



Elmstead Nursery

Inspection report for early years provision

Unique Reference Number	650062
Inspection date	17 October 2006
Inspector	Susan Elizabeth Warren
Setting Address	Elmcroft, Holly Way, Elmstead Market, COLCHESTER, Essex, CO7 7YQ
Telephone number	01206 827583
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Registered person	Elmstead Nursery Ltd
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?

Elmstead Nursery opened in 2000 and operates from purpose built premises. It is situated in the grounds of a primary school in Elmstead Market, Essex. A maximum of 26 children may attend the nursery at any one time. The nursery is open each weekday from 08.55 to 12.30 and 13:00 to 15:30 during school term times. On Wednesday and Friday afternoons sessions run from 13:00 to 15:00 only and are specifically for the under three's. All children share access to a secure enclosed outdoor play area.

There are currently 59 children aged from two to under five years on roll. Of these, 40 children receive funding for early education. Children come from the local area and surrounding villages.

The nursery employs ten members of staff. Of these, six hold appropriate early years qualifications and one is working towards a further qualification.

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PROVISION

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

Children are kept healthy at the setting and learn about aspects of a healthy lifestyle through everyday routines and topic work. They follow good basic hygiene practises such as hand washing before eating, aided by a pictorial sequence. They use the toilet facilities unaided or with help if required, and know that they must wash their hands afterwards. Many do all this without prompting. Younger children can be changed discreetly in a separate area, good hygiene procedures are observed to maintain children's health and prevent cross-infection.

Toys and equipment are kept clean and safe, and table tops cleaned with anti bacterial spray before they are used for food. Children's plates and cups are washed in a dishwasher after each use, keeping them very clean and hygienic. Children needing first aid are treated by trained staff and the details recorded for a parent or carer to sign. Similarly, any medication given is recorded and signed off. If children become poorly whilst they are at nursery they are kept comfortable until they can be collected by a parent or carer. Parents are made aware of exclusion times for any infectious conditions and asked to keep children at home until they are well enough to attend, thus preventing the risk of spread of infection. Children needing specialised medical attention have their needs met by staff who are fully trained to deal with the equipment and routines, ensuring their safety and good health whilst attending nursery.

Children enjoy a nutritious snack and a drink midway through sessions. They have a choice of fruit or vegetables, toast and breadsticks and other options chosen to reflect the healthy eating policy. Drinks are available at all times, and children pour their own as soon as they are able to do so. Some children stay for a lunch club where they enjoy a packed lunch from home. They are encouraged to help themselves and eat the food in a sensible order. Parents are asked to keep to healthy options and avoid sweet or sugary items and fizzy drinks. All children with allergies or specific dietary needs have their requirements documented and displayed; staff are very well aware of these and see to it that no unsuitable foods are ever given.

Children benefit from excellent opportunities to make good progress in physical development. Inside the playroom they have manipulative toys and construction kits, and tools for crafts and mark making, to help with fine motor skills. They can climb the stairs to the upper level role play area and manage this safely and skilfully.

Outside they use the climbing frame and other apparatus for balancing, climbing and moving with increasing skill. Safety surfaces ensure that no accidents will occur and children are allowed to challenge their own limits without being over supervised or monitored. They can use wheeled toys to steer and ride, learning to avoid collisions and manage the space effectively. Children enjoy using the scaled down brooms to sweep up sand after they have used the sandpit.

Planned movement and music sessions in the school hall teach movement through imaginative drama and visualisation exercises, such as moon walking, with complementary music for added stimulus. A parachute provides opportunities for collaborative group fun, and controlled movement.

Children under three attend separate sessions where they are able to use the equipment with supervision until they gain the confidence to explore unaided. They learn to move safely round the playroom and respond well to requests to line up, sit on the mat or find a space at snacktime, helping them with ideas about space for themselves and others.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

Children are cared for in an extremely well presented environment, equipped and furnished to meet all their developing needs. Security is given a high priority and no child can leave the premises unseen. All visitors are screened prior to entry, so children will not come into contact with unwanted visitors. Regular safety checks on electrical and fire safety equipment minimises children's risk of accidental injury. They regularly practise a fire drill so that they are aware of how to respond in case of an emergency evacuation, and occasionally join in with the school fire drills as well, covering all eventualities. Maintenance and safety issues are recorded when identified and promptly attended to, keeping the environment safe and hazard free for children.

The playroom is decorated with displays of children's work. These are carefully mounted and labelled, so that children and parents can see and celebrate the children's efforts, and to create a colourful and stimulating environment in which children can work and play. The room is always ready to receive children before sessions, so that they can begin exploring and interacting with one another and the equipment and activities as soon as they arrive. As well as their artwork, displays include an interest table, with a science display, or something linked to the topic, and a letter of the week display introducing the letter and with various items, some brought in by children, to illustrate the initial sound.

The furniture and equipment is all of very high quality. Items are carefully selected to be child friendly, enabling children to select activities and work or play in comfort and safety. The role play area is well designed and cleverly uses two levels to provide double opportunities for imaginative scenarios, currently a green grocer's shop and a domestic environment, increasing the play value for the children. Storage, both inside and out of doors is adequate and allows easy access to equipment, giving children more choices and ability to develop independence in selecting resources.

Children are protected from potential harm and neglect by staff's understanding of child protection procedures. These are displayed for parents too, so they can be aware of the nursery's approach and reassured that concerns are dealt with appropriately.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

All children make very good progress during their time at the setting. Children under three years of age have a programme of activities tailored to their needs and ability level and use ideas and information from the 'Birth to three matters' framework. They are introduced gradually to the demands of being in a group, with sensitively planned sessions to help them develop confidence and a sense of belonging.

Nursery Education

The quality of teaching and learning is good.

Children aged three and over follow a curriculum based on the Foundation Stage, helping them make very good progress through the stepping stones towards the early learning goals. Staff demonstrate a sound knowledge and understanding of all aspects of the Foundation Stage, including how children learn. They plan and deliver a balanced and broad programme of stimulating and well thought out activities covering all the areas of learning.

Children have free choice for the larger part of the session, from the equipment and activities set out by staff. There is a range of teaching styles including individual, small group and whole group teaching. A balance of active and quieter times, and an integrated approach with activities linked to reinforce learning across all areas, provides variety and a stimulating and interesting day for the children.

Children's behaviour is exemplary in response to consistent and clear management by all staff, who maintain a calm and cheerful approach. Children are able to maximise their learning potential and investigate and try new things, challenging their own limits in a safe and supportive environment. They show independence and confidence as they take part in self chosen activities and respond extremely well to staff's direction to help with daily routines such as snack time and outside play time.

Children's achievements and progress are recorded by staff, who use their observations to record what children can do and from there, plan the next stages of learning. The record clearly shows children's progress through the stepping stones, and this record is shared with parents on a regular basis, enabling them to continue their learning at home.

Children needing additional help are very well provided for. Any concerns are monitored and discussed with parents, and where necessary using help and advice from outside professionals.

Children are able to sit quietly and attentively, responding to stories and group discussions with appropriate and thoughtful answers, showing that they have listened well. They ask questions and make their feelings known, seeking help when needed. Staff join in with the play and introduce vocabulary, for example, at the water tray containing coloured water, as the children describe what they see and what it reminds them of. Children have opportunities for mark making using chalks, paint and a range of pens and crayons. They practise letter formation in a fun and informal way and write for different purposes, though some opportunities such as in the role play area and during outside play, are occasionally overlooked. Name cards are available for a self registration system when children enter at the start of a session, and older children have name cards for use at other times. However, name cards are not readily accessible throughout the session to encourage all children to write their own name, for example on a piece of work. An excellent book corner contains a varied selection of books which children can browse and share with a staff member or a friend; comfortable cushions encourage a relaxed approach and a love of books as a source of information or pleasure. Stories are used to good effect to reinforce topic work and learning, for example, as a springboard for drama and movement.

Children's awareness of mathematical concepts such as number, shape and space is developed through day to day routines and core provision such as sand and water play. They count the number of children present and have a go at calculating whether there are more boys or more girls. Children recognise numerals and how to order them as they park the bikes in numbered bays outside. Cooking, dough play, sand and water introduce concepts of weight, volume and capacity as children freely explore the tools and materials. Puzzles and construction kits develop awareness of shape and space and a range of equipment allows experimentation with sequencing and pattern. Shape, pattern and symmetry is also explored using artwork.

Children are able to explore and investigate natural and made materials and objects as they freely play in the garden and playroom, and on nature walks in the school grounds. They wait and see a flower take up food colouring and transform from white to black. They enjoy caring for the nursery's pet guinea pig discussing his food and care needs as well as those of their own pets at home, developing ideas of how living things need to be looked after. There are opportunities to grow and nurture plants in the nursery garden, such as the giant sunflowers, which are very rewarding and demonstrate life cycles to the children.

Children's skills in terms of information technology and everyday technology are enhanced by use of the computer and compact disc player, and some programmable toys as well as items of play technology such as a till, in the role play area. They are very competent in using the computer to complete simple programmes supporting learning across all areas. Children become familiar with the use of a digital camera which is widely used to record children's activities and special moments such as parties and plays.

Children learn about past and present events and begin to understand the passage of time as they talk about changes since babyhood, during topic work. They take part in local and community events such as the school fete, and contribute to the school's efforts to raise environmental awareness by composting all their food waste and kitchen scraps.

They gain an understanding of world cultures through stories and songs, and have some costumes in the role play area. There are posters depicting children from various ethnic backgrounds and some examples of language such as the greetings poster in the entrance area. Festivals and cultural events are celebrated throughout the calendar year and children take part in a joint Christmas production with the adjacent primary school. Children are able to think about the differences and similarities in their experiences, customs and beliefs with those of other children from around the world.

Creative opportunities include free and guided art and craft activities such as painting, printing and exploring techniques involving colour and texture. Wax resist, string printing and collage are some of the methods children can use when creating work as part of topic studies or as free play. They watch the results of mixing colours such as when exploring black and white as part of a larger topic based on colour.

Music is used as part of movement and drama sessions, where children use a visualisation technique to recreate an imagined scenario or feeling. Free use of percussion instruments, indoors and in the garden, help children explore rhythm and pitch; they also use these at other times to accompany singing sessions.

Role play in the split level area is well provided for, with an imaginative use of space and resources to create stimulating play situations such as the green grocer's shop. Domestic style props and costumes ensure there is always a doll to dress, feed or take for a walk, or maybe on a visit to the doctor if they are feeling poorly.

Small world play resources include road and rail layouts and vehicles, dinosaurs and farm animals. Children use these in a variety of ways to create imaginary scenarios, sorting and grouping them, and grading for size, and begin to share and take turns. They invent games which encourage language development and cooperation as they act out characters and organise themselves to play collaboratively, generally requiring little input from adults.

Children benefit from the staff's low key approach; whereby they are always on hand to guide and extend the play, but it remains mainly child led and not over dominated by an adult agenda, whilst keeping an eye on time and routines. Staff interact sensitively, showing understanding of the children's differing levels of attainment and understanding, and use praise and encouragement and gentle reminders when needed, for example, to walk safely or take care with tools or equipment.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

All children's needs are very well known to staff, as details are recorded on the registration forms, and staff have regular informal chats with parents at the start and end of sessions. There is an excellent, sensitive settling in procedure for new children, which is very flexible and allows them to take as long as they need to feel comfortable and secure before being left for a whole session. This means that children feel at home in the setting from an early age, allowing them to make full use of the play and learning opportunities they are offered.

Children demonstrate excellent concentration skills as they settle to self chosen activities. They develop independence in self care as they use the toilet facilities unaided, and at snack time when they serve themselves with drinks and food, or during the lunch club when they require little help in organising themselves with their lunchbox contents. Children are made welcome and feel a sense of belonging at the setting. They have named coat pegs and a pocket with a photograph for their belongings, letters and work to take home. Many wear the uniform sweatshirt and know that they will wear a uniform when they go to school.

Children's attitudes to learning are very positive; they move confidently around the nursery and eagerly attempt new and known activities, chatting comfortably to their peers and the adults around them as they play and work, discussing home, families and pets.

Children requiring additional help are very well supported. Their needs are assessed and monitored closely and staff work with parents and outside professionals to ensure that all facilities and support systems are made available, allowing children to fully access all activities. Inclusiveness is fostered and all children's needs are well considered to make sure they are able to fulfil their full potential. The use of visual timetables and sequences is used where it helps children stay focused, and signing is available for those who experience any language difficulties.

Children's behaviour is very good and demonstrates their understanding of the boundaries and accepted codes of conduct. Children discuss how their actions may make others feel and are rewarded for positive behaviour and showing consideration for those around them.

The very effective partnership with parents is seen as key to providing high quality care and education for the children. This begins early on when new parents and children approach the setting. They are given very good information in the form of a prospectus and details about the curriculum and the approaches to areas such as writing and reading. A key worker is assigned and builds a relationship with the family, though parents are able to approach any staff member when they have questions or concerns. Informal discussions about the children's progress take place at the end of sessions, and a more formal appointment can be made at any other time, keeping parents well informed and enabling them to continue with helping the children's development at home.

Nursery Education

The partnership with parents and carers is good.

In addition to the above, parents are kept well informed about events at the nursery by leaflets and notices, either on the notice board or individually given. The planning for the term is displayed and parents are always invited to contribute with ideas or resources, or to give a talk about their job or hobby. Parents may view the developmental profiles at any time and key workers can talk about any specific concerns as well as their goals for the children over the coming term, enabling parents to be involved in their child's learning.

Social, moral, spiritual and cultural development is fostered.

Children are made aware of how their actions impact on others. They form friendships and good relationships with the adults caring for them. They join in with celebrations of traditional and world festivals, becoming aware of the values and beliefs of their own and other cultures.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

Children are cared for by staff who have been checked and vetted to ensure their suitability to work with children. There are well established procedures in place for the recruitment and appointment of staff, with clear job descriptions and details of responsibilities, expectations and duties. An induction programme ensures staff are fully conversant with all aspects of the position they are applying for. Staff in post are all suitably qualified and/or experienced and take part in regular training and updates such as on 'Birth to three matters' and many other day courses connected to the curriculum and the smooth running of the facility.

Children attend sessions designed to cater for their age group, enabling the activities to be tailored for the ability and achievement levels and their social skills competence. This means that the groups are able to flow smoothly and a harmonious atmosphere is maintained, making a good climate for the learning experiences. The ratio of adults to children is favourable and above the minimum requirements, ensuring sufficient time and attention for all children. The

key worker system provides a point of contact for parents, helping to maintain continuity for the children and helping to sort out any concerns or issues parents may wish to air, in a confidential setting if requested.

All documentation required to support children is in place and mostly to a very high standard. One or two policies need minor amendments to ensure they reflect the latest information and changes to the National Standards. The documentation is well presented and very accessible for parents, as it is kept on a table in the entrance and on a large notice board. The nursery benefits from a well organised office space and a dedicated administrative assistant, so children's details and records are very confidential and up to date. An operational plan sets out the day to day aspects of the setting as well as policies and procedures in depth, and specialised information regarding the teaching of reading and writing, which is broadly in line with the approach taken by the adjacent primary school.

Nursery Education

Leadership and management is outstanding.

The management of the nursery is underpinned by a clear and well developed child centred ethos, aimed at helping children achieve and make progress to the best of their abilities and potential. The nursery manager has worked extremely hard to develop systems and maintain the high quality of education and care which is currently offered, and has had an influence in motivating and promoting the staff team to do the same. Staff display high levels of commitment and genuine enthusiasm, which in turn encourages the children in positive ways.

The quality of teaching is monitored and evaluated, and good use is made of outside sources such as the early years partnership in making sure that planning is meeting the needs of the children. Some very innovative methods are used to complement the Foundation Stage, such as the Colchester Primary Optical Centre (CPOC) and Neuro Linguistic Programming (NLP) approaches, which are used along with traditional approaches to open out the curriculum and make it exciting and accessible to all children. These in particular have had a very positive result in the way children can listen attentively and respond thoughtfully and imaginatively to new ideas and situations, and provide them with extra tools for learning which will be of benefit for their future years.

There is an awareness of the strengths and weaknesses in the setting and a clear plan to continually improve and develop those areas which can benefit from a re-evaluation. Staff are made to feel involved and their contributions and opinions valued.

A comprehensive appraisal system is in place, addressing staff development needs and identifying training to refresh or update knowledge. Staff are actively encouraged to attend external and in-house training and also benefit from the strong links with the adjacent primary school, to which the majority of the children progress. This gives them a wealth of knowledge and even resources to draw upon and is a mutually beneficial relationship since the school welcome the firm links and encourage as much interaction as possible, especially in regard to the developmental records which are available as children complete their time at the nursery. The

head teacher is welcomed into the nursery to read stories and becomes a familiar and friendly face to the children, easing their transition into school.

Overall, the nursery leadership and management is an outstanding feature and one of the many strengths at this provision, and has a positive effect in helping the children learn and achieve to the high standard they currently enjoy.

Overall, children's needs are met.

Improvements since the last inspection

At the last inspection the provider was asked to review the child protection policy and ensure that parents are made aware of this.

The child protection policy has been reviewed and now contains the latest guidance and information; details are available to parents via the prospectus. Additionally, a poster and booklet are displayed on the parents' notice board.

As a result of these actions, parents are well informed and children's care and welfare is enhanced.

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

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 that policies and procedures are updated to reflect the latest National Standards requirements.

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 children have a wide range of opportunities to write for different purposes, such as in the role play area and outside area, and have access to resources to encourage the development of their emergent writing, such as name cards.

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