

Little Sunbeams Preschool

Inspection report for early years provision

Unique Reference Number	EY343816
Inspection date	05 June 2007
Inspector	Sandra Daniels
Setting Address	4th Epping Elm Scout Hut, Stonards Hill, Epping, Essex, CM16 4QE
Telephone number	01992579644
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Registered person	Helen Sarah Walker
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?

Little Sunbeams PreSchool registered in 2006. The group has been previously registered since 1993 and is now under new ownership. It operates from rooms in a scout hut situated near to the centre of Epping Town. A maximum of 26 children may attend the group at any one time. There are currently 45 children on roll, including 30 funded three and four-year-old children. The setting is open each weekday from 09.15 to 12.15, term time only. All children share access to an adjoining outdoor play area. Children come from the local and wider community. The pre-school currently supports a small number of children with learning difficulties and could also support children who speak English as an additional language. The nursery employs six members of staff, four of whom hold an appropriate early years qualification. One member of staff is currently working towards a childcare qualification and another is undertaking training at a higher level. The group is supported by the Pre-School Learning Alliance and the Local Authority.

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PROVISION

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

Children stay very healthy because practitioners follow current and appropriate environmental health and hygiene guidelines, for which policies and procedures are in place. For example, staff wear protective clothing when changing younger children's nappies and tables are cleaned with anti-bacterial spray before and after each snack session. Staff encourage parents to ensure their children have appropriate clothing for the weather, should they go outside to play. Each child also has a spare set of their own clothes so they can be comfortable should they need to be changed. Practitioners talk to children about sun awareness and how to protect themselves by wearing hats and using sun-block. Half of the current staff team are qualified to administer first aid and are confident in their ability to respond well to minor accidents and medical emergencies. Detailed information is recorded about children's medical needs and dietary requirements to ensure that staff are equipped and able to meet children's individual needs.

Children learn to understand good health and hygiene practices as they follow the very good example set by practitioners. For example, when called for their snack, children independently go to the bathroom to wash their hands and are familiar with this routine. Staff take the time to explain to children about germs and they demonstrate for children how to wash and dry their hands properly. There are also visual prompts in the bathroom to reinforce this. Children learn about the importance of good personal hygiene as they play with dolls; washing, dressing and feeding them. They take pride in their personal appearance as they look in the large mirror in the bathroom.

Thematic planning encourages children to learn further about healthy lifestyles as they look at different vegetables, investigating both known and new ones. Children make posters of fruits and vegetables and discuss their favourites. Their learning is reinforced as they visit a local organic farm and make collages of plates with their favourite vegetables on. Children also make vegetable soup with locally purchased vegetables and are able to experience different tastes.

Children are very well nourished as they have drinking water available throughout each session and enjoy healthy snacks. For example, fresh and dried fruits, vegetables, plain biscuits, crackers and milk or water. Practitioners have given careful consideration to producing a snack menu which is nutritious and attractive for children. The menu is available for parents to see. Children learn about foods that are good for them as staff explain, for example, that milk helps them to grow and be healthy.

Children enjoy physical activities. They have some opportunities to play outside on an adjoining grassed play area where they can run freely, experience the elements and enjoy picnics in the shade of the trees. The indoor play area is very spacious and staff provide many different physical play experiences. For example, children construct and climb as they play with large wooden blocks and cardboard boxes. They balance on stepping stones and learn to control and co-ordinate their bodies as they move to music. Children learn to successfully manipulate scissors as they cut various materials. Children are able to rest or be active as they choose within the setting.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

Children are cared for in a very welcoming, secure and safe indoor and outdoor environment. The hall is very spacious and staff take pride in, and spend their own time, decorating the setting to make it interesting and stimulating for children. Practitioners design and make backdrops, for example, for the imaginary play area, to make it look like a real home. Children's work is displayed attractively around the hall, there is an informative notice-board for parents and staff set up exciting and purposeful activities which children cannot wait to explore.

Children's arrivals and departures are managed extremely safely. Members of staff stand at the external and internal doors, as parents come right into the hall to bring and collect their children, to ensure that no child can leave unsupervised. During sessions the external doors remain locked and access is via a door-bell only. Visitors sign in and out and children and staff are accurately registered so that practitioners know exactly who is in the building at any given time. Staff carry out daily health and safety checks on the premises and equipment to ensure children's safety and security at all times.

Children learn about keeping themselves safe as staff give them gentle reminders about, for example, not running indoors unless they are taking part in a planned physical activity. Children practise regular fire evacuation procedures with staff, learning how to behave responsibly in an emergency situation. Children are kept very safe on outings as practitioners conduct risk assessments to ensure that safe adult to child ratios are maintained. Staff are highly vigilant in their supervision of children. Children are given independence and freedom and are able to take small risks in this safe environment. For example, older children take themselves to the bathroom independently and are competent in the management of their own personal care. Practitioners are deployed effectively around the setting, ensuring there is always an adult nearby to anticipate potential accidents and prevent them from happening.

Children are cared for by adults who are vetted and have relevant experience, knowledge and skills. Children are very well safeguarded as all practitioners fully understand their role in the protection of children. They update their knowledge frequently and are able to put appropriate procedures into practice when necessary.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

Children thoroughly enjoy their time at the setting. They have an excellent attitude to learning and are happy and purposefully engaged in a wide range of interesting and challenging activities throughout each session. Children aged under three years are involved, busy and occupied within this very stimulating environment. Children enjoy playing imaginatively in the home corner, which is often transformed into different scenarios, such as a shop or an office. Children develop their creativity as they make several cardboard boxes into a boat, make flags and sail the seas. Children who are new to the group settle well because practitioners have a very good understanding, and sensitivity towards, the mixture of emotions felt at the time of a child's first separation from their main carer. Parents are welcome to stay with their children to settle them and staff give sensible advice to parents to ease this process.

Children develop confidence and become skilled communicators and competent learners with the benefit of skilled and enthusiastic interaction from staff. Practitioners listen carefully to what children have to say and speak to them sensitively and kindly. As children become familiar

with the routine, their self-esteem grows. They feel emotionally secure and become confident to try new experiences with the support of caring adults. Support is given both verbally and non-verbally as staff greet each child by name, smile and offer appropriate cuddles and reassurance. High staff ratios ensure that there are sufficient adults to spend time actively playing and working directly with the children. Practitioners maximise children's learning opportunities as they encourage children to ask questions and express their thoughts and ideas. For example, as they play in the 'polar landscape', children wonder what would happen if they put paper into the freezing water. They discover it goes cold and soggy and decide to use the timer to see how long the 'iceberg' takes to melt. Children acquire new knowledge and skills as they follow written and pictorial instructions to make some dough.

Children's individual needs are very well known and met and their welfare is highly promoted. Staff know each child well; their likes and dislikes, routines and family contexts. The 'Birth to three matters' framework is used effectively to meet the individual needs of children under three years. It supports younger children's development and well-being and the planning of activities and experiences is developed from children's own interests and needs.

Nursery Education.

The quality of teaching and learning is good. Practitioners all have a very good understanding of how to put the Foundation Stage into practice and how young children learn. However, the provider has agreed to further develop all staff's understanding of the principles of the Foundation Stage to enable them to contribute fully to the planning and assessment process. The learning environment and programme is planned to provide a broad and balanced range of activities and experiences across the six areas of learning. Planning is largely child-led and based on children's interests, determined through observations and discussions. Information gained from observations and assessments is used to help move children to the next stage in their learning. Staff help children to become focussed, able to resist distractions and to persist for some time. For example, children make a crane, turn it into a plane and then a train, spending a significant amount of time as they initiate and follow each other's ideas. All activities have a clear purpose and staff encourage children by offering praise for their efforts and achievements. Practitioners use a good variety of teaching methods that help children to learn effectively, taking account of their age, capability and other relevant factors. This is evident as children clearly enjoy what they are doing. Staff ask questions which encourage children to think and work things out for themselves. Staff demonstrate new skills for children, for example, holding a pencil and cutting with scissors. Practitioners know when to extend these productive times by working and playing alongside children and when to stand back and allow children to develop and extend their own play. There is an excellent balance between adult-led and child-initiated experiences and activities.

Staff manage children very well and have sensible expectations for their behaviour. All three and four-year-old children are able to share and take turns and take part in group activities. Practitioners use positive strategies to encourage good behaviour, for example, asking children to consider the consequences and effects on others.

Children are highly motivated to learn as they follow the example set by staff who are enthusiastic and interested. Children develop an awareness of their own needs and become sensitive to the needs of others as they allow their peers to join in their play. Children have opportunities to make choices and decisions about their care and play. They can select and use activities and resources independently and use their own initiative.

Children use language for communication as they take turns in conversation, for example, about what they did during half-term. Children develop a love for stories and books as practitioners successfully bring stories to life for children. Children concentrate on the content and are interested to discover what happens next. Staff recap the main themes of the story and children are able, therefore, to discuss their favourite parts when the story is finished. Children link sounds to letters and many can verbally spell out their names correctly. Children can write their names, some with support, and correctly copy other words. Opportunities for children to make marks and begin to write can be found in various activities. For example, clipboards in a garage and score cards for games. Children enjoy writing letters and addressing envelopes.

Children say and use number names in familiar contexts and many can count reliably up to 10 and beyond. They recognise numbers when they are written and can identify them on the number line. Children use developing mathematical ideas and methods to solve practical problems. For example, children counting out cups at snack time realise they do not have enough and calculate that they need two more. Mathematical language is used with growing confidence as children construct with large wooden blocks. They use and understand the concepts of 'on top of', 'next to' and 'one more'. When celebrating children's birthdays, they are presented with a cake which they share with some friends. Children learn that if the cake is cut in half and then in half again, they will have four quarters. Children demonstrate an awareness of symmetry as they practise 'butterfly painting' by folding the paper in half, then attempt to paint a butterfly freehand.

Children have good opportunities to investigate objects and materials by using all of their senses appropriately. They learn how to use a camera and show particular interest in the view-finder. Children investigate sounds as they listen to 'rainmakers' which they have made. They listen to music and talk about how it makes them feel. Children thoroughly enjoyed a visit from an 'animal encounters' company. They were able to feel and hold various creatures and watch them move. Children study different environments as they use small world play to discover what it is like for polar bears living on ice. They begin to learn French as they sing, count, and say their names and ages in another language. They talk about the different seasons and the changes that happen to the weather. Children explore similarities and differences as they study two very similar toy monkeys and compare them. They learn about the natural world as they plant runner beans and watch them grow.

Children develop an understanding of changes that happen to their bodies when they take part in physical activities and learn what it means to be healthy. They develop physical control of the way they move and use a range of small and large equipment to enhance this. Children's creativity is highly valued as they use their imaginations and respond to what they see, hear, touch and feel. In the winter months, children have great fun playing outside in the snow. When they come indoors they use a wide selection of materials to create collages of themselves and the clothes they wear to keep warm. They use various materials to create three dimensional models of their choice and discuss recycling as they make paper bag puppets. Children are very animated as they put on a puppet show in the 'theatre'. They imaginatively use different voices for the characters and the audience is captivated. Children learn to recognise and explore how sounds can be changed as they shake their bells softly to make a quiet noise, and then vigorously to make a louder one.

Children are making very good progress through the stepping stones towards the early learning goals in all six areas of learning. Some older children have reached some goals and continue to progress well before they go to school.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

Children become aware of the wider society and benefit greatly from activities and resources that help them to value diversity. For example, on World Environment Day, staff bring in a newspaper with pictures of polar animals on the melting ice-caps. This is accompanied by an activity where the polar landscape is recreated in the water tray, generating a genuine interest from the children. Many festivals from around the world are celebrated with children and practitioners go to great lengths to bring these occasions to life in a way which clearly has a positive impact on children. All children have equal access to all the toys and resources and activities are adapted or extended to meet the needs of children who may be less able or more able than others.

Children clearly feel a strong sense of belonging in this setting where they are valued and respected as individuals. Each child receives a warm welcome from staff and they delight in seeing photographs of themselves around the room. Children's work is attractively displayed by staff, helping children to feel good about themselves. Links are created between home and pre-school as 'Theo', the group's own toy monkey goes on short-break holidays with different children. On his return, children welcome him home and discuss what he has been doing. To encourage children to settle and feel part of the group, there is a welcome book which contains photographs of children at various activities and routines.

Children learn to understand responsible behaviour. They follow the very good examples set for them by staff and learn to share and take turns as they play together in harmony. Children respond very well to practitioners' calm and consistently positive approach. Rather than being told not to do something, children actually learn about responsible behaviour as staff suggest alternative methods of dealing with things. Older children are encouraged to negotiate and resolve their own conflicts and they are given time to do this by staff who know they do not always have to intervene too soon. Children are polite and develop an awareness of, and consideration for, the feelings of others. For example, when listening to a story a child sits a smaller child on her lap so that he can see the pictures. Children develop secure and trusting relationships with the adults who care for them. They make strong friendships which often extend outside the pre-school. They make a friendship wall where each child signs their name on a brick. Children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is fostered.

The partnership with parents and carers is good. Parents receive good quality information about the provision, including the educational programme. The planning is on display for parents to see and there is also written information about the areas of learning and the early learning goals. Parents are involved in fundraising events which take place in aid of various charities or to raise funds for the pre-school itself. Staff work very well in partnership with parents, which clearly has a positive impact on children's learning. There is an effective two-way flow of information, knowledge and expertise. Parents are informed of children's achievements and the progress they are making. Various methods of communication are used, including newsletters, daily diary entries for parents to read, verbal discussions and an informative notice-board. Towards the end of each session, staff recap with children what they have been doing during the day. Practitioners encourage children to show their parents, for example, the runner beans they planted and the polar bear on an iceberg.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

Overall children's needs are met. Recruitment and vetting procedures ensure that children are well protected and cared for by staff with a good knowledge and understanding of how children learn and develop. However, there is not a structured staff induction procedure in place. This is a stable and mature staff team who offer a great deal of experience in the childcare field. They are well qualified and committed to further training and development as they attend both long-term and short-term courses. All staff have a thorough understanding of the needs of young children and meet them very well. Practitioners clearly have a high regard for the well-being of all children. They develop honest and comfortable relationships with children and support them in play extremely effectively.

High adult to child ratios and effective staff deployment contribute to children's good health, safety, enjoyment and achievement and ability to take an active part in the setting. All staff are fully aware of their roles and responsibilities for each session and remain highly motivated and enthusiastic, contributing new ideas and suggestions for future improvement. Good organisation of the premises maximises learning opportunities for all children. All documentation meets the requirements of the National Standards, is confidentially maintained and, where appropriate, shared with parents.

The leadership and management is good. The setting is led and managed for the benefit of the children. The manager has created an effective and improving setting where children are safe, feel good about themselves and make very good progress in the Foundation Stage. Looking beyond what the policies and procedures are intended to do, it is clear that they work well in practice to meet children's needs and have a positive effect on children's well-being and learning. The manager sets directions, leading to improvements in the organisation of the nursery education and the outcomes for children. Staff and children alike are motivated by the manager who acts as a good role model. The setting assesses its own strengths and weaknesses and reviews the effectiveness of activities and systems. Successful teaching strategies are shared and adopted by staff.

Improvements since the last inspection

Not applicable.

Complaints since the last inspection

Since registration 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):

- review current recruitment procedures to develop a structured induction programme for all staff, to include training in health and safety and safeguarding 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):

- further develop all staff's understanding of the principles of the Foundation Stage to enable the whole team to contribute fully to the planning and assessment process.

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