



Neptune Nursery

Inspection report for early years provision

Unique Reference Number	EY104279
Inspection date	15 June 2006
Inspector	Linda Oliver / Sandra Daniels
Setting Address	Flagship Centre, London Road, Tilbury, Essex, RM18 8EY
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Registered person	Sure Start Project
Type of inspection	Integrated
Type of care	Full day 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

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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?

Sure Start Children's Centre opened in 2004 to serve the local area of Tilbury. The centre is part of the Sure Start local programme, led by Thurrock Council. The day nursery is open each weekday for 51 weeks of the year from 07.30 to 18.30 and a range of multi-agency and parent-led services which are fully integrated and designed to offer support to parents and carers attending the centre.

The services, including Neptune Nursery, are housed in a purpose-built building

called the Flagship Centre with outdoor play areas for the children. A maximum of 37 children may attend the nursery at any one time. There are currently 40 children aged from birth up to five years on roll in the day nursery; 15 of these receive nursery education. Many of the children who attend come in on a sessional basis. The centre also provides a small and varying number of crèche spaces as required to support various adult groups that meet in the centre.

The nursery currently supports a number of children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and also supports a number of children who speak English as an additional language.

There are 17 staff who work with the children in the day nursery. Of these, 13 members of staff hold an appropriate early years qualification, one is working towards a qualification, and eight already qualified staff members are working towards further qualifications. There is a full-time teacher attached to the centre who provides support in the day nursery.

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PROVISION

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

Children benefit from being cared for in an environment where good hygiene practices are always maintained. They learn about the importance of good personal hygiene through well-established routines such as washing their hands after using the toilet and before eating. Older children manage their own personal care needs very well and are developing an understanding of things that may affect their health, such as germs, healthy foods and exercise. Younger children also develop good levels of personal independence as they are encouraged to be responsible for washing and drying their hands with minimal help.

Staff consistently apply agreed health procedures which ensure that the risk of cross-infection is minimised and children's health and welfare is maintained. Information is given to parents regarding children's health issues, such as exclusion times relating to childhood ailments. Staff are knowledgeable about individual children's needs and ensure that they are suitably trained to provide necessary intervention where there are risks. For example, they are able to administer treatment for severe allergies.

Children's awareness of the benefits of healthy eating is actively promoted at snack and meal times. Meals are prepared in the Children's Centre Community Café, using freshly prepared and nutritiously balanced ingredients. Children begin to learn that some foods are better for them than others. Practitioners use meal and snack times as an extension to children's formal learning activities by discussing what they are eating. Fresh drinking water is freely available throughout the day and children can help themselves independently. Staff maintain good written records for each child to ensure their individual health and dietary requirements are always met.

Younger children are able to rest and be active according to their individual needs.

Babies are cuddled when they appear to be tired and, if they fall asleep, they are placed in a cot. Their sleep is monitored and recorded for parental feedback.

Children have regular opportunities for physical play through well-planned activities within the nursery garden. Children enjoy using equipment such as wheeled toys, climbing and balancing apparatus and playing imaginatively in their dens. Staff ensure that there is sufficient challenge for the children at different stages of their development. Less confident children are given ample opportunities and additional support from staff to develop their skills and become increasingly independent. They also have access to a soft play area and enjoy visiting the centre's own musical sensory garden and the local park where there is a variety of large play equipment.

Children are beginning to understand what happens to their bodies when they are active and discuss together feeling hot and needing a drink. They develop control and hand-eye co-ordination in using appropriate tools and other play equipment. They are offered a variety of malleable materials, both with and without tools, such as play dough, spaghetti and sand. There are regular opportunities to construct and staff help the children to use scissors, mark-making equipment and joining materials safely and with increasing control.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

Children are protected by very good security measures and access to the premises is carefully controlled. Emergency evacuation procedures are understood by staff and practised regularly so that they can ensure that children are kept safe. The provision has effective measures in place to ensure that all potential risks to children's safety, both indoors and outside, are identified and minimised. There are clear, written safety procedures in place and these are consistently applied by staff. For example, registers show the arrival and departure times of all children and staff, ensuring an accurate record of people on the premises at any one time. Effective risk assessments are carried out regularly and appropriate action taken as necessary.

Children learn to keep themselves safe in welcoming and stimulating purpose built facilities, where they are able to move freely around the learning environment. Practitioners are vigilant about children's safety and talk to the children about safe practice, for example, not throwing sand during play as it might hurt someone's eyes. Children and babies benefit from using toys and equipment which are of good quality and well-maintained. They enthusiastically choose play resources which are appropriate for their age and stage of development. Toys and equipment are stored at child height to encourage independence in selection.

Children are well protected as practitioners have a good knowledge and understanding of child protection issues. They recognise and are confident of their roles and responsibilities and know how to implement nursery and local child protection procedures. Children's welfare is further ensured as staff have speedy and effective access to the many other professionals who provide services in the centre, including health visitors and social workers.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

Children are very happy and secure within the nursery environment. Practitioners clearly know each child very well and offer high levels of support and assistance to children who require help in leaving their main carer. The nursery offers a settling-in period which is flexible according to the needs of each child and their family.

Children make friends with their peers, initiating conversations and involving other children and adults in their play. Staff interact very well with all children during planned and free-play activities. These warm and comfortable relationships that are developed by staff encourage children to feel secure and develop their self-esteem.

Children enjoy playing in the nursery garden which is stimulating and well-resourced. However, there is insufficient opportunity for them to explore and investigate the natural environment, such as plants, flowers, grass, trees and wild-life.

Younger children are able to share their thoughts, feelings and ideas because practitioners are adept at supporting their attempts to explain things. Their needs are acknowledged and well met as the 'Birth to three matters' framework is effectively implemented in practice. Staff use this framework to plan an interesting and stimulating range of activities to provide good quality care and education. The curriculum is flexible and many activities are developed directly from children's individual interests. Children gain confidence and independence as they learn and play in this relaxed environment that clearly puts their needs first.

Nursery Education.

The quality of teaching and learning is good. Staff have attended training on the Foundation Stage and receive excellent support from the nursery teacher. This has enabled them to put together a well-planned programme of interesting activities which covers all areas of learning. Staff have a good knowledge of how young children learn and are aware that they learn at different rates and need time to explore and apply their learning.

Children make good progress in their learning and achieve well as staff are very aware of their capabilities and starting points. Information from parents helps them to find out about children's attainment on entry so that they can build on what children already know and can do. Plans show clear learning objectives and how all children will be included and their individual needs met. The stepping stones towards the early learning goals are clearly identified throughout in both the planning and assessment records. Activities are adapted to suit children who learn at different rates or who have particular needs. Children's learning is extended as staff ensure that the activities provided are suited to their interests. For example, they proudly display a large collage of the planets which arose from the ideas and imagination of children working with a jigsaw puzzle.

Children build warm and trusting relationships with the adults in the nursery. They are confident and readily ask questions and join in during group times. They are given

lots of praise and encouragement from staff to develop their confidence and self-esteem. They are keen to offer ideas and show good levels of independence, curiosity and imagination. They use initiative in many ways when they are playing and take responsibility for their environment, such as sweeping up the spilt sand, tidying up and spring-cleaning their room.

Staff make regular observations that identify children's achievement. Children are helped to move to the next stage in their learning as staff use the information gained from these observations and assessments. When learning difficulties are identified, appropriate activities are included in future planning to ensure all children make progress. An example of this can be seen when, during an activity, staff identify that a few of the younger children do not recognise some colours and shapes. Activities are organised to help them, such as finding shapes in the sand and looking at shapes in the environment. They also enjoy the activities planned to recognise the colour red, such as using red play dough, water and spaghetti.

Children are happy and settled in the nursery. They are actively involved in their learning and enjoy the activities on offer. They have a developing awareness of their own needs, views and feelings and staff provide books about 'feelings' and emotion lotto to help with this. Stories such as 'Don't say that' and 'I don't want to go to bed' help them to understand the consequences of their words and actions on others. They enjoy helping and often take messages to the office, supported by an adult. Most children can see to their personal needs when visiting the toilet and washing their hands and deciding when to have their drink and snack. Their confidence is increased through having a sense of belonging. Staff get to know the children and their families well and good relationships are formed.

Children's speaking and listening skills are developing well. They confidently make contributions to small group discussions and happily listen to each other as they talk about what they like to do at nursery during circle time. Staff ask questions which encourage children to think and introduce new words to build on their vocabulary, such as whilst baking a cake and when making birthday cards. Children have access to a good range of books which they often choose to look at and use to support topic work. They enjoy listening to stories, songs and rhymes. They discuss the beginning and end of stories and staff write down the stories they make up. Children practise their early writing skills in role-play situations such as the hospital, office, space rocket and hairdresser's shop. Children like to listen to and join in with rhyme and rhythm, and there are some opportunities to hear and say sounds. However, this is not always extended to include linking sounds to letters, and naming and sounding the letters of the alphabet to provide further challenge for the older and more able children.

Children enjoy a wide range of practical activities, sing number rhymes and use free play to promote an understanding of numbers, shape and measurements. For example, through junk modelling and other planned activities they learn to recognise shapes and develop mathematical ideas and methods to solve problems. They measure and weigh each other and draw round their feet to find the biggest and smallest. Children are introduced to numbers as labels as they count the candles on their play dough birthday cakes and find the correct numeral to represent them.

Children are given many opportunities to investigate and explore household objects such as a pepper mill, hair straighteners and a telephone. Staff support them in discussing their uses and how they work. Children plant seeds, water them and talk about how they grow. They build and construct with a range of resources including junk modelling, collages using newspapers and magazines and construction toys. Children are made aware of the importance of technology in our everyday lives. They use a computer and play with telephones, cash registers and use a compact disc player to provide music for their dancing. Children have a good sense of time which is developed by staff as they learn about the daily routine and discuss past and present events in their lives.

Children have many opportunities to develop their creativity and learn through their senses. They explore a range of materials, for example, in collage work and marble painting. Children use their imagination in a range of creative activities and staff allow them sufficient time and freedom to explore their own ideas and provide them with different resources. They join in enthusiastically with the children and encourage them to dance to music, such as Caribbean and classical music.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

Children are highly valued as individuals and are warmly welcomed into the setting. They are given excellent support as they settle at the nursery and they separate well from their parents and carers. Children's needs are met by a professional, well-qualified staff team who are extremely skilled at supporting the children when they are playing. Children with learning difficulties or disabilities are included, their needs identified early and effective support quickly put in place.

They build very warm and trusting relationships with the adults at the nursery and as a result, they behave very well. They can share and take turns with their friends and they develop positive attitudes to others through stimulating activities and an environment that reflects both the lives of those who attend and the wider community. Staff find out about the children's family, faith, racial and cultural heritage so that familiar experiences, interests and needs can be used as starting points for care, teaching and learning. Through displays and activities which reflect the diverse local community they are helped to understand and appreciate the customs and cultures of others, such as celebrating festivals. They enjoy looking at photographs of people from different countries and tasting a variety of foods.

Children's work is valued and displayed around the nursery in a dynamic way. Children are fully included in the life of the nursery and feel a great sense of belonging. They have a clear understanding of right and wrong and show concern for living things as they care for the nursery snails and know that their plants will die if they do not water them. They are helped to take pleasure in the world around them. Children enjoy being in the centre's musical sensory garden and broaden their experiences by listening to music, looking at pictures and visiting the local community. The provision fosters children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

The partnership with parents and carers of funded children is outstanding. It is central to the work of the nursery. Children benefit from the extremely close and caring relationships and informal contact between their parents and the staff. Parents are kept well informed about the nursery activities through the very detailed notice boards, newsletters and the many posters which are displayed around the centre. The centre provides colourful information leaflets about the facilities available which are very attractively designed and easy to read. All children and their families benefit from the multi-agency approach which works very well in supporting them.

Parents feel welcomed and valued and appreciate the way staff involve them in their children's care and learning. There are very effective settling-in procedures to ease the transition from home to the setting. Information about the children's day is recorded on a daily sheet and given to their parents and carers, encouraging excellent continuity of care. Staff provide parents of funded children with relevant information on their child's progress towards the early learning goals. Children's photographs are displayed all over the nursery highlighting the many and varied experiences they can take part in, such as examples of mark making, going to the community park and sensory activities.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

Staff working at the centre are highly committed to providing very good levels of care and education to enhance children's experience and well-being.

There are robust recruitment and vetting systems in place to ensure children are well protected and cared for by staff with very good knowledge and understanding of child development. Staffing ratios ensure that children are given appropriate support. The professional development of staff is managed so that they are all appropriately supported and trained. There are very good induction procedures in place to ensure all new staff understand the vision and work of the nursery. Appraisals are held regularly to ensure staff training needs are identified and addressed. All required policies and procedures are in place and implemented by staff to contribute to the welfare, care and learning of the children who attend.

Leadership and management is outstanding. The centre is very well organised and has an excellent management team who share a very clear vision of what it should be like for the children, parents and carers, staff and other professionals working at the nursery. The aims of this vision include a commitment to good relationships, being welcomed, respected, valued, listened to, supported and having equal opportunities and fun. There is a strong focus on personal development and achievement for all.

The buildings and gardens are attractive and very well-organised to provide maximum play opportunities for the children. The management team have an excellent understanding of the setting's strengths and areas for development. Those identified in the previous inspection have been fully addressed and the managers have very clear development plans of how they intend to make further improvements in the nursery. Managers and staff are extremely well motivated and act as good role

models for the children. Children's progress towards the early learning goals is effectively monitored and successful teaching strategies are shared amongst the staff.

Staff are very well informed and communication in the nursery is excellent. Regular team meetings ensure that children's progress is discussed and support systems identified and put into place to help meet the needs of individual children.

Overall the provision meets the needs of the range of children for whom it provides.

Additional Services:

The provision of additional services is a strength of the nursery. Staff work together to combine nursery education, family support, employment advice, childcare and health services on the one site. Families are well supported in the community and their needs identified and addressed. Many agencies work in close partnership with the centre such as social workers, health workers including a midwife, health visitor, play development workers and counsellors. The services are exceptionally well organised and provide support for children and their families when they need it most. Families benefit from the very good communication systems within the teams and the other agencies.

The childcare provided enable parents to take advantage of the services at the centre, such as attending courses that will help them to develop their parenting skills which has a positive impact on children becoming more confident learners. Parents are directed to the services they require including courses designed to help them to return to work, improving children's lifestyle and economic well-being. Many of the parents and members of the community attend the facilities each day. A parents' forum called FLAG (Family Led Action Group) meet together regularly to identify the needs of the community and organise events to get the community together. Currently, the group are trying to involve older people in the community.

The centre is an excellent meeting place and 'one stop shop', with a director who is very involved in all that goes on, and where all the agencies are available and easily contactable. Agency workers know the children well and they have a very close liaison with the nursery staff. The agencies constantly monitor the services to provide facilities that are appropriate and effective for the children and their families. Many agencies also visit the children's homes, such as outreach and play development workers. They are able to identify problems at a very early stage and 'nip them in the bud'. This has shown to have a very positive effect on the children when they start at the nursery.

The 'First Steps Forward' group is specifically designed to encourage 'hard to reach' parents to attend the centre. Staff offer 'Playlink' home visits which cover early educational needs for young children and there is a teenage parents' co-ordinator who works very closely with the young mums through their pregnancy and provides care and support after the birth. The portage worker helps children with learning difficulties either in their homes or at the centre. She is also a 'signalong' tutor and 90% of the staff at the centre can use this method of communication which has benefits for all.

Other groups are run at the centre including 'Babes into Books' which is organised by a parent who reads stories in an exciting and stimulating way to keep children interested and involved and popular rhymes and songs are sung together. The aim is to show parents and children how enjoyable story time can be and also aims to get parents to join the library.

The centre's café has an important role to play at the centre, not only by providing affordable, healthy food, but also by providing the opportunity for parents and other people in the community to get together socially. Staff at the centre work hard to get feedback regarding the services they offer. Parents and children's comments and ideas are listened to and used to develop these services and meet their needs.

The centre has a long-term vision to improve the lifestyles for the children and their families. Evaluations are carried out by each of the services to ensure parents and children's needs are being met. Comments from parents show that they find them extremely beneficial, especially regarding the care of their children. They make very good use of the services and courses provided and often this results in them helping out at the centre themselves and in the local community. The centre is a very welcoming and friendly place to be and is successful in encouraging many parents to use it. The impact on the children attending the nursery is clear and makes a positive contribution in determining very good outcomes for the children who live in the community.

Improvements since the last inspection

At the last inspection the setting was asked to keep a record of all visitors (Standard 6). A system for recording all visitors to the nursery has been put in place and as a result children's safety is further promoted whilst they are on the premises.

The setting was also asked to improve opportunities for children to write for different purposes and to improve their understanding and use of mathematical language. Staff have relocated the writing area so that it is more easily accessible to the children. Writing materials are available for use in other activities such as construction, role play and during outside play. Staff have attended training on emergent writing and they encourage older and more able children to write their names on their work. Observations, planning and children's records show more opportunities for writing and samples of mark making demonstrate the children's progress in this area of learning. A designated member of staff has the responsibility for writing opportunities and staff regularly review and evaluate the provision.

Staff have attended training to help their understanding of mathematics in the Foundation Stage. Their feedback and observations of their practice show increased confidence and understanding in this area of learning. Observations and assessments of children's play show their progress through the stepping stones regarding their understanding of mathematical language. Staff support and model mathematical language by capitalising on daily routines and opportunities in children's play.

These measures have had a positive impact on the quality of nursery education in all

areas of learning and ensure that children benefit from the good practice at the setting.

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 log 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):

- develop the outside play area to provide opportunities for children to explore and investigate the natural environment.

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):

- provide further opportunities for the older and more able children to link sounds and letters within the daily activities.

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