

# The BigTop Pre-School

Inspection report for early years provision

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	EY231935
<b>Inspection date</b>	13 September 2007
<b>Inspector</b>	Sonjia Nicholson
<b>Setting Address</b>	Bedgrove Pavilion, Bedgrove Park, Ambleside, Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire, HP21 9TT
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<b>Type of inspection</b>	Integrated
<b>Type of care</b>	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](http://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?

The Big Top Pre-School was registered in 2002. It is privately owned and operates from a community centre in the Bedgrove area of Aylesbury. The pre-school opens five days a week from 09.15 until 11.45 and from 13.00 until 15.30 on Tuesdays. Children can also attend a lunch club from 11.45 until 12.45 each day. Children have use of a large main hall with easy access to an enclosed outdoor area. Staff make use of the pre-school's close proximity to the playground, park and training pitch to further extend children's physical play.

The pre-school is registered to care for up to 35 children aged two to five years at any one time. Children usually attend from two and a half years. There are currently 62 children on roll of whom 40 receive funding for nursery education. The pre-school supports a number of children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and who speak English as an additional language.

The pre-school employs nine staff. The manager and six staff hold relevant early years qualifications. The pre-school receives support from Buckinghamshire Early Years Development and Childcare Service.

## THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PROVISION

### **Helping children to be healthy**

The provision is good.

Children enjoy nutritious snacks which encourage them to develop healthy eating habits, for example, they have the choice of two items each day, such as, breadsticks, fresh fruit, toast or cheese biscuits. Children access water from a jug at their level and have the option of milk or water at snack times to ensure they are not thirsty. Some children stay for the lunch club where they bring a packed lunch; staff store lunchboxes on a trolley in the foyer and encourage parents to include an ice pack to prevent food spoiling, although not all parents follow this advice. All children have the opportunity to take part in weekly cooking activities where they make a variety of foods both sweet and savoury, such as, couscous, apple tarts and vegetable stir fry; this increases their knowledge of different foods and encourages them to try new flavours and textures.

There are a number of staff who have current first aid qualifications and are able to deal with minor injuries to children using the fully stocked first aid boxes available. Staff record details of accidents appropriately and ensure parents sign the entries to acknowledge the treatment given. Staff obtain written consent to seek further treatment in the event of an emergency. They have good systems in place to handle more serious health issues, for example, they have a detailed Health Care Plan to ensure children receive prompt and appropriate medical care. There are good arrangements in place for the storage, administration and recording of medication given to children.

Children learn the importance of good personal hygiene through the daily routine. They line up to wash their hands in a sterilising solution to prevent the spread of infection before snacktime and after using the toilet and have access to tissues so they can wipe their noses. Staff follow effective routines to further prevent the spread of germs, such as, wiping tables before snack time with anti-bacterial spray and wearing gloves when changing children's nappies. Staff remind parents of the group's sickness policy on a regular basis and inform them of any infectious diseases that may affect their child by displaying a sign in the foyer, however they do not have any further information about infectious and notifiable diseases available.

Children have daily opportunities to play outside in the fresh air; they use a wide range of equipment, such as, balls, hoops, bean bags, slides and see-saws to develop their physical skills and have use of the adjacent training pitch, playing field and playground to run and play on large equipment. Staff plan a Physical Education session each week where children participate in team games, develop new skills, practise old ones and complete an obstacle course. Children develop their fine manipulative skills as they use scissors, pencils, chinks, paintbrushes and thread cotton reels onto strings.

### **Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe**

The provision is good.

Children play in a unique building that provides a safe and clean environment in which space is used well so they can move freely both inside and outside. The lay-out of the main room allows staff to see children at all times which means supervision is good and children play safely. Children have easy access to the fully enclosed paved outdoor area throughout the session which contains no hazards, for example, they enjoy free painting, water play and painting the

fence with water using large paintbrushes. Children also have use of the surrounding area to further extend their play opportunities.

There is plenty of storage space for the excellent range of toys and equipment which staff set out each day on child sized tables and mats on the floor so children can access them independently. Staff check toys at this time to ensure they are safe for children to use and there is a regular routine to clean toys and equipment, for example, they wash dressing-up clothes and make fresh playdough each week. Children move freely between the activities making independent choices; they enjoy looking at books in the comfortable book corner and role playing in the large well-equipped home corner.

As a precaution, fire safety equipment is in place throughout the building, including a fire alarm system, fire blanket and extinguishers. All fire exits are clearly identified and free from debris so staff and children can escape easily. Staff practise the evacuation plan on a regular basis, alternating the days and times it takes place so all children are involved and consequently know what to do. The drill is on display for visitors to view and staff record details of evacuations for future reference. Staff are clear about their role in helping children leave the building quickly and safely.

Children remain safe during the session as the main door is kept locked; visitors must press the door bell to attract attention and sign the visitor's book so staff are aware they are present. At drop-off and collection times staff are vigilant in their supervision of the children and follow an established routine where children wait in the main hall until their parent or carer arrives and are then called to be reunited with them. Parents inform staff of any changes to adults collecting their child via the communication book kept in the foyer; this means staff monitor that children go home with the right person. There is a policy in place regarding a child becoming lost whilst at the setting but this does not include a procedure for when children are playing or walking in the neighbourhood. The policy relating to a parent failing to collect their child also lacks some detail.

Staff have a good understanding of their role in safeguarding children; they recognise signs of possible abuse and know when and who to report their concerns to. The setting has systems in place to record existing injuries and concerns and a Child Protection policy, however, this does not reflect changes to how safeguarding issues are dealt with locally. The Local Safeguarding Children Board procedures document is not shared with parents which means they are not fully aware of the staff's role and responsibility to protect children. Staff are easily identifiable in their uniform of purple polo shirts and from their photographs on display in the foyer.

### **Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do**

The provision is good.

Children benefit from effective staff deployment which means they receive high levels of support, particularly the influx of new children who are aged under three years. The experienced staff team offer lots of cuddles and verbal reassurance to help children settle and consequently the majority of them enter happily and part from their parent or carer without staff support. Children are becoming familiar with the daily routine as staff take time to explain things to them, for example, where they can get a drink and what to do if they want to go to the toilet.

Staff do not use the Birth to three matters framework but children eagerly participate in a wide range of interesting activities as they move freely around the room, including small world play

with dolls houses, cars and a garage, imaginary play in the home corner and various creative activities, such as, playdough, sponge painting and junk modelling. Children are occupied and interested in what is going on which creates a busy atmosphere. Staff successfully take the curriculum outdoors so children can enjoy a range of activities, such as, free painting, playing with rice in the water tray and using large paintbrushes and water to paint the fence.

## Nursery Education

Most children confidently enter the group and appear happy, settled and familiar with the daily routine. They develop positive relationships with staff and respond well to their instructions, for example, to join the whole group for registration. Children enjoy sociable lunch and snack times as staff sit with them, chat freely and encourage good manners. Staff are beginning to allow children some independence as they choose a 'milk monitor' from each table to distribute cartons of milk to the other children using small shopping trolleys; they encourage children to open their straw and pop it in the carton but do not give children the opportunity to pass the snacks around to one another. At home time children find their own bag and coat and some children put their coat on independently, whilst others attempt to do so with adult help.

Children enjoy looking at books in small groups with an adult where they listen attentively and then talk about the story, for example, how many legs the spider has. During large group time, staff confidently tell the story of 'The Three Little Pigs' using the puppet theatre; children animatedly join in the repetitive sentences, such as, 'I'll huff and I'll puff and I'll blow your house down'. Children are beginning to recognise their name as they find their name card on arrival and some children attempt to write their name independently, for example, a child uses a large paintbrush to write her name in water on the fence outside. There are lots of opportunities for children to make marks using a wide selection of tools, such as, chalks, crayons and pencils and clipboards in the home corner.

Children recognise and name simple shapes, such as, circle and triangle as they build with construction apparatus and play a shape game. Staff regularly incorporate activities that help children sort, match and sequence into the curriculum and children enjoy singing mathematical songs, such as, '5 Little Speckled Frogs' to help develop their understanding of numbers. Children count by rote up to 20 at registration time but staff do not routinely provide opportunities for them to count and make simple calculations during everyday activities, for example, when lining up or at snacktime. Staff encourage children to use mathematical language during their play, for example, identifying the big and small peppers in the home corner as they make dinner.

Children mimic real life situations as they play in the home corner where they look at books, make dinner and care for the dolls. They express themselves freely through a range of creative activities, including, chalking, painting and printing and explore textures as they play with playdough, sand and make junk models using 'fluffy' and 'shiny' materials. Children take most of their artwork home as there is limited space to display it within the setting. Children sing simple known nursery rhymes at large group time, for example, 'Wind the bobbin up' and 'Twinkle, twinkle little star' and particularly enjoy singing along to the 'Wake up' song which is their cue to choose what they want to do. Children recognise and name colours, for example, staff ask them to sit at the 'yellow', 'blue', 'green' or 'red' table for snacktime.

Children confidently use simple programs on the laptop computer; they operate the mouse competently to move objects around the screen. Staff monitor the computer so that all children have the opportunity to use it and learn new skills. Children explore a range of appliances like

the toy toaster, kettle and food mixer in the home corner where they turn knobs and push buttons to make them work. Children design and construct models using junk materials and construction apparatus. They investigate change during cooking activities and manipulate malleable materials, such as, playdough where they roll, pat and squeeze it. Children are beginning to remember and talk about significant things that have happened to them and make connections, for example, during a discussion about their holidays a member of staff tells them she went to Cornwall and a child says 'that's where I went!'

The quality of teaching and learning is good. Staff have a sound knowledge of Foundation Stage and are all involved in planning a range of topics, such as, 'All about me' which incorporate the stepping stones. They make regular observations of children's achievements, monitor their participation in activities and evaluate planned activities to help plan the next steps in their learning; consequently, children are making steady progress towards the Early Learning Goals. Staff record children's progress on Record of Achievements that parents can see at any time if they ask; they provide a written report which they share informally with parents and teachers on transfer to school. An effective key worker system is in use and staff organise the session well so that they have the opportunity to work with the children in their group to complete set tasks. Children are split by age into two groups for story time which means they benefit from age-appropriate stories and can concentrate without distraction. Children enjoy good interaction from staff throughout the session; staff speak respectfully to them, listen carefully and are genuinely interested in what they have to say.

### **Helping children make a positive contribution**

The provision is good.

Children behave very well; they play together harmoniously without incident. They respond well to staff instructions, such as, tidying up when staff shake the tambourine signal at tidy up time and are beginning to learn the simple rules in place through regular reminders. Children receive plenty of praise and encouragement from staff which boosts their confidence and self-esteem.

Children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities receive excellent support from group's Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO) in conjunction with staff and outside agencies. The SENCO has attended appropriate training and has an interest in furthering her knowledge by participating in a programme aimed at developing children's speech and language. She works closely with staff to ensure children have time and attention each day to work towards their Individual Educational Plans and meet specific targets. Staff have support from the Area SENCO who visits each term to discuss concerns and help produce reports for health professionals. The group's SENCO holds regular review meetings with parents so they are fully involved in their child's care. Children who speak English as an additional language also receive good interaction from staff so they begin to settle into the group and feel secure, for example, they use a 'time line' of photographs depicting the daily routine to show what is happening next.

Children learn about their local community as they take part in activities and walks in the local area, for example, to the spinney and playground. They receive regular drop-in visits from the local police and community support officers along with planned visits from the fire service and a postman; this helps them gain an awareness of the jobs people do within the community. Children enjoy celebrating world festivals and events, such as, Chinese New Year and Diwali where they make clay diva pots; this develops their understanding of other cultures and religions. Staff encourage children to think about others less fortunate than themselves by taking part in events, such as, a sponsored toddle to raise money for a children's charity. There is a good

range of resources that reflect diversity including, books, male and female dolls with differing skin tones, dressing-up clothes for boys and girls and that depict the different jobs people do, an atlas and play people of different races and with disabilities. Children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is fostered.

There is plenty of information for parents regarding the care offered to children including a notice board, a folder containing policies and procedures, a display of staff photographs/details, some of which needs updating and a prospectus for new parents. Regular newsletters keep parents informed about news, themes and issues within the group. Staff have information available for parents regarding how to make a complaint but this information is out of date, however there is a system in place to record complaints. Staff encourage parents and children to visit the setting several times to aid the smooth transition from home to pre-school; they ask parents to complete an information sheet which helps them get to know the children and offer appropriate and individual care. The friendly staff team greet parents on arrival and make themselves available to speak to them at anytime, therefore developing trusting relationships. Parents are very happy with the care provided and particularly like the natural, caring manner of the mature staff team, the organisation of the group, the clean, spacious environment and the support offered to children which means they settle quickly and are happy.

The partnership with parents and carers of children receiving nursery education is good. Staff use information gained from parents when their child commences at the setting to start a record of achievement; they update this information regularly through observations and assessments and share it with parents informally. There is some brief information about the six areas of learning contained within the prospectus, however little else is shared with parents about the Foundation Stage. Regular newsletters keep parents informed about the themes and planned activities so they can bring items from home for display on the interest table and therefore contribute to their child's education.

## **Organisation**

The organisation is good.

All aspects of the setting are well organised. Staff ratios are high which means children receive good levels of care and attention. They are deployed effectively both inside and outside as they follow a rota so they know where they should be and what they are doing; consequently, the sessions run very smoothly. Staff work extremely well together; there is clearly a good rapport between them which adds to the friendly atmosphere within the group. There are some procedures in place to recruit new staff but these do not include gathering information about an applicant's health to ensure they are fully suitable. Children benefit from an established daily routine which makes them feel secure and keen to attend. There is a good range of activities both inside and outside to ensure children have fun, learn new things and have new experiences, such as, a visit from a fire engine.

Leadership and management is good. The hardworking owner/manager has a clear vision of her aims within the group; she regularly reviews her own practice and updates her skills and knowledge through attending many courses, the content of which, she enthusiastically cascades to the staff, for example, 'Children's Emergent Writing'. There is an appraisal system in use which includes a self-evaluation form for staff to highlight their strengths and any areas for development. The owner/manager places a high emphasis on training and encourages staff to gain professional childcare qualifications and attend short courses and workshops to keep up to date with current practice, for example, 'Practical Activities for Pre-School Children'. She supports staff to fulfil their role successfully, for example, she provides time during the weekly

routine for all key worker staff to update their children's record of achievements and write reports at the end of the summer term.

All regulatory records are in place. Staff complete them accurately, store them confidentially to protect children's identity and share them with parents, for example, they sign the accident record to acknowledge the entry. A range of policies and procedures are available to parents so they are aware of the service provided, however some need updating and/or lack detail. The setting meets the needs of the range of children for whom it provides.

### **Improvements since the last inspection**

At the last Children Act inspection it was recommended that Ofsted's details were added to the complaints procedure so that parents are fully aware of how to contact Ofsted and raise a complaint. These details have now been added to the complaints policy and is shared with parents.

At the last S122 inspection three key issues were raised; to ensure children's development is recorded through the stepping stones and their next steps for learning are identified, develop the evaluation process to formally record if the expected learning outcome has been met and use this to inform future planning and develop the planning to ensure that children are offered opportunities to reinforce their learning through repetition, questioning and re-visiting activities. All staff now receive time out to write up observations and complete children's records which means they are able to identify gaps and plan the next steps in their learning. Planning sheets have been re-designed to incorporate space for further evaluation of activities and comments as to whether the learning outcome has been met and now include other areas of learning, such as, snacktime to encourage small group discussions and opportunities to re-visit subjects.

### **Complaints since the last inspection**

Since the last inspection there have been no complaints made to Ofsted that required the provider or Ofsted to take any action in order to meet the National Standards. The provider is required to keep a record of complaints made by parents, which they can see on request. The complaints record may contain complaints other than those made to Ofsted.

## **THE QUALITY AND STANDARDS OF THE CARE AND NURSERY EDUCATION**

On the basis of the evidence collected on this inspection:

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

The quality and standards of the nursery education are good.

### **WHAT MUST BE DONE TO SECURE FUTURE IMPROVEMENT?**

#### **The quality and standards of the care**

To improve the quality and standards of care further the registered person should take account of the following recommendation(s):

- ensure all policies relating to children's daycare contain the necessary detail.

## **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):

- provide further opportunities for children to count and make simple calculations during everyday activities.

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](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)