

The Crickets Playgroup

Inspection report for early years provision

Unique Reference Number	113761
Inspection date	21 June 2007
Inspector	Susan McCourt

Setting Address	St Johns Pavilion, Park Road, Burgess Hill, West Sussex, RH15 8HG
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Telephone number	01444 247903
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Registered person	The Crickets 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 satisfactory. 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?

Crickets Playgroup opened in 1994. It operates from a sports pavilion in St John's Park in Burgess Hill. The playgroup serves the local area. It is registered for 24 children and is open for sessional day care.

There are currently 35 children from two to five years on roll including 29 that receive the nursery education grant. Children attend for a variety of sessions. The setting has two children with English as an additional language.

The group opens five days a week during school term times. Sessions are from 09:30 to 12:00, with an afternoon session on Mondays and Tuesdays from 12:15 to 14:45, term time only.

There are five staff, three of whom have NVQ 3 in childcare and education. The setting receives support from the local authority and is a member of the Pre-School Learning Alliance.

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PROVISION

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

Children play in a clean and well-maintained environment, and they enjoy helping to keep it that way by tidying up after their play. Children learn good hygiene routines, washing their hands after using the toilet or having messy play, and using anti-bacterial gel before eating. Staff are always supervising to ensure that children use these methods effectively, and reduce the risk of cross-infection as a result. Staff know how to record accidents and use the medication procedures, which safeguards children's health in an emergency.

Children benefit from a very healthy diet in the setting. Most times, children can have their snack at a time of their choice as the snack table is open for small groups to attend. Children can pour their own drinks and help chop the fruit and salad items under close supervision. Children are very independent and learn good skills in this way. The food choices are always healthy, including dried fruit and raw vegetables. Children can have milk or water with their snack and have access to water through the session to prevent dehydration. Sometimes the food is pre-prepared and all the children sit together to eat. Children enjoy cooking activities and trying food from around the world. They also enjoy the celebratory meaning of food, by making cakes for special mother's day tea parties.

Children's physical development is fostered. The group has a good range of equipment and children enjoy using the bikes, balance beams, climbing frame and slide, although practical limitations affect how frequently each item can be used. Children's small muscles and manipulative skills are developed using a range of pencils and small tools when playing with dough and other craft activities.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is satisfactory.

Children benefit from having a warm and well-maintained room to play in with easy access to the outside area and amenities such as toilets and a cloakroom. The areas are well-maintained with good levels of natural light. The children have free choice of the activities that are out, and though further equipment is only accessible to staff, children are confident that if they ask for any further toys, staff are happy to respond. A limited amount of children's work is put on display, consequently limiting their chances to remember and enjoy their art and craft achievements.

Staff do risk assessments and daily checks to ensure the areas are safe for children to play. Radiators are blocked to prevent children accessing them and all sockets have covers. Children can access some stacked chairs at one end of the room, but understand that it is out of bounds. The premises are very secure, with a locked entrance door and high railings around the outdoor area. Staff are careful to only release children to authorised people, and closely monitor the door at handover times to ensure that all children are accounted for. The fire equipment is regularly checked and fire drills are held every term. The fire drill record does not go into sufficient detail to be evaluated and improved, and some staff are aware of when they are to be held, reducing its effectiveness as a drill. Children learn simple safety rules such as not running in the room, which helps to develop their sense of self-care.

All staff have child protection training and know who to go to with concerns. They have the recent safeguarding children procedures at hand, and are aware that the welfare of the child is paramount.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

Children settle well into the setting because staff and parents work closely to ensure that the settling-in process is managed at a comfortable pace for each individual child. Children benefit from receiving a warm and sensitive response from staff who are very considerate of their needs and feelings, which helps foster a strong sense of belonging. The routine is organised to give children maximum time to choose what to play and develop their ideas and there is sufficient equipment out for children to choose from, giving them a balanced range of play activities over the session. The whole group comes together at certain times of the morning to share a story, sing, or look at the date and weather board. Some children are very confident and happily speak in front of the group, and quieter children are given support to gain the same level of confidence and ensure they can still contribute.

Nursery education

The teaching and learning is satisfactory. Staff are familiar with the Foundation Stage and provide a broad balanced curriculum. They stay alongside children and chat with them about what they are doing, sharing in their enjoyment and listening to their reactions with interest. The learning environment is hampered by the practical limits on how much display space is available and how many activities can be brought out, which has an impact on children's choice and independence, and staff currently have few strategies to overcome this difficulty. The planning is done in consultation with the whole team and is monitored to ensure that all of the stepping stones are covered. However, while staff do know the individual children well, the plans are not rooted in children's recent development, which undermines the effectiveness of the plans. All staff make notes on children's progress and they are then compiled by the supervisor into the written profiles to chart children's progress through the Foundation Stage.

Children enjoy using the different equipment and play materials, and staff are happy to get further things out for them on request as part of a spontaneous play idea suggested by the weather, for example. However, activities may only cover one area of learning, which reduces the interest and excitement that children experience when fascinated by their play. Children move freely around the play spaces and can be independent in choosing what to play next. They often invite their friends to join them, and learn how to share and co-operate with each other. Children learn how to take care of their own personal hygiene and are confident that if they ask for help, staff are always on hand to support them. Children enjoy story times and build narratives into their play. They have sufficient mark-making opportunities and there is always a drawing activity available. Staff bring writing into activities such as role play and encourage children to write their own names and identify significant letters and the sounds they make. Children use mathematical concepts and comparative language in their play, and staff ensure the curriculum covers the stepping stones, but they do not always consolidate such learning in practical activities such as in counting songs. Children use programmable toys and other forms of technology in their play, and learn about the wider world in themed activities about growing, or animal life. Visitors from the community, such as a vet, bring themes to life, as do outings to the zoo and other local places of interest. Craft activities are very open-ended, giving children good scope to make what they choose. They enjoy singing and sometimes sing

spontaneously in play, beating out rhythms and dancing in their chairs. Children take part in a variety of role play scenarios using a good range of home corner equipment.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is satisfactory.

Children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is fostered. Children are introduced to a range of cultures through some excellent fiction and non-fiction books, as well as taking part in festivals from around the world. Staff have an anti-discriminatory approach and support non-stereotypical play, helping children to have a positive approach to differences. Where children have English as an additional language, staff try to work with the parents to support the child in the group. There is a special educational needs co-ordinator on the team and all staff work together to provide consistent and appropriate care to all children's individual needs, liaising with parents and other professionals where necessary.

Children's behaviour is handled in a clear, calm and gentle manner so children understand what is expected of them and are happy to comply. Children are given praise for their achievements and are clearly held in high esteem by the staff, which helps children to feel good about themselves.

The partnership with parents and carers is satisfactory. Parents can see the plans for themes and activities on the notice board and contribute to the group by providing equipment such as quantities of junk modelling materials. Parents can talk with staff at any time about their child's development and are given a scrap book at the end of the year charting their child's progress. However, parents comments and contributions are not included in the profile, reducing the effectiveness of the partnership. Parents have good opportunities to be involved in the group and can be on the committee and act as volunteers in the setting, giving them full access to how the group is run. Parents are appreciative of how approachable and friendly the group is, valuing the settling-in process very highly. Parents know they can discuss any concerns with staff, although the complaints policy does not fully reflect the regulations.

Organisation

The organisation is satisfactory.

The setting meets the needs of the range of children for whom it provides. The staff team includes mainly qualified staff who stay up to date with current ideas by attending short courses. They share the roles in the group and communicate well to ensure that the sessions run smoothly. Adult-child ratios are consistently surpassed and children are always in sight and sound of the staff. The sessions are organised to provide free play for children, which helps their independence. The register is an accurate reflection of the dates and hours of attendance, and staff and visitors are also signed in and out. Policies and procedures are reviewed regularly and are available to parents. All records are stored securely and for the specified periods.

The leadership and management of the setting is satisfactory. The supervisor of the group works closely with the management committee to ensure that the group runs effectively. The supervisor works alongside the staff and most roles are shared, although the supervisor does the majority of the assessment profiles and planning. The group has a good sense of shared values, and their simple aims for the welfare of the children are rooted in established care principles. The group achieve these aims because they all regard the child's welfare as paramount. The supervisor is open to ideas as to how to improve the practice of the group and appreciates the support she receives, tackling any weaknesses with a considered and measured approach.

Improvements since the last inspection

Seven recommendations were made at the last inspection regarding the care aspect of the setting. Four of these were related to details of policy and procedures, and all have since been updated to ensure that the care standards and regulations are met, which safeguards children's welfare. A further two recommendations were made about health and hygiene. The hygiene practice of the group is now improved with children using anti-bacterial gel as well as hand washing to maintain their cleanliness and prevent cross-infection. There is also at least one qualified first aider present each day in the group, which safeguards children's health in an emergency. The final recommendation was to ensure that staff had sufficient information to support children's cultural needs as well as improving the equipment that reflects a diverse population. Staff have since improved the registration form and obtained more play equipment and continue to develop their resources in this area.

Four recommendations were made regarding the nursery education. Two asked the group to ensure the equipment and activities for maths and technology were improved to provide challenging activities. The group has obtained more equipment, and the children's access to and use of the equipment generally is the subject of recommendations in this inspection. The third recommendation was to improve the assessment and observations of children. Staff now share this activity, all recording anything significant that they observe about children's development for the supervisor to add to the profiles. This charts children's progress through the Foundation Stage in preparation for school. The final recommendation was to improve the information given to parents and carers about the Foundation Stage and involve parents more. Staff post the plans on the notice board for parents to see, and ask parents for resources and voluntary help in the group. Staff say they are also more available at handover and out of hours for parents to approach them at any time.

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.

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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):

- improve the fire drill procedures and records

- ensure the complaints policy reflects the current guidance

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):

- develop the learning environment to create more interest around the spaces, both indoors and out
- improve the number and quality of activities offered to provide greater choice and independence
- develop staff skills in assessing children's development, and planning activities that build on recent learning
- continue to develop the opportunities for parents to be involved as partners in their child's education.

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