

St John's Playgroup

Inspection report for early years provision

Unique Reference Number	400351
Inspection date	22 May 2007
Inspector	Christine Anne Rice
Setting Address	St John's Church Hall, Bilton Lane, Harrogate, North Yorkshire, HG1 3DP
Telephone number	01423 506152
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Registered person	St Johns Playgroup
Type of inspection	Integrated
Type of care	Sessional 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?

St John's Playgroup opened in 1977 and operates from a church hall in Bilton, on the outskirts of Harrogate in North Yorkshire. The provision is run by a management committee and serves the local community. A maximum of 24 children aged from two to five years may attend the playgroup at any one time. There are currently 48 children on roll aged from two to four years. The playgroup operates term-time only five mornings and two afternoons per week, with the latter specifically for pre-school aged children.

There are currently 37 children attending who are in receipt of nursery education funding. There are currently no children with learning difficulties or disabilities or with English as an additional language attending the playgroup.

There are five members of staff employed to work directly with the children, two of whom are qualified, two are due to complete their qualifications in July 2007, and one is seeking to update her Diploma in Nursery Nursing. The setting receives support from the Pre-School Learning Alliance and from the local Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership.

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PROVISION

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

Children understand the need for good personal hygiene as they wash their hands at appropriate times, such as before snacks, after going to the toilet and after messy play. In addition, the spread of infection is minimised as children help themselves to tissues to blow their noses. Staff offer prompts where necessary and act as positive role models by, for example, using anti-bacterial spray to clean the tables.

Thorough policies and procedures regarding accidents, medication and illness protect the children's health. For example, children who are infectious do not attend the playgroup, thus preventing the spread of contagious illnesses and clear procedures are in place to ensure children are cared for appropriately if they are taken ill or have an accident. Furthermore, three of the staff have current first aid certificates and a newly replenished first aid kit is readily accessible.

The children benefit from eating healthy nutritious food for snacks, such as bananas, apples, pears and bread sticks. As the setting operates a cafeteria system, the children develop confidence and independence since they choose when to eat. They help themselves to a selection of fruit and a drink of water or milk, before sitting down and chatting to the other children and a member of staff, who monitors snacks. Sometimes the children help to prepare the food by making fruit kebabs. When children are thirsty they can help themselves to water which is always available in a water dispenser at the side of the room.

All the children, including those in receipt of nursery education, have good opportunities for fresh air and large physical exercise, since the setting has access to an outdoor play area. Consequently, children may choose whether to play outdoors or indoors. Additionally, the large hall indoors is usually divided into two, allowing a separate space for physical play. The children ride on bikes, slowing down as they negotiate their way past one another, before speeding up when their path is clear. They successfully negotiate a space when they are being chased by the 'alligator' and move backwards as well as forwards. Children play ring games and climb and balance on larger items of equipment. Parachute games and music and movement further extend the children's physical development. Fine motor skills are developed by the children using knives, rolling pins and shape cutters to manipulate dough. They handle scissors carefully to cut out shapes.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

The children are cared for in a welcoming and safe environment where there is good evidence of children's play and activities with attractive displays of the children's work, such as colourful butterfly paintings on the walls. There is a good range of age-appropriate resources and equipment, which are stored in a well-organised cupboard and rotated to maintain the children's interest. Children develop independence as they freely choose their own activities from the toys and equipment, which are spread out on the tables both in the hall and outside in the garden.

Staff use toys, equipment and materials effectively to ensure children are provided with a balanced range of activities that promote children's learning in all areas. For example, there are child sized tables and chairs, booster steps to enable the children to access the wash basin

independently and floor cushions where children can relax and look at books. Toys and equipment are stimulating, fun, interesting and provide sufficient challenge for the children. For instance, there are jigsaws, construction toys, paints, dough to mould, rice play, water play, a train set, creepy crawlies and magnifying glasses to examine them, all of which draw and interest the children.

As the staff have a good awareness of safety, potential hazards are minimised. All sockets are, for example, covered and there is a safety gate between the hall and the kitchen. Before the children play outside, the staff complete a check to ensure that the outdoor area is safe and clean. The children's close supervision is assured by the generous staffing ratios, which allow for two staff members to be outdoors and two to be indoors. Children learn to contribute to their own safety by wearing safety helmets appropriately when they are riding bikes and by practising the fire escape plan. Role play activities further support the children's ideas and understanding of fire safety.

The children's welfare is promoted through the staff's good understanding of the Local Safeguarding Children Board procedures. There is a written child protection policy and the staff understand how and when to make a referral to the appropriate agencies. All staff have undertaken specific training and some staff have some relevant experience in this area. However, the policy does not include the contact details for the local child protection agencies.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

The provision meets the needs of all ages attending and the children enjoy access to a good range of activities and resources, such as craft activities, rice and water play, paint, books, jigsaws and dressing up clothes. They are interested in all the activities and are eager to join in. The activities are linked to the theme of creepy crawlies, so that, for example, the craft activity is to make a snail out of newspaper and the children take magnifying glasses outside to examine worms, spiders and woodlice. The children are very excited when they find a frog, which they then observe as it hops around the lawn.

The staff interaction with the children is good. Consequently, the children are happy and settled in their environment. The atmosphere is friendly and the children approach the staff very easily. The staff take time to hear what the children have to say and encourage them to develop their thoughts. There are many spontaneous conversations throughout the session; for example, at circle time, children talk about their bikes and their experiences of snails crawling up the walls.

Children enjoy listening to stories; they cluster around staff in small groups and sit comfortably in the book corner to read 'The Gingerbread Man'. They follow this theme through as they make gingerbread men out of dough. At circle time, the children enjoy singing songs and rhymes, such as 'Wind the Bobbin Up' and 'Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star'. Props, such as a shiny silver star, add to the children's enjoyment as does the participation through actions and the decision to 'wind the bobbin up' quickly, which makes them smile delightedly as they try to keep up with the speed of the actions. The staff ensure that all the children are engaged and included so that everyone gains from the activity. Children with birthdays receive special attention as they proudly blow out the candles on a pretend cake.

Nursery Education

The quality of teaching and learning is good. The staff use their knowledge of the curriculum to provide some varied, interesting and well-planned activities, which promote the children's learning in all areas. For example, as part of a theme about nature, the children grow amaryllis plants for their mothers for Mother's Day. They subsequently bring these into playgroup to measure, comparing heights and extending their vocabulary as they describe them. Children benefit as the staff stand back, allowing them to drive the activities and learn independently, but offering timely support to facilitate their learning. The staff interact positively with the children, giving them praise and encouragement. They consistently talk and listen to the children, asking questions to make them think and develop their activities. The teaching is adapted to the individual needs of the children, with differentiation for children of different ages and abilities. In response, children are interested and focused and make good progress towards the early learning goals.

The children are sociable and confident to talk with each other and adults in small groups and at circle time in front of the whole group. They are happy to leave their carers and are familiar with the routine of quietly sitting down for the register, when they respond by saying 'good morning' as they are individually greeted. They can concentrate on tasks for extended periods, for example, during a dough activity when they consider how they roll and cut the dough to make snails and gingerbread men. Children seek out friends to share experiences, such as when several children join in a role play activity, pretending to be firefighters. They show a sense of caring and belonging to the playgroup by bringing in a birthday cake to share with the other children. They are able to contribute to their own care needs by, for example, independently going to the toilet and putting on their own coats.

Many children are able to form recognisable letters, as demonstrated when they use paintbrushes and water to write the first letters of their names on tables outdoors. Older children recognise their names on their pegs and as they self-register. They are beginning to make good attempts to write their names, whilst younger children make marks for a purpose, using pencils, crayons and paints to draw lines and circles as their writing emerges. Children link sounds to letters as they sound out the first letters of their names. They use language to express feelings and extend their vocabulary, such as by describing a big spider as 'massive'.

Children develop their counting skills throughout the session. For example, when the children sing 'Five Little Monkeys', they choose five children to be monkeys and then count how many children are left when the alligator catches a monkey. Children know that they need one more candle than three on the birthday cake to celebrate a four-year-old's birthday. The older children can confidently count to 10 and understand the concept of size, as they make a small snail, a bigger snail and a very big snail. They measure tall plants and work out which one is the tallest and whether they are taller than themselves.

There are plenty of opportunities for children to develop their knowledge of the wider world, especially as the children can freely access outdoor play. For example, they notice that the letters they write with a paintbrush dipped in water gradually disappear and work out that this happens because the sun dries the water up. Staff explain that this is called 'evaporating'. The children examine woodlice under a magnifying glass, noticing that this has the effect of making the creatures bigger. The children put water on the paving slabs and learn that snails are attracted to water as they find it easier to move on a wet surface.

Children develop their creative abilities through free painting, music and movement sessions, and dressing up and role plays. Some children wear long silky dresses and hats, imagining that they are going to a ball; they count out pretend money and keep it secure in their purses.

Children enjoy making papier-mâché money boxes and experimenting with paint by, for example, painting the tables and then pressing paper down on top to make patterns. At circle time, they heartily sing the 'Wheels On The Bus', joining in with the actions. Children make good progress towards the early learning goals.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

Children benefit from the implementation of the setting's equal opportunities policy, which ensures children are valued as individuals and treated with equal concern. The staff know the children well and tailor their care according to their individual needs. In this way, young children new to the provision, for instance, are given support to gain confidence, and the needs of children with particular dietary requirements are respected. Children learn about their community and the wider world through activities, such as visits to the library, the post office and the church, and outings to farms. Visitors, such as grandparents, teachers, the vicar and firefighters are welcomed to the group. Children learn about the diversity of the world through access to a good range of resources, such as books, toys and dressing up clothes, which reflect positive images and dispel gender myths. This is supplemented through celebration of a range of festivals, such as Chinese New Year, when the children make dragons and eat their food in rice bowls. Children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is fostered.

Children with learning difficulties and disabilities are welcome in the setting, which has effective arrangements in place to assure their care, such as an appropriate policy and a receptive attitude. The playgroup leader, plus one other member of staff have completed the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO) training and all the staff share in working with parents and professionals, such as the speech and language therapist, to maximise the children's development. There are good behaviour management strategies in place, with children being praised for good behaviour and given explanations about unacceptable behaviour. Children respect boundaries and are well behaved; they are cooperative, helping to tidy up at the end of the session and they are learning to take turns and share.

Partnership with parents and carers is good. When children join the provision, the parents receive a welcome pack, which contains clear information about the Foundation Stage curriculum, the playgroup's activities and details about policies and procedures. Subsequently, parents can access the policy file at any time for reference. They receive regular newsletters, plus information on the noticeboard outlining the termly plans, which are linked to the areas of learning, and detailing the week's activities. Parents are encouraged to participate in their children's learning by helping at a session or on outings and by helping their children to bring in materials to support current topics. For example, children may be asked to bring in three items from home, beginning with 'Mm' to support their phonics work. Parents are kept informed through the exchange of information at the end of a session, plus a verbal report and open days twice a year, when they see their children's profiles. In addition, parents can access their children's profiles at any time, though there is no facility for them to add their own written contributions.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

The environment is well organised. Staff are deployed effectively and work cooperatively as a team, knowing their roles and responsibilities, automatically spotting gaps so that all activities are enabled. Thus the playgroup is run efficiently, with the children receiving a good standard

of care and learning through stimulating activities. The staff consistently interact with the children and offer effective support and encouragement, which helps children feel secure and confident. There is a comprehensive range of practical policies and procedures in place, which provide a structure for the safe and efficient management of the setting. All of the required documentation is in place, such as registration and emergency contact details, and is stored securely in the interests of confidentiality. The registration and insurance certificates are prominently displayed on the noticeboard for parents to view.

Thorough recruitment procedures are followed to ensure that staff who work with the children are suitable to do so; for example, background checks are carried out and references taken up. The ensuing induction process further ensures that staff are fully prepared for their roles, as they familiarise themselves with the policies and practices of the playgroup. Adult to child ratios are always maintained to positively support children's care, learning and play. Staff are dedicated and keen to develop their knowledge and skills by attending available training courses, such as inclusion training and managing behaviour through music. In addition, they have all signed up for specific training on assessment and the new Foundation Stage.

The leadership and management of the nursery education is good. The staff, who have a good understanding of the Foundation Stage and the National Standards, work together to plan the playgroup's activities. The leader oversees the planning of the educational programme with advice and guidance from the local authority. Thorough long term planning ensures that all aspects of the six areas of learning within the Foundation Stage are covered. Medium term plans further outline topics and short term plans provide the detailed activities, with clear links to the stepping stones. Focused activities are monitored and evaluated in order to inform future practice, though learning intentions are not clearly recorded. All staff contribute to assessment by noting down their observations and then placing them in the children's profiles, which enables staff to track the children's progress towards the early learning goals.

Overall, the provision meets the needs of the range of the children for whom it provides.

Improvements since the last inspection

At the last inspection the provision was asked: to develop the snack time routine to develop the children's social skills; and to improve the frequency of fire drills and hand washing procedures. The setting has now instituted a cafeteria system, whereby children independently help themselves to snacks and drinks. The fire drill is recorded, the last one being in September 2006, and new hygiene procedures have been developed for hand washing.

At the last education inspection, the provision was asked: to use the children's assessments and evaluations to inform future planning; to extend the information on the Foundation Stage to parents; and to extend opportunities for children to calculate, problem solve and develop their imagination through sound, music, movement and dance. The provision now uses assessments and evaluations to inform future planning, parents receive information about the Foundation Stage in their welcome packs, and the children have opportunities for calculating and problem solving combined with everyday activities. In addition, children have regular opportunities to develop their imagination through weekly music and movement sessions.

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

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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):

- review the child protection policy to include the contact details of the local child protection agencies.

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 parents to add their comments to the children's developmental records
- improve planning by incorporating clear learning intentions in the short term plans.

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