

Inspection of The Ark in Dartmouth

Dartmouth Preschool, Southford School Rooms, Southford Road, Dartmouth, Devon
TQ6 9QS

Inspection date: 17 September 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

Staff provide a calm, welcoming and inviting environment for children. Staff greet children warmly at the start of the day and children settle quickly into activities of their choosing. When more children arrive and children hear the door buzzer, they excitedly say 'more friends here to play'. Children experience a sequenced curriculum that prepares them well for their future learning. Staff provide plentiful opportunities for children to be independent, confident and social. Children develop positive relationships with others. They show care for their friends and help each other with tasks, such as putting their shoes on. Children show pride in their achievements. For example, as they build towers with blocks and successfully count the number of blocks, children clap their friends' efforts.

Children enjoy engaging in activities in the local area, such as yoga sessions, library visits and seasonal walks, such as an autumn lantern walk around the church grounds. Children are excited at having their families take part in some of these activities alongside them and sharing the experience. Children enjoy quality story times that promote their early literacy skills. Staff make the experience inviting. Children use blankets and cushions to share with their friends as they enjoy listening to the story of the week. Children show confidence as storytellers as they join in with familiar parts of the story. Staff model language well for children and speak with them about feelings, and explain the hedgehog in the story is feeling frustrated. Staff explain the meaning of new words simply and clearly. Children enjoy learning that nocturnal animals are awake during the night.

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

- In the community, children learn to have confidence around new people and in new environments as they travel on the local bus to take part in forest school sessions at a local school. Children develop the physical skills of whole-body control and coordination as they help carry wood for campfires and find sturdy logs to sit on when enjoying stories in the woods.
- Staff provide daily opportunities for children to learn outside. Children dress for outside play and enjoy playing in the rain. They play imaginatively with plastic ducks in a tray filling with rainwater. As children play, they sing 'Five little ducks' together. They giggle as they make ducks splash as they swim in their pretend river.
- Children enjoy investigating different shaped autumn leaves. Staff describe differences and children listen with interest to staff's ideas. However, at times, staff do not use questioning effectively to draw out and extend children's own knowledge and extend their curiosity even further.
- Children build respectful relationships. Staff encourage children to show good manners. As children are presented with their lunch, staff gently prompt them to

use their good manners and children enthusiastically thank the member of staff who cooked today.

- Leaders support staff to extend their knowledge and skills. Staff attend training that enhances their interactions with children and sharpens the delivery of the curriculum to best support children's progress. For example, all members of staff have received training on targeted speech and language teaching and use strategies modelled by a local speech and language therapist. Staff promote a range of communication methods with children, they consistently use Makaton signing when providing instruction.
- Staff know the curriculum well and use this to plan activities based on what children already know and can do and what they need to learn next. However, at times staff do not consistently support children's next steps in learning when opportunities arise during their play.
- Staff promote children's independence well. They encourage children to do things for themselves and model strategies to succeed. For example, as children attempt to fasten their shoes, staff show the part of the shoe to hold and the part to thread through and push down. Children repeat 'thread and push' as they persevere and succeed.
- Staff form effective working relationships with parents. When children start at the nursery, staff gain information about children that supports them to thrive. Parents value bonds staff form with their key children. Parent partnerships support consistency in care routines, such as toilet training.
- Staff support children well, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), to help them achieve. Staff provide some targeted teaching to children with SEND, however, during group activities staff do not always target support as effectively as they could, and this impacts on the focus and engagement levels of some children.

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:

- promote children's next steps in learning further as they play to support the best progress for all children
- improve the use of questioning to support and extend the curiosity, knowledge and skills of all children
- review the organisation of group activities to help enhance children's focus and engagement.

Setting details

Unique reference number	2741417
Local authority	Devon
Inspection number	10407514
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	1 to 3
Total number of places	36
Number of children on roll	44
Name of registered person	The Exwick Ark Limited
Registered person unique reference number	RP903483
Telephone number	07510093261
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable

Information about this early years setting

The Ark in Dartmouth registered in 2023. It is located in Dartmouth, Devon. The nursery opens Monday to Friday, from 8am to 6pm. It has four other linked settings, all based in Devon. The nursery offers government funded places for childcare. The nursery employs seven members of staff, all hold appropriate qualifications in childcare ranging from level 3 to level 6.

Information about this inspection

Inspector
Shirley Evel

Inspection activities

- The manager joined the inspector on a learning walk and talked to the inspector about their curriculum and what they want their children to learn.
- Children spoke to the inspector during the inspection.
- Staff spoke to the inspector during the inspection.
- The inspector spoke with the nominated individual about the leadership and management of the setting.
- Staff spoke to the inspector about how they support children with SEND.
- The inspector observed the quality of education being provided, indoors and outdoors, and assessed the impact that this was having on children's learning.
- The inspector looked at relevant documentation and reviewed evidence of the suitability of staff working in the nursery.

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.

If you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk

This publication is available at <https://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/>.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

© Crown copyright 2025