

12 July 2016

Dear Parent/Carer

**Acrewood Nursery
Stirling**

Recently, as you may know, my colleague and I visited and inspected your child's early learning and childcare (ELC) setting. Throughout our visit we talked to parents and children and we worked closely with the manager and staff. We wanted to find out how well children were learning and achieving and how well the ELC setting supported children to do their best. The manager shared with us the ELC setting's successes and priorities for improvement. We looked at some particular aspects of the ELC setting's recent work including the use of the outdoor play environment and transition arrangements for children. As a result, we were able to find out how good the ELC setting was at improving children's education. I would now like to tell you what we found.

How well do children learn and achieve?

Across the centre the majority of children settle well on arrival. Children under three years of age benefit from the caring and reassuring approach of all staff. They are being encouraged to gain some important self-help skills such as, being more independent at snack and lunchtime. They are becoming more confident in their environment and are beginning to make some choices in their play. We have asked staff to provide a better range of natural and more sensory experiences which are developmentally appropriate to encourage exploration and curiosity. Older children in the nursery are beginning to make friends and are encouraged to take turns in their play. At times they act as 'buddies' to younger children which is helping to develop important personal skills. Children were learning best when the environment was purposeful, resources easily accessible and routines appropriate. For example, staff have recently developed the outdoor play area which children clearly enjoy as they were particularly interested in creating a 'bug hotel' for insects. Staff now need to increase the range of quality experiences on offer with children throughout all areas of the nursery. Children attending after-school care were making friendships and enjoyed the practical and problem-solving activities planned by staff.

Children's achievements are noted in their personal learning journal. At present these contain examples of children's work. We have asked staff to involve children in more meaningful conversations about their learning and to build on their use of journals to record significant aspects of learning for children to share with parents.

As a priority, staff need to provide better learning opportunities to help children aged three to five years improve progress in their early language and mathematical skills. Some children participate well in interesting conversations with an adult and each other. This was most noticeable in outdoor learning. A few children are interested in making marks and notice letters in their name and can relate these to similar letters in the environment. A small number of children made good attempts at writing signs and labels. Younger children are encouraged to develop an awareness of number by singing songs and rhymes. Toddlers are beginning to show an interest in sorting by colour and shape. Older children are beginning to explore and recognise numbers in everyday contexts, for example, when reading stories with numbers with staff and a few children showed confidence in counting to ten. Some children were interested in number patterns and games. When outside, children were developing their awareness of measurement and used comparative language such as shorter than or longer than when looking at insects. However, we think that children have the potential to make better progress in early language and mathematics through more skilful support from staff to extend children's skills.

How well does the early learning and childcare setting support children to develop and learn?

Staff relationships with children are positive and caring and staff work hard to meet the emotional and care needs of children. There is an inclusive ethos in the nursery where everyone is made to feel welcome. A few parents who spoke with us during the inspection commented positively on the relationships between staff and families and others said they would like more information about their own child's progress. We found that staff are not yet meeting the learning and development needs of all children consistently well enough. For example, the rate which older children learn could be increased. Where a few children need additional support with their learning appropriate referrals are in place to access additional help and parents are included in this process.

The centre's overall approach to delivering a curriculum for children is based on play and broadly designed to meet their needs. Staff have made a start to using national guidance to plan activities for younger children and have made a few positive changes to some areas of the playroom as a result. Recent positive work has been to review the learning environment particularly for older children. This needs to be further developed to ensure a better range of experiences for children. Staff are using Curriculum for Excellence to help improve the curriculum for children aged three to five years and they acknowledge that this has been more irregular and inconsistent than they would have wished. Positive steps have been taken to help children start Primary 1 including home link work through the 'Travels with Paddington Bear' initiative. Overall, progress in the delivery of the curriculum is too slow. As a result the curriculum is weak. We discussed with staff the need to improve the curriculum for older children and asked that they should involve parents in making these improvements.

How well does the early learning and childcare setting improve the quality of its work?

Staff work well together and showed a willingness to improve their work. After a gap of almost a year a permanent new manager has been recently appointed and has a clearer idea of improvements which require to be made. The peripatetic teacher appointed by Stirling Council has begun to monitor practice in the playroom but self-evaluation to improve practice is largely informal. As a result, there is little evidence available to show improvements over the last year. Children's experiences and achievements are still not of a high enough standard. Staff now need to place a greater focus on monitoring how well their work improves children's overall experiences and leads to better progress in their learning. Staff would benefit from more engagement in professional learning and from visiting other early learning and childcare settings to identify and share good practice. We have advised the nursery to continue to work in conjunction with Stirling Council to make the necessary improvements outlined in this letter.

During the previous Care Inspectorate inspection, the setting had no requirements and one recommendation. From these, the recommendation has been met. As a result of this inspection, there is one requirement and no recommendations.

Our inspection of your ELC setting found the following key strengths.

- Children who are making friendships and are keen and eager to come to nursery.
- A receptive staff team who are willing to improve the work of the nursery.
- Positive relationships with parents.

We discussed with staff and the education authority how they might continue to improve the ELC setting. This is what we agreed with them.

- Improve children's experiences in early language and mathematics to ensure children make better progress.
- Improve the curriculum to ensure children receive better learning opportunities which helps them progress more quickly and builds on their prior learning.
- Improve self-evaluation and leadership at all levels to evaluate and monitor the work of the nursery and ensure necessary improvements are made.

What happens at the end of the inspection?

As a result of our inspection findings we think that the ELC setting needs additional support and more time to make necessary improvements. Our Area Lead Officer and Lead Officer Early Years and Childcare along with the local authority will discuss the most appropriate support in order to build capacity for improvement, and will maintain contact to monitor progress. We will return to carry out a further inspection within one year of publication of this letter. We will then issue another letter to parents on the extent to which the ELC setting has improved.

Elizabeth Paterson
HM Inspector

Fiona Stewart
Care Inspector

Additional inspection evidence, such as details of the quality indicator evaluations for your setting can be found on the Education Scotland website at <http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/inspectionandreview/reports/school/eyc/AcrewodNurseryStirlingStirling.asp>.

If you would like to receive this letter in a different format, for example, in a translation please contact the administration team on the above telephone number.

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