

Merchistoun Minnows

Inspection report for early years provision

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Registered person Horndean Community Association

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

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 satisfactory. 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?

Merchistoun Minnows Pre-School is run by Horndean Community Association as part of a range of childcare facilities. It opened in 1998 and operates in Merchistoun Hall, a community building in Horndean, a residential area of Hampshire. The pre-school serves the local community and surrounding areas. The group share the premises, although have sole use of the main areas used whilst sessions are running. Children have additional use of an enclosed outside play area, the adventure playground and a large hall. A maximum of 20 children may attend the group at any one time. The pre-school opens Monday to Friday 09:00 - 11:30 during the school term. Additional sessions are available some weeks of the school summer holiday.

There are currently 23 children from 2 years to under 5 years on roll. Of these, 20 children receive funding for nursery education. The association employ a qualified leader to be responsible for the day to day running of the group. In addition, three staff work with the children. Two staff are qualified and the other is currently working towards a child care qualification.

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PROVISION

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

Children begin to gain a very good understanding of how to look after themselves and recognise the importance of taking regular exercise as part of maintaining a healthy lifestyle. They have wonderful opportunities to develop their physical skills using a range of challenging apparatus in the outside adventure playground. Children swing on ropes attached to pipes, walk across rope bridges, developing very good balancing skills, and climb rope netting. Practitioners help support children in climbing over the log at the top of the netting before climbing back down again. Children develop new skills and learn to take risks in a safe and controlled environment. They recognise when their bodies become hot from running around outside and help themselves to drinking water from individually labelled bottles. Children talk about the need to wear sun hats and cream in order to protect their bodies from the sun in hot weather and recall how they wrapped up in scarves, gloves and hats before playing in the snow outside.

Children's understanding of good personal hygiene routines is displayed after they go to the toilet. They wash their hands with soap recognising the need to 'get rid of germs.' However, hygiene routines are not so effective at snack times because children are not encouraged to go to the bathroom and wash their hands before sitting down to eat. Children's health is maintained because all practitioners have relevant first aid training and know how to effectively deal with accidents and administer medication. Secure systems are in place to record this and share information with parents and practitioners have a good knowledge of children's individual medical history and allergies. Consequently, they ensure children's individual needs are fully met.

The pre-school promote healthy eating and children benefit because parents are encouraged to provide a healthy snack for their child during the session. Practitioners make suggestions and consequently parents provide options, such as salad vegetables, cheese and crackers and different types of fruits and vegetables. Alternatives are provided by practitioners, including crackers, breadsticks and raisins, for those children whose parents forget to send a snack with their child. Children have the choice of water or milk at snack times and enjoy sitting with practitioners and their peers. They discuss different types of foods recognising those that are good for their bodies and talk about how these contribute to a healthy balanced diet.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is satisfactory.

Children develop a very good understanding of how to keep themselves safe within the group. They recognise the need to hold onto banisters walking up and down the stairs and stop before crossing the road to check that cars are not approaching. Children wait for each other to climb across equipment, recognising the potential dangers of accessing the same piece of apparatus. They practise regular fire drills and talk confidently about this procedure. Children's understanding of keeping safe is enhanced through the implementation of a 'traffic light system' within the group. Red, amber and green coloured circles are displayed on pieces of equipment, cupboards and areas within the room, which indicate to children where potential dangers may be. For example, children recognise they must not go into cupboards marked with a red circle, despite being locked, because they contain dangerous substances. The colour amber indicates that children need to ask practitioners for help and green allows children to access resources, equipment and areas within the room freely and in safety.

Children are cared for in a safe and secure environment where high priority is placed upon ensuring risks are minimised. Secure systems are in place to ensure the safe arrival and collection of children to and from the group and practitioners are deployed effectively during this time. Children move freely and safely around the learning environment and have independent access to a vast array of play provision and resources. The implementation of risk assessments and daily checks ensure all areas used by children are safe, including outside areas. Equipment, furniture and play provision is suitable for the ages of children attending and effective procedures are in place to ensure this is clean, safe and well maintained.

Children are protected from visitors because secure systems are in place for them to sign in and out of the group and show identification. Accurate records are maintained relating to who is on the premises, and highly effective procedures ensure children are collected from pre-school by adults known to practitioners. Children are safeguarded from harm because secure procedures are in place relating to child protection issues and practitioners fully understand their role with regards to protecting children in their care. They know how to implement pre-school and local child protection procedures and recognise possible signs and symptoms that may indicate a child is at risk. Practitioners have undertaken relevant checks, however the community association have overlooked the potential risk to children as they have weekly contact with an unvetted adult in the group. In addition, some trustees have yet to complete relevant checks to ensure suitability and consequently, children's safety may be compromised.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

Children are happy, enjoy coming to pre-school and show a positive approach to learning. They show real excitement running into the group with their parents and know the routine well finding their name cards to place in the box. Children talk excitedly to practitioners about their weekend and make their decisions about what they want to play with from the selections made available to them. They develop very good self care skills and work well with their peers when they decide to pack equipment away and choose other resources suggesting they build a train track. Children enjoy playing independently and together with their peers and develop secure trusting relationships within the group.

Younger children become skilful communicators talking through their ideas and participating excitedly in group stories. They are confident to ask questions and seek reassurance from practitioners recognising when they need support, for example when trying to negotiate new apparatus in the adventure playground outside. Children are competent learners developing their understanding of number, shape and size and know how to operate equipment, such as remote controlled bumble bees and tape recorders with headsets. They enjoy being imaginative and expressing their creative ideas using dolls and prams in role-play and experiencing a range of different media. Children become extremely independent across most parts of the session. For example, they select their own resources, put on their aprons and hang their paintings up to dry, although opportunities for them to be independent at snack times are not promoted. Practitioners prepare tables, lay out name cards, serve snacks and pour drinks, which impacts on children's ability to develop their self care skills across all aspects of the session. Interaction between practitioners and children is wonderful and practitioners use the Birth to three matters framework to help guide their planning and assessment of younger children. Consequently, they pitch their teaching at an appropriate level ensuring effective support is provided. As a result, young children are keen to try new experiences and develop good levels of confidence and self assurance.

Nursery education

The quality of teaching and learning is good. Children make good progress in their individual learning because teaching is rooted in a secure knowledge of the Foundation Stage Curriculum. Practitioners provide a rich and stimulating environment where all children thrive and are actively engrossed in their learning. Children benefit from the structure of sessions where they lead their own learning and initiate their own ideas. Practitioners are extremely skilful in the way in which they use children's self chosen play, routine activities and incidental opportunities to extend their learning. For example, during physical activities in the hall children notice and compare shape and size of wheels on their vehicles. They talk about different types of bicycles and are introduced to new vocabulary as practitioners describe how stabilizers work to support children when learning to ride a bicycle. Children count the cones when their peers have finished riding in and out of them and sort them into colours. They make patterns with the cones confidently arranging them into different shapes.

Children enjoy participating in group discussions and explore books together. They talk about the pictures expressing their own ideas and listen to practitioners responding effectively to questions they ask. Children are actively engrossed as practitioners use exciting and inspirational teaching methods to capture their attention, for example when reading stories. However, the organisation of large group times and the deployment of practitioners is not always effective in ensuring all children remain actively engaged and receive effective support. Consequently, some children begin to get fidgety and do not involve themselves in the discussion, which impacts on the learning that takes place.

Children show curiosity and enjoy investigating how things work and how they change. They recognise why the remote controlled equipment does not work and enjoy hiding plastic mini beasts in ice cubes and watching them melt. Children plant seeds, such as sunflowers, learn to take care of them and watch to see how much they grow. They develop their understanding of measure as they monitor whose has grown the tallest and mark this on charts and graphs. Children investigate a variety of objects making predictions about which will float and sink when placed in water and increase their understanding of weight as they measure ingredients when cooking. They use magnifying glasses to examine patterns on shells and explore natural objects, such as fir cones, pebbles and leaves describing them as prickly, cold and smooth.

Children use very good mathematical language in their play comparing the size and shape of pieces of track and negotiating with their peers how best to design their railway. They listen and value one another's ideas responding excitedly when one child suggests making a tunnel for the trains to pass through. Practitioners play alongside children and are very effective in encouraging them to solve their own problems and develop their own ideas. They help support children's imagined ideas offering to be the cashier when a child decides to stop and fill his car up with petrol at the garage. Practitioners help to extend children's ideas when they decide to make items for the bakery when playing with dough. Effective questioning encourages them to think about the types of food that can be bought from a bakery. Consequently, children decide to make different types of bread and cakes and show competence when using tools, such as knives, cutters and scissors.

Children benefit from many opportunities within the learning environment to develop their early reading and writing skills. For example, they recognise names on their cards, and point out letters included in words displayed around the room. Children talk about sounds and begin to link them with letters through discussions with practitioners. Their understanding is enhanced as they bring in items from home linked to the letter of the week and notice familiar letters in

their names. Children have independent access to a range of writing tools and materials and practise writing in a variety of situations. They are generally encouraged to write their names on their paintings at the easel and enjoy writing menus and shopping lists in their imaginative play.

The use of space and presentation and accessibility of resources has a significant impact on children's learning. The environment is presented in different areas and children have independent access to a vast array of resources, for example in the mathematical, creative and finding out areas. Children enjoy expressing their imagination as they explore creativity. They use their sense to explore media such as corn flour dough, cooked and uncooked pasta and spaghetti, ice and sand and water. Children explore paint using a range of techniques and objects and enjoy making their own colours mixing paints together. They laugh and giggle with practitioners and their peers participating enthusiastically in songs and action rhymes and explore a range of instruments learning about sound and rhythm.

The system for planning is secure and practitioners are highly effective in the way in which they monitor and assess children's progress towards the early learning goals. Assessment records are extremely comprehensive and provide a clear and accurate picture of children's starting points and how they progress. Practitioners base planning around topics and identify clear learning intentions, although they adapt their teaching techniques around individual children. They use their knowledge of each child and information gained from assessment to enable children to make progress by learning in meaningful and practical ways that interest them. Consequently, children have time to develop and practise new skills consolidating what they have learnt before moving on to the next stage in their learning. They progress at their own rate, show high levels of concentration and become confident autonomous learners who are able to achieve their individual potential.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

Children build positive and trusting relationships with practitioners, which are enhanced through the implementation of a highly successful key worker system. They are extremely confident and display high levels of self-esteem responding well to practitioners who continually praise them for their efforts. Children receive smiley faces on their individual cards for good behaviour and special achievements and delight in receiving certificates of achievement, when their cards are full. They learn to value their own achievements and those of others and are caring and considerate towards one another. Children have many opportunities to learn about themselves and others and begin to recognise and value their similarities and differences. Practitioners make excellent use of stories, discussions and activities linked to topics, such as Ourselves and Our Families, to promote this. For example, children discuss how some people have freckles and some wear glasses. They learn why some people need aids, such as crutches and wheelchairs, to help them walk and recognise that every one is an individual and very special.

Children's understanding of their local environment and the wider world is enhanced through topics, discussions and outings. They play an active role in the Association Summer Fete and enjoy visits to the fire station, going on nature walks and participating in an African music session at Mill Hill Early Years Centre. Visits from the police, ambulance service, librarian and animals from the small local farm help increase children's understanding of their local community and people who help them. Children's understanding of diversity is promoted as they learn about different countries, flags, food and famous landmarks. Practitioners make good use of special events and cultural festivals to increase children's awareness of other cultures and

customs. For example, children learn about Chinese New Year, engage in role-play in their Chinese restaurant and taste new foods. This positive approach fosters children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

All children are highly valued and their individual needs fully met. Secure systems are in place to ensure those with special needs are well supported and provided with opportunities to achieve their potential. Children benefit immensely because practitioners and their parents develop extremely positive relationships and strong links are established between home and pre-school. Parents share information about what their child can do when they begin the group as well as details about their individual needs and family and home life. This helps to ensure practitioners have a secure understanding of their individual needs and starting points, enabling them to pitch their teaching at the appropriate level. Parents are encouraged to play an active role in the group, for example by helping out in sessions, participating in fund raising events and completing activities with their child at home. Practitioners welcome suggestions and comments through informal discussion and the implementation of regular parent questionnaires.

The partnerships with parents are good. Parents are well informed about the pre-school through a variety of ways, including informal discussion, information displayed on the notice board and in the parent pack and regular newsletters. They receive detailed information about the Foundation Stage Curriculum and are helped to understand how their child learns through play. Practitioners encourage parents to support children in bringing in items for the interest table linked to pre-school topics. However, systems to share curriculum planning with parents, ensuring they are aware of the planned learning intentions have not yet been introduced. Parents receive information about their child's progress towards the early learning goals. This takes place informally at the end of sessions and formally through the implementation of consultation meetings with their child's key worker. They share assessment records and discuss children's individual achievements, both at home and at pre-school, acknowledging their strengths and recognising areas for development. Practitioner's share suggestions of how parents can help support their child's learning at home, which enables them to play an active role in their learning.

Organisation

The organisation is satisfactory.

Children thrive and make good development in their learning because they are cared for by suitably qualified and experienced practitioners who work exceptionally well as a team. They recognise how children learn most effectively and have a secure knowledge of child development, which is enhanced because they regularly update their skills by attending training opportunities. Highly effective communication takes place between practitioners ensuring clear roles and responsibilities are defined. Consequently, the pre-school is extremely well organised, sessions run smoothly and operational issues are addressed as they arise. As a result, the setting meets the needs of the range of children for whom it provides.

Recruitment and vetting procedures have recently been reviewed in line with new regulations, although these are not yet fully developed. A system to ensure the ongoing suitability of those already working in the setting has not yet been introduced. Effective systems are in place to monitor staff performance and development and practitioners complete a self appraisal as part of this procedure, which enables them to recognise their own strengths and identify their training needs. Highly effective systems are in place to support new practitioners through a comprehensive induction programme, implemented by the pre-school leader. This ensures staff have a clear understanding of their role and receive effective support, although procedures to

monitor their performance during this period are informal. Successful outcomes for children are promoted because practitioners know and implement effective policies and procedures within the group. However, procedures to ensure children's safety around regular volunteers in the group and trustees have not been fully addressed by the association.

Leadership and management of nursery education are good. Children's learning is significantly enhanced because practitioners plan and evaluate together and take responsibility for ensuring the children in their key work group make good progress in their individual learning. Secure systems are in place to monitor the curriculum, ensuring all aspects are sufficiently included and the continuous provision available across the session boosts opportunities for children to develop in each area of learning. Practitioners implement excellent systems to assess and monitor children's individual achievements and evaluate the impact planning has on their learning. Consequently, assessment records give a very clear and accurate picture of children's individual progress. Children flourish in a happy and secure environment because practitioners recognise the strengths of the pre-school, and continually evaluate the educational programme they offer and the way in which this is delivered.

Improvements since the last inspection

At the last care inspection the group were asked to ensure all documentation is fully detailed, including the visitor's contact details, children's full names, the fire log book and the name of any medication that is administered. A new system has been implemented to record details of visitors to and from the group and contact details are now obtained. The fire log book includes details of when the practise took place, how long it took to evacuate the building, who was present and a full evaluation. Children's full names are recorded on all documentation and the full details of all medication is recorded. This contributes to promoting children's health and safety whilst in the group.

At the last nursery education inspection the group were asked to develop an effective system to ensure curriculum planning relates to the stepping stones, includes the outdoor play area and is clearly displayed for the parents information. A new system for planning has been introduced, which now includes outdoor areas and highlights links to the stepping stones. Informal discussion with parents helps them to be aware about what their child is involved in, although procedures to share the curriculum planning with parents have not yet been introduced.

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 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 satisfactory. 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):

- implement procedures to ensure all those providing day care and adults in regular contact with children are suitable
- further develop procedures for recruitment and vetting and develop a system to ensure the ongoing suitability of those already working in the setting
- improve the arrangements for snack time to promote children's personal hygiene and independence

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):

- review the organisation of large group times to ensure all children are actively engaged and effectively supported
- review how information is shared with parents in relation to curriculum planning and identified learning intentions

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