



St Michael's Playgroup

Inspection report for early years provision

Unique Reference Number	509653
Inspection date	21 June 2006
Inspector	Hazel Taylor
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Registered person	St Michael's Playgroup Committee
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. Michael's Playgroup opened in 1986 and is run by a committee. It operates from one main room within St. Michael's Church House which is located near the centre of the market town of Louth. Children have access to a fully enclosed outdoor play area. The playgroup serves the immediate locality as well as surrounding villages.

The playgroup is registered to care for no more than 18 children, from two to under five years, at any one time. There are currently 45 children on roll and, of these, 14

children receive funding for nursery education. Children attend for a variety of sessions. The playgroup has systems in place to support children who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities and children who speak English as an additional language.

The playgroup opens five days a week during school term times. Monday to Thursday sessions are from 09:00 to 11:45 and 13:00 to 15:45. Friday sessions are from 09:00 to 11:45.

There are five staff who work with the children on both a full and part time basis. Over half of the staff have early years qualifications to NVQ level 3. One member of staff is currently working towards a recognised early years qualification. The playgroup is affiliated to the Pre-School Learning Alliance.

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PROVISION

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

Staff promote children's good health and well-being effectively as they are proactive in recognising and reducing possible risks of infection and illness. Their procedures for managing accidents, administering medication and caring for any child who becomes ill are good and ensure that children are well cared for and that their individual needs are met. Children are developing their own understanding and awareness of good health and hygiene through helpful explanations and daily routines, such as regular hand-washing, which reinforce good practice and act as helpful reminders to encourage their independence. Children show a good understanding and willingness to keep themselves healthy and safe from infection.

Children enjoy a variety of nutritious snacks and can easily access drinking water throughout the session. They talk positively about how eating fruit and drinking milk makes them healthy. Snacks provided are wholesome, include fresh fruit and vegetables, and take account of the individual and cultural needs of all children. Whenever possible, staff encourage children to actively contribute to the development of healthy eating and positive food choices by sharing responsibility for decisions about their drinks and snacks. Children's health and dietary needs are met effectively by staff and parents sharing information.

Children develop physical control in stimulating daily indoor and outdoor experiences which contribute to their good health. Staff have a secure understanding of each child's stage of development which means the youngest children are given rich sensory experiences and different opportunities to explore and investigate. Older children are gaining competent co-ordination of their bodies and are developing a positive attitude to physical exercise as they learn about the importance of activity in maintaining a healthy lifestyle. They delight in the challenges of a wide range of energetic activities which they tackle enthusiastically. Staff develop meaningful relationships with the children which fosters their emotional well-being and ensures that they feel confident and secure as they explore their play environment.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

Children are secure and parents are welcome in this setting. Staff organise indoor and outdoor space effectively, creating a child-friendly environment which enables children to explore and take risks while being appropriately supervised. Good procedures and consistent risk assessment by staff ensures that all areas accessed by children are safe and any hazards are minimised. Children begin to take responsibility for themselves and are encouraged to make safe decisions about their play and learning as they choose from a wide range of good quality toys and play materials both indoors and outdoors. Children enjoy accessing developmentally appropriate resources and can move around safely and confidently to use them imaginatively. Children learn how to keep themselves safe on outings with the encouragement and guidance of staff.

Children are cared for by skilled and experienced staff and thorough clearance procedures ensure they are suitably checked and vetted. Children's welfare is safeguarded and promoted by the knowledgeable practice of the staff, underpinned by the good quality and accuracy of their supporting documentation. Clear written policies and procedures ensure that parents are aware of any steps the staff will take to maintain children's safety and deal with any accidents that may occur, including applying first aid. Children are safeguarded because staff have a secure understanding of their responsibilities regarding child protection procedures and the signs and symptoms that may indicate that a child is being abused.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

Children enjoy their time at the playgroup and explore their surroundings with enthusiasm, confidence and growing independence. They benefit from the care and encouragement of committed staff in a harmonious learning environment. Children relate well to each other and socialise with others as they play in groups participating in a range of stimulating activities. Children are becoming good communicators, they chat confidently between themselves, and the staff make very good use of conversations to extend children's thinking and play. Children are beginning to use their imaginations well as they take part in thoughtfully resourced role-play activities. They develop their physical skills regularly, both indoors and outside. Children under three are cared for in the same room as older children and staff evaluate the organisation of resources and planning in order to ensure that they are developmentally appropriate and provide a range of experiences which increase children's learning. The youngest children achieve well because staff are highly skilled and are developing their use of early years guidance, such as the 'Birth to three matters' framework, to provide high quality care and learning opportunities.

Nursery Education

The quality of teaching and learning is good. Children make good progress in their individual learning because staff have a secure knowledge of the Foundation Stage

curriculum and work well together to provide a broad range of interesting activities to help children to learn. Staff use effective questioning to promote children's thinking and their enthusiasm, along with a varied approach, provides an exciting environment in which children can enjoy learning. Planning and assessment systems benefit from regular review and they provide a firm framework to help children make good progress towards the early learning goals. Children's continual progress is observed, assessments are thorough and staff use this information to guide their planning. Staff are committed to an ongoing refinement of the monitoring systems, so that evaluative judgements which take account of how children are responding to planned provision are consistently used more effectively, to inform future planning and to secure best progression in all children's learning. This ensures activities are pitched at the appropriate level and children receive effective support and sufficient challenge, enabling them to achieve their individual potential.

Children are eager to learn and concentrate well showing good perseverance with activities. They co-operate and negotiate roles, for example, when acting out their imagined ideas in role-play and value one another's ideas. They are confident and skilled speakers and use words effectively to convey their experiences both real and imaginary. Children listen with great excitement to stories and offer answers to questions, for example when talking about sounds and letters. They are also able to treat books with respect and use these for pleasure as they are aware that they contain stories which they enjoy. Children are making good progress in mark making to represent their own ideas and the older children are skilled at writing their own names. Children count confidently, use number in their play and respond enthusiastically to challenges which extend their mathematical vocabulary and skills in planned activities and daily routines. They begin to make sense of the world around them as they explore and investigate a variety of materials and learn about their local environment, as well as other cultures, through interesting topic work. They are aware of their own bodies and their ability to use their senses. Children enjoy exploring creativity and talk about different textures as they access resources and use a range of media. Their physical skills develop and improve through a wide variety of experiences, including movement to music.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

Children are warmly welcomed into the playgroup and a good range of resources encourages children to be aware of their own and other cultures. These positive images of the wider community enable children to develop self-esteem and a sense of their own worth. The playgroup has effective arrangements in place to care for children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Children are well behaved and are able to share and show consideration for others. They respond well to reminders to care for resources and each other and staff have high expectations of their behaviour. Children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is fostered.

Strong relationships between staff and parents means that information regarding children's individual care needs is shared and used effectively and this contributes significantly to the children's feelings of security and well-being. Written information

for parents regarding the way in which the playgroup works and the details of the nursery education curriculum has been updated to take account of recent changes. Consequently, parents are able to reflect on care practices and feel appropriately informed about the provision made for their children's nursery education.

Partnership with parents and carers for nursery education is good. Staff regularly talk to parents about what their children have been doing in the session and their current achievements. Key workers ensure that parents receive regular verbal information about how their child is developing and progressing. Parents' views are actively sought prior to their children beginning at the playgroup so that staff are aware of some of the children's developmental needs and interests. There are systematic arrangements for staff and parents to share their observations and assessments of children's progress towards the early learning goals, within the Foundation Stage, and they are beginning to develop their planning for the next steps in children's learning together. Children benefit from their parents involvement in topic work which enables them to follow through learning at home and contributes to their development and progress.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

The management team ensures that children's care is enhanced by the staff's understanding of the playgroup's comprehensive policies and procedures to protect children and promote their well-being. They have developed strong aims and values for the provision and have a clear vision for improving children's care and education. They establish good training opportunities to enhance the quality of care given to children and are committed to further developing the staff's knowledge and understanding of the needs and outcomes for the very youngest children as they begin to use the 'Birth to three matters' framework.

The organisation within the playgroup meets the needs of the children well. There is a very good balance of indoor and outdoor activities to extend play and learning opportunities for the range of children attending the setting. Staff effectively organise time to allow the children to be cared for in small and mixed age groups which ensures that they receive suitable levels of care appropriate to their developmental stages. The good ratios of staff to children ensure that children receive a lot of individual attention which promotes their sense of belonging and self-worth. All legally required documentation which contributes to children's health, safety and well-being is in place and is regularly reviewed.

Leadership and management of the nursery education is good. Children's care and learning are supported through the effective organisation of the setting and the ability of the enthusiastic and committed staff team, headed by the knowledgeable and experienced manager. There are appropriate recruitment and induction procedures in place and all staff are committed to continuous improvement and development. Processes for monitoring and evaluating children's progress are strong and are currently being refined further to ensure that children consistently receive high quality care and that nursery education meets each child's needs. For example, staff meet

regularly to assess planned activities and review their suitability in terms of enabling individual children to progress. Individual staff skills are well recognised within the team, resulting in confident staff who are proactive in ensuring an inclusive environment where every child matters.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

At the last care inspection the setting was asked to make a number of improvements to its provision for children. They were asked to: ensure all records of accidents involving children are countersigned by parents; demonstrate that furniture, toys, equipment are well maintained and kept in good repair; ensure that fire safety records are kept to the satisfaction of the Fire Safety Officer; ensure that the complaints procedure includes contact details for the regulatory body; ensure that the equal opportunities policy is consistent with current legislation and guidance regarding gender issues and review policies and procedures with reference to Ofsted standards. Since then the playgroup has updated all the required policies and documentation to include clear information to ensure that staff and parents are fully informed and acknowledge the appropriate action which would be taken to ensure that the safety and welfare of children is maintained.

At the last nursery education inspection the setting was asked to develop their planning systems to ensure that activities are consistently adapted so that all children are able to gain the most from the learning opportunity and learning materials and are assured of optimum progression in their learning. They were also asked to monitor the effectiveness of this in practice. Discussion with staff and consideration of documents indicates that planning and assessment systems have since been reviewed and staff have developed their practice in the light of various training and support opportunities. The system for planning has been developed to relate well to the stepping stones and to link meaningfully with assessment. This ensures a broad-based curriculum that links suitable themes with practical play activities and which is adapted to help all children make good developmental progress towards the early learning goals in all areas of their learning. However, further refinement of the monitoring and evaluation systems is still ongoing with reference to current guidance. The playgroup intends that their evaluative judgements are used with increasing effectiveness to enhance future planning and secure best progression for all individuals. This aspect of their development will continue as a recommendation of this inspection.

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.

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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):

- continue to consolidate and formalise staff's knowledge and understanding of the needs and outcomes for children from birth to three by using an approach in line with the 'Birth to three matters' framework.

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):

- continue to refine the monitoring systems so that evidence and evaluative judgements, which take account of how individual children are responding to planned provision and information gained from parents, are used with increasing effectiveness to inform future planning and to secure best progression for all children's learning.

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