



The Castle Montessori

Inspection report for early years provision

Unique Reference Number	129395
Inspection date	16 February 2007
Inspector	Sheila Harrison
Setting Address	Shooters Way, Berkhamsted, Hertfordshire, HP4 3TY
Telephone number	01442 872398
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Registered person	Kids Out of Hours Ltd
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

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 satisfactory. The registered person meets the National Standards for under 8s day care and childminding.

The quality and standards of the nursery education are satisfactory.

WHAT SORT OF SETTING IS IT?

The Castle Montessori Day Nursery opened in 1999. It is one of eight provisions operated by Sunhill Daycare (Europe) Ltd. The nursery operates from four main rooms in an adapted building set in a semi rural part of Berkhamsted. The nursery serves the local area and surrounding villages.

There are currently 71 children from three months to five years on roll. This includes 10 funded three and four year olds. Children attend for a variety of sessions. The setting is willing to support children who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those who speak English as an additional language.

The nursery opens Monday to Friday, 51 weeks of the year. Opening hours are from 07.30 until 18.30. Five part-time and eight full-time staff work with the children. Six members of staff

have appropriate early years qualifications and two staff are currently working towards a recognised early years qualification. The setting receives support from the Local Authority. The nursery follows elements of the Montessori methods of teaching.

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PROVISION

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is satisfactory.

Children learn about healthy eating as they enjoy a varied and healthy menu with freshly prepared ingredients including sufficient fruit and vegetables. In the summer children help the cook by growing their own vegetables and herbs. Procedures are followed to note children's allergies and all staff are aware of the list of dietary preferences. However, staff do not fully follow procedures to record information from parents for children to try different foods or offer the option of milk to young children at snack time. This potentially restricts children's healthy choices.

Children's health is suitably protected as the setting has suitable policies and procedures for accidents, medication and sickness. Well established daily routines and clear explanations increase children's understanding of the importance of washing their hands to help maintain good hygiene. They wash their hands before meals and after the toilet and discuss that germs will give them tummy ache. Satisfactory procedures to stop the spread of infection are in place as staff use anti-bacterial hand gel after wiping children's noses. Children are beginning to gain control of their bodies with support from staff as they set up generally acceptable systems in discussion with parents to help children succeed at toilet training. Staff support young children to develop their self awareness as they sensitively change children's nappies. Young children are beginning to learn some personal care routines as they have some help to put on their own coats and shoes for outside play. Older children are encouraged to dress themselves and can visit the toilet with little supervision.

Children enjoy adequate chances to exercise in the fresh air in the outside area. They wear appropriate clothing to ensure they can go out in most weathers. Children enjoy the safe challenges of a steep bank of grass and suitable climbing frame. They can use an adequate range of balls, scooters and sit and ride toys. Children have some opportunities to learn on a larger scale in the summer with a large set of scales and water flow system. They record their observations of the growing vegetables on large sheets of paper. Older children learn to move with control during the Montessori session as they use the red rods to make a walk through a maze. Older children learn to carry their chairs safely and climb the stairs holding the hand rail.

Children can rest and sleep in peaceful surroundings with individual bedding. Their safety is protected as they are frequently checked. Sleep times are recorded and this information is shared with parents.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is satisfactory.

Children are cared for in a welcoming and generally comfortable setting. The premises are in a suitable state of repair, adequately lit and staff regularly open the windows to ensure there is sufficient ventilation. The manager undertakes suitable risk assessments of the premises and regularly checks the accident records to see if any action needs to be taken. Staff have a sound knowledge of the fire evacuation procedures. Children are learning to keep themselves safe as they are reminded to sit on their chairs properly. They are given the consequences of their actions, for example 'someone may get hurt if you play firemen with the red rods'. There is an adequate range of equipment, generally in suitable order and appropriate for children's needs.

Children's welfare is adequately safeguarded as the staff have a suitable knowledge of child protection procedures. Some staff have recently attended child protection training to raise the awareness of the signs and symptoms. The manager has the appropriate information on reporting procedures.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is satisfactory.

Children are broadly content and settled in the setting. Those who are new to the nursery are helped to leave their main carers by staff that are sensitive to their needs. Close and caring relationships increase the children's sense of trust with their early communication skills being well supported. The baby room staff sing softly to babies to comfort them and in 'Ladybirds' young children show pleasure as they clap, do the actions to the songs and begin to make sounds. Children are becoming competent learners as they explore the mediums of water, sand and cornflour as glue. Children in 'Ladybirds' are purposefully involved as they sing action rhymes whilst waiting for the water play activity to be ready. Staff are becoming confident to plan activities and record achievements using the 'Birth to three matter' framework.

Nursery Education.

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. Children are making satisfactory progress towards the early learning goals. Some staff have a sound understanding of the Foundation Stage. They use the areas of learning and stepping stones to plan a suitable range of activities. Staff plan a target for each child's development using an individual learning plan. However, these are not fully linked to the children's interest or stage of development. Plans do not always include extension activities for the older or more able children. The routine and the organisation of the Montessori session enables children to become sufficiently confident to work independently and occasionally in small groups. Children respond appropriately to adult expectations for acceptable behaviour as they sit and watch the demonstration of Montessori equipment. Children develop their small motor skills by making patterns with small beads and pouring small quantities of water and pasta. At registration time staff suitably question the children to check their understanding. 'How many boys and girls and which is the most?' Staff check children's understanding of measure as they encourage children to use different language to compare the red rods laying on the floor and standing on end. Children are encouraged to solve problems with adult support using complex puzzles to sort sizes and match colours.

Children listen intently as they requested the story of the enormous currant bun which was made up by the nursery manager. They contribute their ideas for the ingredients; discuss effects of the heat from the oven; the time by which it has to be cooked and to be ready for the children to come home from school. Staff give children information on the names of shapes and encourage them to see examples in the environment for example, the moon appears as a crescent in the sky. Records of achievement for the Montessori session are not linked to the areas of learning or stepping stones leading to gaps in the provision, for example writing for a purpose.

The arrangement of resources and staff deployment at other times of the day and in other parts of the nursery limits opportunities for the children to develop their learning, for example when foundation stage children are deployed in another room toys and activities lack interest and challenge. They are discouraged from using one article to simulate another. Children's independence is not fully developed at snack and meal times as staff pour the drinks or serve the meals. They sit at the table waiting for the table to be cleaned and to visit the toilet to wash their hands. Children are in a large group and all talk at once. Staff are not sitting with the children to encourage suitable social conventions for conversation. The role play area lacks interest and variation in the available resources hindering children's choices to play creatively.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is satisfactory.

Children behave well as staff are skilful role models, they praise and encourage the children frequently. Children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is fostered. They are beginning to understand their own needs and to respect the needs of others as they help each other and remind others of the rules. Children are encouraged to take turns. They have the opportunity to play alone or in small groups and are beginning to form friendships. There is a satisfactory system to identify children's needs and to ensure they receive appropriate support strategies. Children are learning about the wider world as they discuss the weather and calendar during registration time. They acknowledge important events in their lives and some festivals. Children begin to feel secure as staff and parents share information consistently. Parents of young children welcome the information sent home. They receive regular newsletters. The regulations relating to complaints log have been considered and a suitable complaints log is in place. Partnership with parents and carers is satisfactory. Children's records and progress are shared at parents' consultation. Parents can contribute to these records during this time. They have information on the children's learning through display of the plans and daily feedback from the staff, this includes information on the Foundation Stage.

Organisation

The organisation is satisfactory.

Children benefit from a generally effective organisation. The setting receives support from the company quality assurance scheme to regularly review the quality of care the children receive. However, the procedures for management to monitor the current practice and communicate with staff are not fully effective and this restricts children's well-being. A suitable use of documentation supports the care of the children although the registers do not accurately record the children present potentially risking children's safety. Children are cared for by staff that

have a sound understanding of childcare. The setting undertakes satisfactory recruitment procedures to ensure staff are vetted and suitable to work with children. They ensure the minimum child: adult ratios are maintained over the nursery as a whole. There are adequate contingency plans during times of staff shortage as staff move from a neighbouring nursery to cover vacant posts. This enables children to be cared for by dependable staff who generally know the company's policies and procedures.

Leadership and management is satisfactory. Information from the evaluation of the some activities, staff meetings and regular one to one discussions are used to identify the strengths and weaknesses in the quality of education. Staff are using the 'Curriculum guidance for the foundation stage' to devise activities in line with the stepping stones and early learning goals. Overall children's needs are met.

Improvements since the last inspection

At the last care inspection the setting agreed to ensure the procedures to deputise for the manager are efficient, to carry out a risk assessment for potential hazards, ensure there are sufficient staff on duty with an appropriate first aid certificate and to develop staff's knowledge of child protection procedures. Recommendations were made to provide an area away from the children for staff breaks and domestic style furniture for the young children.

The setting ensures sufficient staff on duty have an appropriate first aid qualification and they have a suitable system to ensure qualifications are updated regularly. The provision has developed an adequate action plan to ensure the assistant manger meets the qualification requirements when taking over in the absence of the manager. Some staff have undertaken child protection training and the setting has information on a DVD to share with the staff team. This ensures there are adequate procedures for the safe management of children. Risk assessments on the premises are regularly undertaken and the provider has an in-house maintenance system to ensure premises are suitable for the purpose.

The setting has a room away from the children for staff to take their breaks. There is a settee in the baby room for adults to feed babies in comfort. There is some soft space in 'Ladybirds' for young children to develop their mobility. The setting is considering some small chairs to bring a home like atmosphere to this room.

At the last education inspection the setting agreed to review staff's training needs to ensure they receive training in the Foundation Stage, to improve the planning system and to extend the activities for mathematics, communication, language and literacy for the older or more able children.

The setting is in the process of reviewing the opportunities to extend the staff's knowledge of the Foundation stage as staff have acknowledged this is a training need through regular supervision meetings with management. This continues to be a recommendation. Improvements in the planning system have lead to staff assessing the stage of the child's development, planning, evaluating activities and compiling individual learning plans for each child using the areas of learning and stepping stones. However, these are not linked to the child's strengths or interests to help children move to the next steps in their learning. The Montessori equipment

is used to good effect to extend the older or more able children's development in mathematics, communication, language and literacy. However, foundation stage children lack access to sufficiently demanding toys and equipment and as a result are not fully challenged when staff and foundation stage children are deployed in 'Grasshoppers'.

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 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):

- ensure there is an efficient system for the sharing of information on children's dietary preferences and that young children are routinely offered a choice of suitable drinks
- ensure the monitoring of the provision includes effective communication systems between staff and management
- ensure records show children's hours of attendance.

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):

- review the deployment of staff and resources to ensure children are purposefully involved
- improve the staff's knowledge and understanding of the Foundation Stage.

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