



Crocus Early Years Centre

Inspection report for early years provision

Unique Reference Number	EY219409
Inspection date	21 February 2007
Inspector	Sandra Daniels
Setting Address	Saffron Walden County High School, Audley End Road, Saffron Walden, Essex, CB11 4UH
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Registered person	Crocus Early Years Centre Limited
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

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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 Crocus Early Years Centre was opened in 2002. It operates from purpose-built single storey premises situated in the grounds of the County High School in Saffron Walden. There are four playrooms, a kitchen, staff room, office, laundry and toilet areas. There is a fully enclosed outside play area consisting of a soft play area, grass and tarmac.

The Centre is registered to care for no more than eighty-five children from three months to under five years at any one time. There are currently 145 children on roll. This includes 45 funded three and 4 year olds. Children attend for a variety of sessions. The centre supports a small number of children who have special needs and who speak English as an additional language.

The centre opens five days a week all year round. Sessions are from 08.00 until 18.00 hours. A special 07.00 start is available if required.

There are a total of 22 members of staff working full-time or part-time with the children. Most of the staff have early years qualifications to National Vocational Qualification level 2, 3 and 4. The setting receives support from qualified teachers within the staff team and also 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 extremely well promoted. They are protected from infection as a result of excellent hygiene routines which follow comprehensive policies and procedures. Children use liquid soap and disposable paper towels to wash and dry their hands after using the toilet and before meals. They are encouraged to learn about personal hygiene and to take pride in their appearance. Tissues are always on hand to clean noses and older children learn to do this independently. Thematic planning also helps children to develop their awareness and understanding of how to keep healthy, for example, the 'look how we grow' topic. Children speak confidently about how healthy foods, such as fruits and vegetables, and exercise helps to keep them fit.

Parents are fully aware of the policy for excluding children who are sick and they are kept exceptionally well informed of any infections that crop up within the setting. Notices are displayed on room doors 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.

All members of staff are qualified to administer first aid and any accidents are appropriately recorded and shared with parents. Staff are confident in their ability to deal with minor accidents and medical emergencies, such as allergic reactions. All children's medical needs and special dietary requirements are sensitively met as practitioners adopt a proactive approach. Relevant information is known by all staff, including catering staff, to ensure children's health and well-being.

Children benefit greatly from a varied menu of family style meals. Menu planning is given great thought and attention. Children have foods they like and are familiar with and are also encouraged to try new tastes and textures. Babies are bottle fed according to their home routines. They are always held by a member of staff whilst being fed, which helps babies to bond and develop positive relationships. As they progress through the weaning process, babies receive foods in suitable textures and consistencies. They can experiment with finger foods and begin to develop preferences for certain tastes. Older children sit together with staff at meal times. They can choose their portion size and there is always sufficient food for hungry children. In addition to a cooked pudding, children can choose from a yoghurt or a piece of fresh fruit for their dessert. Children have opportunities to help to prepare their snacks and thoroughly enjoyed an activity where they explored and investigated various fruits and

vegetables in their natural, whole form. The setting fully respects and provides meals which conform to individual medical and religious requirements. In addition to this, personal preferences, such as organic milk, are also supplied for children. All members of staff hold appropriate food hygiene certificates and use their knowledge to ensure children remain healthy.

Many excellent opportunities are provided for children to play outside. They are well protected from the elements as sun screen is applied in the summer and, in the winter, children play outside wearing suitable clothing. For example, following a recent heavy fall of snow, children wrapped up warm and played outside, making snowmen and having great fun. Parents, coming to collect their children, also joined in adding to the enjoyment of the children. The outside play area is divided into sections to add interest for children. On the grassed surface children use large equipment for climbing, balancing, jumping stretching. Children develop co-ordination and spatial awareness as they pedal and steer bikes. Control and coordination is acquired as children negotiate an obstacle course in the garden, ending with aiming a ball into a net. Children, of all ages, are taken for frequent walks inside the main school grounds. Hand to eye coordination is developed throughout the setting as children use a variety of tools and natural materials. Babies manipulate the play-dough with great enthusiasm and older children use scissors and pencils with increasing confidence. Babies and children are able to sleep, rest or be active according to their individual needs and in consultation with their parents.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is outstanding.

Children receive extremely 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. Children benefit from spacious accommodation in which to play and learn and each room has quiet areas for children to rest or relax with a book. The outside play area has been developed with great care and consideration and there are future plans to increase accessibility for all children throughout their day in the setting. All furniture and equipment is of excellent quality and is suitable for the various ages of children being cared for. Bathroom facilities and nappy changing areas are separated from the main play areas and are spacious, clean, hygienic and very well organised.

Practitioners have created a totally accessible, interesting and stimulating environment in which children flourish as they play and learn. All toys and resources are stored around the rooms at child-height, enabling babies and children to choose what they play with. Making choices and decisions about their play and learning develops children's self-esteem, confidence and independence. Practitioners display a broad selection of activities ready for children's arrival. If children wish to play with something else they confidently help themselves to toys and games. They remain interested in the resources as the range is extensive and staff regularly introduce new items.

Children's safety is given high priority in this setting. An accurate and well-maintained registration system gives a clear illustration of exactly who is on the premises at any given time. The setting is very secure and children are unable to leave unsupervised. Thorough, ongoing risk assessments ensure that children are kept safe at all times. Staff are vigilant in their supervision of children and accidents are kept to an absolute minimum as staff skilfully anticipate

incidents and prevent them from happening. All necessary fire precautions are in place and children enjoy regular emergency evacuation practices with practitioners. Parents are given useful safety information in newsletters. For example, details of the new regulations for car seats and restraints. Children learn to keep themselves safe as they tidy up after themselves, behave responsibly and have consideration for each other when playing. They know, for example, that it is not safe to run or walk around with scissors, explaining that 'someone might get hurt'.

Children's welfare is extremely well promoted by a staff team who have an excellent understanding of safeguarding children. Staff clearly recognise their roles and responsibilities and know how to implement the necessary procedures should they have any concerns for a child's welfare. Parents are also kept fully informed of the setting's responsibilities to protect children.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

Children relish their time in this setting. They have an excellent attitude to learning and are extremely happy and purposefully engaged in a wide range of interesting and challenging activities throughout the day. Babies and children who are new to the setting settle quickly because practitioners have an excellent understanding, and sensitivity towards, the mixture of emotions felt at the time of a child's first separation from their main carer. The settling in procedure is flexible and parents are welcome to stay with their child. This is also seen as a good opportunity for parents to get to know their child's key worker and to begin a constructive and positive relationship.

Practitioners listen attentively to children and speak to them sensitively and kindly. Children are given time to express themselves and to complete activities that they are interested in. For example, in the garden, a young child was a little shy and stayed close to a member of staff. Then, as the children were going back inside, he became confident enough to go and kick a ball. The practitioner went with him and played with him for a few minutes more after the other children had gone inside. Babies are encouraged to communicate and form positive relationships with each other and adults. Staff in the baby room are very knowledgeable and highly experienced. They fully appreciate the implications of young children's emotional well-being and they ensure that babies are extremely well supported and cared for, meaning that they are emotionally secure and resilient. Babies and toddlers readily seek out a familiar adult for support and reassurance. For example, a baby crawls towards his key worker, stops half way and puts his arms out to her. She praises him for his crawling and moves forward to pick him up and cuddle him. The baby has a big smile and after a while he indicates that he is ready to be put down and carries on playing happily. Practitioners encourage emergent language skills in babies and toddlers. They are extremely skilful at interpreting their sounds and gestures and talk about what they are doing during play.

Children's individual needs are extremely well known and met and their welfare is highly promoted. Staff know each child very well; their likes and dislikes, routines and family contexts. 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 individual needs. Staff understand the framework well and this is evident as it clearly supports young children's development and

well-being. The planning of activities and experiences for younger children is developed directly from children's interests and needs.

Staff plan and provide activities and play opportunities that promote children's all-round development. Children are very confident and independent and develop a high self-esteem because they have so very many opportunities to make choices and decisions about their play, learning and care. Older children are very competent with self-help skills. They are able to put on their coats, take themselves to the toilet and pour themselves drinks when they are thirsty.

Children's views sought and acted upon. For example, a member of staff asks children what toys they would like to play with after lunch. Their choices are provided and children play happily at their chosen activities. Children are all able to initiate their own play and follow their own interests. A young child wants to dress up and asks a member of staff for assistance. She says she is being the mummy and is going shopping. The practitioner fetches a bag for the child and asks her to get some bread and milk. The child enthusiastically responds appropriately and comes back with the imaginary shopping.

Nursery Education.

The quality of teaching and learning is outstanding. Practitioners have an excellent knowledge and understanding of the Foundation Stage and clearly recognise important factors about how children learn, for example, through practical and real-life experiences such as playing in the snow. Staff talked to children about the snow and the next day they watched periodically as their snowmen began to melt.

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, or learning intention, and plans show how children will be grouped, the resources needed, staff deployment and include provision to extend or adapt activities and resources, as children learn at different rates.

Staff encourage children and expect the most from them. Children are encouraged to think and demonstrate what they know and can do, for example, when playing with 'Octons', children try to copy a pattern made by a member of staff. After they have done this, they try to create their own patterns, supported by the practitioner, who talks through what they are doing, encouraging them to think. For example, 'If you put a blue one on that side, what colour do you think you should put on this side to make the pattern?'

Practitioners use an innovative variety of teaching methods that help children to learn effectively, taking account of their age, capability, additional needs, home language and other relevant factors. This is evident as children clearly enjoy what they are doing. The teaching helps them to become focussed, for example, staff become involved in children's play when appropriate, asking questions and challenging them. Practitioners also demonstrate things for children to help them learn, such as when washing their hands. Staff know when to extend these productive times by working and playing alongside children, and they also know when to stand back and

allow children to develop and extend their own play. There is an excellent balance between adult-led and child-initiated experiences and activities.

Staff help children to acquire new skills that enable them to progress, for example, cutting with scissors and using pencils for writing. Staff encourage children to try new experiences and they provide clear explanations and ask challenging questions to support this.

Practitioners manage children extremely well and have high expectations for their behaviour. They help children to know what is expected of them in terms of appropriate behaviour. All three and four year old children are able to share and take turns and take part in group activities. Staff use positive strategies to encourage good behaviour, for example, numbered footprints on the floor in front of the door help children to line up effectively and without pushing. This is also used as an opportunity to discuss concepts such as 'behind' and 'in front of'.

Children are very kind and considerate towards others. A three year old child holds the hand of a slightly younger child who is visiting the room in preparation for changing groups. There is a 'buddy system' in place whereby new children are assigned a 'buddy' who is responsible for showing them the routine and where things are. This is, of course, monitored and supported by an adult. Practitioners make very effective use of time and resources. They are able to work and play directly with children as high adult to child ratios operate in the setting. The environment is extremely inviting and well organised to encourage children's independence.

Staff use assessments of children's progress to guide their planning and teaching. Children's achievements are clearly identified and assessments are informative, objective and linked to the stepping stones and early learning goals. Information gained from assessments is used to help children move to the next stage in their learning.

Children are interested, excited and motivated to learn. They maintain attention, concentrate and sit quietly when appropriate, for example, at circle times, most three and four year old children know they must not interrupt when others are talking. Children have developed an awareness of their own needs, views and feelings and they are sensitive to the needs, views and feelings of others. For example, children enjoy playing in the role play area, pretending to be a patient, nurse, doctor and ambulance driver at the hospital. The patient is well cared for, the nurse repeatedly asks if she is ok and if she wants anything. The doctor takes her temperature and gets her a drink of water as she is 'much too hot'. The ambulance driver is driving very fast to get the patient to hospital to make her better. When the patient says she is feeling sick, the nurse says 'Never mind dear, we're nearly there, you'll be ok'.

Children use vocabulary and forms of speech that are increasingly influenced by experience of books, for example, after looking at the book 'The Secret Staircase', a three year old child says 'You be the mummy and I'll be the sister'. On the wall in the pre-school room there is a display entitled 'Look At Us'. It represents the stages of emergent drawing and clearly shows very good progress as children develop from abstract lines to a clear picture of themselves with detailed features. Children use language to imagine and recreate roles and experiences and many can write their own names freehand and unassisted. They are able to link sounds to letters, naming and sounding the letters of familiar words, such as their names and the names of friends. All three and four year old children can recognise their names when written. There are lots of labels

around the room, helping children to become familiar with print in various situations and to begin to recognise familiar words.

There are many opportunities for children to develop problem solving skills and reasoning through daily routines and planned activities. Children use language such as bigger, smaller, heavier and lighter to compare quantities and qualities when playing with magnets and exploring which objects are easier or harder to magnetise. Children are able to make simple calculations in practical situations, such as at lunch time when a child says 'I haven't got a beaker'. A practitioner asks how many beakers are on the table and how many children are at the table. She then asks 'So how many more beakers do you need?', and the child is able to answer.

Children ask questions about why things happen and how things work. There are several cameras for them to play with but only one of them has a flash bulb. A child asks a member of staff the other cameras don't have a light. The practitioner explains about flashes and taking photographs in the dark. The same child then wants to know why the torch needs batteries to make it work. Again, this is explained simply and clearly by the member of staff and the child is content with his new knowledge. Children find out about their environment and talk about where they live. A child is drawing a road and a discussion follows about where the child lives. The practitioner says she lives nearby, so they are neighbours. Children begin to differentiate between past and present. A child talks animatedly about when she was a baby.

Children move with confidence, imagination and in safety as they negotiate an obstacle course set up for them outside. They climb, balance, throw a ball at a target and run between cones with great dexterity. Children recognise the importance of keeping healthy and the things that contribute to this. A four year old child is able to tell me that fresh air and sunlight is good for you and you should walk somewhere every day to keep fit. Children have many opportunities to use a wide range of equipment for physical exercise and development. The setting's garden has large climbing frame, slide, barrels, tunnels and balance beams. Children use tools with increasing confidence, such as paint brushes of different sizes, scissors and glue spreaders.

Children explore colour, texture, shape, form and space in two and three dimensions. They enjoy free access to creative materials of a vast range and can explore and experiment to their heart's content. Children engage in role play frequently in different circumstances. They role play past experiences in their own lives, stories that are familiar to them and totally make believe situations. They use musical instruments to explore how sounds can be made and changed, and children love to sing songs and rhymes. When listening to stories staff allow children to anticipate what will happen next, which they do very well indicating they are paying attention and listening well. Staff always ask 'tell me about your picture' when children show them what they have painted or drawn, and many are able to give detailed information about their 'creations'.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

Children have many opportunities to explore and investigate 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, there are many books, fact and fiction, some

in dual languages, dolls, small world characters, jigsaw puzzles, home corner resources and dressing up clothes. There are many posters and welcome signs in several languages. All children have equal access to these toys and equipment which meet their individual needs.

Children clearly feel a strong sense of belonging in this setting. The key-worker system works very effectively. It is well managed and organised so that children and parents are introduced to their key-worker before starting in each group. Children delight in recognising their photograph and name on their coat pegs, and children see photographs of themselves at play in many circumstances. For example, they are used on a notice board to inform parents what activities have been on offer during the day and, in the pre-school room, children enjoy a collection of photographs depicting them at various activities which they can use to ask practitioners for the toys or equipment they see in the pictures.

There is clearly an extremely positive approach to caring for children with additional needs in this provision. The special needs co-ordinator works very closely with parents and other professionals to ensure children's individual needs are always met. Activities and resources are adapted as necessary to ensure that all children can participate and make a positive contribution to the life of the setting.

Children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is fostered. Children 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 for making choices and leading their own pace for learning. They are never bored or doing something they are not interested in and, consequently, are highly motivated to learn and enthusiastic about their play. They listen to others with interest and welcome visitors into the setting in a confident and polite manner. Positive strategies are effectively used as children learn to respect others through social skills, role-modelled by staff. For example, children become expert at lining up as there are numbered footprints on the floor for them to stand on to guide them. As this is such a fun activity, children do not bustle each other in the line, but stand firmly on their number until it is time for them to move forwards. Children show an excellent attitude towards one another and are extremely confident and self-assured. They flourish in this environment because they are exceptionally well supported by staff who encourage them to become competent learners. Relationships are excellent on all levels and children gain high levels of self-control. Staff 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 take pleasure in their achievements.

Partnership with parents and carers is outstanding. Staff recognise that parents are children's first and most important educators and highly effective partnerships are established, having a clearly positive effect on children's development and learning. There is an excellent two-way flow of information, knowledge and expertise. Parents and carers are fully informed about the Foundation Stage and the progress their child is making. This is because practitioners take the time to explain the systems that are in place for teaching and children's learning. This is done both verbally and in writing. The superb relationships between parents and staff further enhances children's experiences at the setting. Parents are involved at every level, helping their child to

bring something in for the 'letter of the week', contributing to an initial assessment of their child's routine, development and needs and sharing knowledge and expertise about, for example, specific religious festivals. Parents receive detailed information and can discuss the curriculum with practitioners, helping them to understand how children learn and develop through play. Notice boards and regular newsletters are used extremely well to keep parents informed of events, themes, activities and other useful information. Parents are consulted on proposed changes within the provision and their views and opinions are actively sought and considered. Their observations about their child's learning are valued highly and 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. 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. A structured, and recently reviewed, induction process is highly effective and ensures that practitioners are of the quality and standard required by the proprietors. Staff receive regular appraisals and there are many opportunities for further training and development. Extremely high adult to child ratios means that children always receive the care and support they need. There is always sufficient staff to work and play directly with the children. Highly effective management and communication systems ensure consistency of approach as staff are clear about their roles and responsibilities. The stable staff team and effective key-worker system gives children continuity of care.

Ever keen to review and improve practice, staff have attended training, reviewed and updated policies and procedures and introduced an innovative system for curriculum planning which meets both current and future requirements. This setting has achieved the National Day Nursery Association's 'Quality Counts' accreditation and has been awarded Investors in People status. Staff are very enthusiastic about their work and are well deployed so that children receive high levels of support. Good organisation of the premises, both indoors and outside, maximises learning opportunities for children. All documentation meets and exceeds the requirements of the National Standards, is confidentially maintained and, where appropriate, shared with parents.

Leadership and management is outstanding. The setting is clearly led and managed for the benefit of the children. The proprietors, managers 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. There is a clear vision for this provision and the quality of care and nursery education it provides, which steers the work of the setting. Looking beyond what the policies and procedures are intended to achieve, it is very clear that they have an extremely positive effect on children's well-being and learning.

The professional development of staff is managed so that teaching and learning can be improved. There are currently three members of staff, including the manager, who are training to National Vocational Qualification level four. The setting assesses its own strengths and weaknesses and reviews the effectiveness of activities and systems. The proprietors and managers know what is going on throughout the setting and practitioners know what works with particular children.

Successful teaching strategies are shared and adopted by other staff. The management team clearly demonstrates their high expectations of the staff and the children.

Improvements since the last inspection

At the last inspection the provider agreed to make the outside play provision more freely accessible to the children throughout the year. Children's physical development and enjoyment is extremely successfully promoted as they have frequent access to separate areas of garden. On the grassed surface children use the climbing frame confidently and competently, developing skills of spatial awareness and agility. The hard-surfaced area is divided into sections for different types of play, for example, children enjoy the obstacle course, learning to negotiate objects and throw balls into a net. Outside play areas are used by children throughout the year and practitioners take full advantage of spontaneous events such as the arrival of several inches of snow. Children, staff and parents enjoyed making snowmen and playing with snowballs.

The provider also agreed to review the organisation at snack and meal times to enhance children's social skills and encourage independence. Older children's independence is exceptionally well promoted as they are able to decide for themselves when they would like to take their snack. They can choose to sit with a friend and a member of staff is always present to ensure children have enough to eat and drink. At meal times children choose and collect their own meals from the serving table. Children are given small responsibilities such as collecting the beakers, and are able to choose between a main dessert, a piece of fresh fruit or a yoghurt after their main meal. Children's social skills also develop well as snack and meal times are seen as social occasions where children and staff discuss what they are eating. Children begin to learn about the benefits of a healthy diet and many children know that fruits and vegetables help to make you healthy and strong.

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 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