



Little Merlins Pre-School

Inspection report for early years provision

Unique Reference Number	102854
Inspection date	17 October 2006
Inspector	Nicola Jayne Pascoe
Setting Address	Culdrose Community Centre, Hibernia Road, Helston, Cornwall, TR13 8DJ
Telephone number	01326 562894
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Registered person	Little Merlins Pre-School 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?

Little Merlins Pre-School opened in 2002. It previously operated under the name of Seahawk playgroup for approximately 15 years. It operates from two rooms in the community centre, on the edge of Helston town. The pre-school serves the local area and the service community.

There are currently 38 children from two to five years on roll. This includes 16 funded three and four year olds. Children attend for a variety of sessions. The group opens five days a week during school term times. Sessions are from 09:15 until 11:45. There are sessions available for children aged two to three years on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 12:30 until 14:30.

There are seven part-time and one full-time staff who work with the children. Over half the staff have early years qualifications to NVQ level 2 or 3. There are three staff currently working

towards a recognised early years qualification. The setting receives support from the local authority and Pre-school Learning Alliance (PLA).

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PROVISION

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

Children's physical health is promoted well. All children are able to play and explore outdoors freely each day to enjoy fresh air and physical exercise. Children use the level and secure designated outdoor play area on a daily basis, regardless of the weather, as they wear suitable clothing and footwear. Children enjoy collecting rainwater in their buckets during a shower. They run, jump, balance, ride bikes and play games outdoors. Indoors children move confidently and with control. They benefit from plenty of floor space in which they move freely during music and movement activities. Children are cared for by a sufficient number of staff who have completed appropriate first aid training. Accident records show that injuries are treated appropriately and that parents are kept informed. Suitable procedures are followed to care for sick children. Children who feel unwell during their time at the pre-school are monitored effectively and cared for sensitively until their parent can collect them.

Children generally wash their hands regularly and at appropriate times, for example, before snacks and after messy play. Staff are vigilant in wiping children's noses when required. Suitable procedures are in place to ensure that medication is stored and administered appropriately. Written parental consent has been obtained for the administration of any medication and to seek emergency medical treatment or advice. Children have use of clean premises, toys and equipment. They eat very healthy and nutritious snacks, such as different types of fruits, sultanas, cereal, cheese and crackers. Snacks and drinks are freely available in sufficient quantities. Fresh drinking water is readily available for all children.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

All children benefit from the use of a purpose built pre-school unit, which is child-centred, safe and secure. Rooms are very well organised and provide comfortable areas for children and babies to rest and play. Toys and resources are readily accessible, as they are kept in low storage units, which are clearly and appropriately labelled. The premises are uncluttered, which enables children to move freely and safely indoors. Children, visitors and staff entering and leaving the premises are monitored effectively. There are appropriate systems in place to ensure that children are collected by authorised persons.

Children use age appropriate tools and equipment to support their learning and development. Staff follow comprehensive risk assessments. The premises and equipment are checked daily to ensure they are safe for children's use. Clear child protection procedures are shared with parents and followed well by staff, who demonstrate confidence in their ability to identify, record and report concerns appropriately. Suitable emergency procedures are in place and children practise fire drills on a regular basis, to develop their familiarity and confidence. Children are closely and appropriately supervised at all times.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

All children attending the pre-school follow comprehensive planning, themes and activities. Younger children benefit from the use of an effectively implemented Birth to three framework. Children are actively involved in a range of interesting, worthwhile and purposeful activities. All children enjoy time to play individually and as part of a group. They participate in a wide range of both self-initiated and planned activities. Staff offer good levels of support and interaction, praise and encouragement.

Older children follow the Foundation Stage curriculum, which is delivered well, through a very hands-on and practical approach. A familiar daily routine is followed, which provides children with security and a balanced range of activities. Children participate in enjoyable opportunities to play and learn. All children are confident to initiate play and offer ideas and suggestions to further develop their learning. Children enjoy outdoor play as and when they wish, as they have free access to the secure, enclosed outdoor play area. Children freely and independently access a suitable and interesting range of toys, resources and tools to further extend their play. They are actively engaged in manipulative play with dough and use an interesting and appropriate range of tools and resources during craft activities. They demonstrate high levels of concentration and perseverance.

Nursery education.

The quality of teaching and learning is good. Children follow a broad and balanced curriculum. Children's individual observation records contain good levels of information and identify age appropriate targets. Children participate in regular opportunities to use mathematics to solve everyday problems. For example, children count how many children are at the setting and later re-evaluate this when a child is collected early, reducing their number. They scribe regularly during free play activities. However, this is not promoted purposefully through daily routine activities, for example labelling their own work or signing themselves in at self-registration time, to encourage and support children's development of letter formation. Children's written work is not displayed. Children have developed their independence within the pre-school room. Resources are stored in low, labelled storage units and toilet facilities are freely accessed. Children are well behaved, polite and kind to others. They listen and concentrate well at group discussion time, when they welcome each other and discuss the weather. All children are actively and enthusiastically involved in tidying away at the end of the session.

Most children participate in the music and movement session. However, staff are respectful of the wishes of those that do not want to join in and suggest that they may sit and watch the fun. Children demonstrate high levels of imagination and are able to initiate and maintain role play with others harmoniously and for considerable periods of time. They have use of good quality role play resources which include items such as real tea bags. Children have collected natural materials such as pine cones, twigs and leaves, which are displayed in trays for free exploration, so that they may compare the textures. All children are making good progress along the stepping stones. Staff use interesting and hands-on methods of teaching. Good use is made of the outdoor learning environment. The pre-school promotes a healthy eating

programme, which provides children with the opportunity to freely access a balanced range of healthy snacks and drinks, as and when they are hungry or thirsty.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

All children are generally confident, settled and happy. They have formed strong and trusting relationships with staff and other children. Some younger children are still settling in and yet are confident to approach staff to be comforted. Staff are kind and considerate to their needs. Staff are good role models and children respond well to follow their examples. Children are developing their manners and demonstrate consideration of others. Children's individual needs and preferences are identified, respected and met appropriately. There is an effective key worker system in place. Children explore and celebrate their own and different cultures, beliefs and abilities through planned activities. They also have free access to a suitable and sufficient range of resources and visual aids, which promote a positive awareness and understanding of people's differences. The pre-school fosters children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

The partnership with parents and carers is good. Staff are very aware of the importance and value of sharing information regularly with parents, and of how this positively impacts on children's well-being at the pre-school. Information is shared verbally with parents at the beginning and end of each session. Children's progress records are shared formally on a regular basis. The parent notice board displays useful and up-to-date information and the written policies are freely available to parents at all times. A comprehensive prospectus and regular newsletters provide further written information for parents. Parents are encouraged to be actively involved in children's learning.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

Children benefit from the ability of the pre-school staff to provide a very well-organised and safe environment. Children are well cared for by a suitably qualified, experienced and supportive staff team. Staff are confident and competent in their roles and responsibilities. They are fully committed to attending further training. All staff are proactive in ensuring they deliver high standards of care and education for all children attending the pre-school. The committee follows robust recruitment and vetting procedures. Suitable contingency arrangements are in place to provide emergency cover. Registration systems are used effectively to clearly show that adult to child ratios are met at all times. The pre-school is supported well by a very efficient administrator, who ensures that children's records and nursery documentation is stored securely and confidentiality is maintained. She demonstrates a very good awareness of the importance of updating records regularly and of storing these records for an appropriate length of time.

The leadership and management of the setting is good. The committee are fully involved and work closely with the manager, leading to improvements in the organisation of nursery education and the outcomes for children. The provision is managed and monitored effectively. There are good levels of support for staff and, as a result, they are confident and competent. However,

the procedure for the induction of newly appointed members of staff does not provide sufficient levels of ongoing support and monitoring. The pre-school has developed strong links with the local schools. Pre-school children are visited by teachers from the local schools and some children attend the 'Learning together' programme. Support and advice is actively sought and welcomed from external agencies. Parent questionnaires and staff appraisals are used to monitor and assess the effectiveness of the setting. The pre-school promotes an inclusive environment in which every child matters. The setting meets the needs of the range of children for whom it provides.

Improvements since the last inspection

At the last inspection the setting were required to extend the range of resources which promote a positive awareness and understanding of people with disabilities. They now provide a wide range of interesting and suitable resources and visual aids, which children use both freely and during planned, adult-led activities. Staff were required to develop the use of children's developmental records, so that they plan more challenging activities for older and more able children and the next steps in all children's learning. Children's individual observation sheets and targets are now used effectively to identify suitably challenging activities, in order to promote their development and skills appropriately. Staff were also required to plan more opportunities for children to develop literacy skills by practising and valuing emergent writing, attempting to write with a purpose and by beginning to link sounds to letters. Some progress has been made in this area. Children use a range of writing materials imaginatively on a daily basis, both with and without adult support. However, there are no routine daily activities with which to promote the development and reinforcement of letter formation through purposeful writing and children's written work is not displayed. Finally, it was agreed to increase staff's knowledge of how to use language during daily planned and routine practical activities to help children develop their understanding of number through problem solving. Children are now actively encouraged to discuss and evaluate mathematical problems on a daily basis. They confidently and accurately count and subtract in order to discover how many children remain at the setting when some have left early.

Complaints since the last inspection

Since the last inspection there have been no complaints made to Ofsted that required the provider or Ofsted to take any action in order to meet the National Standards.

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):

- develop and formalise the procedure for the induction of new staff to ensure that they are fully prepared for their role and responsibilities and are provided with ongoing support.

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):

- develop and implement daily routine activities through which children may practise purposeful scribing and develop letter recognition and formation. Display children's written work for all to admire.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the leaflet *Complaints about Ofsted Early Years: concerns or complaints about Ofsted's role in regulating and inspecting childcare and early education* (HMI ref no 2599) which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk