

Mersea Island School

Inspection report for early years provision

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Inspection date	18 May 2007
Inspector	Janette Elaina Lockwood
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Registered person	Mersea Island School & Nursery Committee
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?

Mersea Island School provides a wrap-around care provision. It opened in 2004 and operates from a purpose built unit in the grounds of Mersea Island School. A maximum of 52 children may attend the provision at any one time. The setting is open each weekday from 07.00 to 18.00 during term times. All children share access to a secure enclosed outdoor play areas.

There are currently 69 children aged from two to under eight years on roll. Of these, 59 children receive funding for early education. The setting currently supports a number of children with learning difficulties or disabilities and also supports children who speak English as an additional language.

The nursery employs seven staff. Of these, five 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.

The setting implements very thorough systems to help children to be healthy. This includes proper hand washing procedures which are overseen by staff. Children not only wash their hands before eating and after going to the toilet but can confidently talk about the reasons for doing so. The health policy is comprehensive detailing the responsibilities of the committee in helping to implement healthy practices, for example, keeping the first aid box up-to-date and providing resources such as soap and paper towels. As a result of these measures, the spread of germs between children is minimised.

Children are cared for in a sympathetic and caring manner if they are taken ill or have an accident at the setting. There are first aid trained staff available and the setting holds permission to seek emergency treatment from parents. Any medicine administered is carefully checked and written consent is obtained so that children's health needs are met.

There are effective arrangements to keep children safe in the hot weather, with staff offering them extra drinks, ensuring they wear sunhats and applying high factor sun block which parents supply with the accompanying written permission.

Children benefit from a healthy diet in the setting enjoying a variety of fruit everyday at snack time. The staff operate a snack bar so children can choose when to eat and can take as little or as long as they need. The snack time is a sociable occasion and opportunities to talk about healthy eating with children are encouraged by staff. In addition, there are regular activities to help children learn about a healthy diet such as making summer salads and looking at and tasting exotic fruits.

Some children eat a dinner provided by the school and these are nourishing and wholesome as the school has a healthy eating policy. The setting has less control over what parents choose to send in children's lunch boxes but nevertheless encourages parents to provide their children with healthy options where possible.

Children have frequent use of the large garden everyday as the doors are open for most of the session for children to choose to play inside or out. There are many good quality opportunities for children to develop their large muscle skills using the climbing frames or to run at speed around the garden developing their stamina. The equipment available includes pedal bikes and scooters to manoeuvre around obstacles. Children also have opportunities to collaborate in physical tasks such as pulling a large wooden container to fill up with bricks. Inside the nursery children have planned opportunities to take part in music and movement sessions where they can deftly copy a range of movements and manipulate their bodies in particular ways. As a result, children are becoming confident in their physical skills.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

The group operates from a large room in a purpose built nursery unit and benefits from a large enclosed garden and smaller covered outdoor area. The room is cleverly divided into play areas so that children can play in smaller well-organised areas. For example, the book area has been enclosed by tent-like curtains that hang from the ceiling to make it cosy and inviting; decorated with moonscape models and rockets mobiles on the ceiling. In addition, staff have grouped

particular toys together, such as the small world toys, so that children can be inspired to use their imagination well. The room benefits from a utility area and adjacent toilets so that children can begin to develop their independence and overall the premises are very clean and well-maintained. Consequently, children can play in safety and comfort.

Staff consistently talk to children about safety, for example, helping them realise the consequences of some of their actions which could potentially cause accidents to others. Children begin to understand, for instance, that if paper towels are dropped on the floor in the toilet area, someone could slip over and hurt themselves.

There are effective steps taken to ensure any outings are planned properly and risk assessed to ensure children are kept safe. Specific equipment such as a mobile phone and first aid kit are taken and paperwork relating to names of children and details of the visit are copied and left at the setting.

The premises is kept very safe and secure by vigilant staff and there are clear risk assessments to ensure areas and equipment are safe and suitable for children to use.

There is a named person for fire safety and regular fire drills are carried out and reviewed thoroughly to ensure they are effective. Contingency plans have been devised in case of a prolonged emergency to help protect the children.

The setting holds a comprehensive policy on safeguarding children which links with information from the Local Safeguarding Children Board. The policy details contact numbers for reference and includes information on what to do if there are allegations made against staff.

Staff are well aware of their responsibilities and are clear about procedures to follow if they have concerns about a child. Some of the staff have had child protection training and there are plans to ensure staff have opportunities to update their training as soon as possible. As a result, children are safeguarded in the setting.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

The setting is registered for children between two and eight years and all children benefit from good quality play activities which help with their learning and development. Staff know the children very well through the implementation of an effective key worker system which allows them to understand each child's individual ability. However, although it is acknowledged that there is planning in place which is used for children between two and three years, there is no specific planning using a system such as the 'Birth to three matters' framework. Children in this age group follow the same planning as the children who receive nursery funding, although it is clearly aimed at a more basic level. All children benefit from the ethos of learning through good quality, purposeful play opportunities.

Staff have recently implemented a system of recording children's progress using the 'Birth to three matters' framework and are becoming more familiar with the system. There are plans in place to introduce the framework into their practice to help with planning in the future.

The setting also offers 'wrap-around care' for children whereby children who are pupils in the school arrive early for breakfast and stay after the school day has ended. The staff who care for these children are qualified and experienced in caring for children of this age group and they provide suitable activities for them. At present, the numbers of children attending are

small but nevertheless, this service is invaluable to parents and children who enjoy their time spent in the setting.

Nursery Education

The quality of teaching and learning is outstanding. Staff have an extensive knowledge and understanding of the Foundation Stage. They recognise important factors about how young children learn and understand that children learn at different rates, needing time to explore and apply their learning. In light of this, the setting organises exciting activities in which children can absorb themselves and develop their thought processes. Children begin to plan and experiment through practical and immediate experiences which are skilfully supported by staff.

Staff plan the curriculum expertly to promote progress towards the early learning goals and use dynamic ideas from key workers so that children's individual needs are planned for. Staff provide worthwhile opportunities to encourage children to think and to demonstrate what they know and understand. For example, whilst making musical instruments children are asked why one shaker makes a noise and another does not. Through the careful questioning, the children are able to establish that one shaker contains pasta and that the other is empty. As a result, children are beginning to make valuable predictions and draw conclusions from their experiences.

Staff are experts in providing activities that challenge children to help them progress, reflecting the high expectations for each child to progress further. In addition, staff understand how some children need extra support and are able to adapt the activities to meet children's differing needs.

Staff skilfully use assessments of children's progress to guide their planning and teaching. Assessments are systematic, informative, objective and carefully linked to the stepping stones and early learning goals for staff to be able to easily identify and plan for children's next steps. These are detailed in children's folders so that staff can review them regularly and use them in planning.

Children are very confident, moving around their play environment with a sense of purpose and belonging. Visual aids around the room show routines for children and photographs of the children help them identify their friends. Children are beginning to stand up for their own rights and take an interest in others. They are given frequent and purposeful opportunities to develop their independence skills, for example in helping themselves to drinks when they are thirsty.

Children develop their communication language and literacy skills well through a variety of clever teaching methods. The environment is text rich and children are frequently invited to listen to exciting stories or look at interesting books with staff. Children enjoy using factual books, for example, to find out about dinosaurs. Staff also use information books to support children's activities. For example, when making instruments there are books on the subject available to inspire children's ideas.

Children have regular opportunities to look at letters and practise making letter shapes using chalks on the pavement, or making initial letters in playdough. Role play areas often include writing equipment so children can begin to understand the importance of writing in everyday lives. They have free access to clipboards and pens to use with their imagination, for example, when making 'secret plans' or drawing 'treasure maps'. Whilst doing these, children often include attempts at writing or letters from their names, demonstrating that they understand the importance of writing.

Children's mathematical development is highly encouraged through everyday routines in which staff skilfully talk to them about numbers and objects. Children often record statistics using simple graphs to make comparisons and they play number matching games with staff. There are interesting opportunities for children to learn simple calculation through effectively managed action songs and rhymes to learn the basics of adding or subtracting. In addition, regular cooking activities show children the importance of measuring and weighing accurately.

Children are finding out about the world around them through visits from people to show them artefacts such as African drums and to give them opportunities to try them out for themselves. They begin to develop their investigation skills to see how things go through change, for example, how ice melts. There are frequent opportunities for children to look at today's technology through using a computer, a digital camera or by controlling a remote control robot. In contrast, children also begin to understand some aspects of our natural world by planting seeds, making trips to the woods or learning to care for animals.

Children are provided with plenty of opportunities to use their creative skills from simply painting a picture on an easel to making collages. The nursery room is highly decorated with children's own work to show how many different techniques they have used. Throughout these activities, staff encourage children to experiment and explore the materials and what they can do with them so they can use their own ideas to express themselves. Staff help inspire children's imagination through role play and support ideas such as playing in a space ship they have made and holding an 'alien' tea party.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

Children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is fostered. Staff actively encourage children to talk about their homes and families and to learn about how other people live. Children take part in exciting activities such as a sponsored 'Toddle Waddle' to help raise money for children who are ill and staff talk to them in simple terms about how the money they raise can help others.

There are interesting activities planned which help children to show appreciation of other cultures and beliefs such as investigating different foods and drinks and handling a range of cultural items. Children broaden their experiences through looking at different festivals such as Hanukkah and the environment is richly decorated with displays and posters reflecting diversity.

Children with learning difficulties or disabilities are supported well within the setting. Staff recognise the importance of following the individual learning plans devised by the special education needs co-ordinator and they work together with parents and specialists to help implement them. One member of staff has recently attended a visual aids course and has implemented their use in the setting. These well designed visual aids are frequently used to help children to learn routines and understand what comes next in their day so they can begin to develop their sense of belonging. Simple Makaton signing is used with all the children so that the communication can be used consistently in the setting and a range of good quality equipment to support children with disabilities is available to help with care needs.

Children's behaviour is good. There is a calm atmosphere in the nursery and staff handle issues of behaviour in ways appropriate to the child's stage of development and understanding. Praise is frequently used and specifically relates to children's action or behaviour and if necessary

staff refocus children's attention of other activities. Children are learning to share, negotiate and co-operate with one another and staff encourage children to adopt caring attitudes towards others. There is a specific behaviour policy for children under three years, recognising that they may not be able to regulate their own emotions in the same way as older children.

Partnership with parents and carers is good. The setting recognises that parents are the first and most important educators of children. They are provided with relevant information about their child's progress through sending home a 'busy' book daily which details what children have been doing during their day. However, although parents are aware that they can ask see their child's progress records, there are no pre-arranged open days when all parents are invited in to speak to staff and view the progress records. Parents are easily able to see some of the work their children produce by looking at displays in the setting and are actively encouraged to share what they know about their children through writing their comments in the 'busy' book. Parents are encouraged to continue with some of the play and learning activities at home and are sent activity sheets to help inspire them.

Policies and procedures are shared with parents and staff can arrange home visits to establish successful links with the families to help children develop a sense of trust and settle well. Any relevant information about children is gathered so that parents can directly influence the care their children receive. Parents are given plenty of information via a notice board and newsletters so they are aware of what is going on in the nursery. In addition, the complaints procedure is up-to-date and in line with the Addendum to the National Standards incorporating a complaints log in which to record any concerns.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

Leadership and management are outstanding. The head of Early Years in the setting shows a clear sense of purpose which directly influences the staff, encouraging them to be dynamic and versatile in their approach to teaching. She ensures that any strengths and weaknesses are effectively identified and improvements to practices are made where necessary. There are effective action plans in place to address any issues arising so there are constant improvements to the quality of service offered to children and their parents. The manager regularly evaluates the planning and delivery of the Foundation Stage Curriculum to ensure it successfully meets the needs of all the children helping them to progress to the best of their ability.

There are good procedures in place for the recruitment and vetting of staff although these do not currently incorporate clear enough details regarding checking the health of any future staff. However, all staff have been appropriately checked through the Criminal Records Bureau and there are procedures to ensure regular appraisals are carried out.

The setting deploys staff well whether children are playing inside or outside and all staff are highly aware of meeting the ratios. Children receive plenty of adult attention and generally group children effectively in small groups. Overall, children's needs are met. There are regular staff and planning meetings where information is shared and staff are able to contribute their ideas. All staff are enthusiastic about training and committed to their own personal effectiveness.

Improvements since the last inspection

At the last inspection the setting was asked to organise whole group activities so that children could fully participate, or for those who opted out, to ensure that alternative suitable activities

were available. Furthermore they were asked that the grouping of the children was reorganised to provide a richer experience. Staff now plan an effective balance between whole group activities and smaller group activities to meet the needs of the children attending, taking account of their ability and understanding.

At the last inspection it was recommended that the setting updated the child protection statement and the complaints procedures. The two policies have been updated and are now consistent and up-to-date with the National Standards.

During the last inspection the setting was asked to develop opportunities for children to learn to add and takeaway through practical play activities and to provide more opportunities to hear letter sounds during their play. Daily routines as well as cleverly planned activities help children to use simple forms of calculation and games such as 'eye spy' help children to recognise initial letter sounds.

The setting agreed at their last inspection, to devise and implement a robust system to monitor the quality of nursery education to ensure all aspects of learning are met. The Head of Early Years ensures this is monitored effectively on a regular basis so that children are progressing towards the early learning goals.

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):

- plan a suitable range of activities for children between two and three years using a system such as the 'Birth to three matters' framework
- ensure there are effective procedures in place for checking the health of new staff to ensure they are suitable to work with children.

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 formal opportunities for parents to see their children's progress records and discuss their individual learning needs with staff.

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