

The Centre Preschool

Inspection report for early years provision

Unique Reference Number	650006
Inspection date	20 April 2007
Inspector	Sandra Daniels
Setting Address	Lifelong Learning Centre - Broadmayne, The Hub, Ely Way, Basildon, Essex, SS14 2EQ
Telephone number	01268 281591
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Registered person	The Centre 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 outstanding. The registered person meets the National Standards for under 8s day care and childminding.

The quality and standards of the nursery education are outstanding.

WHAT SORT OF SETTING IS IT?

The Centre Pre-school opened in 1976 and has been operating from these premises since 2000. It operates from one main room with kitchen and toilet facilities in a life long learning centre in Basildon. The pre-school serves the local and surrounding areas.

The pre-school is registered to care for no more than 26 children from two years to five years and there are currently 78 children on roll. This includes 50 funded three and four year olds. Children attend for a variety of sessions. The setting currently supports a small number of children with special needs and who speak English as an additional language.

The group opens five days a week during school term times. Sessions are from 09.15 until 11.45 and 12.45 until 15.15.

There are six full-time staff working with the children and five cover staff available. The vast majority of the staff have early years qualifications to National Vocational Qualification level two or three. The setting receives support from the Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership (EYDCP).

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PROVISION

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

Children's health is exceptionally well promoted in this setting where they are protected from infection as a result of excellent hygiene routines which clearly follow robust policies and procedures. This allows children to enjoy a clean and hygienic environment as they learn about keeping themselves clean and germ-free. Children know and learn to understand that they should wash their hands after using the toilet and before eating, and they do so independently and, sometimes, without being reminded. Those who do forget are given gentle reminders, as they see the visual prompts on display in the bathroom, or by practitioners, together with further explanations and demonstrations. Children use liquid soap and bring in their own personal towel from home. This significantly reduces the risk of cross-infection amongst children and motivates them to want to wash their hands as they like to use their own towels.

Parents are fully aware of the group's policy for excluding children when they are unwell and they are kept exceptionally well informed of any infections which may crop up within the setting. Notices are displayed on the board and parents are given verbal information from staff. This includes information on the signs and symptoms to look out for, possible treatments and recommended exclusion times.

Children benefit enormously from frequent access to fresh air and the outdoor environment. Here, the classroom is extended outside to maximise learning opportunities for children whilst they experience the elements of nature. In hot weather, children are protected from the sun through wearing hats and the application of their own sun screen. In colder weather, practitioners ensure children are appropriately dressed and comfortable. Children use equipment confidently for balancing, jumping and climbing and develop their co-ordination and spatial awareness as they pedal and steer cars and bikes.

Staff are fully qualified to administer first aid and any accidents are appropriately recorded and shared with parents. Practitioners are confident in their ability to deal with minor accidents and medical emergencies, such as allergic reactions. All children's medical needs and dietary requirements are sensitively met by staff with an excellent understanding of these issues. Relevant information is known by all staff to ensure children's good health and well-being.

Children develop an interest in, and a good understanding of, healthy eating. They choose from a range of healthy options for their snack, for example, toast, fresh and dried fruits and sugar-free juices. They enthusiastically make their own sandwiches sometimes, selecting the filling of their choice. Staff sit with children as they eat, joining in friendly conversations and giving praise and encouragement. Children enjoy experiencing new tastes as the thematic planning encompasses foods from around the world and healthy eating topics. All children can help themselves to water from the dispenser at any time, ensuring that they are never thirsty.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is outstanding.

Children thoroughly enjoy and benefit from an exceedingly colourful, stimulating, child-orientated and accessible space. The main play-room is bright and extremely interesting and children are very confident, independent, happy and secure in this setting. All children receive warm, personal greetings from staff as they are welcomed each day. The premises are

extremely inviting with a wealth of well presented children's work displayed throughout for parents and visitors to see. The accommodation is spacious and very well organised into different areas of learning and quiet areas for children to rest or relax, for example, with a book. Great consideration has been given to developing the outside play area to ensure children's safety and to maximise their learning opportunities. Bathroom facilities and nappy changing areas are separated from the main play area and are spacious, clean, hygienic and very well organised. All furniture and equipment is of high quality and is suitable for the various ages of children being cared for.

Children develop high self-esteem as they are enabled and encouraged to make choices and decisions about their care and play. Practitioners thoughtfully set out activities before children arrive and, in addition to this, children can independently access other toys and resources throughout sessions as everything is stored at low level. Children remain interested in the activities as the range is extensive and staff regularly introduce new items and ideas. Children flourish as they learn in this stimulating, interesting and safe environment which has been created for them by a staff team who give security and safety extremely high priority.

Accurate and well maintained registration systems and visitor log give a clear illustration of exactly who is on the premises at any given time. Admission to the pre-school is via a series of coded entry systems and a security gate which ensures that children are unable to leave unsupervised and unexpected visitors are adequately screened. Children are kept safe at all times as there are comprehensive health and safety checks and rigorous risk assessments in place. Accidents are kept to a minimum as staff are particularly vigilant in their supervision of children and skilfully anticipate potential dangers and prevent them from happening. This does not, however, inhibit children's independence and autonomy as they are able to experiment and take risks in a safe, controlled environment. For example, children who want to climb to look out of the windows are allowed to do so under the close watchfulness of a member of staff. Afterwards the practitioner explains the potential dangers of this activity and suggests alternative methods for this activity. This assists children to consider the consequences of their behaviour and to take responsibility for their own safety.

All necessary fire precautions are in place and there is a 'back-up' system of whistles should children not hear the fire alarm. Children enjoy regular emergency evacuation practices with staff and begin to learn about the dangers of fire and how to keep themselves safe as practitioners discuss this with them. Tidying up after themselves also supports this concept and children learn to behave responsibly and have consideration for each other whilst playing. They know, for example, that it is not safe to move around with scissors or to run indoors, explaining that someone might get hurt.

This staff team has an excellent understanding of safeguarding children. The member of staff with specific responsibility in this regard has recently attended training encompassing changes to local procedures and all staff are fully aware of what action to take should they have any concerns for a child's well-being or safety. Staff clearly recognise their roles and responsibilities in this respect and parents are kept fully informed of the setting's policy and procedure to protect children at all times.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

Children have great fun and look forward to attending this setting. They develop an excellent attitude to learning and are extremely happy and purposefully engaged in a considerably broad

range of interesting and challenging activities throughout each session. They enjoy and thoroughly benefit from unique experiences which actively promote high self-esteem, independence and confidence. For example, children were taken on an adventure by the Regio Amelia theatre company where a professional actress and sculptor visited the setting over a period of weeks. A story evolved, led entirely by the children and their interests, which took them to Africa and lots of exciting things happened on the way. Children made and played musical instruments and wore costumes they made for themselves using pillow cases. They sculpted busts of themselves and proudly displayed them around the setting.

Children who are new to the group quickly settle because practitioners have an excellent understanding, and sensitivity towards, the mixture of emotions felt at the time of their first separation from their primary carers. The settling in procedure is totally flexible and parents are welcomed to stay with their child until they feel the time is right to leave. This time is used as an opportunity for parents to get to know their child's key worker and to begin to build constructive and positive relationships.

Children's welfare is highly promoted and their individual needs are extremely well known by all staff members. Practitioners are very knowledgeable about the 'Birth to three matters' framework and it is used with great effect in practice to meet young children's needs. This clearly supports young children's development and well-being as staff understand the framework very well and implement it in practice. The planning of activities and experiences for younger children is developed directly from their interests and needs.

Practitioners listen attentively to children and speak to them sensitively and kindly. Children are given time to express themselves and to complete activities they are interested in. For example, when a child is proud of his completed model using a construction toy, he is given a camera and takes a photograph of his achievement. Children of all ages develop positive relationships with each other and with adults. Staff are highly knowledgeable and experienced and fully appreciate the necessity to support young children's emotional well-being and stability. They ensure that children are extremely well supported and cared for, meaning they are emotionally secure and resilient.

Children are extremely confident and independent and develop a high self-esteem because they have so very many opportunities to make choices and decisions about their learning and care. Older children are competent with self-help skills as they are able to put on their coats, take themselves to the toilet and pour themselves drinks if they are thirsty.

Nursery Education.

The quality of teaching and learning is outstanding. Staff clearly recognise important factors about how children learn and have an excellent knowledge of the Foundation Stage. Practical, real-life experiences allow children to relate on a personal level to things and provide the best opportunities for them to learn. For example, on a particularly cold day, children playing outside were able to see how water freezes in very cold weather and, then what happens to it when the temperature rises and it thaws and melts. They enjoy playing in the snow and develop an awareness of various climates and weather conditions.

The curriculum is extremely well planned to promote children's progress towards the early learning goals and to ensure the inclusion of all children. Plans clearly cover all six areas of learning and there is an effective system in place to ensure that each child covers each area equally or according to their needs. Activities have a clear purpose and plans show how children

will be grouped, the resources needed, staff deployment and provision to extend or adapt activities and resources, as children learn at different rates. Children are encouraged to think and to demonstrate what they know and can do. They are consistently encouraged by practitioners who have high, but realistic, expectations of them. Children make patterns using coloured pegs and use positional language such as over, under and through whilst exploring in the bark box in the garden. Numbers are made fun for children as they play in the garden picking a number card and racing to the corresponding number chalked on the ground.

Practitioners use a very good variety of teaching methods which help children to learn effectively, taking account of their age, capability, additional needs, home language and other relevant factors. For example, children become focussed as they begin to explore nature by planting and nurturing some potatoes. They learn that plants need sunlight and water in order to grow and take great delight in harvesting them when the time is right. Real and meaningful activities such as this create interest and a motivation to learn in children. In the play-room the potatoes become a focus of discussion and a member of staff patiently recaps the planting and growing process. Children then count the potatoes, decide which is the biggest and the smallest and talk about their different shapes. Staff help children to acquire new skills that enable them to progress, for example, when demonstrating to a child how to cut with scissors, a practitioner explains she is opening and closing the scissors like a smile. As the child practises she smiles each time she opens the scissors and is soon able to use them effectively.

Children are kind and courteous towards others and can often be heard asking "Do you want any help with that?". Staff have high expectations for children's behaviour and manage this extremely well. Children are able to share and take turns and participate in group activities. High staff ratios ensure that there is always sufficient staff to work and play directly with children, supporting, encouraging and challenging them. Practitioners use assessments of children's progress to guide their planning and teaching. Children's achievements are clearly identified, mapping their way across the stepping stones towards the early learning goals.

Children thoroughly enjoy stories and respond with relevant comments and questions. Three and four year olds are developing their early writing skills through a wide variety of opportunities. For example, children 'sign' their drawings and paintings and 'write' comments on a chart on the wall to describe how different objects feel. They spend some time making shopping lists and the imaginary play area is transformed into a shop to make this activity purposeful and fun. Exploration with paint, dough, dry and damp sand and a wide range of natural materials helps children to represent their experiences, feelings and ideas in a multitude of ways. They explore and investigate, finding out about the world around them when they plant and grow a small patch of grass. Children are able to link sounds to letters, naming and sounding the letters of familiar words, such as their name and the names of friends. Most three and four year olds can recognise their names when written. There are lots of labels around the room, helping children to become familiar with print in various forms and to begin to recognise familiar words.

Children are exceptionally well supported by staff who talk through what they are doing. This style of teaching helps children to become focussed, for example, children have the opportunity to make spiders as part of the 'mini-beasts' theme. As they choose the materials they wish to use the practitioner brings the activity to life by initiating a discussion about a spider the children saw outside. She shows the children pictures of other 'mini-beasts' so that children have sufficient information to make their own creation. Children make and use musical instruments to explore how sounds can be made and changed, and they love to sing songs and rhymes.

Children truly learn through their play, and the thoughtfully planned provision of the indoor and outdoor learning environments, combined with the support of highly knowledgeable and enthusiastic practitioners, ensures that children are developing extremely well in preparation for their further education in school.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

Children clearly feel a strong sense of belonging in this setting. The key worker system works exceptionally well as it is managed and organised so that children and parents are introduced to their key workers as soon as children begin their placement in the setting. Children happily place their coats on their names coat pegs and their towel and bag on a peg of their choice in the bathroom. Children have many opportunities to investigate and explore similarities and differences amongst people. They become aware of the wider society and benefit greatly from activities and resources that help them to value diversity. For example, a visit is planned in the near future to a mosque where they will be introduced to the Imam and observe as prayers take place. Children look at books, fact and fiction, and some in dual languages, play with dolls, small world characters, jigsaw puzzles, home corner resources and dressing up clothes. There are posters and welcome signs in several languages and staff and some of the children use sign language to complement the spoken word.

There is very clearly an extremely positive approach to caring for children with additional needs in this provision. Children are referred through professionals in various areas as The Centre Pre-school has an exceptionally good reputation for providing a fully inclusive environment where all children are encouraged and supported to achieve their full potential. The special needs co-ordinator works closely with parents and other professionals to ensure that children's individual needs are always met. Activities and resources are specialised or adapted as necessary to ensure that all children can participate fully and make a positive contribution to the life of the setting. Those children who do have additional needs develop and achieve exceptionally well in this provision.

Children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is fostered. They learn to understand responsible behaviour as staff set clear and consistent boundaries so that children know what is expected of them. Children are very well behaved because they are always interested in what they are doing and have plenty of opportunities to make choices and decisions and lead their own pace for learning. They are always doing something they are interested in, are never bored and, consequently, are highly motivated to learn and enthusiastic about their play. They welcome visitors into the setting and listen to others with interest. Positive strategies are effectively adopted and children learn to respect others through social skills as they follow the excellent examples set by staff. Relationships are outstanding on all levels and children gain high levels of self-control. Practitioners do not intervene too quickly, giving children time to work out if they can do things for themselves. Children, their ideas and views are very well respected by practitioners. This raises children's self-esteem and enables them to take part confidently in activities and to take pleasure in their achievements.

Partnership with parents and carers is outstanding. Parents and carers are fully informed about the Foundation Stage and the progress their child is making. This is because staff take the time to explain the systems that are in place for teaching and children's learning, both verbally and in writing. As a child becomes eligible for funded nursery education, parents are invited into the setting. From the start, therefore, they feel involved at every level, contributing to an initial assessment of their child's routine, development and needs and sharing knowledge and expertise

about, for example, specific cultural festivals. Parents receive detailed information and can discuss the curriculum with staff, helping them to further understand how children learn and develop through play. Regular newsletters and an informative notice board are used extremely effectively to keep parents informed of any changes within the provision and their views and opinions are actively sought and considered. Parents and staff work together to support children's learning, both in the setting and at home.

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

Overall children's needs are met. Ever keen to review and improve practice, staff have attended many relevant training courses to ensure they are totally up to date with legislation and regulations. Policies and procedures are constantly under review and amended as necessary. The setting has achieved a very well deserved accreditation through the Pre-School Learning Alliance and staff are always receptive to, and enthusiastic about, using innovative ideas and systems to improve outcomes for children. Very good organisation of the premises, both indoors and outside, maximises learning opportunities for children. Staff are clearly dedicated to their work with children and are extremely well deployed so that children receive exceptional levels of support. All documentation meets and exceeds the requirements of the National Standards, is confidentially maintained and, where appropriate, shared with parents and carers.

Robust recruitment and vetting procedures ensure that children are exceptionally well protected and cared for by staff with an expert knowledge and understanding of child development. There is a structured induction process to further ensure that practitioners are of the quality and high standard required by the manager and the committee. Staff receive regular appraisals and review and assess their own, and each other's, practice and performance in an open and honest manner. Children and families benefit enormously from the care and support they receive from this highly motivated, well qualified, knowledgeable and caring staff team. Many practitioners have worked in the group for several years. They bring a wealth of different skills and interests which compliment each other as they work together as one.

Leadership and management is outstanding. The setting is clearly led and managed for the benefit of the children. There is a clear vision for this provision and the quality of care and nursery education that it provides, which steers the work of the setting. The manager and senior staff have created a highly effective and improving setting where children are safe, feel good about themselves and make excellent progress towards the early learning goals. Looking beyond what the policies and procedures are intended to achieve, it is very clear that they have an extremely positive impact on children's well-being and learning.

The professional development of staff is managed so that teaching and learning can be improved. All practitioners are qualified and experienced and actively seek out training opportunities. New knowledge and information is disseminated throughout the team effectively. The setting assesses its own strengths and areas for development and continually reviews the effectiveness of activities and systems. The manager knows what is going on throughout the setting and all practitioners know children's individual needs particularly well. Successful teaching strategies are shared to maintain the high expectations that are in place for both staff and children. This is clearly an environment in which children are cared for exceptionally well as they learn and develop through exciting play experiences.

Improvements since the last inspection

At the last inspection the provider agreed to include details of arrival and departure times on daily registers. Children's safety is highly promoted in this setting and registers clearly detail the times of each session. Notes are made on registers when children arrive late or leave early or late. This ensures that there is an accurate record of exactly who is on the premises at any given time.

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

The quality and standards of the nursery education are outstanding.

WHAT MUST BE DONE TO SECURE FUTURE IMPROVEMENT?

The quality and standards of the care

No recommendations for improvement are made because the quality and standards of care are outstanding.

The quality and standards of the nursery education

No recommendations for improvement are made because the quality and standards of nursery education are outstanding.

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