



St. Joseph's Playgroup

Inspection report for early years provision

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Inspector Gail Groves

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Registered person St. Joseph's Playgroup

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.

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?

St Joseph's Playgroup opened in 1994 and operates from a mobile classroom in the grounds of St. Joseph's Roman Catholic School situated in Hertford in Hertfordshire. A maximum of 16 children may attend the playgroup at any one time. The group is open each weekday from 09.10 to 11.30 and on Monday and Wednesday afternoons from 12.40 to 15.00 during school term times only. The group also operate a daily lunch time club from 11.30 to 12.30 for nursery and playgroup children. All children

share access to a secure enclosed outdoor play area.

There are currently 36 children from 2 to 4 years on roll. Of these, 13 children receive funding for nursery education. Children attending the group come from the local area. The playgroup currently supports a number of children with special educational needs and also supports a number of children who speak English as an additional language.

The Playgroup employs 6 staff. Of these, 4 staff including the manager hold appropriate early years qualifications and 2 staff are working towards a qualification.

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PROVISION

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

Children are protected from infection and are well taken care of if they have an accident or become ill, because the group follows current and appropriate environmental health and hygiene guidelines, policies and procedures. Staff discuss the importance of simple, good health and hygiene practices with children, such as the need to wash their hands before cooking or eating and after using the toilet and encourage them to carry these out at all times. As a result, they are beginning to understand the importance of these routines and are developing good hygiene habits for later life. Children learn about healthy eating and healthy living through well planned themes and topics as well as through practical experiences within their daily routines. For example, topics such as cleaning their teeth and looking at and tasting different types of food are built into the curriculum and staff use opportunities during cooking activities to discuss the issue of germs and why children should not lick their fingers when preparing food.

Children have their health and dietary needs met because the group works well with parents. Information is sought about special dietary requirements before the children begin to attend and any particular needs are clearly displayed in the kitchen area so that all staff are aware of these when preparing snacks and drinks. The group's timetable allows opportunities for children to take part in regular physical activity both indoors and outdoors and so they are able to develop their motor skills and have an enjoyment of exercise and fresh air. In the outside play area, a wide variety of carefully planned activities such as obstacle courses and sand and water play. As well as resources such as balls, hoops, bikes, scooters, a climbing frame, tunnel and trampoline provide children with practice in hopping, climbing, jumping, balancing, throwing and catching. Inside they dance to music and enjoy action rhymes and movement sessions where they learn to move their bodies in different ways. Within the daily routine, active play is thoughtfully balanced with quieter times such as story or circle time. Children can choose to play with small world toys, construction or table top games if they wish to rest or be less energetic.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

Children are cared for in a very welcoming, secure and safe indoor and outdoor environment which is suitable for purpose and which is regularly risk assessed. The group's policies and procedures minimise the risks to children's safety and staff ensure that these are well-implemented at all times. For example, a written daily check list is completed before the children arrive to ensure that all areas are safe and secure and fire drills are carried out each half term. Children use good quality, suitable and safe equipment which is age appropriate and meets their differing needs and which they can access independently from low level shelving and boxes.

Carefully devised procedures ensure children are kept safe on outings when they go on nature walks, visit the local library and ride on the bus. Activities such as learning how to use zebra crossings are built into these trips whilst play experiences with road safety resources back at the playgroup reinforce children's experiences, and help them learn to keep themselves safe. Practical examples and opportunities for discussions with staff about the need to think about safety also arise within daily play situations, such as cooking. For example, staff remind children why they should not put knives in their mouth and ask them to think about what happens to the oven as their pizzas cook and why they should not go near it.

Staff have attended relevant training, understand their role in child protection and are able to put appropriate procedures into practice when necessary. However, the procedure to be followed in the event of an allegation being made against a member of staff or volunteer is not fully laid out in the child protection policy. As a result, it is not clear how children's welfare will be monitored and protected if this situation were to arise.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

Children are carefully supported by staff to settle and be comfortable in the setting and as a result they are happy, excited and eager to learn. Consequently, at the start of sessions they quickly become fully involved in the stimulating, interesting and exciting play and learning opportunities available to them. Staff value and respect children and are always interested in what they do and say. This means that children develop self-esteem and become confident to make decisions, explore and investigate. As a result, they learn independence and are able to extend and develop their thinking and learning. For example, when it is time to play outside, children decide to go and look in the pond to see if there are any frogs and to experiment with chalks on the outside blackboard, exploring what happens to their hands if they wipe them on the blackboard duster. Children relate well both to other children and to familiar and unfamiliar adults and are learning good social skills. They readily seek help when they need it and communicate confidently when they are asked questions.

Nursery Education

The quality of teaching and learning is good. Staff are very experienced in working with the Foundation Stage and when presenting children with new experiences and

information they show a clear understanding of how children learn effectively. For example, they use practical experiences such as tasting and cooking cheese to help children learn about dairy foods and encourage children's understanding of numbers and calculation when giving out the correct number of cups at snack time. Staff challenge children and expect the most from them, providing them with opportunities to demonstrate what they know and understand by carefully questioning them and interacting in their play. They make effective use of time, resources and accommodation to provide a stimulating and exciting learning environment which is very well organised to help children to be independent. They work directly with the children for much of the time and use the outdoor accommodation particularly well to help children to move towards attaining the early learning goals.

Staff plan the curriculum to promote children's progress towards the early learning goals, but the learning intentions of activities and how these link to the stepping stones are not always clearly or consistently recorded. In the short term plans and activities are not evaluated. As a result, teaching could potentially become less focused and there is no effective method of monitoring that all areas of learning are being covered effectively, or that children who learn at different rates or have particular needs are being appropriately supported. At the present time, the group is in the process of developing a new system of assessing and recording children's progress. The system is not yet being used to guide and inform planning and teaching and so restricts the effectiveness of staff in helping children to move to the next stage in their learning.

Children are confident, interested and show good attention and listening skills in group activities such as circle time. Their self-care is developing and with support from staff they are learning to find and put on their coats when they go outside to play or their apron when they are cooking or gluing. They listen carefully and with interest to stories and are beginning to make marks and experiment with writing for a purpose, such as in cards or when making shopping lists in the imaginative play area. The good use by staff of visual clues and simple sign language enables children with special needs and those learning English as an additional language to participate in activities and to make progress with their communication skills. Labelled coat pegs and the use of name cards to indicate whose turn it is to wash their hands at snack time, help children begin to recognise their written name in meaningful ways and to begin to link phonic sounds with letters.

Children gain confidence in using numbers in their play and respond well to challenges to extend their calculation, problem solving skills and ideas about shape, space and measure both in planned activities and daily routines. They enjoy exploring and investigating the world around them as they access the stimulating outdoor area where they grow vegetables and flowers, look at wildlife in the pond, care for the group's two Guinea Pigs and explore the sensory garden. Their physical skills develop and improve through a wide variety of experiences and activities both inside and outside and by having regular opportunities to use tools such as scissors, knives and rolling pins. Children explore a wide variety of creative painting and gluing activities and have chances to model on a large scale and experiment with joining and connecting. They sing and play musical instruments with enthusiasm and develop imaginative role play scenarios in the home corner and shop.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

Children are valued and included at all times and their individual needs including any special needs are met. Staff work in close partnership with parents, carers and other professionals and if required, provide one to one support for children in order that they can offer the appropriate help to encourage their development. Staff manage children well and have high expectations for their behaviour so that children clearly understand what is expected of them and are beginning to understand the need for self-discipline and consideration for others. For example, when playing outside they queue and wait patiently for their turn to jump on the trampoline or complete the obstacle course. Politeness is valued and encouraged at all times and children play harmoniously together, helping to tidy up before snack time and cooperating with each other when carrying large items. As a result, they are developing good social skills. Staff ensure that they recognise and praise children's achievements at all times and use stickers to reinforce the value they place on children's efforts. For example, remembering to ask to use the toilet or behaving considerately. Throughout their daily routine children make choices and take decisions which help them to develop independence and self-esteem and which allow them to feel that they have a part to play in the decision making process of the group. For example, they decide whether they play inside or outside, they choose their own activities and resources and negotiate with staff if they wish to make changes to the timetable. They benefit from activities and resources which help them value diversity and they learn about different religious festivals and cultures. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is fostered.

The partnership with parents and carers is good and contributes significantly to children's well-being in the playgroup. Parent's views about their child's needs and interests are actively sought before the child starts to attend the group and on a regular basis throughout their time there. Parents are provided with good quality information about the setting and its provision so that they are beginning to know how children are helped to learn. Formal and informal channels are used to share information about children's achievements and progress. Parents are encouraged to be involved with their child's learning through information given in regular newsletters and on the parents' notice board. They are always welcomed into the playgroup to share a particular expertise or to help provide items associated with the curriculum topic or theme. They are highly satisfied with the provision and with the staff's attention and support for children's particular needs.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

All the legally required documentation for the efficient and safe running of the setting is maintained. The group's policies and procedures are regularly reviewed and work well in practice to promote children's health, safety, enjoyment, achievement and ability to make a positive contribution. Recruitment and vetting procedures ensure children are well protected and cared for by skilled staff who all have knowledge and

understanding of child development and a high regard for the well-being of all children. The premises are well organised and both the indoor and outdoor spaces are laid out and used to maximise play opportunities for children. Staff are deployed extremely effectively and have clearly understood roles within sessions.

Leadership and management is good. The manager has made an accurate assessment of the group's strengths and weaknesses and is committed to providing quality care and education for all children. The excellent staff team share her aims and work extremely well together. Regular staff meetings and staff appraisals enable ongoing assessments of the team's strengths and weaknesses and help to support improvement. The group is currently in the process of completing the group's re-accreditation with the Herts Quality Standards quality assurance scheme and so monitoring and evaluation of the group's provision for nursery education is in the process of further development.

Overall, children's needs are met.

Improvements since the last inspection

At the previous inspection the group agreed to improve their documentation. They now ensure that parents' signatures are obtained against all entries in the accident book and they have implemented a procedure for recording the arrival and departure times of staff and visitors. As a result, children's health and safety is more fully protected. They also agreed to provide more opportunities to extend the children's knowledge of different cultures. They now plan topics within their curriculum which give children opportunities to explore the food, religious festivals and sporting activities from other countries. For example, the theme 'Around the World in Half a Term' enables children to eat hot dogs and play baseball when learning about America and to try curry and learn about growing tea when thinking about India. Children are also given opportunities to develop their understanding of festivals such as Chinese New Year and Diwali. Consequently, they are learning to value the differences between people.

Complaints since the last inspection

There have been no complaints made to Ofsted since 1 April 2004.

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 the child protection policy includes details of the procedure to be followed in the event of an allegation being made against a member of staff or volunteer.

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):

- ensure that daily plans are consistent and clearly indicate learning intentions for children
- ensure that assessments of children's achievements and progress are used to influence and guide planning and teaching.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the leaflet *Building better childcare: Compliments and concerns about inspectors' judgements* which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk