

# St Marks Pre-school

Inspection report for early years provision

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| <b>Unique Reference Number</b> | 219169           |
| <b>Inspection date</b>         | 15 June 2007     |
| <b>Inspector</b>               | Melanie Eastwell |

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|---------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Setting Address</b>    | St. Marks Church & Community Centre, Calder Rise, Bedford,<br>Bedfordshire, MK41 7UY |
| <b>Telephone number</b>   | 01234 312634                                                                         |
| <b>E-mail</b>             | office@thisischurch.com                                                              |
| <b>Registered person</b>  | St Marks Church Council                                                              |
| <b>Type of inspection</b> | Integrated                                                                           |
| <b>Type of care</b>       | Full day 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](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?

St Mark's Church Pre-school opened in 1976. It operates from rooms in St. Mark's Community Centre which is in the Brickhill area of Bedford. A maximum of 40 children may attend the pre-school at any one time. The setting is open each weekday from 08:30 to 17:30 during term times and offer a holiday club according to demand during school holidays. Children have access to a secure, enclosed outside play area. There are currently 87 children aged from two to under five years on roll. Of these, 62 children receive funding for nursery education. Children come from the local and surrounding areas. The pre-school currently supports a number of children who have learning difficulties or disabilities and also supports a number of children who speak English as an additional language. The pre-school employs 14 members of staff. Of these, 11 hold appropriate early years qualifications and two are working towards a qualification.

## THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PROVISION

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

The provision is good.

Children's continued good health is actively promoted because staff follow effective routines such as using antibacterial spray to clean tables before children eat their lunch, wearing gloves when changing children and storing packed lunches in the fridge to ensure food stays fresh. Children learn about effective practices for managing personal hygiene. They have access to low-level, pump action sinks within the main rooms which enable them to wash their hands independently before they have their snack. They are always supervised in the toilet areas and use steps to enable them to reach the toilets and sinks. Staff talk to them about how to minimise the risk of cross-infection and the reasons why personal hygiene is important. Children wear hats when playing outside and they talk about the sun cream and how important this is in protecting them from sunburn. Children who have accidents receive appropriate and sensitive treatment because a number of staff hold current first aid certificates and a well-stocked first aid kit is accessible at all times. Accident records are in place and are signed by parents. However, there is some inconsistent recording of the specific site of any injury that occurs.

Children enjoy the packed lunches provided by their parents. They sit together, supervised and assisted by the staff, and parents are encouraged to provide healthy choices. Snacks are provided at the pre-school. Children choose when they have their break at the snack bar. A member of staff supervises the snack bar to ensure that all the children have some food and a drink and to ensure that hygienic practises are maintained. Children's independence skills are promoted during snack time because they make choices about toppings for bread and which fruit they have to eat. Children are introduced to new tastes during activities where they try vegetables such as celery and peppers. They do not become thirsty because covered jugs of water are available throughout the session and during outside play, that the children can help themselves to.

Children's physical skills are promoted through the wide range and imaginative use of the garden. Children have opportunities to run around, use bikes and ride-on toys, climb and balance. They use a range of small equipment including hoops, bats, balls and quoits. Children benefit because the staff become involved in the outside games. They encourage them to play throwing and catching games and praise them for trying hard. Children learn to negotiate space and steer the bikes and themselves effectively, not crashing into each other. Inside, children's hand and eye co-ordination is developed through the use of play dough tools, scissors, threading and the manipulation of construction toys and puzzles. Both rooms have areas where children can rest and relax, they use the book areas which have cushions and bean bags.

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

The provision is outstanding.

Children's safety is given top priority by the staff who are extremely vigilant in their supervision of children. During arrival and departure times the doors are closely monitored to ensure children do not leave unattended. When children go to play outside the staff count them and monitor the front and back of the line which promotes their safety. The outside area has been designed with safety in mind. It has areas of shade provided by trees. The ground is covered with safety surface and the fixed equipment is at low level. Comprehensive risk assessments and daily checklists are in place, are regularly reviewed and prompt action is taken to make any necessary repairs. Inside, staff are aware of the children at all times and set the rooms out to allow space

for safe movement. Children stay safe during outings because the staff follow thorough planning procedures and work to higher ratios. Children have very good opportunities to learn how to keep themselves safe. For example, they understand the emergency evacuation procedures and practise these regularly. Staff keep records of the drills to identify any issues around health and safety. Children benefit from the topics such as 'People who help us' because the staff incorporate activities about the school crossing patrol. They play in the garden using a home made zebra crossing and resources such as a child sized 'lollipop' and reflective jacket. They work together, taking turns to be the crossing patrol or the traffic. Children are learning about road safety.

Children enjoy working with a stimulating range of play materials that are pitched correctly for their individual needs. Staff ensure that the activities are set out in an attractive and imaginative way which encourages children to come and try them out. For example, two toy castles are displayed on a mat with dinosaurs and knights with a beam across the top, linking the two together. This thoughtful display encourages children to extend their play. All the equipment and play materials are very well maintained to ensure they are safe. Children's welfare is safeguarded because the staff have a secure understanding of the correct procedures to follow in the event of child protection concerns. Most have completed extra child protection training courses to ensure their knowledge of current procedures is kept up to date. Some have direct experience of managing such issues and are familiar with working in partnership with other agencies to support families which is beneficial to children. All concerns are recorded and reported. Staff understand the importance of maintaining confidentiality and the required documentation is in place.

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

The provision is good.

Children enjoy attending the setting which is very welcoming and friendly. The staff do their utmost to ensure that children have their individual needs met and that their time at the pre-school is happy and productive. Children are divided into two groups according to their age and come together for activities such as 'Sticky Kids' which is about physical activity. Children enjoy taking part in a wide range of activities that are fun and stimulating, such as cooking. They look at the ingredients, become involved in weighing and measuring, taking turns to stir the mixture which helps them work as a group and to learn about how things change when they are mixed together and cooked. Younger children's achievements and progression is recorded using methods from the 'Birth to three matters' framework such as written observations, samples of their work and photographs. Children are happy and confident, they move freely between their chosen activities and are familiar with the daily routine. This develops a sense of ownership and belonging for children. They form close friendships and show delight on their faces when special friends arrive at the beginning of the session.

Children are interested and motivated to learn because the staff provide them with activities that are meaningful, fun and promote their thinking and learning. They sit together during circle time and are fully engaged by the staff. They listen to each other and have opportunities to discuss news from home, the date and the weather. Staff always inform the children about which activities are available to them each session. Their self-confidence is promoted during circle time. For example, an activity is introduced where children take turns to tap out their name using a large drum. Most are confident to do this independently and staff support those who are less confident by accompanying them to the drum and helping them to tap out the syllables in their name. They play well together and seek out their friends during games and hold hands in the line while waiting to go outside. Children develop positive, close relationships

with the staff because they spend time with them during activities and engage them through play and conversation throughout the session. Children's independence skills are promoted because they put on their hats before going outside and have access to low-level pegs to enable them to hang up their own coats. They choose toppings and spread their own bread during snack time and pour their own drinks. The children in the 'Top Marks' room wash up their own plates and cups when they have finished their snack. Children are aware of people in the community. They use a range of resources and props such as dressing-up clothes to learn about safe practices when crossing the road. The setting has close links with the church and attend four services each year. Children prepare songs and plays as part of the church service such as the Nativity. Staff ensure that children are fully prepared for the services by encouraging them to use the costumes during their play and practising the songs. Children visit the church often and are familiar with the surroundings.

Children enjoy listening to stories read by the staff and join in enthusiastically with familiar songs and rhymes. Staff link rhymes and finger plays to the number of the week. For example, 'Five currant buns' and 'Five little men in a flying saucer'. Most children are confident to speak and share their experiences in the small and large groups. They recall events from home and refer to various members of their families. Children's early reading skills are actively promoted. They independently use the book area and some re-tell familiar stories from the pictures. On arrival they find their name card and store it in a pocket with the corresponding first letter of their name. Most children can write their names and they benefit from the free access to the mark making table during the session. Their awareness of mathematical concepts is developing because the children have plenty of opportunities to count and identify numbers from displays in the rooms. They take turns to count each other during circle time. They work as a large group to put a sequence of numbers in order, using number cards and the support from staff. They use compare bears to identify groups of numbers and to sort by size and colour. Children play with sand and water which helps them to learn about capacity. Mathematical language such as 'full up', 'empty' and 'half full' is used by the children and introduced by the staff.

Children benefit from opportunities which allow them to explore and investigate. They use a range of magnifiers to find out about patterns and the structures of mini beasts and flowers. Children work well as a group with the member of staff who talks to them and asks questions about what they can see. They look quizzically at metal mirrors that are concave and convex and wonder how their reflection turns upside down. They mix their own paint to create pictures and note the change from dry powder to liquid paint when they add the water. Children are skilled in creating models using a variety of construction materials and manipulate the pieces to create the desired effect. Children have a wide range of experiences around knowledge and understanding of the world. However, they do not have regular opportunities to become familiar with information and communication technology and programmable toys. The re-introduction of these activities will enhance children's experiences. Children enjoy expressing their creativity through a good range of activities including listening to music. They benefit from the background music of different styles which is played during the session. Instruments are played with enthusiasm and the staff encourage a range of sounds such as 'soft' and 'loud'. Children are also creative with their art and craft work and messy play. They use tools such as scissors to cut sticky tape and attach it to the tables to make a sealed off area and play dough equipment to make holes, roll it flat and to squeeze it into different shapes. Their work is valued and a variety of colourful displays are on the walls in the rooms. This creates a sense of achievement and pride in their own work. Children are actively encouraged to extend their own play. For example, a small group use a brick trolley to carry dolls and pretend food around the room and serve the food onto plates for the doll to 'eat'.

The quality of teaching and learning is good. The staff sit with activities and engage the children in conversations about what they are doing and how they want their current task to progress. Children are encouraged to complete tasks they have chosen such as art work or puzzles and the staff support and encourage them to do this through lots of positive interaction, smiling, reassuring and giving plenty of praise for their efforts. The staff have a good knowledge of the Foundation Stage and use this to plan the great range of activities that are correctly pitched in order to enable children to progress through the stepping stones. All the staff are involved in the planning which ensures they develop a sense of ownership and value. They contribute ideas, and the planning is all pulled together by the head of the pre-school. The observations made of the children are used directly to inform the planning and their individual needs for extension of their learning is clearly identified on the written plans. The key worker system is effective in identifying particular activities for children and key workers use these as targets in their progression. Children's assessment records clearly show their progression in learning through the written observations, samples of their work and photographs. The staff know the children very well and are able to anticipate their needs. They are successful in implementing the Foundation Stage in an interesting way which promotes learning for every child.

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

The provision is outstanding.

Children are treated as individuals and with respect. The staff are highly aware of their individual needs and use every opportunity to promote their self-esteem. They are given high quality experiences and interaction from staff who make time to listen to them and accommodate their requirements wherever possible. Children have access to a huge range of resources and artefacts that show positive images of diversity and the staff make use of these to celebrate a variety of festivals throughout the year. Children are learning about other cultures because they have daily access to dressing-up clothes, small world characters and books which show and celebrate diversity. All children are warmly welcomed into the pre-school and the staff work closely with the parents and other agencies involved with children to ensure a consistent approach which enables the child's specific needs to be met effectively. Children who have learning difficulties or disabilities have a detailed Individual Educational Programme which is reviewed regularly to ensure it is effective. Children are supported as required to ensure their time at the pre-school is successful, fun and beneficial to their development.

Children behave very well. They show respect, care and concern for each other and the play materials. They understand the expectations for behaviour because the staff explain clearly to them the reasons why boundaries are in place. Effective strategies are used to manage children's behaviour and the staff are skilled in knowing when to monitor situations that arise between children and when to step in. Behaviour issues are minimised because staff ensure that a stimulating range of activities are always available to children which are challenging and achievable. This ensures that children are busy and interested in their activities which promotes good behaviour. Children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is fostered.

The partnership with parents and carers is outstanding. Children benefit greatly from the highly positive partnership between the staff and their parents. The staff welcome parental involvement in activities and fund raising. They value the parents' contributions and parents speak very highly of the staff's commitment to meeting all the children's individual needs. Parents are encouraged to continue their child's learning at home and each child has the opportunity to take a book home every day to read with their parents. They are invited to share their child's record of progression and to add their own comments. Staff ensure that notice boards are attractive and up to date and regular newsletters are produced. This ensures that parents have

access to information about the 'Birth to three matters' framework, the Foundation Stage, forthcoming events, child health information and general information. Children benefit from the information supplied by their parents when they start attending which helps the key workers know where their starting points are. This aids the key workers in providing a suitable range of activities from the outset. The setting has an appropriate system in place to record any complaints relating to the National Standards that may arise from parents.

## **Organisation**

The organisation is outstanding.

Children's care, learning and welfare are highly important to the extremely well-organised staff team in this pre-school. They give top priority to meeting all children's individual needs and ensuring that all the documentation is in place and kept up to date. The written policies and procedures are clearly evident in the staff's daily activity with the children and the organisation of the staff team and their individual skills and initiative are exemplary. The operational plan is a working document that is regularly updated and reviewed. The setting always works to higher than required ratios which ensures that each child is able to have sufficient one-to-one attention and support as they require. The setting has robust systems in place to ensure the suitability of new staff and the current staff have undergone induction procedures and benefit from annual appraisals where they can identify achievements and training needs, and regular staff meetings are held to ensure consistency in everyone's approach.

The leadership and management is outstanding. The head of pre-school is currently working towards a level four qualification and is highly capable and knowledgeable about early childhood. She works in close partnership with the deputies and the rest of the staff team and has a great relationship with the church leader and line manager who support her with management decisions. The staff team are fully aware of the benefits to their practice of keeping their knowledge up to date and regularly attend training courses and workshops. The staff team are highly effective and committed to providing children with a range of experiences that inspire and enable them to reach their potential. Overall the provision meets the needs of the range of children for whom it provides.

## **Improvements since the last inspection**

At the last inspection the provider agreed to develop the short term planning to identify the expected learning outcome. The planning has been amended and the staff now record evaluations of the activity to identify areas that went well and areas requiring adapting for next time. The provider also agreed to provide parents with more detailed information regarding their child's developmental progress. Parents are now invited to take their child's file home and add comments if they wish. The setting has ongoing plans to include consultation time with each parent and this is due to commence in September 2007. Children and parents who are new to the pre-school have an introductory session with the staff when the Foundation Stage is explained to them and they are informed who their child's key worker is. One recommendation arose from a variation visit in 2005, to identify a named deputy. The setting now has two deputies in place, both of whom are able to cover in the absence of the head of pre-school. The action taken ensures that the planning is effective and the partnership with parents is enhanced which is beneficial to the children.

## **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 sufficient detail is included in the accident book.

#### **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):

- increase children's experience of information and communication technology.

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)