

Inspection of Mini Cowpers Pre-school Group

Hertingfordbury Cowper Primary School, Birch Green, Hertford SG14 2LR

Inspection date: 2 May 2025

Overall effectiveness	Good
The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not applicable

What is it like to attend this early years setting?

The provision is good

Children separate from their parents with confidence. They are warmly welcomed by staff at the door, which contributes to their swift and happy transition into the inviting pre-school. Staff thoughtfully prepare a range of activities that promote exploration and independent learning. They enhance children's curiosity through an engaging 'mystery box' activity, revealing a bird's nest, to spark interest. Children are encouraged to ask questions, make predictions about what materials have been used to make the nest and describe what they see. They use magnifying glasses to explore the nest in further detail. Staff skilfully weave in discussions about the pre-school's 'golden rules', reinforcing expectations, such as using 'kind and gentle hands', in context with handling the delicate nest.

Staff provide consistent emotional support, helping children to settle and feel safe. Their interactions are warm and responsive, which underpins their practice across the pre-school. Routines are well embedded, and children show high levels of familiarity and confidence. They listen for the bell to indicate transitions, such as 'carpet time' or 'lunchtime', and carry out tasks such as hand washing in preparation for lunch, with ease. Staff support turn taking and cooperative play effectively, helping children to play alongside each other and develop their social skills.

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

- Children make good progress in their learning and development. Staff have developed a sequenced and ambitious curriculum that is consistently implemented. Learning opportunities are a balance of adult-led and child-initiated experiences, such as messy play, sand and water exploration, and a daily 'wow' tray to reflect children's interests. For example, a recent topic on farm animals was developed following children's expressed interests.
- Staff place a high importance on settling-in procedures, which include home visits, allowing them to gain valuable insight into children's backgrounds and learning requirements. This information is used to adapt the curriculum, ensuring that it meets the needs of each child. Children are matched with staff they naturally gravitate towards, ensuring strong emotional bonds from the outset.
- Staff closely monitor children's learning through regular observations. They know children well and confidently identify next steps to help children progress, in particular for those who may have some gaps in their development. However, the curriculum and next steps are not always refined enough to support the most-able children to stretch and challenge them even further with their learning and development.
- There is a strong focus on developing children's communication and language

skills. Staff are skilled communicators who model positive language and interactions through singing and discussions about the day of the week, the weather and a recent farm trip. Staff extend children's learning by introducing new vocabulary, such as 'sty', as they learn about different enclosures that animals live in. They incorporate positional language, such as 'next to', as children make the enclosures out of clay and small bricks, helping them to broaden their vocabulary in meaningful contexts.

- Children thoroughly enjoy play and exploring outdoors, with staff creating areas that mirror indoor learning opportunities and support physical development. Children engage in gardening activities, such as planting strawberries and tomatoes, to promote healthy eating and sustainability. Children become immersed in the mud kitchen, cutting herbs with scissors and mixing them with mud to create pretend drinks. They use equipment, such as trikes, scooters and climbing frames, to build on their gross motor skills.
- Partnerships with parents are strong. Families are kept well informed about their children's learning through an online platform and regular updates. The use of book bags and reading records encourages families to support children's literacy development at home. Children are empowered to choose books to take home, promoting a love of reading and preparing them for school.
- Leaders work collaboratively with the committee, creating a strong leadership team. Staff are well supported. They receive regular supervision and feedback and have access to a wide range of training opportunities to ensure consistency in practice and continuous improvement. Staff feel valued and report high levels of morale. Their well-being is prioritised, and contributions are recognised through positive initiatives.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

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

What does the setting need to do to improve?

To further improve the quality of the early years provision, the provider should:

- build on the curriculum and use of children's next steps in learning to stretch and challenge the most-able children's learning even further.

Setting details

Unique reference number	2717771
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10380667
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 4
Total number of places	40
Number of children on roll	42
Name of registered person	Mini Cowpers Pre-School Group CIO
Registered person unique reference number	2717769
Telephone number	01992 679844
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable

Information about this early years setting

Mini Cowpers pre-school re-registered in 2022. It operates from a single-storey building in the grounds of Hertingfordbury Cowper Primary School and is managed by a voluntary committee. The pre-school employs six members of childcare staff, all of whom hold a qualification at level 3 or above. This includes the manager, who holds a qualification at level 6. The pre-school opens from Monday to Friday during term time only. Morning sessions operate from 9am to 11.45am. Optional lunch-club sessions operate from 12pm to 1pm, and the afternoon sessions operate from 1pm to 3pm. The pre-school provides funded early education for eligible children.

Information about this inspection

Inspector
Emily Woodhead

Inspection activities

- The manager joined the inspector on a learning walk. She talked to the inspector about the curriculum.
- The inspector observed the quality of education being provided, indoors and outdoors. She discussed the children's progress with staff.
- The setting leader and the inspector carried out joint observations of an adult-led activity.
- The inspector looked at relevant documentation. This included evidence of staff suitability, staff training records and supervision documents.
- The inspector spoke to parents during the inspection to take account of their views.

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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