

Inspection of Harlequin Forest School

The Woods, Boughton Lane, Boughton Monchelsea, Maidstone, Kent ME17 4NA

Inspection date:

16 December 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 flourish at this unique and special setting. They enjoy freedom and independence within the boundaries of the forest and investigate with confidence and enthusiasm. Staff plan an enticing curriculum with activities that embrace children's unique interests and preferred patterns of learning. Children sustain their attention and engagement for long periods of time and their play is productive and purposeful. For example, children paint tree stumps with mud as they talk about the 'dragon's skeleton'. They make marks and notice patterns in the wood as they engage in imaginative play. Staff model the use of new words, and children then repeat these in their extensive conversations. Children learn to become explorers of their own passions and interests because staff provide a wealth of experiences that inspire awe and wonder.

Children show that they feel secure and safe in the forest. They understand that they must keep themselves and others safe by keeping to the agreed rules. For example, staff support children to understand that they must not 'pick or lick' anything that they find on their adventures. Children demonstrate an excellent knowledge of the potential impact and risk that this poses to their health and safety. They are excellent role models and show high levels of respect for each other. Staff provide children with the freedom to make careful choices and to collaborate and persevere to solve their own problems.

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

- Staff expertly deliver a curriculum that is centred on exploration and discovery in the beautiful surroundings. Children know the landmarks dotted around and can confidently explain how the environment is constantly evolving with the seasons. For example, children note that the tree might be cold because its leaves fell off during the autumn. Staff place a heavy focus on encouraging children to make links with what they know and can do. Staff use resources to promote risky play and provide highly stimulating experiences. For instance, they allow children to saw and slice their own wood from fallen branches. Teaching is highly focused to ensure outstanding outcomes for all children.
- Staff help children to become respectful of their own background and that of others. Children share their experiences from home, and differences are openly celebrated and discussed. Staff share their unique cultures and diversity. For example, they cook delicacies from their home countries so that children experience a wide range of healthy recipes. Children learn what it is to be unique. They learn curiosity and respect for one another's individual values and preferences.
- Staff use language with children that deliberately broadens their vocabulary and helps them to learn the correct names for the natural environment. For example,

during a forest walk, children use words such as 'deciduous' or 'evergreen' to describe the trees. They confidently name the Indian conker tree and note the differences between its leaves and that of the native horse chestnut tree. Children show they are excellent communicators as they explore and investigate with delight.

- Staff expertly weave frequent mathematical language into their interactions with children. For example, they encourage children to make estimates for how many times they will need to saw back and forth before their branch is sliced through. Children learn to embed counting items up to five and ten, as they add 'one more' treasure to their bucket. Staff make excellent use of the vast selection of natural resources available to support children's development across all areas of learning.
- The provider works in the setting to model excellent practice to staff to support and enhance their skills. Staff are regularly observed and receive feedback to improve practice where needed. Well-being is of the utmost importance to the provider, who ensures regular communication to develop knowledge and skills within staff roles. Staff share that they feel extremely valued and are very proud of the work that they do.
- Parents feel that their children are thriving as a result of their attendance at this distinctive and individual setting. Children with special educational needs and/or disabilities receive expertly tailored support. Staff work seamlessly with parents and external professionals to provide the very best outcomes for children. Parents comment that their child has made progress in 'leaps and bounds' because of the impressive and varied approach to learning.

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	2691614
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	10360177
Type of provision	Childcare on non-domestic premises
Registers	Early Years Register, Compulsory Childcare Register, Voluntary Childcare Register
Day care type	Full day care
Age range of children at time of inspection	2 to 4
Total number of places	15
Number of children on roll	22
Name of registered person	Harlequin Out Of School Clubs Ltd
Registered person unique reference number	RP904177
Telephone number	07734507086
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable

Information about this early years setting

Harlequins Forest School registered in 2022 and is based in Boughton Monchelsea, Kent. Children visit the forest school from their main setting in nearby Coxheath, which opens from 7.15am to 6.30pm, Monday to Friday, in term time only. The setting employs eight members of childcare staff. Of these, seven hold appropriate early years qualifications. Additionally, the forest school runs a holiday club. The setting provides funded childcare places for eligible children.

Information about this inspection

Inspector

Kate Williams

Inspection activities

- The inspector viewed the provision and discussed the safety and suitability of the premises.
- The provider joined the inspector on a learning walk and talked to the inspector about their curriculum and what they want the children to learn.
- The inspector spoke to the children to find out about their time at the setting.
- Staff spoke to the inspector during the inspection.
- The inspector observed the interactions between the staff and the children.
- Parents shared their views of the setting with the inspector.
- The provider shared a sample of key documentation at the request of the inspector.

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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