

The Ark Child Okeford

Prospectus

Welcome to The Ark Child Okeford. We are a childcare setting providing care and education for children aged from 0 - 11 years. Located in the heart of North Dorset, between Blandford Forum and Sturminster Newton, on the premises of St. Nicholas Primary School, in the village of Child Okeford. We open from 8.00am until 6.00pm for 50 weeks per year, closing for one week at the end of August and one week at Christmas. We are a community group, a company limited by guarantee and a registered charity.

Our aims are:

- To enhance the development and education of children in a parent-involving, community-based group.
- To offer good quality, affordable childcare
- To provide a caring, safe, secure and stimulating environment for children from 0-11 years
- To work within a framework that ensures equality of opportunity for all children and families.

The Ark Child Okeford – History

The Ark started in 1967 as Child Okeford Playgroup, and was run by a committee of parents at Child Okeford Village Hall for 3+ year olds. In May 1994, it was registered as a charity and later that same year moved into St. Nicholas Primary School. Over the years the group expanded its hours and changed its name to Child Okeford Pre-school, but it was not until 2006 that a major change took place. After five years of fundraising, an extension was built to the school to accommodate a full day nursery, and in January 2007 the Preschool became The Ark, taking children from 0 – 11 years of age and incorporating Breakfast, After-school and Holiday Clubs. In 2008 The Ark became a company registered by guarantee with the official title of The Ark Child Okeford. However, it remains a registered charity, run by parents, and any excess of income over expenditure is ploughed back into the group.

As the years passed and the Ark became over-subscribed, especially for Breakfast, After-school and Holiday Clubs, the need for more capacity became urgent. Further fundraising enabled us to obtain, renovate and reconfigure a mobile classroom and the school allowed us to expand into another area adjacent to The Ark's garden. In July 2019 we opened this much needed new space, The Raft, which has provided our school-aged children with their own separate facilities and garden area.

The Ark Committee

The Ark is a registered charity and not-for-profit organisation run by an elected committee of trustees, which ensures that major decision-making is in the hands of the parents who use the group. The trustees are responsible for overseeing both policy and practice, and for the employment of staff.

Why not join us? We are always keen to welcome new trustees to our committee – the only real requirement is a passion for helping The Ark to thrive and continue to provide the high quality childcare of which we are very proud.

No time for a committee but still keen to help? We are always on the lookout for willing volunteers to help with fundraising events; provide raffle prizes; help with the garden or run an activity/talk with the children. Speak to the nursery manager if you have any ideas or skills to offer. We need all our parents to be involved and we value your help with fundraising events.

Admissions

We arrange our waiting list in order of date of the application received for each year group. We are flexible about attendance patterns; however we do recommend children start with a minimum of two sessions a week. We do not take bookings more than nine months in advance of commencement, unless there is no availability until later, or a sibling is already attending The Ark who will continue to do so during the intervening period. To secure a childcare place we ask parents to pay a deposit of 50% of four weeks' fees when booking. This deposit is refundable when your child leaves The Ark, but **not** if you do not take up the place you have

booked. Fees are payable monthly, in advance, and we request one month's notice for any reduction of hours or cancellation of a childcare place.

Session Times & Prices

THE ARK FEE STRUCTURE FROM 1ST JANUARY 2026

CATEGORY	DETAIL	The Ark
Babies	All Day 8.00 – 6.00	£59.50
	Morning 8.00 – 12.30	£31.20
	Afternoon 1.30 – 6.00	£30.00
	Lunch Hour 12.30 – 1.30	£6.05
Toddlers	Breakfast 8.00 – 8.45	£5.00
	Morning 8.45 – 11.30	£17.60
	Lunch Hour 11.30 – 12.30	£6.05
	Afternoon 12.45 – 3.15	£16.30
	After School 3.15 – 4.15	£6.05
	After School 4.15 – 5.15	£6.05
	After School 5.15 – 6.00	£5.25
	Full After School 3.15 – 6.00	£14.00
	All Day 8.00 – 6.00	£59.50
	Hot Lunch	£3.35
Pre-School	Tea	£1.20
	Breakfast 8.00 – 8.45	£5.00
	Morning 8.45 – 11.30	£17.00
	Lunch Hour 11.30 – 12.30	£6.05
	Afternoon 12.45 – 3.15	£15.60
	After School 3.15 – 4.15	£6.05
	After School 4.15 – 5.15	£6.05
	After School 5.15 – 6.00	£5.25
	Full After School 3.15 – 6.00	£14.00
	All Day 8.00 – 6.00	£56.00
	Hot Lunch	£3.35
	Tea	£1.20
School	Breakfast 8.00 -8.45	£6.05
	Full After School 3.15 -5.45	£14.00 * £11.90 (2 nd Sibling) * £12.60 (3 rd Sibling)
	All Day Holiday Club 8.00 – 6.00	£36.00 * £30.60 (2 nd Sibling) * £32.40 (3 rd Sibling)
	Half Day Holiday Club 8.00 – 12.30/1.30 – 6.00	£20.00 * £17.00 (2 nd Sibling) * £18.00 (3 rd Sibling)
	Holiday Club Lunch Hour 12.30 – 1.30	£6.05 * £5.14 (2 nd Sibling) * £5.45 (3 rd Sibling)
	Hot Lunch	£3.60
	Tea	£2.05
Discounts	After School Club (School age only)	*15% for 2 nd sibling *10% for 3 rd sibling
	Holiday Club (School age only)	*15% for 2 nd sibling *10% for 3 rd sibling

SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disability) and Children with Additional Needs

The Ark prides itself on being a fully inclusive nursery. We aim to offer all children who attend The Ark a safe, fun and stimulating environment where they can learn through play and work towards the Early Years Foundation Stage targets. We have two trained SEND Coordinators who attend regular training to keep up to date and staff have training in Promoting Early Interactive Conversation - Dorset, Picture Exchange Communication System, Sign-a-long, and Common Assessment Framework. The Ark work closely with outside agencies and professionals such as Portage, Speech and Language and Physiotherapists; all programmes will be carried out in the setting by the SENDCo or child's key worker. We fully support children with an Education, Health and Care plan and where required an Individual Plan will be put in place by the SENDCo and child's key worker.

The Ark is a modern, purpose-built setting and is completely accessible for all, with the use of a disability bay for parking. The main entrance is on level ground and there is access via a ramp to the garden. We have a ground floor toilet, wheelchair accessible toilet and facilities for intimate care for older children with additional needs. All our rooms have adjustable height tables, making activities accessible for those in wheelchairs. There is a large outside area which is extremely well equipped, again much of which is accessible to children in wheelchairs. Staff in all rooms use Signalong to communicate with children with language difficulties.

We offer your child

- A specially tailored curriculum for each child.
- Individual care and attention made possible by a high ratio of qualified staff to children.
- Fun and friendship with children and adults.
- The support of a personal key worker.

Baby Room

Our Baby Room has space for up to six babies under two years of age. Staff within the room create a safe, caring, calm and homely atmosphere that complements home routines as much as possible. Each baby and child has their own key worker who carefully plans appropriate activities for their individual interests and age and stage of development.

Daily activities include lots of sensory play both in and outdoors. Examples of some of our activities to encourage imagination, communication and creativity are: singing; sharing books and listening to stories; cornflour; play dough; sand; water; cereals; treasure baskets containing natural objects such as feathers, pots, pans and vegetables. All babies access our purpose built baby garden on a daily basis and, with written parental consent, enjoy local walks around the village and trips to the park.

There is a daily exchange of information between parents and key workers; verbally, in daily dairies and in their online learning journal, Tapestry. This includes information about your baby's day: sleep times; snacks and meals; nappy changes and their activities throughout the day at The Ark. The gate leading to the Toddler Room means that both babies and toddlers can see each other throughout the day, sometimes playing together when appropriate. Transition to the Toddler Room at the age of two years, therefore, takes place seamlessly and naturally.

Cots, sleep mats and bedding are provided for babies and children to rest or sleep. Each baby or child will have his/her own bedding, kept in named, cotton drawstring bags. Bedding will be laundered by us. Sleeping babies are frequently checked. Babies will be held whilst bottle feeding, by the same carer, and feeding will follow each baby's individual needs. The nursery will provide beakers, bowls, plates, cutlery and bibs.

We ask you to bring in nappies, wipes and a change of clothes, bottles of milk, labelled with your baby's name. Meals can be provided for babies from weaning age in line with each baby's individual needs and with detailed consultation with parents.

Toddler Room

Our Toddler Room has space for up to eight children per session. The Toddler Room is designed to create a calm and engaging atmosphere where children develop their own individuality and opinions, and learn how to build relationships with their peers and familiar adults.

We provide many opportunities and activities for your child to develop their independence and confidence; for example, helping to prepare their own snack, manage their own clothing, and wash and dry their hands. We offer the children a range of activities; sensory, creative, as well as singing, listening to stories, music and

movement, gardening, imaginative play and going on walks around the village or trips to the park. There is a daily exchange of information between parents and key workers, verbally, and in your child's online learning journal, Tapestry.

The toddlers and pre-school children share the garden space, providing plenty of opportunity for the children to interact with each other as well as with the adults in the Pre-school Room. Close to the time your child reaches three years of age they will begin to start their transition into Pre-school. Their key person will provide you with information about the routine in Pre-school, the staff members who work in the room and your child's settling sessions. The settling sessions will provide further opportunity for your child to become more familiar with the routine and resources available to them as well as getting to know their new key person.

Pre-school

In our Pre-school Room we make learning fun, build positive relationships and promote children's confidence and independence. We provide a variety of activities to cover all areas of learning. Our activities are mainly child-led with a small number of adult-led, planned activities. Activities include large and small construction; mark-making; painting; music; puzzles; games; ICT; books; role play; using malleable materials; the sand and water trays and small world toys.

Each child is individually assessed throughout the year. This helps us review their progress and gives us the opportunity to share children's development and experiences with parents using our online learning journal, Tapestry. It also helps support their transition to school. We offer free-flow play, allowing children to choose whether to play and learn inside or explore and learn outside in our large, well equipped garden.

We promote independence, providing the children with a rolling "snack café". This helps them manage time, prepare their own snack and make their own choices. Small group time takes place once in the morning and once in the afternoon. This helps develop vocabulary and communication skills, allowing children to share ideas and develop social skills. These groups also promote the children's early phonics, literacy and numeracy skills in preparation for school.

Tapestry

Tapestry is the software package designed for nurseries which we use to record a special record of your child's experiences, development and learning journey throughout their time with us. Using photos, videos, and diary entries, our staff, along with the child's parents or carers, and the child themselves if they're ready, 'weave' the story of the child and how they are growing and developing. The Tapestry platform enables these memories to be kept as a permanent record of each child's unique journey. All information held in the platform is stored securely and can be downloaded and shared as required. Parents or carers are able to view their child's progress, the activities provided for them, and how much fun they're having, whilst also uploading their own comments and media. The communication between staff and parents that Tapestry enables, helps build a shared understanding of how every child can reach their full potential.

Settling In

Starting at a nursery is a big step, both for children and for their families. A child who is tense or unhappy will not be able to play or learn properly, so it is important for parents and childcare staff to work together to help the child feel confident and secure in the group. This takes longer for some children than for others and parents should not feel worried if their child takes a while to settle.

These suggestions are intended to help you make it a successful and happy time:

Be prepared to stay with your child on the first day, and for as many sessions as necessary, until he/she is settled and happy to part from you. If your child has never attended a nursery before, please stay for a minimum of two sessions, on the third leave for an hour or so. Every child is different and we suggest you talk to the Manager and/or the appropriate Room Leader for individual advice.

Try to spend some time in the group if you can, or attend open days/evenings, so that you know what goes on there. This will make it easier for you to talk to your child afterwards about what he/she has been doing. Welcome the paintings or other mark-making your child might occasionally bring home. Many of the activities we offer provide your child with excellent learning experiences, and do not have an end product.

If you are approached to help occasionally, please try to come if you possibly can. It can mean a lot to a child to see parents actively involved. If you are not free to attend Pre-school sessions, it may be that there are ways you could help at other times, for example, if you play a musical instrument or have a skill to share with the children.

What to wear

In order to feel free to explore and experiment with all kinds of materials, including messy ones, it is best to send children dressed in clothes which are easily washable and/or not too new. It is good for children to practise the skills which will make them independent. Simple clothing which they can handle themselves will enable them to go to the toilet when they want to and to put on and take off their outdoor clothes without being too dependent on other people's help.

Transitions

We believe that transition periods should be slow. Children need to feel secure throughout the process. When children in the Toddler Room are approaching three years of age, and are ready, both socially and emotionally, to move to the Pre-School Room, children will be taken to visit for short periods accompanied by their key worker. Staff will keep you informed about this process and will introduce you to your child's new key worker.

During the summer term, children in the Pre-School Room who will be starting at St. Nicholas School the following September, begin their transition visits. Each week every child is taken to play in the reception class for an hour, accompanied by a member of staff from the Pre-School Room.

In line with government policy, when your child leaves The Ark, staff pass on transition sheets containing information about your child's individual development, to the new setting or school that your child will attend. If your child attends another setting at the same time as attending The Ark, your child's key worker will arrange to visit the other setting in order to exchange information.

The Raft

Our **Breakfast, Afterschool and Holiday Clubs** for school aged children take place in The Raft.

The Raft was opened in July 2019 primarily for children aged 5-11 years. Breakfast Club runs from 8.00am until 8.45am, and our After School Club runs from 3.15pm until 5:45pm during term time. Holiday Club runs from 8.00am until 5:45pm during school holidays.

The Breakfast, After School and Holiday Clubs provide a homely and relaxed atmosphere. Outside play and socialising are a large part of our day. Facilities include a wonderful garden with swings, climbing frame and a den building area. The school playing field is at our disposal providing opportunities to play football, rounders, tennis and other traditional games. Summertime water fun days add to the variety of activities. Children are also free to choose from a number of indoor activities including arts and crafts, pool, games, cooking projects, game console or just simply relaxing in our chill-out areas with a book. Regular themed days and formally organised trips are undertaken during Holiday Club periods.

We hope that your child's time with us will be a very happy and productive one. If you have any questions, or if we can be of any help, please contact the staff at any time.

Staff

We are proud of the high ratio of adults to children in our group. This ensures individual attention to the needs and development of each child.

Training

We are constantly in touch with new thinking in the fields of childcare and education and care. We receive a fortnightly magazine offering practical advice and up to date information, and have access to a range of professionally produced publications. Parents may ask to see any of these. In addition, on-going training is available through Dorset Council Early Years team. Informal training is available through local forum meetings, and parents will be informed about these. We receive support and guidance from an Early Years & Childcare Adviser.

Policies

Our policies are available at The Ark and can also be downloaded from our website

All our policies are designed to offer the best possible experience for the children and families in the group. Our policies are reviewed on a regular basis and comments and suggestions from parents are always welcome.

We hope you will find the following information useful:

- We have a 'Safer Eating & Nutrition Policy'. We can provide nutritious cooked lunches, at a very reasonable cost.
- Children are given whole milk or water at snack time. Water is available for the children to help themselves to throughout the sessions.
- Old clothes are best for playing in, but we do provide aprons for messy activities.
- Please bring a change of clothes, and indoor shoes in a drawstring bag, and PLEASE NAME ALL ITEMS OF CLOTHING. The children need to wear boots for outside play during the winter months.
- Please make sure you close the outside door when you leave the building, and MAKE SURE YOU BOLT ALL GATES AFTER YOU.
- There is parking at the front of the school for disabled parents or carers. Otherwise, **please DO NOT park in the staff car park between the hours of 8.15am and 4.00pm during the school term.** There is also limited parking in the recreation ground next to the school, with safe access, by footpath.
- Smoking is not allowed on the premises at all.

Illness:

- COVID-19 - No one should enter the grounds or premises if they have symptoms of COVID-19. The most common symptoms of COVID-19 are a new, continuous cough or a high temperature (over 37.8 degrees). If your child displays symptoms of COVID-19 then a PCR test must be taken and the results be negative before the return to Nursery. If your child tests positive for COVID-19, they must self isolate for 10 days before returning to nursery.
- Please do not bring your child if she/he is unwell and/or has had a temperature above normal within the last 24 hours.
- Sickness or diarrhoea – no attendance until 48 hours has passed since the last attack.
- High temperature – no attendance until a normal temperature **without medication** for 24 hours
- If in doubt either seek medical advice, ask one of the staff, or keep your child at home.

Polo Shirts and Sweatshirts

We have a stock of 'The Ark' polo and sweatshirts which are sold at cost price. Please see Sarah or Tracey.

Management and Administration

The Ark is run by an elected committee of trustees, which ensures that major decision-making is in the hands of the parents who use the group. The committee is responsible for overseeing both policy and practice, and for the employment of members of staff. Our Annual General Meeting, at which the committee of trustees for the following year is elected, is held in October.

Trustees

Chairperson & safeguarding	Emma Nicholls
Treasurer	Amy Rose
Secretary	Florence Horsey

Nursery Manager	Sarah McNab
Deputy Manager	Tash Pike
Health & Safety	Florence Horsey
Staff & Parent Representative	Kathy Pym
Other members	Alice Witcher
	Jenny Young
	Georgina Mclean
	Holly Parsons – Fox
	Rebecca Baker

Contact details:

The Ark

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