

Team Development

South Acton Nursery School and Children's Centre,
Willow Room Team **Acton, Ealing**



“
Every member of the team has been so generous with their thoughts and time, showing genuine interest and concern for my daughter, that Willow feels like an extension of the family unit
– parent

In 2016, Willow Room, which is based within South Acton Children's Centre, was rated 'requires improvement' by Ofsted. Staff felt the rating was unworthy of the support they gave to the 14 children aged six months to two years in their care, some of whom are known to social services. But despite an appeal launched by the Children's Centre, the rating stood.

According to centre head Beverley Kellett, the room's four staff 'were devastated and very upset at the outcome'. But she says, 'Willow team worked very hard and with support and guidance made changes to planning, which incorporated parental contributions focusing on individual children's interests, as well as to embed learning stories in everyday practice.'

After regular meetings, training and hard work to improve systems, the dedication paid off. Willow gained an Outstanding rating in May last year, just 11 months after the previous inspection. Ofsted said the setting now enabled 'all children to make exceptional progress.'

The team currently caters for fee-paying children and those who come via referral. One attendee is on a Child Protection Plan, another has a Child In Need Plan and another receives the funding as a respite measure because of a sibling with SEND.

The setting has access to a recently refurbished outdoor space, and has just expanded from offering six places to nine per day to meet parental demand. Ms Kellett says that is crucial in an area where many families live in flats without any outdoor space at all.

Now, staff plan for each child individually. Planning is shared with parents on a six-weekly basis, which requires them to contribute and support the child with learning at home. 'Learning stories' enable staff to identify these key areas and the next steps to develop them. Parents are thinking more about how learning takes place and how it is related to children's interests.

The setting has been praised for its settling-in process, which involves a home visit. A parent, who left her daughter at the centre when she was eight and a half months old, says, 'The team made the process easy and stress-free, meaning when I returned to work I did so with great confidence that my daughter would be safe and happy.'

FINALISTS

Kidzone Cranwell, Building Capabilities, Sleaford
KidzRus Nursery, Manchester
Sleepy Hollow Group, Northern Ireland
Sunbeams Day Nursery, Enhanced Quality Training, Leeds

CRITERION

Open to early years and childcare service providers who have built a high-quality staff team through good practice in recruitment and retention, training and career development



HIGHLY COMMENDED Honey Pot Day Nurseries, Liverpool

With a training system that has been judged by Ofsted to be worthy of dissemination to other providers, Honey Pot places training at the core of what it does – with every member of staff receiving some every three and a half weeks on average. This takes place in a purpose-designed training suite at its head office. A quality and training manager, who holds Early Years

Teacher Status, devises termly training programmes and performs observations before and after training on individual staff to judge its effectiveness on performance.

Data is used to look at how specific groups of children are performing and how well the setting is doing compared with national average data. The group offers training to all levels, from apprentices upwards, and now offers training to other local settings for a small fee.