prioritise children's emotional well-being to ensure that they have a gentle and gradual introduction to forest school life. For example, new children are sensitively and reassuringly shadowed by their key person until they feel comfortable and confident to explore the natural environment independently. Staff have high expectations of children and use a thorough, consistent and fair approach to managing children's behaviour. Older children behave exceptionally well and support younger children to behave in positive ways.

Children are highly curious, self-motivated learners. Staff provide a variety of exceptionally well-structured activities from a rich and highly stimulating curriculum. All children make excellent progress. Staff provide innovative activities to support children's creative development. For example, children carefully and skilfully hammer collected leaves under calico cloths until coloured pigment seeps out. They excitedly say, 'I want to add more leaves to make a pattern!' Staff teach children excellent safety awareness as the children wear safety goggles and gloves while using hammers. Children say 'stay back' to others who are quietly observing the activity, which shows an exceptional understanding of how to keep safe.

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

- Children are highly articulate and expressive. Staff teach children ambitious vocabulary, such as 'camouflage', as children use diggers to create hidden traps in the earth. Staff provide an excellent range of books, both fiction and non-fiction, which children browse through in quiet concentration. Children use small electronic discs to record their voices, which supports their communication and language skills very well.
- Children gain an exceptional understanding of the world. For example, during group time, a candle is lit in the forest and a member of staff presents different wood whistles to represent a variety of bird sounds. Children listen carefully and learn about the names of birds and the sounds they make.
- Children have excellent mathematical skills. For instance, they carefully count out baskets of conkers and skilfully match conkers and acorns to patterns on cards. They use mathematical language confidently and say 'look at the tall trees'. Children skilfully work out how many more cups of tea are needed as they create a pretend tea party.
- Children are extremely confident and independent. They prepare their own fruit snacks and proudly say 'I'm peeling lychees'. Children learn to put on their forest school kit, including high-visibility vests. They manage small risks for themselves, such as climbing on fallen trees and balancing on trunks, under staff supervision. Staff support younger children to attain these skills. Older children

teach younger children how to share and take turns by acting as excellent role models.

- Staff promote healthy routines in a robust way. For instance, they issue guidance to parents on healthy food items for lunch boxes and talk to children about the value of eating well. They support children's understanding of oral hygiene by ensuring that they only have water to drink, and read stories about ways to keep teeth and gums healthy. Children have very good oral hygiene awareness.
- Staff work extremely successfully with parents and help them to support children's learning. For instance, parents come into the forest to read stories to children about Rosh Hashanah, a Jewish festival. Staff give parents regular updates on children's progress in effective ways. During the inspection, a parent commented, 'My child is being prepared exceptionally well for school.'
- There is excellent monitoring of, and support given to, the small staff team. The provider works with children in the forest and models best practice to staff to enhance their skills. They observe staff and provide feedback to improve practice, where needed. The provider enjoys excellent communication with all staff and meets with them individually to review their work. They are highly committed to enhancing staff skills and knowledge. For example, staff attended in-house training on developing children's creativity, which has led to improved outcomes in this area.
- The provider has astute awareness of the strengths and areas for development of the forest school. They set ambitious goals for ongoing improvements. For example, there are plans to enhance partnerships with parents to include a practical induction into the forest school ethos of learning.
- Children develop excellent physical skills. They develop strong core muscles as they climb forest slopes and balance on tree branches. Staff organise games for children using balls and hoops to develop their physical coordination skills very effectively.
- Staff are extremely vigilant about children's safety. They ensure that daily, comprehensive risk assessments are carried out in the forest before children arrive, to reduce the risks of hazards. Staff ensure that boundary cones are in place and children know not to go outside of this area. Staff are deployed well to ensure that there is excellent supervision in all parts of the forest school. They teach children the forest school rules for safety. For example, children hold sticks that are no longer than their arm, and at low height, behind them.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

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

Setting details

Unique reference number	2652092
Local authority	Camden
Inspection number	10350585
Type of provision	Childcare on non-domestic premises
Registers	Early Years Register
Day care type	Sessional day care
Age range of children at time of inspection	2 to 3
Total number of places	20
Number of children on roll	20
Name of registered person	Woodentots Montessori Limited
Registered person unique reference number	RP904358
Telephone number	07815575344
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable

Information about this early years setting

Woodentots Forest School registered in March 2022. It is located within Belsize Wood Nature Reserve in the London Borough of Camden. The forest school is open on Monday and Thursday from 9am to 3pm during term time only. There are five staff, including the manager, all of whom hold appropriate early years qualifications. The manager holds a degree in early years. The nursery accepts funding for free early years education for children aged two, three and four years.

Information about this inspection

Inspector

Jenny Beckles

Inspection activities

- The manager carried out a joint observation of a group activity with the inspector.
- During the inspection, the inspector went on a learning walk around the nursery with the manager.
- The inspector observed the interaction between staff and children, and spoke with children when appropriate.
- The inspector held a meeting with the manager and sampled some documentation.
- During the inspection, the inspector considered the views of staff and parents.

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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