

Inspection of The Early Bird Pre-School (Wheathampstead)

Wheathampstead Playgroup, Nurseries Road, Wheathampstead, St. Albans AL4 8TP

Inspection date: 23 April 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 make good progress in this warm and nurturing pre-school. They build strong bonds with staff, enabling them to feel safe and confident in their environment. Staff provide a rich and engaging curriculum, which is built from children's interests and their learning needs. For example, staff facilitate highly engaging science activities, examining basil leaves under a microscope. Staff extend the activity by introducing additional materials such as stones and crystals. They use rich, descriptive language and introduce new vocabulary, such as 'rose quartz', supporting children's language development and scientific curiosity. Staff use books to make connections with previous learning, helping children to recall and build on past experiences.

Staff ensure that routines are consistent, helping children to feel secure and understand what is expected of them. They use a gentle approach to support children's behaviour and provide plenty of praise to celebrate children's achievements, helping to raise their self-esteem. Staff advocate children's choices at every opportunity, from choosing resources encouraging exploration and learning, to choosing what fruit they would like from the menu at snack time. They support children's early mathematical development through counting how many pieces of fruit they have and help children to develop their independence as they pour their own drinks.

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

- Outdoor experiences are integral to children's learning. Staff create an enriched environment that children explore with ore and wonder. Twisted willow structures are created to provide welcoming cosy spaces for children to absorb the nature around them. Activities, such as forest school sessions, making campfires and gardening, where children grow a range of vegetables, provide opportunities for them to make choices, and become deeply absorbed in their learning.
- Transitions are managed with great care. The pre-school offers home visits to build early relationships with children and their families. Settling-in procedures are highly flexible, including a monthly Saturday group session where families can familiarise themselves with the environment at their own pace. This helps staff to fully understand the needs of children before they start and ensure that children transition smoothly.
- Staff place a strong focus on supporting children's communication and language. They are highly skilled in delivering bespoke strategies to support children with gaps in their language. They model and narrate play, which helps children to learn new words. Staff benefit from focused training opportunities to help build on their skills and focus on the needs of the children. Leaders' commitment to

continuous improvement is highly evident.

- Staff ensure that available resources meet the children's needs well and they purchase specific equipment when needed. For example, certain resources are provided to support children's physical development further. Children's learning and development is regularly assessed and monitored by staff, which helps children to make good progress. However, staff do not always sharply focus their practice to support children's next steps to ensure rapid progress.
- The pre-school demonstrates a strong commitment to engaging parents and supporting home learning. A dedicated 'Parent Hub' in the reception area offers a wide range of resources, including home-learning packs and a library to encourage reading at home. This helps to reinforce the pre-school's focus on children's communication and language development. Parents are well informed about their children's progress and the pre-school's curriculum. Staff host parent evenings and deliver presentations to support understanding of school readiness.
- Adult-led sessions are purposeful and engaging. Staff use movement and music to support listening and physical coordination. Children demonstrate strong listening skills as they respond to music and instructions. Creative activities, such as woodwork sessions, encourage children's exploration, build on their fine motor skills and promote perseverance. Children show resilience and focus as they work one-to-one with staff, using real tools under supervision.
- The pre-school's strong community ethos is reflected in a range of local trips and partnerships. Children visit the local shops, go on 'blossom walks' in the local area, and engage in charitable activities such as donating food to the food bank. Community members, including church volunteers, regularly visit to read to the children, helping them build a sense of connection and belonging within their local area.

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:

- support staff to place a sharper focus on children's next steps to help them extend and progress their learning even further.

Setting details

Unique reference number	2701839
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10380244
Type of provision	Childcare on non-domestic premises
Registers	Early Years Register, Compulsory Childcare Register
Day care type	Sessional day care
Age range of children at time of inspection	1 to 4
Total number of places	40
Number of children on roll	47
Name of registered person	Early Bird Pre-School CIC
Registered person unique reference number	RP536670
Telephone number	01582 833126
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable

Information about this early years setting

The Early Bird Pre-School (Wheathampstead) operates within the grounds of Beech Hyde primary school. It operates Monday to Friday, from 8am to 3.30pm, term time only. There are 10 members of staff, seven of whom hold early years qualifications at level 2 or above, including the manager who has a qualification at level 6. The pre-school provides funded early education for all 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 children's progress with staff.
- The setting leader and inspector carried out joint observations of activities in the Fledgling room.
- 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 and took account of written feedback provided.

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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