

# Nursery of the Year

## Little Barn Owls Nursery and Farm School Horsham, Surrey



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Judge Wendy Scott

**B**ased on a working farm, Little Barn Owls Nursery and Farm School, Horsham, is dedicated to the wellbeing and rounded development of children, and creating an environment that helps the whole family to thrive.

Its enquiry-based approach is inspired by the pedagogy of Reggio Emilia pre-schools and outdoor practice in Scandinavia, as well as the UK's tradition of play-based learning.

There is a particular emphasis on the Characteristics of Effective Learning and how children build knowledge within a stimulating environment that includes a garden, allotment, 'farm school' and art studios, and features a rich variety of well presented provocations and open-ended resources.

Children's theories, knowledge and competencies are observed, reflected upon and considered as possible lines of enquiry for deeper research in focused sessions or child-initiated activities. Listening and responding to children's views also lie at the heart of practice.

Judge and early years consultant Wendy Scott says, 'Little Barn Owls are deserving winners because of their insightful and principled way of working, and their deep appreciation of each child.'

'Children are genuinely consulted as well as challenged, and given unhurried opportunities

for thinking through and enacting their ideas. They are encouraged to reflect on what they have done within the imaginative environment provided by the exceptionally observant and responsive staff. They also contribute to the careful documentation of their work, including advice on how to look after the animals in the nursery farm.'

Also impressing the judges are the nursery's reciprocal links with families. Consultation evenings, parent workshops and an active Parent Nursery Association all demonstrate the setting's commitment to inform, consult and work with children's families.

As well as running recent workshops on topics such as phonics and the Reggio Emilia approach, the nursery has also set up Baby Enrichment Classes to educate parents about brain development and the importance of secure attachments.

The high quality of practice is made possible by effective leadership and staff development. Ms Scott notes, 'The particular strengths of staff are recognised and they all contribute to the maintenance of exceptionally high standards in the sourcing and presentation of open-ended materials.'

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As well as continuing to reflect on its own practice, the nursery is also using its drive and enthusiasm to provide training and spread best practice. It has already published a book about one of its projects, founded the South-east Network for Enquiry-based Learning and held a professional development event, entitled 'From Interest to Enquiry'. It is now building on its links with the University of Greenwich and co-writing a module on Enquiry Based Learning for the University's MA in Education, starting next September. Practical elements of the course will be held at the nursery.

*See also 'Enabling Environments', page 29*

### Finalists

**Advantage Day Nursery, Surbiton**  
**First Steps Children's Nursery, Rathvilly School, Birmingham**  
**Little Learners Childcare, Corby**

### Criterion

Open to registered settings offering full daycare for children from birth to five (private, voluntary or maintained sector)