

PARENT RESEARCH AT SIXPENNY ALDBOURNE

Tuesday August 21st 2007.

1. Thomas and Sophie's mum

Why did you choose Sixpenny Aldbourne

- Location – we live in Aldbourne and work in Swindon (mum works 2 days per week)
- Children's Friends also attend, many from the NCT so they have known a lot of the children from meeting them at NCT.

What do you like about it?

- Community feel
- Clean, helpful, friendly
- The staff are dedicated to the children
- "They get cuddles if they need them – they're never left on their own or unhappy".

2. Girl aged 7 months came first, followed by sibling.

Why choose Sixpenny Aldbourne?

Location – live in Lambourn, not many other nurseries within a 10minute drive.

Looked at Sixpenny Aldbourne and Hillsborough, Bishopstone.

Didn't like Hillsborough because;

- Not much structure
- Disorganized – they weren't expected even though they'd rung to make an appointment to visit
- In the middle of nowhere

What do you like about Sixpenny Aldbourne?

- Care and attention
- Home-cooked food
- Men are part of the staff like now – most places are all female
- Outside play area with an undercover area so they can go out a lot
- "the wonders around the village, like the park and swings"
- Parents' evening – held about every 6 months where they get feedback about their children's activities and progress.
- Flexibility when a child is at pre-school with pick-up and collection; plus the walking round the village encompassing the pre-school, picking up and collecting older sibling.
- Different themes each week – eg food from around the world.

Don't like?

Staff changes – quite a few, and all at the same time. But that can be OK as long as it's handled sympathetically, and children have to learn to handle change anyway.

"It's a big investment so you have to get it right"

“It’s good that they’re doing this, some proper PR”.

3. Mum works in Egham fulltime, dad also works a distance away. Live in Ramsbury. Baby joined Sixpenny Aldbourne at 6 months

Why Sixpenny Aldbourne?

Looked first at Mildenhall but it was a bit too new and felt empty. It was bigger and quiet because they visited at sleeptime.

Aldbourn was

- more homely
- more active
- had a really excellent show around by Philippa.
- Also thought about Little Rainbows but they visited Sixpenny Aldbourne first so in the end didn’t even bother to see Little Rainbows because they got a good gut feel about Sixpenny Aldbourne – country location, in a village, homey.
- All staff, especially in the baby room, are really good at their job, which reassured her. “They’re all experts at their job”.

“I’ve never worried about leaving her here at all.”

When the baby is sick the staff will ring, but will nearly always try to sort it out as they know she can’t get back for at least an hour.

Don’t like?

Staff changes which seem to happen all in one go.

The baby isn’t bothered but you do as a parent build a relationship with the staff.

4. Lives in Aldbourne, works part-time in Swindon. Started with Sixpenny Aldbourne when in the original cottage. 2 girls Izzy and Jessica, who both started when they were babies.

Why Sixpenny Aldbourne?

- Main reason is the location – easy drop off on the way to work. Fits part-time working hours.
- Was very homey in the original location – have maintained that.
- Outside play
- Lots of different activities – both children love crafts, plus music lady and yoga.
- Childcare vouchers scheme; both husband and wife get childcare vouchers through work which Sixpenny take.
- Open during the holidays. (Both children go to the pre-school; as there are ‘not many Aldbourne village children at Sixpenny Aldbourne’, the children therefore don’t get to mix with the children they’ll be going to school with. Would prefer the children to go to the pre-school all the time, but they’re not open in school holidays, and their After School club is too old for her girls. (Izzy

goes to pre-school on a Thursday, Mon – Wed at Sixpenny Aldbourne; Jessica also goes to pre-school on Thursdays, plus Wednesday all day.)

Don't like?

- Staff turnover. The girls establish a relationship with a member of staff, then they move on.
- Sixpenny don't seem able to keep their staff.
- We don't always get introduced to the new staff.
- The Key Worker is important in being kept informed about your children, but it's difficult when you don't know who the key worker is for each child.

"The parents dislike it when there are changes."

5. Lucy's mum Paula

Lives in Russley Park near Baydon, works in Newbury.

Choice was between Sixpenny Aldbourne and Springburn just north of Jct 16 of the M4.

Why Sixpenny Aldbourne?

- Word of mouth – made friends at NCT and many of them came to Sixpenny, and all had really good things to say. So came through recommendation.
- The children she meets here are the friends she'll move on with.
- The rabbit – Lucy loves it.
- Village location
- "It had a really lovely feel about it".

Will keep Lucy here even if they have a second child, when she would give up work and therefore drop the number of days Lucy spends at Sixpenny Aldbourne; very good for her socializing.

6. Jason

Lives in Ogbourne St Andrew, works full-time in Swindon. 2 boys of 4 and 2, been at Sixpenny Aldbourne since they were 6 months old.

Why Sixpenny Aldbourne?

- Recommended by a friend who had done all the research. They then visited both Sixpenny Aldbourne and a nursery in Swindon. Swindon Nursery was awful – children were not looked after and were screaming.
- Location – fresh air. "great place, great setting."
- Children all looked happy, as did the staff.
- Facilities
- Cosy, warm feeling about it, safety, consistency– "I realised suddenly that this is really important and I've got to get it right."

Don't like?

- Big changes of staff, all at the same time.
- Big staff turnover would indicate that the staff are unhappy, poorly paid, have no progression.
- What's not handled well is that rafts of people come in and out, and we need to be formally introduced to new staff. New staff need to be invited to come and talk to us about our children and our aspirations for them.
- Quality of information about the boys from the staff is not good. "He eats all his food" – well, he does that anyway, so what else?
- Too many times I've picked up Tom with a dirty nappy – are they being looked after properly? Tom cut his head and his version of events was different from that given by the staff.
- It's apparent that it is a business not a nursery. (Felt this happened when Minal was built, when he felt that Sixpenny Aldbourne became less homey)

When asked "Would you recommend Sixpenny Aldbourne to others he said; "I'm glad I haven't got a younger child coming up behind these 2 – it would be difficult".

"At times I'm an advocate; I'm not really one at the moment – but I haven't seen other nurseries, and I'm not unhappy."

How to improve things?

- Consistency of staff is difficult, and that's understood. But is looking for more passion from the staff about the children, and about what the boys have been doing all day.
- Better overlap between old ad new staff – eg a fixed 2 month notice period which would provide a robust handover system. "We then wouldn't always begin a relationship with a new member of staff from a standing start."

"It's good that you're doing this – it's important".

Summary

1. Main positives

- Location
- Homely and safe
- Outdoor area
- Great staff

2. Main negative

Staff change.

Maybe we should be more upfront about it. eg

"This is a young sector, with national staff turnover between 30 and 40%. Our turnover of staff is only X%, and many of our managers have been with us for X years, often moving between locations as the chance arises.

Because our staff tend to be young, some will inevitably move on, to other Sixpenny locations, other nurseries, or out of the industry. It is a fact in this industry that many staff leave, move on or go on

holiday in the summer, when they're away with parents or friends. We're aware of the impact this can have on the children and parents who have built up relationships with the staff and key workers, so do everything we can to minimise this impact.

- Formal introduction to new staff for parents
- 2 month contracted notice period for all staff joining from X date, for a managed handover.
- Regular newsletter with information about new staff.
- Bulletin board at each location with pix and info about the staff
- Trained temp staff who return year in year out
- No duplication of holidays for staff looking after any one room