Health and Human Services

Iowa Department of Health And Human Services

CHILD CARE CENTER ANNUAL EVALUATION

Name of Center: Apple Tree Preschool and Learning Center

Provider No.: 30124

Address: 3835 Indian Hills DR, Sioux City, IA, 51104

County: Woodbury

Director's Name: Stacy Eldridge

On-Site Supervisor: Cassandra Vaske

Phone Number: 7122391002

E-Mail: nsat.director@gmail.com

HHS Visit Date: 08/06/2026

Licensing Period: 07/01/2025 to 08/01/2027

Fire Inspection:

Date Inspected: 07/07/2026

Comments:

Report Visit Type:

- [ ] PTO
- [X] Licensing Visit
- [ ] Drop In
- [ ] Administrative Change

License Type:

- [X] Full
- [ ] Provisional

Quality initiative:

Quality Rating: 1

- [ ] Accrediation

Program Duration:

- [X] Year-Round
- [ ] School Year
- [ ] Summer Only

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HOURS:	*Year-round*	*School-Year*	*Summer Only*
Sunday			
Monday	6:30 AM to 6:00 PM		
Tuesday	6:30 AM to 6:00 PM		
Wednesday	6:30 AM to 6:00 PM		
Thursday	6:30 AM to 6:00 PM		
Friday	6:30 AM to 6:00 PM		
Saturday			

Program Population Served:

- [ ] Infant(0-<24 Months)
- [X] Toddler
- [X] PreSchool
- [X] School Age
- [ ] All Ages

LICENSE CAPACITY	Infants	2 Years	Preschool	School-Aged	Capacity
General			60	40	100
Summer					0

1. Basic Overview

On August 6, 2026, I completed an unannounced licensing visit at Apple Tree Childcare Center. I met with Whitney Lacek, who is currently transitioning into the director role. Whitney has worked at Apple Tree in multiple capacities since the age of 16 and brings extensive hands-on experience to the position. She is in the process of obtaining her Child Development Associate (CDA) credential, which will further support her administrative and classroom responsibilities.

The center consists of five classrooms and serves children aged two years through school age. Apple Tree operates Monday through Friday from 6:30 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. The facility has a secured entrance. All areas of the program were observed, including classroom environments and activities, nutrition practices, health and safety procedures, playground conditions, transportation and field trip procedures, and an administrative records review. At the time of the visit, the center had 67 children enrolled, with 34 children present.

Each classroom contained age-appropriate visual supports, including the alphabet, numbers, colors, shapes, and additional instructional materials. I also observed real-life photos depicting children completing tasks such as handwashing, providing clear and relatable guidance. Staff support children in identifying and expressing their emotions and in learning strategies for self-regulation. The center utilizes the Creative Curriculum, which offers a structured, developmentally appropriate framework that guides lesson planning, supports intentional teaching, and promotes child-initiated learning. The curriculum helps teachers individualize instruction based on each child's developmental level, interests, and needs. It also emphasizes social–emotional development, which aligns with the center's focus on helping children identify their emotions and practice self-regulation.

The center's furniture arrangement supports smooth transitions and classroom flow. Spaces are organized to accommodate a

variety of activities and to facilitate lining up for outdoor play or meals. Numerous photographs of children and their families are displayed throughout the classrooms, helping foster connection and belonging. Children's artwork is showcased across rooms, reinforcing creativity and pride in their work. Classroom management was observed to be effective, including smooth transitions to and from outdoor play.

Meals and snacks—including breakfast, lunch, and afternoon snack—are prepared and served on site following CACFP guidelines. I observed appropriate food preparation and storage practices. Documentation of monthly fire and tornado drills is current, along with playground inspection records. Radon testing has been completed and is within the normal range. The furnace has been inspected within the past year. Playground equipment and surfacing are in good repair, and the center is in the process of distributing pea gravel evenly throughout the area.

The center offers field trips, including swimming lessons and gymnastics. When speaking with the children, they reported the splash pad and nature center as their favorite summer activities. Apple Tree provides transportation for school-age children attending the program after school, supporting continuity of care. Vehicles receive regular maintenance and are kept in good repair.

Please update emergency preparedness plan.

The goal of this program is to increase enrollment.

2. Identify Observed Strengths of the program

This center offers insurance to their staff. Providing insurance to employees is a significant benefit that supports staff well-being and stability. Access to health coverage helps employees stay healthy, reduce financial stress, and feel valued by their employer. This often leads to better staff retention, increased job satisfaction, and a more consistent, experienced workforce—directly contributing to the overall quality and continuity of care for children in the program.

The center is currently rated at IQ4K Level 1, which indicates that they meet all Iowa's foundational licensing and registration requirements. Level 1 is the entry point in Iowa's Quality Rating and Improvement System and reflects that the program has established the basic health, safety, and administrative standards required for operation. Achieving this level also shows the center's commitment to participating in Iowa's quality system and beginning the process of continuous improvement toward higher quality practices.

The center participates in quality assessment practices that support social-emotional development. One of the tools used in early childhood programs is the Teaching Pyramid Observation Tool (TPOT). TPOT is a structured classroom observation and interview instrument designed to evaluate how well teachers implement evidence-based practices from the Pyramid Model, which promotes positive social-emotional skills and supports children in learning appropriate behaviors. The tool helps identify strengths, areas for improvement, and professional development needs, ultimately guiding teachers in creating supportive, responsive, and well-managed classroom environments.

3. Identify the aspects that fall below the standard

109.4(2): Postings are required for:The certificate of license.Notice of exposure to communicable disease.Notice of decision to deny, suspend, or revoke center license or reduce to provisional status.Mandatory reporting requirements.Notice of availability of the handbook.Name and contact information of the HHS licensing consultant.Program activities and menus.All postings shall be conspicuously placed at the main entrance of the center.

109.7(2): Center directors and all staff have the required contact hours of training.

109.9(2)a-c: All files contain sufficient information to allow the center to contact the parent or emergency contact at any time child is in center's care as well as who can pick up the child as authorized by the parent.

109.9(2)d: All files contain sufficient information and authorization to allow the center to secure emergency medical and dental services at any time child is in center's care.

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109.10(13)b: Emergency instructions, phone numbers, and diagrams for fire, tornado, and flood shall be visibly posted and documented at least once a month for fire and tornado. Records shall be maintained for current and previous year.

4. Any corrective action plans, provisional license, and safety plans-steps to get into compliance

5. Special Notes/Recommendations

Targeted Assessment: Behavior Management

I discussed with Whitney about her oversight of behavior management related to helping childcare staff: 1) Understand expectations, 2) managing frustrations, 3) monitor performance.

The staff at this center have been trained in Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), an evidence-based framework that promotes the use of proactive, consistent, and developmentally appropriate strategies to support children's social–emotional development and positive behavior. PBIS training equips staff with tools to model expectations, reinforce positive behaviors, and respond to challenges in a calm, supportive manner. This contributes to a stable, predictable classroom environment where children can thrive.

Each employee signs the employee handbook, which clearly outlines expectations, policies, and professional guidelines. Staff communicate effectively with one another and demonstrate willingness to collaborate and ask for support when needed. During my visit, I observed a staff member requesting assistance, and Whitney responded promptly by going to the classroom, reflecting strong teamwork and responsive leadership.

The center also utilizes cameras within the program to support supervision, reinforce safety practices, and provide opportunities for administrative monitoring. Regular evaluations of staff engagement with children are conducted by the director through scheduled observations, ensuring ongoing coaching, accountability, and professional growth.

Director needs to email consultant by 10/31/26 confirming that all aspects the fall below standards have been completed.

A full license is recommended at this time at this time.

At least one visit will be made to the center during the next year.

Date: 08/06/2026

HHS Licensing Consultant: Leann Steinhauer

Non-compliance with any of the mandated regulatory requirements listed above may lead to the cancellation or revocation of your Child Care License. Please take steps necessary to completely address each of the violations noted above.

Child Care Resource and Referral is an excellent resource for providers to access training options and support in your area. You can reach Child Care Resource and Referral at **https://iowaccrr.org**.