

MEN BUSINESS

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Time to give Susie support she deserves

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Nursery school that parents voted top of the class

(And the children love it, too)

CELEBRATIONS are under way at a local nursery after it was named one of the best in the UK.

Oakfield Nursery School in Altrincham was awarded second prize in the National Day Nurseries Association nursery of the year awards, beating off competition from dozens of other nurseries.

Proprietor Roisin Moriarty travelled to London with her parents and nursery manager Jayne Winstanley to collect the trophy at a glittery award ceremony at the Savoy Hotel.

Margaret Hodge, minister for children, and TV's most famous child carer, Jacqui Sales - Ramona the nanny in TV's *Cold Feet* - presented the awards. More than half a million youngsters now attend UK day nurseries, which have increased in number by 34 per cent in the last three years.

Family business

Founded 35 years ago, Oakfield is the oldest nursery in Cheshire and one of the longest established in the UK. A real family business, it was established by Roisin's mother, Finola, who was a health visitor before setting up the business. A stickler for standards, Finola succeeded in establishing the nursery as one of the finest in the region, a standard she is proud to see Roisin upholding and devoting to.

Roisin taught at Oakfield for a year before taking over the management role. She finally bought the business from her parents in 2006. Oakfield now employs 27 full time staff and is registered to look after 80 children from six months to five years of age.

The on-going education and training of staff is positively encouraged - over 40 courses and seminars were attended in 2008 alone. Among the wide range of activ-

ities enjoyed by the children on a daily basis are yoga, ballet, football and French.

"This is the first competition we have ever entered," says Roisin. "And we only entered this because it was voted for by parents, who are the real judges of how good a nursery really is."

The rigorous judging process involved the NDA sending entry forms to each of the UK's 10,000 nurseries, which were then forwarded for completion to the parents of each child. They were asked to rate the nursery across a range of categories, including the happiness and social and intellectual development of their child, help-

fulness of staff, safety of the nursery quality of food provided and range of activities.

The feedback was analysed by the NDA and a shortlist of nurseries drawn up. Each of these was then visited by Tracy McDonough, a former nursery manager and assessor for the NDA.

"We were genuinely staggered by the feedback we received from parents," adds Roisin. "All the written comments on the forms were glowing and genuinely brought tears to our eyes."

"Ninety per cent of them marked us as 'excellent' in all areas, while the remainder gave us a combination of 'wonder'

and 'very good'. We're already looking at ways to ensure we get 'excellent' across the board in the future!"

"We refuse to get complacent and will continue to work hard to provide the best quality education for our children. We are proud of what we have achieved - and our long waiting list shows that we're obviously doing something right."

It wasn't just good news for Roisin and her staff, though. All parents who returned forms were entered into a prize draw for a £3,000 voucher from Mark Warner. Holidays, which sponsored the awards. The ThankBoos from Knutsford, whose three-year-old daughter goes to Oakfield, were the lucky winners.

Roisin continued, "Our work is so important. We learn more up to the age of five than at any other time. The way children are cared for nurtured and educated at this stage is of vital importance - not just for them, but also for society as a whole."

Real tribute

"One of the main rewards in this business is seeing busy happy children developing and learning each day. Receiving this award is the icing on the cake and a real tribute to our staff for their ongoing dedication, commitment and enthusiasm."

Minister for children Margaret Hodge said: "Day nurseries make an enormous contribution to the lives of children and families. They help ensure that parents have a choice in deciding where their child will be most happy, secure and well looked after while they go to work. These awards are the first where parents voted to decide award winners, setting an example of excellence for nurseries to aspire to."



■ WELCOME at the gates... Finola (left) and Roisin Moriarty



■ PRIZE PRESENTERS: Children's minister Margaret Hodge (left) and Cold Feet nanny Ramona (Jacqui Sales)

Web firm criticised over bonuses for execs

BY LOUISA NESBITT

INTERNET firm lastminute.com was under fire today over an "excessive" new bonus scheme for its executive team.

Pension and investment Research Consultants wants its members to oppose the packages at next month's AGM, describing performance targets as "not sufficiently stretching".

"The lobby group is also urged its members to abstain on the re-election of chairman Adrian Leighton.

Lastminute.com is a specialist travel site with a new annual bonus plan, which will mean 50 per cent of any bonus is payable in cash and the remainder in shares.

Executive directors and other senior managers will be able to earn a maximum bonus equivalent to 150 per cent of their salary.

Bonuses will be awarded if the company achieves growth of 20 per cent over three years, as well as the current scheme.

Last year three of lastminute.com's five executive directors received cash bonuses of 35 per cent after meeting performance targets, while two others received more than doubled his salary.

The £200,000 combined basic pay of the five rose to £1m one bonus and benefits were included.

Chief executive Brent Hoberman received a £22,000 bonus on top of his £150,000 basic pay, while co-founder Martha Lane Fox, who has quit the day-to-day running of the firm, was awarded £48,000 on top of her £140,000 salary.

PRIC also said that during the past year questions had been asked about the time Mr Leighton could devote to his post.

"In the absence of justification from the company, PRIC recommends that clients abstain on Mr Leighton's re-election."

Lastminute.com rejected claims that its pay scheme was excessive, saying that it had no point in setting targets that were not achievable. The firm's average bonus was the lowest paid executive in the FTSE 250.