

Toad Hall Nursery

Inspection report for early years provision

Unique Reference Number	EY239470
Inspection date	30 May 2007
Inspector	Lynne Kathleen Talbot
Setting Address	23-25 Bury Mead Road, Hitchin, Hertfordshire, SG5 1RT
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Registered person	Careroom Ltd
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 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?

Toad Hall Nursery is situated in Hitchin, Hertfordshire. It was registered in October 2002 and is part of a chain of nurseries run by Care Room Limited. The setting serves the local and wider area.

A maximum of 75 children may attend the group at any one time. There are currently 73 children from birth to under five years on roll including funded three and four-year-olds. All children share access to the outdoor play area.

They are open each weekday from 08:00 to 18:00; additional hours can be offered from 07:30. The setting is open all year with the exception of bank holidays and one week between Christmas and New Year. The nursery supports children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and who speak English as an additional language.

There are 16 staff directly working with the children, including the manager; this number includes four staff who offer lunchtime cover and emergency staffing. Thirteen staff hold recognised early years qualifications.

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PROVISION

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is satisfactory.

Children are cared for in a stimulating environment where there is plenty of space and separate areas to offer a wide range of activities. Children's immediate health and welfare is well promoted because staff understand and promote children's good health by being good role models and ensuring that their own knowledge is up-to-date. Training course information is cascaded between the staff group and, where children have specific needs, a trained medical professional is invited into the setting to provide in-depth training for the whole staff group. This ensures that children are effectively protected throughout the setting and by all staff caring for them. Clear information is displayed to show the location of several first aid boxes and the responsible persons present each day, this ensures that swift action may be taken to protect children in the event of an accident.

Children have regular opportunities to understand personal health and take responsibility for their physical needs. This is consistently promoted as they wash and dry their hands before snacks, use flannels from an early age to wash after meals, and clean their teeth after each meal. Children take a full part in discussions where they explore the links between germs and stale foods which may later make them ill.

Children enjoy healthy and nutritious foods, including a broad range of fresh fruit and vegetables. All foods are freshly prepared and cooked from fresh ingredients. Children all participate in a range of creative activities such as food tasting sessions and explore foods by using all their senses. This includes looking at and describing foods, smelling foods, tasting and even 'listening' to see if they can hear foods being cut into, such as apples and bananas. Children enjoy cooking activities and detailed projects which focus on healthy eating or 'our body'. Children discuss why they need to enjoy regular food and drink during the day, speaking with staff in all areas of the setting about eating good foods which help them to grow; they compare their own size with that of their parents and carers which further promotes the links with home. Younger children have increasing independence and serve their own meals with some developing skill, they make close observation of what the foods look like such as comparing a savoury crumble with the similar look of a cake. Children show that they are interested in everything around them and enjoy discussing their day with staff.

Children enjoy a range of physical activities which contribute to their good health. They develop control of their bodies and improve their physical skills and co-ordination as they participate in structured activities. These include movement sessions and activities planned around themed topics. Children's physical movement is developed as they construct routes for themselves using the sensory tracks. They extend those activities by pretending to cross rivers, imagine what may be underneath where they are walking, and lead and organise obstacle courses together. Children enjoy action stories and eagerly act-out the story themselves. This was shown when they constructed a pathway from mats and explored prepositions and directing each other to go forwards, backwards and count the mats. Children use small equipment such as scissors, glue spreaders and small construction pieces which aid their development of fine manipulative skills. Younger children are developing their independence physically and emotionally. They are active and becoming increasingly independent, acquiring control over their bodies and new physical skills. They are learning to express their needs for instance as they ask for help with cutting their food or learn about meeting their own toilet needs.

Children's general health and safety is fully supported by all relevant paperwork and records although care does need to be paid to ensure that monitoring charts are fully and diligently completed at all times. Children's medical needs, both ongoing or of an emergency nature, are dealt with through clearly outlined procedures carried out by qualified staff. Clear methods of recording and procedures underpin all aspects of physical care. These well-executed measures ensure that children's health can be promoted at all times.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is satisfactory.

Children's safety is given a high priority and risks of accidental injury are minimised because staff are vigilant and use risk assessments to reduce potential hazards. Policies, procedures and paperwork in this area are very well planned and reviewed by the management to continue assessing any potential risks to children's safety. Children explore their environment safely because staff carry out daily safety checks, repeating these throughout the sessions to ensure continuing safety. They inform each other when they are moving around the areas of the premises at all times. In this way they ensure that the supervision of children is thorough and maintained. However, there were identified issues regarding safety which included access to a broken toilet seat and plastic bags in a low-level location. Children are also placed at risk due to a lack of a clear procedure, or system, for obtaining support from other staff within the building in the event of an accident to children; this potential delay is an unacceptable risk.

Children have a firm understanding about taking responsibility and keeping themselves safe as they take part in regular emergency drills. They are given explanations by staff and understand the importance of listening to instructions in order to prevent accidents. Children take part in regular road safety activities where they use the surrounding areas to safely extend their awareness of traffic and roads. Children learn, through activities and discussion with staff, to think about their immediate surroundings. For example, staff ask them to think about what may happen if they do not move some obstacles, what space they think they may need when laying out activities, and to think about the possibility of tripping over. This enables them to make predications and think about their surroundings themselves.

Children are cared for in a welcoming setting where their work is creatively displayed on all areas and at child height. Continuous monitoring of the environment and staff's attention to details ensures that children's access to play materials reaches a high standard of safety. This is further promoted by the provision of appropriate equipment such as correctly-sized slides, play houses and climbing frame. There is a very effective procedure, known by staff and parents, which prevents unknown persons from entering the building and this was seen to work in practice during the inspection. Perimeter areas of the setting are secured and clear guidelines for bolting gates and using the viewing panels before allowing persons into the garden ensure children's safety.

Children are very well-protected because staff have a good understanding of child protection issues and the appropriate steps to follow. They have continued to review their practice and made sure that procedures meet the Local Safeguarding Children Board requirements. There are robust procedures for induction of suitable staff and their ongoing suitability whilst employed by the group.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

Children are happy, secure and settled. They are eager to attend and participate in the activities and play opportunities provided. They settle eagerly to play areas, anticipating what they may be about to do each day. Children enjoy the welcome song each day where they sing 'hello' to everyone present and ask how each other is feeling, this promotes their sense of belonging in the setting. Children are very confident in their relationships with each other and with staff, participating in discussions and initiating conversations. They eagerly ask questions of visitors asking who they are, why they are present, and offering information about what they are playing with during the day. Children engage in discussions and are able to use recall of events that happened at home or when on holiday. For example, a child was able to explain an accident and a visit to the hospital ending with the announcement that 'it is all better now!'. Children show that they can sequence events and explain past events to others. Children's personal development and self-esteem are consistently promoted through sensitive support and interaction from experienced, caring staff.

Children show a very high level of independence as they choose resources and activities and control their own activities and independent learning. This is because staff have equipped all areas for all ages with open low-level shelving with clearly labelled boxes as well as offering choices at all times over what they want to do. Children are also recognised as individuals with different rates of development and interest. Evaluation of planned activities is carried out by observations at the time of the activity where staff watch what children are doing and offer additional materials or suggestions to prompt children's further experimentation. Assessment of children's progress is detailed and purposeful, staff are skilled in using a variety of methods. They ensure that assessments are always fed into planning so that all children are offered challenging opportunities and activities which are adapted to suit individuals. This helps to ensure that children are able to realise their full potential. All staff make good use of open questions and take opportunities to extend children's learning for example, seen when children commented on the lamb crumble looking like cake; staff agreed and asked children what they thought it may taste like, bringing in the idea of sweet and savoury tastes.

Children settle quickly due to the staff's care, understanding and planning. They ensure that they have all necessary information about children, including their likes and dislikes. Early profiles, drawn from parental experience of children, assists both the separation process and the initial developmental support for children in their play. Younger children's learning and development is promoted because staff have a very good understanding of child development, staff have attended training for the 'Birth to three matters' framework and have implemented it throughout all areas of the nursery. Multiple displays throughout the setting show creative works completed by children together with detailed planning, these show clear explanations about what areas of development the activities have covered and show the benefit to children. Assessment and developmental progress books are thorough and assist the ongoing support to children.

Nursery Education.

The quality of teaching and learning is good. Children are making good progress and their overall development is promoted because staff have a thorough knowledge of the Foundation Stage curriculum, enabling them to plan and adapt activities appropriately. Children's progress in all areas is well-balanced as staff use comprehensive methods for assessing them, making use of information gained from this to highlight areas to be covered. Planning of all activities

is clear and is linked to the Foundation Stage, ensuring that all areas of learning are covered. However, it does not yet show any differentiation for children nor the staff role or resources which are to be used to meet the learning outcome. This means that children may not always be sufficiently challenged or supported by staff or use appropriate resources to fully meet their potential in that activity. This applies to the planning for younger children also.

Children demonstrate their enjoyment as they choose their play and activities from the wide range offered. These include regular opportunities to engage in sand and water play (including inventive play such as with wet cotton wool, shaving-foam or flour), a broad variety of free crafts and construction, and reading and creative opportunities for role play. Children's knowledge is further extended as they participate in a range of themed topics which change on a regular basis. This enables them to look more closely at subjects such as 'Animal tales' where they develop role play with woodland scenes, use non-fiction books to find out about British animals and insects, sort and count different animals, and look at 'bugs' before drawing them from close observation.

The well-organised environment and daily planning means that children have good opportunities to develop the attitudes and dispositions that enable them to achieve in their learning. They are given sufficient time and appropriate resources to enable them to complete tasks, and their behaviour is very good throughout the sessions, enabling them to listen and concentrate. They are motivated to learn through the provision of exciting and interesting activities. For example, children playing with flour to draw the letter 'e', developed the play into fireworks where they clapped their hands to make 'clouds' and sprinkled the flour and asked each other what it reminded them of. Children later examined footprints on the carpet and talked about size, shape, pattern and made predictions about whose footprints they might have been. Children were able to experiment and make this a practical learning experience as they continued developing the initial play activity which had been set out for them.

Children are confident in using language to organise and explain their thoughts and play, for example, children discussed why they had been absent from nursery for a 'bank holiday' and explored what this meant. They counted the days of the weekend and then the remaining days in the week comparing them to a normal week. Children understand that print carries meaning and are beginning to use this as a means of communicating, recognising their names on their name cards and 'reading' stories to each other. They have abundant opportunities for mark-making and spend considerable amounts of time in small groups engrossed in writing and experimenting with the materials available to them. When using the flour activity, children showed each other how to form the letters showing that they enjoy sharing their knowledge. Children do show a keen interest in books, concentrating on stories and joining in to ask and answer questions.

Children recognise that numbers carry meaning, confidently and correctly counting the number of objects and using numbers in a meaningful context. For example, children are keen to learn and were seen to ask staff, 'How many is three and one?', at which point staff showed them how to calculate for themselves before they reached the correct answer of four. Children know that there are set numbers of places at activities and can calculate for themselves when the number has been reached. They do ask questions such as 'when is it my turn?' and will wait for that time to come. However, children do not have clear explanations given about how long activities take or explore the concept of time. This prohibits their development of exploring a sense of time and of making clear sense about past and present events. They do not have access to everyday technology or timepieces to support this development. Children compare and name shapes during activities as was seen when they played with measuring rules and made triangles

and squares telling staff that they needed three or four lines to make the shapes. They showed great delight when they noticed, with staff encouragement, that looking at a square from another angle made it look like a diamond.

Children have some opportunities to observe, explore and question in a wide range of activities that form the foundation of their later learning in subjects such as mathematics, science and technology. For example, they have the use of tape recorders, calculators and magnets which they explore. They plant and grow some seeds and watch with interest the effect of water and sun on them. Children take part in the care of 'Gizmo' the hamster and may take him home at weekends to care for him thus extending their personal and social education.

Children's physical development is well-promoted and they enjoy a wide range of activities that help them to develop their confidence and skills when using large and small apparatus, tools and equipment. This area is further supported by clear daily planning for physical play which demonstrates that children have opportunities to use tunnels and tents, use balance blocks and sensory tracks and participate in music and movement sessions. They take part in 'Tiny Mites' music club each fortnight, within mixed age groups, which extends their exploration of music and rhythm. They enjoy a very wide range of opportunities to explore colour, texture, shape and form, for example, through free craft where they make their own models.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

All children are welcomed and play a full and active part in the pre-school because staff value and respect their individuality and the family context for each child. Children are offered a wide range of opportunities which promote their understanding of their local society and increase their awareness of other cultures and ways of life. These include exploring language and taking part in French lessons, they celebrate festivals from many cultural and religious backgrounds. Children explore the local community as they visit local parks, invite visitors into the group and take part in sponsored events. These include 'Beep-beep day 2006', the 'Barnardo's toddle' and Sport Relief. Participation in realistic role play such as doctors and hospitals enables children to gain a clear and meaningful knowledge of these issues.

Children's social, moral, spiritual and cultural development is fostered. Children's needs are extremely well documented and met, and their welfare consistently promoted to a high standard because of staff's excellent relationship with parents and carers and the quality information about the provision given. Children are kind and considerate to each other and to staff. They are encouraged to think about each others' feelings and eagerly take care of each other. This is seen when children talk about other children, or their 'babies', being sad and they talk about how they will make them feel better. This is supported by focussed activities which aim to enable children to understand the feelings of others. The newsletter to parents shows planning for children of all ages which includes aspects of care for others and being aware of other people and their feelings. Children's behaviour is very good throughout the sessions as they take part in activities and competently organise turn-taking and sharing. Children are able to feel secure as staff make efforts to understand significant events in their lives and anticipate the possible disruption these may bring.

Children who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities have their requirements clearly identified as there is a practical policy relating to this. Staff ensure, when children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are attending, that this is implemented, working with individual children and parents to make sure that all are included in the activities and routines. Children

for whom English is not the first language receive appropriate support as staff work hard to establish working relationships with parents and extended family.

The partnership with parents and carers of children in receipt of funding for early education is good. There is a strong commitment to involving parents fully in the setting and in their children's learning. Parents are kept very well informed of their children's progress through regular newsletters, consultation meetings with staff and open access to their children's files and assessment records. Specific play plans for all children are developed in partnership with parents and carers and reviewed regularly. Parents have opportunities to provide feedback to continue developing this aspect of care through questionnaires. The children's daily activity, with detailed observations, is linked to progress and development. This positive attitude ensures that parents' views are valued, standards are maintained and high quality care can be provided for each child.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

Overall, the provision meets the needs of the range of children for whom it provides. Children benefit from the care provided by experienced and skilled staff. Their daily comfort and enjoyment is enhanced by the quality of organisation and the attention to all details relating to their care and well-being. Children's varying needs are consistently met and they are offered a broad, planned range of activities and a wealth of play opportunities. Topic areas are identified and adapted according to the children's base rooms. For example, common themes such as 'ourselves' are presented to younger children through the 'Birth to three matters' framework and headings such as 'a healthy child', whilst for older children it develops into personal and social development, and knowledge and understanding of the world. Each group can look at care for others, healthy eating and social behaviours where the themes lead from one age group to the next. The well-organised environment means that children have very good opportunities to develop the dispositions and attitudes that enable them to achieve in their learning. Children's welfare and safety are promoted through the setting's clearly defined policies and procedures and the staff's practical knowledge and daily implementation of these. There is a clear induction process for new staff, providing information and support. This continues through the staff assessment and appraisal system, which ensures that all training needs are identified and staff are able to work appropriately with all children.

The leadership and management of children in receipt of funding for early education is good. Children's overall welfare is promoted by the very good understanding that the manager has of her role and responsibilities; she is supported by the effective extended management who oversee the nursery. She ensures that she is aware of new regulations and implements training for herself and staff in order to implement any changes. The manager acts as an excellent role model and staff are highly motivated, acquiring qualifications and regularly attending additional training. All daily sessions are very well planned, with a balanced range of opportunities throughout the day. Staff pay attention to what children are doing and ensure that they are always given sufficient time and resources to complete their activities and tasks. Staff meet regularly to plan and evaluate future work and review each week's activities to ensure that planning includes the identified next steps for children. This ensures that the needs of individual children are met, the development of all children is promoted and the setting provides high quality care. This is reflected in the assessment and achievements of children shown in their personal files.

Improvements since the last inspection

At the last inspection for care the provider was asked to ensure that recommendations made by the fire officer were met with respect to the closure of fire doors. They were also asked to ensure that babies bottles were clearly identified.

Since that time the provider has introduced 'key tags' to all babies bottles to ensure that they are clearly labelled. The provider has addressed the efficiency and attention to the closure of all fire doors as required. These measures have resulted in improved safety for children in the building and in their personal care.

At the last inspection for nursery education the provider was asked to review the use of books and the encouragement by staff to children regarding reading for pleasure.

Since that time they have increased the range of books in all areas, improved the environment and areas provided for comfortable seating, and increased the planning to include further scope for reading throughout sessions. These actions have resulted in the development of communication, language and literacy across all areas of the nursery.

Complaints since the last inspection

Since the last inspection there have been three complaints made to Ofsted that required the provider to take action to meet the National Standards. The first complaint related to National Standard 2: organisation, National Standard 6: safety, and National Standard 12: working in partnership with parents and carers. Ofsted carried out an unannounced visit and as a result one action was set under National Standard 2: organisation. The provider was required to ensure that children were not left with staff that had not been subject to all required clearances. Ofsted was satisfied that by taking this step the provider remained qualified for registration and, after an appropriate response was received by Ofsted, the investigation was closed.

The second complaint related to National Standard 2: organisation, and National Standard 3: care, learning and play. Ofsted carried out an unannounced visit and as a result two actions were set under National Standard 2: organisation, and National Standard 3: care, learning and play. The provider was required to ensure that staff were deployed effectively to promote children's welfare and safety. They were to ensure that children were provided with activities appropriate to their age and developmental stage in order to promote their well-being and development. Ofsted was satisfied that by taking these steps the provider remained qualified for registration and, after an appropriate response was received by Ofsted, the investigation was closed.

The third complaint related to National Standard 2: organisation, National Standard 4: physical environment, and National Standard 7: health. Ofsted carried out an unannounced visit and as a result three actions were set under National Standard 14: documentation, National Standard 7: health, and National Standard 12: working in partnership with parents and carers. The provider was required to ensure that Ofsted was informed of any significant events and to ensure that those responsible for the handling of food were fully aware of, and complied with, regulations relating to food safety and hygiene. They were also required to ensure that all staff were aware of the need to maintain confidentiality. Ofsted was satisfied that by taking these steps the provider remained qualified for registration and, after an appropriate response was received by Ofsted, the investigation was closed.

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):

- minimise hazards to children within the premises and take precautions to promote safety; this refers to the broken seat in the toilet block, the accessibility of plastic bags and the procedures for obtaining support in the event of accident or injury.

The quality and standards of the nursery education

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

- provide opportunities for children to explore a sense of time; enable them to find out about the past and present events and the use of everyday technology to sequence events
- develop and extend the planning to clearly show how children will achieve the intended learning. Show the staff role and resources. Use the information gained in the assessments to show the differentiation for individual children.

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