

Allens Croft Early Years Centre

Inspection report for early years provision

Unique Reference Number	227266
Inspection date	10 July 2007
Inspector	Adelaide Griffith
Setting Address	Allens Croft Road, Kings Heath, Birmingham, WEST MIDLANDS, B14 6RP
Telephone number	0121 675 2835
E-mail	
Registered person	Allens Croft Early Years Centre
Type of inspection	Integrated
Type of care	Sessional care, Out of School care, Crèche

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 outstanding.

WHAT SORT OF SETTING IS IT?

Allens Croft Children's centre opened in 1997 and was designated in 2006. It is run by a Board of Trustees and governors. The centre operates from temporary accommodation at the rear of Allens Croft Primary School. The centre comprises an under 3's unit and Allens Croft Nursery School.

A maximum of 32 children may attend the unit at any one time. A creche facility for 16 children is also available. The unit is open each weekday during the school term from 09:15 to 11:30 and from 12:15 to 14:45. A maximum of 24 children may attend the out of school provision at any one time. The out of school service operates from 08:00 to 09:00 and from 15:00 to 17:30 during term time, and from 09:00 to 15:00 during the school holidays. All children share access to a secure enclosed play area.

There are currently 70 children aged from two to under four years on roll. Of these, 29 receive funding for early education. Children come from the local community and attend for a variety of sessions. There are currently 36 children aged from three to under eight years on roll in the out of school provision and they come from the schools on the site. The unit currently supports

a number of children with learning difficulties and disabilities and also supports a number of children who speak English as an additional language.

The unit employs eight members of staff all of whom hold appropriate early years qualifications. The unit is supported by volunteers and there is a designated teacher. The out of school provision employs five members of staff. Of these, four hold appropriate qualifications and one is working towards a qualification.

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PROVISION

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

Children are clearly learning about personal hygiene through the daily routine as they wash hands before eating and following messy play. Children are developing self-help skills as they access and use tissues which are disposed of correctly. They are competently protected against infection due to established procedures and the premises are maintained in a clean condition throughout. Owing to the implementation of policies children's health is promoted. Parental permission is obtained for seeking emergency medical treatment for children in the out of school club but this is not in place for others in the setting. This may potentially compromise children's health needs.

Children are gaining a good understanding of healthy eating through the serving of snacks that include a wide selection of fresh fruit, crackers, cheese and raw vegetables. Their independence is positively encouraged through opportunities to choose from the selection on offer and staff are aware of children's specific dietary requirements. All children have access to frequent drinks.

All children benefit from physical exercise. Outside younger children push and pull pushchairs and run around whilst developing their large muscle skills effectively. Some succeed in maintaining their balance for a short period by stepping from one low tub to another. Other children enjoy play with adults as they attempt to hit balls with the rackets provided.

Children receiving early education hop confidently on both feet. They have opportunities to play on low beams and they climb the steps which lead to the inside platform by using alternate feet with good coordination and control. Music is used effectively to promote children's large muscle skills. For instance, they are developing ways of moving their bodies as they bend and twirl to music. They also learn to stand still for short periods in contrast to active movements.

Children in the out of school club have access to a vast range of sports equipment for games including badminton and tennis and they are consistently encouraged to participate in a variety of activities. All equipment is age-appropriate and children's physical skills are effectively promoted through team games. All children have opportunities to engage in quiet activities.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

Children are cared for in a welcoming environment which is cheerful due to colourful examples of their work. The under 3's unit is set up with identified areas which children access constantly due to the free flow system. Consequently, children are comfortable in the setting. They play in a safe outdoor area which is set up with a vast range of resources to encourage play in

different contexts. The gate that leads to the primary school's playground is kept closed at all times. Children access toys which are obtained from reputable suppliers and chosen for age-appropriateness, fun and educational value. These are checked and cleaned frequently.

Children are effectively protected due to a wide range of safety measures including frequent risk assessments. Owing to controlled entry to the premises their security is competently ensured. Children are consistently supervised during all activities and staff adhere to rigorous procedures that are in place for the safe conduct on outings. Frequent fire drills are practised. This means that children are gaining a clear understanding of evacuation procedures.

Children's welfare is substantially safeguarded due to staff's clear knowledge of child protection issues. Staff are well informed about procedures for the reporting and recording of concerns. They have access to a comprehensive policy with detailed procedures regarding allegations against staff.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

Staff use the 'Birth to three matters' framework to plan a broad range of activities that promotes younger children's development effectively. Staff encourage children's self-reliance through the provision of a vast range of exciting resources which are at their level. Children are clearly learning about textures as they explore flour and water consistency while staff talk about the tactile sensation. Consequently, children's sensory learning is substantially supported. Children's self-help skills are competently promoted through their involvement in this type of play and their language skills and vocabulary are developing due to support from experienced staff who help them to describe the sensation.

Children take the initiative to taste materials including the flour and water during play activities. Staff demonstrate a clear understanding of children's natural curiosity as they ask children to talk about the taste before discouraging a repetition of this action. This means that children's learning is managed sensitively and positive links are made at all times. Children's small muscle skills are developing as they hold scissors and cut with good control. Similarly, they scribble freely on the white board with the aid of thick markers. There is a balance between child-led and adult-led activities. For instance, they choose books which staff are asked to read and the water feature is switched on at their requests. Children's self-image is extensively promoted due to low level mirrors in which they constantly see their reflections.

Children in the out of school club participate in enjoyable activities including creative arts. The balance between child-led and adult-led activities is maintained effectively with this group. With staff's guidance children make puppets and then advise staff to write a story. They can access a broad range of resources and they have the freedom to choose activities at all times. Children's interest is competently promoted through cold cooking activities such as decorating biscuits and staff lend support as required. Additionally, homework facilities are available within a flexible arrangement to meet children's needs.

Early education.

The quality of teaching and learning is outstanding. Staff have extensive knowledge and understanding of the Foundation Stage. All staff take responsibility for the planning which is thorough with detailed information about the resources and teaching methods applicable to an activity. Staff are experienced in noting children's preferences and spontaneous occurrences

which are taken into consideration to meet individual needs. For example, for more able children who write their names clearly opportunities are included to write for different purposes such as devising shopping lists. Children's learning is effectively supported through this adaptable and responsive approach.

The range and frequency of observations exceed the regular assessments required to identify children's learning and progress. These are supplemented by photographs with related text to explain the contexts within the areas of learning. Accordingly, they convey a graphic picture of children's progress with indications of their achievements and the information is used to plan the next stage in learning based on the stepping stones. Challenges are included for children individually. Furthermore, all children are encouraged to explore materials and to solve problems during activities. For example, during play with mini beasts children use a magnifying glass to note details and they are asked to explain these to staff. This means that children are significantly stimulated to attain higher levels of learning.

Staff use a variety of teaching methods that help all children to learn effectively. They demonstrate skills, for instance, how to hold the knife for cutting carrots and children use small equipment including spades with increasing control as they dig into the wet sand and fill buckets under supervision. Staff use all routines to help children with their learning, for example, counting and writing numbers during outside play. This means that children are always learning holistically. Staff talk and listen to children constantly and they allow children the freedom to direct play. For example, children have spontaneously reproduced patterns and created some of their own designs by observing those that are illustrated on draped materials. Yet staff are extremely skilled at encouraging children's focus on points of interests. For instance, children are encouraged to join in during the reading of stories and their memory skills are competently promoted as they mimic the noises made by a range of animals.

Staff model the level of noises that they want children to express by reading loudly or at a whisper and children copy this. Additionally, they are learning to use a range of ways to change rhymes, for example, children sing loudly and then quietly. Consequently, children are learning to appreciate the effectiveness of pitching their voices. Children are given choices consistently throughout activities and they are praised constantly. This means that their self-esteem is successfully raised. A set of baskets with specifically selected resources is available and used by staff for nurturing children's skills where gaps are identified such as encouraging them to express feelings. Children's learning is commendably supported through this sensitive approach.

They are exposed to music of different styles including classical, pop, marching and soft relaxation music. For instance, whilst reading a story soft music is played and marching music to indicate the time for tidying away. This means that children are supported in developing skills in interpretation. Staff provide materials that are free from discrimination and effectively reflect the community that the children come from. An interesting range of books and toys shows images of children from various backgrounds and cultures. Consequently, all children have a strong sense of belonging. Above all, staff are highly skilled at integrating children's learning in play activities and they provide a vast range of opportunities for children's enjoyment.

Staff have current experience of working with children with learning difficulties and disabilities. The member of staff with specific responsibility demonstrates in depth knowledge of children's needs. Children are integrated well into the setting through the provision of specially designed resources such as non-slip mats which allow them to join their peers at the table during snack time. Individual educational plans are devised to include a wide range of strategies that

promote children's learning effectively. Children are supported in achieving their potential through individualised programmes that are competently implemented.

Children are well behaved due to staff's calm approach. They help children to understand what is expected of them, for example, they quietly ask children to move up so that all sit comfortably in a small group. Staff sensitively help children to adhere to rules, for example, to wait until others have jumped off the low steps before mounting these. Children clearly demonstrate their understanding of self-discipline by passing equipment to others and awaiting their turn. They are aware of the boundaries of behaviour.

Staff work most of the time directly with children throughout a wide range of activities. For example, they participate in all types of indoor and outdoor play. Staff make effective use of the accommodation. Indoors the unit is divided into different areas in an imaginative way and this promotes an exciting atmosphere. All areas serve a prime function but are also used for other types of play through the versatile use of space and resources. Similarly, outside the forest garden provides a facility to promote children's understanding of the environment and a vast selection of resources is set up to continue the process of learning outside. Accordingly, children benefit significantly from opportunities that promote their learning in interesting ways.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

Children are highly valued and their individual care is met due to the policy to allow all access to the range of resources that is provided. They are gaining a positive understanding of other cultures due to the celebration of festivals and the availability of an interesting selection of resources. Children are imaginatively supported in learning about the environment through play in the forest garden where they locate mini beasts and they clearly develop an appreciation for the wider community when they participate in outings.

Staff have current experience of working with children with learning difficulties and disabilities. Additional needs are discussed with parents who are involved in their children's care at every stage. Specialist support services are available and they provide precise information and devise programmes which are implemented by the setting's staff to support children's developmental progress. There are group activities to support children's communication skills and all staff contribute actively. This indicates that children's individual needs are met through comprehensive strategies.

Children are well behaved due to positive strategies. For instance, they are praised consistently and staff spend a lot of time interacting with them. In spite of this practice there is a sensitive approach which empowers children to use their time effectively. For example, children enjoy quiet times of their choice as they rest or talk with their peers. This means that children benefit from a supportive environment. Staff are commendable role models for children as they address children and other carers politely. The atmosphere which is enhanced by intermittent soothing music contributes to children's calm demeanour. Children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is fostered.

There is a successful working relationship with parents due to the approachable, friendly attitude from staff and the effective support systems. All parents are supplied with written material about the setting including copies of policies. A settling-in period is agreed to meet the needs of families. A family held record is compiled with the help of parents to note their child's development on entry to the setting. Information is shared with parents on a daily basis about

children's experiences, their progress and emotional well-being. Parents are consistently informed about current events at the setting through monthly newsletters and the parents' boards. A wide range of initiatives including healthy eating are notified to parents and workshops are run throughout the years. Children benefit substantially from the partnership with parents.

The partnership with parents and carers of funded children is outstanding. Parents are supplied with copies of the prospectus and all are informed about the areas of learning through materials provided. Staff complete an initial observation record for each child and meetings are held to talk through and note issues that parents feel are important. Parents receive information about children's activities on a daily basis and frequent feedback about their child's progress is provided formally on parents' day and through written reports. Parents are constantly provided with visual reminders of their child's progress due to the vast display of photographs which show their involvement in activities. This strategy helps parents to gain a clear understanding of their child's learning and development.

Parents are openly encouraged to be involved in their child's learning as they have the freedom to access children's portfolios at any time and to take these away. Parents contribute by recording any aspects of learning that they wish to bring to the attention of staff for the further development of their child. The effectiveness of the relationship is strengthened through parental expectations of staff's commitment to promote their children's learning and well-being. This illustrates the level of trust established with parents. Parents also make a contribution to the setting for the continual benefit of other children. For example, they consistently donate resources including items brought back from holidays. Children's learning benefits profoundly from the partnership with parents and carers.

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

Children are effectively protected due to suitability procedures which ensure that all staff including volunteers are vetted and students are not left to work unsupervised with children. There are rigorous systems in place for the recruitment of staff. Newly appointed staff undergo a trial period following an induction which includes reviews of their performance. They are consistently supported by experienced staff. This means that children are cared for by a team with proven competence to meet their needs.

There is excellent organisation for the care of children. This is underpinned by the setting's ethos of promoting children's interpersonal skills with a strong focus on individual potential. Staff are deployed effectively to ensure children's well-being is addressed at all times and senior staff have specific areas of responsibility such as child protection. A comprehensive self-evaluation of the setting to identify outcomes for children's care is completed consistently by the whole team. Consequently, children receive care from staff who are vigilant and proactive in meeting their needs.

Frequent meetings are held to review practice and updating training is accessed consistently. For example, staff have attended courses in physical play for children aged under three years and also to promote the development and well-being of children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Many tasks are carried out daily to support children's learning and play. External personnel such as the music specialist visit weekly to work with all children. An exciting range of initiatives including bags for learning, music, top start physical activity and healthy eating are in place and these are taken home as requested. Accordingly, children's care is substantially enhanced due to the work of dynamic staff in this setting.

The required documentation is available. Children's records are stored securely and updated frequently. Staff are clearly informed of procedures regarding the retention of records and of notifying Ofsted about significant changes. Records, policies and procedures which are required for the efficient and safe management of the provision, and to promote the welfare, care and learning of children are effectively maintained. The range of services which operates from the centre contributes towards its effectiveness. The impact of the services on the children who receive care and nursery education is outstanding.

The leadership and management of funded children is outstanding. The registered person has a vision for care and education that is integrated and aims to provide a centre that offers support for the child specifically and also for the wider family. The stated aim is to ensure that children receive effective assistance in all areas of learning to achieve attainments for life. There is a child-centred philosophy with individual learning plans that promote children's progress towards the early learning goals. Staff aim to provide an atmosphere in which children are happy as this contributes to their learning.

All staff are confident and enthusiastic in their roles in developing children's learning. For example, staff discuss their planning with others and amend any areas that do not fully support children's individual learning. Senior staff inspire the work of others by modelling a wide range of effective teaching methods. This means that children are taught by staff who work as a cohesive team.

Feedback from parents is used for planning and implementing teaching strategies. For instance, where parents indicate their children's achievement at home staff build on these. The registered person and senior staff are fully informed about what is going on in the setting due to their active involvement in all aspects of the provision. Frequent teaching observations are carried out by the registered person and senior staff to achieve improvements and to implement new systems as required. Staff development includes significant skills that support children's learning. For instance, they are taught to observe and interpret children's behaviour and expressions without verbalisation in order to ensure that communication with children is developed effectively. Accordingly, children's learning benefits from precise strategies.

The transition from the under 3's unit to the nursery school is managed very sensitively and competently. This is a gradual process which allows for an exchange of children and staff between the unit and the nursery. This arrangement allows staff to observe children's learning and development and to gain an excellent understanding of children's capabilities before they start in the nursery. Furthermore, children and their parents begin to develop a relationship with nursery staff. The unit is successfully supported by the deputy head of the nursery school who leads the Foundation Stage and works with staff in the role of the unit's teacher. Exemplary leadership and management supports children in their progress towards the early learning goals. Overall the provision meets the needs of the range of children for whom it provides.

Improvements since the last inspection

At the last inspection the provider was asked to ensure that parents are provided with the regulator's (Ofsted) details in the event of a complaint. A detailed policy is now available and children's welfare is effectively met through this updated procedure. Improvements in the early years education are not applicable.

Complaints since the last inspection

Since the last inspection Ofsted received one complaint relating to National Standards 1 (Suitable person), 2 (Organisation), 6 (Safety), 7 (Health) and 12 Working in partnership with parents and carers. Concerns were raised about procedures regarding accidents. Ofsted required the provider to investigate. As a result the provider included more detailed information in the complaint policy. Ofsted was satisfied that by taking these steps the provider met the National Standards and remained qualified for registration at the time 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 outstanding.

WHAT MUST BE DONE TO SECURE FUTURE IMPROVEMENT?

The quality and standards of the care

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

- ensure that written parental permission is requested, at the time of placement, to seek any necessary emergency medical advice or treatment for all children.

The quality and standards of the nursery education

No recommendations for improvement are made because the quality and standards of nursery education are outstanding.

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