

Hilltop Playgroup

Inspection report for early years provision

Unique Reference Number	140422
Inspection date	05 June 2007
Inspector	Maggie Thorp

Setting Address	CUFOS Community Centre, The Avenue, London, N10 2QE
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Telephone number	(0208) 444-3358
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E-mail

Registered person	Hilltop Playgroup
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Type of inspection	Integrated
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Type of care	Sessional care
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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 satisfactory.

WHAT SORT OF SETTING IS IT?

Hilltop Playgroup opened in 1983 and is run by a parent management committee. Since moving in 1987 it has been registered as operating from the ground floor of the Community Use For Old Station Community Centre in Muswell Hill. The playgroup serves the local community. Children use the hall and a fully enclosed outside play area. The playgroup also have use of a kitchen, and toilet facilities for both adults and children.

The playgroup are registered for a maximum of 18 children aged between two and five years. There are 22 children on roll aged between three and five years who attend for a variety of sessions. Of these 18 are currently nursery education funded. The playgroup include children for whom English is an additional language. The group open four days a week and are closed on Thursdays. They operate during term time only between the hours of 09:30 and 12:00.

Three staff work directly with the children and all have appropriate childcare qualifications. They also have a parent helper on duty for each session. The playgroup receive support and training from the local authority, this includes a visit from an early years advisory teacher.

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PROVISION

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

The playgroup has many effective systems in place to contribute to children's good health. Children play and are cared for in a clean environment and the cleanliness of all the areas children use is carefully monitored by staff. Staff clean and check the play materials each half term and parents regularly take items home to launder them. Good measures in place to prevent the spread of infection and children are learning a lot about keeping themselves healthy. This happens through conversations staff initiate as children help to prepare snacks, reminders to wash, and through some of the themes children explore for example, dental hygiene.

Children's health and well being is further safeguarded by the staff's sound understanding of how to support children who are feeling ill or who have accidents. All staff have had training in administering emergency medical treatment and two staff have first aid qualifications. Good systems are in place and implemented to record medication and accidents. There is a cosy rest area and blankets for children feeling unwell. Emergency contact numbers are at hand and parents are sent for. Very good care is taken to ensure children's individual medical needs are known by all the staff.

Children enjoy and are well nourished by healthy snacks of fresh fruit and breadsticks. They help to prepare the fruit and are very enthusiastic about eating it afterwards. Drinks of water are available throughout the session and children like to help themselves to these and after wash their own cups up. The parent helper's child hands round breadsticks at circle time. This is a very social time and children enjoy choosing from the plate and saying 'thank you'. A careful record is kept of any dietary needs and care is taken to ensure children only eat food that is suitable for them. Parents are consulted about which healthy snacks the playgroup should provide and which products are safe for all children to eat including those with allergies.

Children have outdoor play sessions each day in all but the worst weather. They run, jump and balance, using a range of equipment in the garden. Indoors children have opportunities for physical play sometimes with climbing equipment, or a seesaw. In addition they have good exercise as they enthusiastically join in an action songs and games time to end each session.

Older children's physical development is supported well. They are learning to catch and throw. There are a wide range of wheeled toys including scooters, bikes, trucks and dolls' push chairs, which children manoeuvre safely and skilfully. Children use scissors, paint brushes, cooking tools and pens with good control. They confidently peel and chop fruit at snack time.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

Children enjoy the very welcoming, attractive environment of the playgroup. The premises the playgroup use is shared with other groups and there are restrictions to what can be displayed. However, staff have overcome these by making a number of display areas and boards which can be packed away at the end of each session. Children especially enjoy the interest table and display board which reflect the current theme. Parents have display areas and notice boards with information about policies, the curriculum, current themes, and other helpful information about local facilities in the entrance hall. In addition, staff are at hand to greet children and parents as they arrive and this a very happy social time.

Children's independence is fostered through all the necessary equipment being accessible for children eating, using the bathroom and, when required, resting. This equipment and furniture is safe, suitable for the ages of the children and in good condition. There is a wide variety of activities in the playgroup store room that staff rotate and there are a good range of different types of play set out in separate areas each day. However, within these, some activity areas do not have a wide selection of resources from which children can make their own choices.

Children are kept safe through the very thorough risk assessment that has been carried out. Prompt action is taken when risks are identified to ensure children's ongoing safety. A consultancy is used to assess the safety steps staff take and this was recently judged as at a good level. One member of staff is responsible for overseeing health and safety. She has received training for this and is well informed about her role. Children are learning about safety through the themes they explore. Currently this is road safety and a road safety officer is booked to visit the group. In addition, care is taken to keep children safe at arrival and collection times. A record is kept and consulted regarding any changes to who is to collect a child. The outings policy stipulates a high adult child ratio for outings, and good practice in regard to risk assessing any venues to be visited.

Children are protected by staff's sound knowledge and understanding of safeguarding children. They are aware of the possible signs of abuse and what to do if they have concerns. This is underpinned both by a comprehensive policy in line with local safeguarding children guidance, and the training the designated person has received.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

Younger children enjoy their time in the playgroup. There is a happy atmosphere; children are having fun and learning as they play. Staff effectively plan activities guided by the Birth to three matters framework. Children enjoy a good balance of activities that are well matched to different children's ages, stages of development and interests. They are becoming competent learners and are finding out about the world using all their senses as they explore sand and water, roll and cut play dough, and sit with staff in the cosy book area to look at books.

Children are developing as skilful communicators. They make connections between the activities they participate in at the playgroup and their experiences at home and chat freely about these. They talk about their experiences of going on aeroplanes as they do sponge printing with aeroplane shapes. They chat about mummy cooking as they pretend to cook in the home corner. This is well supported by staff who ask relevant questions and take time to listen to children.

Children are being creative and imaginative throughout each session using the range of open ended materials that are accessible to them. Children enjoy dressing up, painting and drawing. There is a good balance of free play and structured group times. Children enjoy the freedom they have to move between the activities of their choice for most of the session and to play outdoors. When it comes to story time or the closing singing time they are able to sit and participate with the older children.

Nursery Education

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. Children are making satisfactory progress helped by the ongoing observations the staff make of each child. In addition, weekly plans include ways individual children can be encouraged in particular areas. Children's interest and

thinking is stimulated well by some of the activities. They have fun and learn as they weigh and mix ingredients when cooking. However, some of the adult led activities at the beginning of each session are less effective than others. This is because staff have not identified what children might learn from the activities offered and what challenges could be included for more able children. An example of this is a printing activity that only sustains older children's interest for a short time.

Children engage in a range of activities to ensure they can make satisfactory progress in each of the six areas of learning identified in the Foundation stage guidance. Children's self esteem and confidence is effectively encouraged by staff's warmth, and obvious genuine interest in each child. However, some areas of the playgroup are not set out in ways that enable children to practice and refine their skills as resources are changed each day. Their independence is encouraged by helping to prepare fruit for snack times and to manage self help tasks such as using and hanging up aprons independently. However, they do not always have a wide selection of resources in each area so they can make choices, extend their ideas and develop their play. Sand and water play are offered for example, with just boats and play people and the carpeted area has one type of construction toy and just cars with it.

Many children have a wide vocabulary and are confident when speaking in front of others. They are learning to listen to each other before contributing their own ideas. This is fostered very well by the show and tell times. Children talk with pride about what they have made that morning or announce the arrival of a new baby. Staff support less confident or articulate children well so they can contribute. Children are learning the sounds letters make and many can identify the letters in their names. When doing an alphabet puzzle staff help children think of words that begin with the letter they are holding. Some children are able to write their names and label their own drawings and paintings. Children's interest in text is encouraged as they are invited to respond to questions on the interest table about the current theme. However, more able children's further interest in writing is not fostered well by the lack of extension in planning and the resources offered in the graphics and other areas.

Children count to ten and recognise numbers as they play. Tarts are counted in the home corner and bangles as children dress up. Children read the numbers on puzzles and name shapes as they complete shape activities. Children learn many mathematical concepts as these are well planned into the different themes they explore. They sort animals by type, weigh and measure as part of cooking activities, and compare sizes of the packaging on food as part of a recycling theme. Number action songs help children learn about simple addition and subtraction.

Planned activities help children learn about seasons and festivals throughout the year. In summer children go strawberry picking, in autumn they collect leaves and make collages. Children are learning about different cultures and the world of work. They make lamps at Diwali and experiment with eating with chop sticks when it is Chinese New Year. They enjoy visits from different professions for example, a dental hygienist. They explore technology as they use a tape recorder with headphones and take pictures with a digital camera.

Children explore different art resources and many are beginning to develop quite detailed drawings. Children explore different ways of painting. They make collages and models with recycled resources. Glue, A4 paper and scissors are set out each day, but additional resources such as sticky tape, hole punches, card and boxes are not regularly available to enable children to build on their creativity. Children enjoy imaginative play in the home corner and when dressing up.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

Children are confident and they greet each other with pleasure as they arrive. There are obvious friendships between children and they have secure, supportive relationships with their key workers. Any children who become upset at parting from their parents are quickly comforted and soon are playing happily. Conversations between staff and children show they know children well and staff make good links with children's home experiences thus adding to children's sense of self esteem and building bridges between home and playgroup.

Children are learning to value the different cultures and abilities of others and to discover the fun that can be had with all toys. This is underpinned by a strong, comprehensive equality policy, and the positive images of different cultures, disability and non stereotypical gender roles in books, displays and toys. Children celebrate a variety of different festivals together. Recently the effectiveness of how the equality policy is implemented was reviewed and steps are being taken to ensure staff get more feedback from parents through an open comments book in the hallway.

Children relate well to each other and staff provide very good role models. Children understand the simple rules of the playgroup for example to say 'thank you' when the bread sticks are passed around, to put their hands up in the circle time, and to use aprons and hang them up afterwards. Children's good behaviour is frequently praised to reinforce this. Staff's gentle prompts encourage children to make amends when they do something unhelpful for example, by saying 'what do we do when something falls on the floor?' Children's social moral, spiritual and cultural development is fostered well.

The partnership with parents is good. Parents receive lots of information about the activities and curriculum offered via a display of photos and text that provides them with clear explanations about each learning area. New parents are given a colourful little booklet explaining what to expect at the playgroup. However, information in the complaints policy is not sufficiently up to date to ensure parents are clear about how to contact the regulatory body and what rights they have regarding requesting information about any complaints.

Parents are able to be involved in their child's learning and participate in the nursery. Displays and newsletters keep parents informed of the current theme and how they can contribute. They take turns to be the parent helper and thus are able to have first hand experience of what happens at the playgroup. Parents are able to make suggestions for improvements or to say what they appreciate. This is through informal conversations each day and by using the comments book and being part of the management committee. Parents receive comprehensive annual written information on their child's progress. This includes photographs, artwork and detailed observations of their child.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

Children are secure and happy at the playgroup. The committed staff team are well deployed to support children as they play and children enjoy good relationships with them. The playgroup have sound employment procedures and so have well qualified and thoroughly checked staff. Children's welfare and individual needs are well met by the playgroup who have appropriate records in place to support their understanding of each child. Good systems are in place to ensure children's health and safety is promoted. Comprehensive policies and procedures and

a management committee with clear roles and responsibilities underpin this good practice. The only weakness in the policies is in the complaints procedure and how well parents are informed of this. The setting meets the needs of the range of children for whom it provides.

Leadership and management is satisfactory. Children are happy and learning because the manager has clear aims in line with the Foundation Stage Guidance i.e. to provide children with an emotionally safe place to play, explore and learn to relate to others as they begin their education away from parents. Some good systems are in place to help staff discuss, plan and evaluate what they provide. However, how to provide children with more opportunities for choice and to develop their play has yet to be thought through and implemented effectively. In addition planning does not include what children might learn from each adult led activity and how to introduce challenge for older children. This reduces the potential learning for children in some activities. Staff have attended a number of courses and are keen to put what they learn into practice. Regular appraisal further supports staff development and contributes to the quality of what children receive.

Improvements since the last inspection

Since the last inspection good progress has been made in putting the recommendations made regarding children's care into practice. These were to fit a fire blanket in the kitchen, to ensure the first aid box is well equipped, that the times children and adults are present are recorded and to maintain a comfortable temperature in the playroom for children. An action plan was drawn up and all of these have been done.

Satisfactory progress has been made in implementing the key issues raised regarding nursery education. Children are learning more about technology and regularly use tape recorders and electronic toys. The observation and assessment systems ensure that assessment is supported by suitable evidence and that this is linked to planning. Lots of written observations are made and these are linked to children's records of progress now. Samples of children's work and photographs are used too. Plans include specific activities to help individual children to progress. Some additional opportunities for children to develop their independence in the self selection of equipment and resources have been created. Staff have added a few more choices in the graphics area and children help prepare fruit and pour their own drinks, but choices for example, in water play, construction and art areas are still limited.

Complaints since the last inspection

Since 1 April 2004 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.

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The quality and standards of the nursery education are satisfactory.

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):

- up date the complaints policy to ensure parents are clear about how to contact the regulatory body and what rights they have regarding information about complaints

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):

- plan what children might learn from activities and what challenges there will be for more able children in order to ensure children benefit from the full potential of what is provided
- develop how the different areas of the room are set out so that children have more opportunities to practice and refine their skills and have a wider selection of choices in each area to extend their ideas and develop their play

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