

Little Fingers

Inspection report for early years provision

Unique Reference Number	EY339104
Inspection date	26 February 2007
Inspector	Lara Hickson
Setting Address	Malt House Farm, Green Street Green Road, DARTFORD, DA2 8DX
Telephone number	07752 040747
E-mail	
Registered person	Little Fingers
Type of inspection	Integrated
Type of care	Full day care, Out of School care

ABOUT THIS INSPECTION

The purpose of this inspection is to assure government, parents and the public of the quality of childcare and, if applicable, of nursery education. The inspection was carried out under Part XA Children Act 1989 as introduced by the Care Standards Act 2000 and, where nursery education is provided, under Schedule 26 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998.

This report details the main strengths and any areas for improvement identified during the inspection. The judgements included in the report are made in relation to the outcomes for children set out in the Children Act 2004; the National Standards for under 8s day care and childminding; and, where nursery education is provided, the *Curriculum guidance for the foundation stage*.

The report includes information on any complaints about the childcare provision which Ofsted has received since the last inspection or registration or 1 April 2004 whichever is the later.

The key inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding: this aspect of the provision is of exceptionally high quality

Good: this aspect of the provision is strong

Satisfactory: this aspect of the provision is sound

Inadequate: this aspect of the provision is not good enough

For more information about early years inspections, please see the booklet *Are you ready for your inspection?* which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

THE QUALITY AND STANDARDS OF THE CARE AND NURSERY EDUCATION

On the basis of the evidence collected on this inspection:

The quality and standards of the care are good. The registered person meets the National Standards for under 8s day care and childminding.

The quality and standards of the nursery education are good.

WHAT SORT OF SETTING IS IT?

Little Fingers day nursery was registered in August 2006. The nursery operates from a low level purpose built facility in Darenth, Kent. The nursery has sole use of the premises and has a large outside play area with a separate section for the under twos. The nursery is open for 51 weeks of the year, Monday - Friday from 07.00 - 19.00. Children can attend for a variety of sessions and the nursery has a very flexible approach towards the hours and sessions that children may do. Full day care and sessional places are available. There are four base rooms which are currently organised into a baby unit, a toddler room, a two-three year old room and a pre-school for children from three-five years. The younger age group rooms include nappy changing areas.

The nursery is registered for 86 children of whom 71 may be under 5 years and children are grouped according to their age range. At present there are 60 children on roll, of these 14 receive funded nursery education. The group supports children with learning difficulties/disabilities and children with English as an additional language. Children come from a wide catchment area.

There are 12 staff employed to work directly with the children and all but one of them have an early years qualification to NVQ level 2 or 3. Staff have access to training courses and receive advice from an Early Years Advisory teacher. The nursery implements a curriculum based on the Foundation Stage and Birth to three matters.

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PROVISION

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

Children are cared for in a clean, hygienic environment where good standards of cleanliness are maintained by the whole of the staff team. Children's good health is promoted well, for example, effective cleaning routines are in place throughout the nursery to ensure the cleanliness of the setting. An extensive health and safety policy is in place and the practice observed reflects the written document. Children are beginning to learn about the importance of personal hygiene through the daily routines at the nursery. For example, staff encourage children to wash their hands after using the toilet, before snack and meal times and after messy activities. Staff provide equipment to encourage the children's independence, for example, trainer seats and steps to enable children to use the toilet themselves and access the soap dispensers and towels independently. Children in the pre-school room told the Inspector very confidently that they have to wash their hands to get all the germs off before lunchtime as they had been out in the garden. Effective procedures help to prevent cross infection, for example, staff wear disposable aprons and gloves during nappy changes and clean tables with anti-bacterial spray before and after drinks, meals and snacks.

An effective written sickness policy is in place which protects children from the risk of infection, for example, the nursery does not accept children when they are unwell or infectious. Children's health is promoted well as there is a comprehensive system in place to record the administration of medication. Prior written parental permission is also sought for seeking emergency medical treatment and to administer medication. An effective accident policy is in place which protects children in the event of an accident or emergency. All accidents are recorded appropriately by staff and parents are informed on collection of their children except in serious cases where the setting would contact them immediately. Regular safety monitoring includes checking accident record forms to identify and minimise any potential hazards. Many of the staff team have completed an appropriate first aid qualification which includes training for babies and young children. This enables them to provide appropriate care if there is an accident within the nursery setting.

The children's physical development is promoted well inside the setting through a variety of different apparatus and equipment. Each group room has a range of indoor physical equipment to enhance children's physical skills dependent on the ages and stages of development. Fine motor skills are developed as children have free access to pens, pencils, stencils and scissors as well as a wide variety of opportunities to use tools and enjoy activities that develop their hand-eye co-ordination, for example threading buttons. The children also benefit from daily access to fresh air and exercise in the outdoor area. There is a selection of fixed play equipment to encourage climbing and balancing skills as well as activities to enhance their running, jumping, pedalling and throwing skills.

The nursery menu is displayed in the reception area and the meals provided are healthy, well balanced and nutritious. Children are encouraged to make healthy choices regarding the snacks and meals they eat. For example, they are able to choose from a selection of fruit platters, raw

vegetables with dips or crackers and cheese at snack time. The menu meets individual dietary requirements and is age and stage appropriate. Effective systems are in place to ensure that children do not have access to food or drinks to which they are allergic or have a cultural or religious restriction. For example, comprehensive lists are displayed in each group room and include information on religious dietary requirements, mild allergies, life threatening allergies and parental wishes regarding dietary requirements. Staff understand the importance of providing drinks regularly and in the older group rooms children's own cups are left at a drinks station for them to be able to access independently. This practice encourages health and bodily awareness, for example, thirst. Older children pour themselves their own drinks throughout the day from small jugs of water.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

The children are cared for in a welcoming, secure and safe indoor and outdoor environment where risks have been identified and fully addressed. Risk assessments are in place and the practice observed within the nursery reflects the written procedure. The nursery is organised well to enable children in all group rooms to move around safely and independently choosing what resources they wish to play with. There are excellent procedures in place for the arrival and collection of children. The door bell is answered by a member of staff who checks the identity of visitors. All visitors to the nursery have to show their identification and are asked to sign the visitors book which is used to monitor all adults on the premises. Children may only be collected by an authorised person and an additional password system is in place for emergencies. There is a policy on uncollected/lost children.

There are clear and effective procedures in place to promote the children's safety in the event of a fire or emergency situation. All fire doors are kept clear, fire drills are practised regularly and all entries are well documented in the fire log book. Children are supervised well by staff at all times and staff are effectively deployed in the group rooms and in the outdoor area.

Children have easy access to an extensive range of clean, well maintained and age appropriate toys, resources and equipment. Children are learning to take responsibility for their own safety for example, when playing on the slide staff encourage the children to look before sliding down to check that the child before them had got off of the slide. Staff take the time to explain that this is to prevent an accident. Children are supported by staff to develop good levels of independence, for example, play resources can be independently selected from well labelled boxes in all grouprooms.

Children are protected from the risk of abuse because the manager and staff team understand their role in child protection and are able to put the appropriate procedures into practice where necessary. Clear action is taken to protect children from people who have not been vetted ensuring that children's welfare is safeguarded. For example, students are not left unsupervised with children at any time and new members of staff do not work unsupervised until all checks have been completed. An extensive child protection policy is in place with clear procedures for staff to follow, for example, a flow chart individual to Little Fingers day nursery is in place identifying responsibility and procedures.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

Children appear happy, confident and interested in the activities available. Generally children separate well from their parents and quickly settle. However, those who become distressed are offered comfort and support to encourage them to participate in the activities available. The staff team are warm, caring and approachable and the children relate very well to them. Children interact well with the staff team and each other. Children play well individually as well as in small groups with their peers demonstrating curiosity, imagination and interest in the varied activities offered. Children are able to independently access a range of stimulating activities and experiences, for example, all play resources are stored on low level shelving or in brightly coloured toy boxes.

Although staff have not all completed Birth to three matters training, they have a good understanding of the guidance and incorporate it into their planning for those children under three. The staff team have a very good understanding of the developmental needs of children under five years and plan activities to develop and enhance these.

An effective keyworker system is in operation and enables children's individual care and educational needs to be met. Babies enjoy very close contact and frequent cuddles with members of staff who spend a lot of their time playing on the floor and conversing with them. Early communication skills are promoted well by staff who engage with them verbally as they play and tend to their needs. The setting has implemented the Birth to three matters framework to ensure the developmental needs of babies are met and staff understand the range of experiences required to enable them to make progress in all areas. Staff have recently introduced heuristic play and treasure baskets into the group rooms as an additional way of helping the children learn through exploration and using their senses.

Staff offer good support to children with learning difficulties/disabilities and demonstrate a good understanding of the identification and assessment of special educational needs.

Nursery education

The quality of teaching and learning is good. Staff implement the Foundation Stage curriculum well and build on each child's previous experiences and achievements. They plan activities according to the six areas of learning and include information regarding resources required, groupings, the adult's role and extension activities. Future plans are noted and all activities are evaluated on the back of the weekly activity plan. Planning is well documented and the next steps in children's learning are used effectively to inform future plans. Transfer document records are completed to help future teachers and early years practitioners plan for the children's educational needs. Staff use evaluations of activities to help to measure the effectiveness of the activities and experiences provided. Although children's profiles record their progress and development whilst they are at the nursery and this is transferred between the different rooms as the child progresses through the nursery, there is no separate record giving a clear indication of their "starting points" in pre-school. However, staff in the pre-school complete a pre-school profile when the child starts in this room which details what they like doing best, what they don't like doing and their keyworker.

Regular observations and evaluation of activities are used to plan the next stages for the children. Staff write down observations on post-it notes and transfer information from these

into the children's profiles. Profiles record how children will progress and evaluate what the children have learned following specifically planned group/focus activities.

Children demonstrate excellent progress in their personal, social and emotional development. Children are confident and independent, making individual choices from the wide range of easily accessible activities and resources. Children are aware of the boundaries within the pre-school and have a sense of distinguishing between right and wrong. Children behave well, are able to share and take turns and their good behaviour is encouraged and recognised by staff. Children are developing self help skills, for example, they are encouraged to do up their own coats to go outside and during role play they dress themselves in the full range of dressing up clothes and accessories available. There are numerous opportunities for children to serve themselves food and drink during the course of the nursery routine and staff positively encourage individual choice. For example, the way that lunch is presented promotes self choice. The components of a shepherd's pie are put in different containers rather than in one whole dish and children decide how much potato, mince and vegetables they want and how they present it on their plate. Children have good relationships with their peers and the staff team and are able to recount stories from home, ask for help where needed and engage in conversation and play. The children are familiar with the daily routines of the pre-school and happily help to put toys and activities away at 'tidy up time'.

Many of the children in pre-school are confident talkers who enjoy chatting away to each other during play activities. They also initiate conversations with members of staff and the Inspector. For example, one three-year-old told his peers all about going to have an eye test with his mummy and excitedly showed them the book his mummy had bought him for being brave. Staff support children's language development by spending time sitting with them, talking to them and listening to them. Children respond with enjoyment to stories and rhymes in group story sessions as well as in individual or small groups. Children have access to a wide range of books, they handle books confidently and use the book area well both independently and with the support of staff who read stories to them in large and small groups. The children recognise their name in print, for example, name cards are displayed in the reception area above their coat pegs and a separate box of name cards is available on the writing table for children to refer to. There are many opportunities to encourage the children to write for a purposes, for example, chalkboards, wipe clean boards and paper and notepads in the home corner area. Children are encouraged to associate names and objects with letters and sounds through using letter cards, alphabet puzzles, letter games and magnetic letters on a white board. One four-year-old child used the keyboard to attempt to write her name and found all of the letters in her name although she got a few in the wrong order. She also pointed to her name on the photo board and explained the different letters phonetically. Another child looked at a list a member of staff was writing and recognised her name, "That's my name there".

Children have the opportunity to see numbers all around pre-school, for example, on mobiles, friezes, picture boards, a 10 green bottle musical display, posters and number puzzles. There are also numerals displayed in the toilet area on the doors and at the sinks. Children also confidently identify other numbers in the environment, for example, one three-year-old showed me his t-shirt and said, "Look I have a three on my t-shirt". Staff use the daily routine to introduce and extend the children's number recognition and counting skills, for example, songs and rhymes are used to promote maths development. Children are developing confidence with numbers and counting, for example, counting children at the lunch table, and counting the amount of children allowed on the bench, "only three are allowed on the bench together". Two three-year-olds enjoyed counting when playing with the cars and confidently counted "1,2,3,4,5,6,7 go". Children understand mathematical concepts, for example, more or less,

sorting, weight and size. As well as providing practical activities for children to develop an understanding of early calculating staff also use games to encourage counting. For example, the children enjoy the "bee game" where whoever has the most bees loses. One four-year-old told the Inspector, "You have to have the least bees to win and if you have the mostest you lose".

Pre-school children have access to a wide range of resources which enable them to learn about the wider world. There are some opportunities for them to learn about different festivals and celebrations during the year. Children have daily opportunities to use a range of different technology. For example, tape recorders, a computer, electronic toys, calculators and cash tills are all readily available and used confidently by the children. The pre-school has a small fish tank and children are beginning to understand the needs of animals, for example, a four-year-old stated, "You need to feed the fish". Children have the opportunity to access a range of materials for model making and construction activities, such as stickle bricks, duplo, and wooden blocks. The children have some opportunities to experience and discover changes in the environment and nature, for example, when it recently snowed they played in the garden area and built a snowman and watched the snow fall. Treasure baskets have been introduced throughout the nursery and in the pre-school room these have been developed into different sensory bags to introduce a range of concepts to the children. For example, there are bags to introduce light/heavy, magnets and sound, light and colour.

Children have access to a range of activities, resources and materials that encourage them to express themselves creatively. For example, painting, drawing, saltdough, gloop, cooked and uncooked playdough and jelly are provided regularly to encourage the children to explore. Staff take time to set up different creative activities for the children to investigate and experiment with. For example the water tray is often set up as a dinosaur swamp with jelly as the land and a green porridge mix as the swamp. The children are able to help with the preparation of these activities and explain how they made jelly and the changes that they observed.

Children express themselves through role play, dance, singing, music and movement sessions and dressing up. The role play area is set out as different concepts, for example, as a vets, hospital or post office as well as a traditional home corner. Story sacks are currently being put together to develop this area further.

The children demonstrate good spatial awareness and they are able to move around the setting safely and independently, in both the pre-school room and in the garden area. They have daily opportunities to develop and practise good balance and motor control. For example, there is a range of large climbing equipment in the garden area, a dance teacher comes in weekly and pre-school staff organise music and movement sessions using various props, such as ribbons and balls. Children use a range of tools and equipment with accuracy and dexterity, for example, paintbrushes, glue sticks, playdough utensils, scissors and art and craft tools. The pre-school leader has been on a Top Start course and has a wide range of new physical games that the children enjoy, for example "Hot Potato" and the "Bean game". These different games encourage different areas of children's physical development, such as predicting and estimating, spatial control, basic motor skills, co-ordination and control and aiming. All of these activities are linked to the learning outcomes and include possibilities for language development extensions and assessment opportunities. Children are able to develop and enhance their hand/eye control and co-ordination through activities available, for example, independently pouring water into a small cup from a jug.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

All children and families are welcomed into the nursery and their individual culture, religion, race and family background valued and included by staff. Staff are very aware of children's individual needs and requirements and the registration form contains all of the appropriate information to enable them to meet these needs. There is a basic range of resources in most group rooms reflecting diversity including books, puzzles and home corner resources and children celebrate some different festivals during the year. There is a wider range of resources available in the pre-school room reflecting diversity. Staff also plan activities for older children to help to develop a positive self image, for example, small round and square mirrors in the bathroom area help children to explore and gain an awareness of themselves and their friends.

The nursery welcomes children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. There is a comprehensive Special Needs statement and procedures in place to ensure that children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are effectively supported and their individual needs met. The child's key-worker liaises with the Special Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO) and with the child's parents to ensure that they are fully supported within the setting. The nursery currently cares for a number of children who have English as an additional language. Staff liaise with parents and use key words in the child's home language to aide initial communication.

A written Behaviour Management Policy is in place and methods for dealing with behaviour management are appropriate and take account of a child's age and level of understanding. Good behaviour is valued and encouraged by staff through recognition, praise and support. Children are aware of the boundaries within the nursery, for example, in pre-school when the children visited the bathroom one child was overheard saying, "Everybody walk, no running". The children also take responsibility for tidying away at activities and one child reminded another child of how to look after the pens, "There are no tops on these pens and they will run out, we need to put the lids back on". Staff provide explanations to children, for example, a three-year-old put toys into the toy washing machine. Staff explain that toys should not be put into the washing machine as the toys or the washing machine may break. Parents are kept informed if staff have any concerns about a child's behaviour and an incident record is maintained.

The partnership with parents is good. The nursery works in partnership with parents/carers to ensure that all dietary, medical, cultural and religious needs of children are met. A settling in period is planned for all children in consultation with their parents and is individual to their needs. Parents of children receiving funding for nursery education receive a range of good quality information on the Foundation Stage and the six areas of learning. They are invited into the nursery regularly to share children's individual progress records and speak with their key workers. Contact books are used for the under threes and staff use these to record information on the child's day. Staff in the pre-school room have introduced a pictorial display of activities enjoyed by the children on a daily basis to ensure parents have feedback regarding the activities and learning experiences provided. Parents spoken to report that they find the pictorial activity board and notice boards useful and are also kept up to date with events and changes through the regular newsletters. Parents spoken to were happy with the level of service provided and stated that their children were progressing well and that they find the staff team approachable and friendly. A suggestion box is available in the reception area and staff report that ideas from parents have been implemented.

Children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is fostered effectively by the staff team. Children behave very well within the setting and are able to take turns and share. Staff set clear, consistent boundaries which children understand and staff demonstrate realistic expectations of children's behaviour. Children are learning right from wrong because the staff team are good role models and encourage children to develop good manners by prompting them to say 'please' and 'thank you' if required. The children receive gentle reminders regarding inappropriate behaviour and lots of praise for positive behaviour which boosts their self-esteem and confidence. Children are very sociable and play well together in pairs as well as in small and large groups.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

The setting meets the needs of the range of children for whom it provides. Children are protected as the nursery has effective procedures in place for the recruitment and vetting of staff and volunteers. Children are never left alone with unvetted adults, for example, any new staff who have not completed their checks are not left unsupervised with the children. An effective keyworker system is in operation and ensures consistency of care for the children. Children are able to independently choose from the range of toys, resources and activities available both within their group room and in the outside garden area.

The nursery owner and Manager both hold appropriate childcare qualifications and most other staff are qualified to NVQ Level 2 or 3. A designated system is in place to cover in the absence of the Manager. Many of the staff team have completed an appropriate first aid qualification who would be able to provide appropriate care in the event of an emergency. There are sufficiently qualified staff working with the children and staffing rotas ensure that staff ratios are met. Contingency plans are in place regarding sickness, there is a range of bank staff which the nursery can call upon and all have been suitably vetted. A comprehensive and effective operational plan is in place and enables the provision to be efficiently and safely managed. All policies and procedures are reviewed and updated in line with revisions to the National Standards on a regular basis. Registration systems are effective, each room has a register and parents sign their children in and out of the nursery upon arrival and departure. There is also a staff register and a visitors book. The registration certificate is displayed and the necessary records are in place and shared with parents.

An annual appraisal system is in place which the Manager completes with staff once a year. Training needs and staff strengths are discussed and the appraisals are seen as a positive experience for looking at how staff can improve their practice. The new owner and the Manager have implemented positive changes within the nursery following recommendations from Early Years advisors and these have contributed towards an improved learning environment for children. The group informs Ofsted of any significant changes.

Leadership and management are good. The staff team demonstrate a positive commitment to the development of the provision and issues identified by Early Years Advisors have been completed effectively to improve practice. Methods to monitor and evaluate the quality of nursery education are sufficiently rigorous to identify any gaps in the provision. Staff have a good awareness of the Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage and Birth to three matters and how to apply these frameworks in practice to support all children's development. The staff team have clearly defined roles and responsibilities and are deployed effectively throughout the nursery to ensure that the children are safe and well supervised. Staff work very well as a team and are supportive of students and new staff employed by the nursery. Staff meetings

take place regularly and are used to discuss practice, new initiatives and future plans and events. The well organised staff rota ensures that that ratios are met and sufficiently qualified staff are working with the children.

The nursery is organised to meet the children's individual needs well, for example, babies move up from the baby unit once they are mobile but this is very much according to their individual needs. The age ranges when children move up to the next age grouproom are approximate and staff cater for each child's individual needs first and foremost. The nursery is well resourced and the bright, welcoming environment is enhanced through the use of displays, children's art work, posters and friezes.

Improvements since the last inspection

Not applicable.

Complaints since the last inspection

Since registration 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):

- continue to develop staff understanding of the framework for observing and assessing the development of children under three
- extend the range of resources that reflect diversity with positive images of race, culture, gender and disability.

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):

- extend opportunities for children to develop practical explorative and investigative skills regarding the natural world and the environment.
- ensure that a clear record is kept on children's "starting points" and extend evaluation of activities to include individual observation of children's progress where appropriate.

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