



## Squirrels Pre School

Inspection report for early years provision

**Unique Reference Number** 203962  
**Inspection date** 12 May 2006  
**Inspector** Lynn Clements

**Setting Address** St Johns & Highwood Community Centre, Highwoods,  
Colchester, Essex, CO4 9SR  
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**Registered person** St John's & Highwoods Community Association  
**Type of inspection** Integrated  
**Type of care** Sessional care

## ABOUT THIS INSPECTION

The purpose of this inspection is to assure government, parents and the public of the quality of childcare and, if applicable, of nursery education. The inspection was carried out under Part XA Children Act 1989 as introduced by the Care Standards Act 2000 and, where nursery education is provided, under Schedule 26 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998.

This report details the main strengths and any areas for improvement identified during the inspection. The judgements included in the report are made in relation to the outcomes for children set out in the Children Act 2004; the National Standards for under 8s day care and childminding; and, where nursery education is provided, the *Curriculum guidance for the foundation stage*.

The report includes information on any complaints about the childcare provision which Ofsted has received since the last inspection or registration or 1 April 2004 whichever is the later.

### The key inspection judgements and what they mean

*Outstanding: this aspect of the provision is of exceptionally high quality*

*Good: this aspect of the provision is strong*

*Satisfactory: this aspect of the provision is sound*

*Inadequate: this aspect of the provision is not good enough*

For more information about early years inspections, please see the booklet *Are you ready for your inspection?* which is available from Ofsted's website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).

## THE QUALITY AND STANDARDS OF THE CARE AND NURSERY EDUCATION

On the basis of the evidence collected on this inspection:

The quality and standards of the care are good. The registered person meets the National Standards for under 8s day care and childminding.

The quality and standards of the nursery education are good.

### WHAT SORT OF SETTING IS IT?

Squirrels Pre-school opened in 1999. It operates from the Highwood's Community Centre, in Colchester. The pre-school serves the local community.

A maximum of 26 children may attend the pre-school at any one time. There are currently 51 children on roll. This includes 44 funded children. Children attend for a variety of sessions. The setting supports children who have special needs and who have English as an additional language.

The group opens five days a week during term times. Sessions are from 09:30 to 12:00 Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday, and two afternoon sessions from 13:00 to 15:30 on Monday and 12:15 to 14:45 on Wednesday.

Eight members of staff work with the children. Five members of staff including the manager hold appropriate early years qualifications and one member of staff is currently training. The setting receives support from the local authority and Pre-School Learning Alliance.

## **THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PROVISION**

### **Helping children to be healthy**

The provision is good.

Children are cared for in a clean and welcoming environment. They learn about the importance of hygiene through the effective daily routines in place. Hand washing is encouraged at relevant times which prevents cross contamination. All health related documentation is in place and regularly updated to meet children's changing needs. Children benefit from staff knowledge of first aid, as well as the effective systems in place to deal with any emergency situation should it arise. A clear sick child policy is in place and shared with parents to protect children from cross infection.

Opportunities for children to learn about healthy eating are promoted by staff during snack and lunch time discussions and planned topics. With parents' permission children have regular opportunities to taste foods from other countries and explore their likes and dislikes. Children are unable to help themselves to drinks during sessions and staff rely on them to ask for a drink if they are thirsty. Parents share information about their child's individual dietary needs, and this is recorded by staff to ensure those needs are met and parental wishes are respected.

Children move freely around the setting, they are able to rest or join in activities according to their individual needs and interests. They have good opportunities each day to engage in physical play both inside and outside. Children climb, run, jump and balance and they construct using a variety of building materials including sheets, pegs and large building blocks; this helps to extend their fine and gross motor skills, enabling them to move freely and use single handed tools or large apparatus with good coordination and control. Children confidently move between the classroom and the outside play area and staff support their physical development further by organising opportunities for them to take walks in the local area and investigate the world on their door step.

### **Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe**

The provision is good.

Children explore and investigate within a safe child centred environment. The use of the children's own creations in the bright displays around the pre-school provide a warm and welcoming atmosphere for children, families and visitors. Staff work as a team to ensure the pre-school remains safe and secure and they are currently

formalising daily risk assessments to identify and minimise any potential risks to children. However, during snack and lunch times, staff place food directly onto tables which have been cleaned with chemical cleaner which presents a potential hazard to children's health.

There is a good range of child height furniture and equipment which enables children to play and learn in safety and comfort. Toys and resources are regularly checked and cleaned to ensure they remain in good condition for children to use. Wherever possible children share their ideas and take responsibility for decisions about their safety, such as practising fire drills and learning about road safety when out and about. Children are encouraged to keep themselves safe as they help each other at tidy up time, putting away toys and resources to prevent tripping hazards and make space for their music and movement session.

There are secure systems in place for the safe arrival and departure of children to prevent them leaving the premises unsupervised. Staff are careful to check the identification of visitors and supervise them at all times to ensure children are kept safe from unvetted persons. All staff have a sound knowledge and understanding of child protection issues and procedures which they follow to ensure children's welfare remains paramount.

### **Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do**

The provision is good.

Children are confident in the pre-school and in their relationships with each other and staff. They are greeted warmly by staff as they arrive each day. They negotiate small world and role play scenarios based on real and imagined experiences, busily making pretend meals in the home corner or filling toys cars with petrol at the garage. Children make their own choices and are motivated to explore the wide range of learning opportunities available. They move freely, investigating natural materials such as sand, water, and soil when they plant and grow their own vegetables which include carrots and potatoes. Children construct from a variety of building blocks creating rafts to protect themselves and their teachers from the sharks or making dens to hide in. Children are keen communicators, sharing ideas while they play and responding appropriately to help others find resources or join in group games. All children have their individual needs met and they are developing a good range of knowledge and skills because staff provide activities and play opportunities that help children achieve in all areas of learning.

Children respond to new challenges by questioning and using their own initiative. Staff have recently attended the 'Birth to three matters' framework training and they are beginning to implement systems to monitor children under three years to ensure they make good progress.

### **Nursery Education**

The quality of teaching and learning is good. Children make sound progress towards the early learning goals. Staff have a secure knowledge and understanding of the Foundation Stage and are involved as a team when planning activities; these are

based on clear observations of what children know and can do. Children's records of assessment are regularly updated and are used well by staff to identify each child's next step for learning. Staff plan a wide range of activities and experiences. However, differentiation in planning requires development to ensure appropriate levels of challenge are in place for all children so they continue to make good progress in all six areas of learning.

Children select and share books. They join in group story times using the pictures as clues to guess what may happen next. They are beginning to recognise their own name in print and the use of labels, signs and pictures around the setting provides further opportunities for children to observe and recognise letters and the printed word. Staff support the linking of sounds to letters using simple phonics. However, opportunities for children to use writing for a purpose requires development, enabling them to write lists, take messages and begin to write their own stories and captions on their creations. Children use number language in their play. They recognise shapes and explore capacity and quantity during sand and water play. Staff support children to notice change as they grow vegetables from seed or watch the changing seasons of the year. Children explore how things work as they peddle forwards then backwards when using wheeled toys or press the buttons on the tape recorder to make the 'music come out'. They have plenty of opportunities to learn about different customs and cultures through topics, examining artefacts and circle time discussions. Children sing and laugh as they play. They join in simple songs and rhymes and enjoy matching movements and actions to music during large group activities. They create their own collages and paintings using their imagination and memory as they talk about fluffy yellow chicks or while they decorate biscuits, making cat faces and one of an octopus with a moustache.

Children are active learners, taking risks and trying new activities without fear of failure. Staff work closely as a team, praising and encouraging children to develop their personal independence and confidence. Overall, children are making sound progress towards the early learning goals.

### **Helping children make a positive contribution**

The provision is good.

Children are developing an understanding of the wider society because staff introduce them to different people in their local neighbourhood and to the wider multicultural society. Visitors to the setting include the local police and dentist. They learn about other cultures and beliefs during topics, discussions, examining artefacts and taking trips out and about. This helps to consolidate previous learning and brings the curriculum to life. Staff ensure that there is no bias in their practice in relation to gender race or disability.

There are clear procedures in place to support children with special educational needs and those who speak English as an additional language. Staff are pro-active in seeking funding which enables them to offer one-to-one support as appropriate. They work closely with other professionals in the best interests of the child.

Relationships are good at all levels. Children are valued as individuals and they

develop positive attitudes and respect for the needs of others. With gentle reminders from staff they learn to take turns and share resources. Children benefit from consistent routines and a secure approach to their care. For example, children and staff talk about being kind to each other and staff validate positive behaviour using descriptive praise and encouragement, raising children's confidence and self-esteem.

Parents are respected and open communications both written and verbal take place daily to support all children. Notice boards provide excellent information for parents concerning all aspects of the pre-school. Policies and procedures are displayed. Newsletters are sent out regularly encouraging parents to share their skills and experiences when helping during sessions and include information such as the letter of the week which enables parents and carers to share and support their children as they learn new things and develop their ideas. Children's needs are being met well because staff work closely with parents and carers to enable all children to achieve in their care and learning.

Partnership with parents and carers of nursery funded children is good. Records of assessment are shared and parents have regular opportunities to add comments and share information about their child's learning at home which helps staff to gain an insight into the whole child when planning their next steps for learning. Clear written information about the Foundation Stage curriculum and the six areas of learning is provided for parents.

Staff are directly involved in children's learning and all children are included and treated with equal concern. Children are learning to share and help each other. They encourage others to join in their games and make room for them at the snack table or during activities. Children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is fostered appropriately.

## **Organisation**

The organisation is good.

The organisation of the setting ensures that children are well cared for. All children are supported appropriately to achieve their potential as staff know their starting points and work with parents and carers to support progress. Documentation is maintained appropriately and policies and procedures are in place. However, the daily registers of staff and children require updating to ensure times of arrival and departure are recorded so children and staff remain appropriately accounted for and protected.

Children are cared for by staff who have a good knowledge and understanding of child development. A high percentage of the staff team hold relevant early years qualifications and attention to ongoing professional development ensures their practice continues to meet the needs of all the children. Staff induction and monitoring systems are in place to help support new and existing members of staff. Policies and procedures are implemented in practice to promote positive outcomes for children.

Leadership and management of the nursery funded children is good. The manager is responsive to the needs of the children, parents and staff. Regular staff meetings

take place to support practice and draw on staff interests, knowledge and skills when defining roles and responsibilities. The manager monitors and evaluates classroom practice to ensure staff continue to work appropriately with children. All staff help children to develop positive attitudes and dispositions towards their learning. Overall, children's needs are met.

### **Improvements since the last inspection**

Since the last inspection managers and staff have addressed the recommendations raised, including updating the children's registration forms to ensure children are protected appropriately in an emergency. They have implemented a complaints procedure so that any concerns or complaints which may affect the care of children are addressed.

Since the last education inspection the provider has improved activities and access for children to use information technology helping them to develop their skills and understanding when using a variety of equipment including tape recorders, computers and battery operated toys.

### **Complaints since the last inspection**

There have been no complaints made to Ofsted since the last inspection.

The provider is required to keep a record of complaints made by parents, which they can see on request. The complaints record may contain complaints other than those made to Ofsted.

## **THE QUALITY AND STANDARDS OF THE CARE AND NURSERY EDUCATION**

On the basis of the evidence collected on this inspection:

The quality and standards of the care are good. The registered person meets the National Standards for under 8s day care and childminding.

The quality and standards of the nursery education are good.

### **WHAT MUST BE DONE TO SECURE FUTURE IMPROVEMENT?**

#### **The quality and standards of the care**

To improve the quality and standards of care further the registered person should take account of the following recommendation(s):

- ensure children have access to drinking water at all times: minimise risks to children's health at snack and lunch times by providing suitable utensils

- ensure times of arrival and departure are recorded in both the staff and child registers.

### **The quality and standards of the nursery education**

To improve the quality and standards of nursery education further the registered person should take account of the following recommendation(s):

- increase opportunities for children to explore writing for a purpose; develop everyday mark making opportunities in role play scenarios
- develop differentiation in planning to ensure that focussed activities and topics challenge children effectively.

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