

Downs Playgroup

Inspection report for early years provision

Unique Reference Number	509102
Inspection date	31 January 2008
Inspector	Christine Bonnett
Setting Address	Cannon Lane Methodist Church, Cannon Lane, Pinner, Middlesex, HA5 1JD
Telephone number	020 8866 0534
E-mail	
Registered person	The Trustees of Downs Playgroup Association
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?

Downs Playgroup is managed by a voluntary management committee made up of parents of children at the playgroup and church members. It opened in 1976 and operates from two halls within Cannon Lane Methodist Church Pinner, in the London borough of Harrow. A maximum of 26 children may attend the playgroup at any one time. The group is open each weekday morning from 09:30 and 12:00, and on Monday, Wednesday and Thursday afternoons from 12:30 to 15:00 during term time. Children have access to a secure enclosed outdoor play area.

There are currently 45 children aged from two years to under five years on roll. Of these, 34 children receive funding for nursery education. Children come from the local community. The playgroup currently supports a number of children who speak English as an additional language.

The nursery employs seven staff, of whom six hold appropriate early years qualifications.

The playgroup is accredited by the Pre School Learning Alliance.

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PROVISION

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

Children's health is promoted as the rooms used by the group are maintained to a high standard of cleanliness. In addition, the play equipment is also clean to ensure it does not pose a threat to their health. Staff discuss with the children the importance of adopting good personal care skills by washing their hands before eating. However, the method and materials used by the children to clean their hands is insufficient to eliminate the potential risk of contamination to their food.

All the staff hold first aid certificates and follow effective systems to manage any accidents, and administer medication. The well maintained garden allows children to benefit from exercise in the open air.

Children's health is further promoted as the group has a policy of 'healthy eating' which is known to, and supported by, parents. Each child brings their own portion of fruit to the session, and the group provide bread sticks and milk or water to drink. Consequently, children are learning which foods provide goodness and which to avoid. Children sit in a small group for their snack, and a social time is created as they talk together about the variety of fruit produced around the table. Children's individual dietary needs are known by staff and respected when food is provided by the group for celebrations. Drinking water is available for children to help themselves to throughout the session.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

Children profit from spending their sessions in premises that are warm and friendly. The main hall has good natural light, and on bright days sunlight streams through the windows which, along with the displays of children's art work and appropriate posters, helps to create a welcoming environment for children and their parents or carers to enjoy.

Ample space is available for children to investigate and explore the play materials in comfort and safety. The range of play resources is extensive, and provides children with a rich variety to aid their development in all areas of learning. Although all items of furniture and equipment have to be packed away at the end of each day, a wide selection is set-out attractively at the start of each session. In addition, children's independence is well promoted as they confidently approach staff to request that a particular item is brought out of the store cupboard for them to use.

Children's safety is also well promoted as staff conduct daily safety checks to identify and eliminate any potential risks. Fire drills are held regularly, which enables children to become familiar with the procedure to help ensure their wellbeing in an emergency. The security of the premises is good and the systems used by staff mean that no one can gain access to the children unchallenged, and no child can leave unobserved.

Children's welfare is safeguarded as all staff have thorough knowledge of child protection issues. They recognise that the wellbeing of the children is paramount, and understand the Local Safeguarding Children Board procedures to report any concerns.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

Children relish their time in the playgroup. Once settled, they happily and enthusiastically engage in an activity of their choice, either sitting contentedly by themselves, or playing co-operatively with their friends. The care given by the staff is very warm and affectionate. New and unsettled children are treated with kindness and helped to overcome their difficulty appropriately to enable them to benefit fully from their playgroup day. The key-worker system is used effectively by the group to help make children feel secure and develop a sense of belonging. The planning of the activities for the younger children effectively incorporates the Birth to three matters framework to support children's learning in their earliest years.

Staff are highly skilled at identifying when a child needs help or guidance with an activity, and quickly step-in to give the appropriate level of support to re-focus the child or extend the play. Staff are also skilled at promoting children's language development and thinking processes well by asking open ended questions and explaining how things work. For example, during an art activity staff explained why the paint needed to be dropped into the salad spinner, how to turn the handle fast, and then shared with the children the excitement of seeing how the paint had dispersed when the lid came off.

Nursery Education

The quality of the teaching and learning is good. All staff have good knowledge of the Foundation Stage and deliver the curriculum with energy and enthusiasm. They also understand how children learn, and capture their interest by providing activities and experiences that are fun, varied and imaginative.

Planning is thorough, and clearly demonstrates the learning intentions of each activity. Staff observe and assess the children's attainments regularly and draw upon the findings to plan the next step for each individual child. All areas of learning are well promoted to enable children to make good developmental progress. However, when organising and planning the curriculum, the outside area is not included in the plans as an extension of the nursery. This does not enable children to have the opportunity to enjoy the full range of play experiences in the open air.

Children's creative development is particularly well promoted, and staff take advantage of the children's enjoyment of imaginative play to introduce additional learning areas. For example, large props are available for the children to act out 'the three little pigs' and 'the three Billy goats gruff'. While the children have great fun in the role play, the staff also take the opportunity to emphasise mathematical concepts, such as addition and subtraction. Staff understand that if an activity is well planned and resourced, all areas of learning can be incorporated effectively. They also demonstrate that they make excellent use of their time and resources to support children's learning.

Children show curiosity and are keen to learn. They use their initiative to find solutions to problems, such as raising the end of the large cardboard tube when a car stops moving in the middle of it, and then smiling with pleasure when it runs out the other end. Although there is routine and structure to each session, the atmosphere is calm and unhurried, giving children the opportunity and space to complete a task, feel satisfaction at doing so, and then move on. Consequently, children are making very good progress in their learning, and achieve well.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

All children are treated with respect and kindness. Their individual needs are well known to the staff and are met appropriately. Children are learning to understand and value their own and other people's cultures as they have access to a range of resources that promote diversity, such as books and home corner equipment. In addition the group acknowledges a range of world faith festivals to enhance children's understanding and enjoyment; these include Diwali, Pesach, Christmas and Eid.

Children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are welcome at the group as its practice is inclusive for all. Staff understand the importance of working closely with the child's parents and all other parties involved with the care and education of the child to ensure their needs are met, and the child makes appropriate progress. Children who have English as an additional language are also well supported, as staff have systems in place to ensure the child settles and engages fully in the life of the group. Children's behaviour is very good as they are busy and interested throughout the session. Any difficulties that arise are managed by staff using age-appropriate and positive methods.

The partnership with parents and carers of children who receive nursery education is outstanding. The group recognises that parents are the children's first and most important educators. They understand the positive impact working closely with parents can have on the child. Parents are provided with good quality information about the setting at the open evening when their child joins the group. This ensures that they fully understand how their child will spend their day and the level of commitment they can expect towards their child from the group, and also the commitment that is expected of them as parents. The group recognises that it is vital to obtain detailed information about the child on admission, as they gain greater insight into the needs and interests of the child, and how they can effectively be met.

Parents are kept well informed about their child's progress and the 'open-door' policy enables them to talk to a staff member at any time. A document entitled 'guide to our themes', which summarises the learning objectives for each term, is offered to parents so that they can support their child's learning at home, and provide resources for the themes. For example, parents are loaned disposable cameras to take a photograph of their door number to be used as part of a theme to look at numbers and forge links between the playgroup and the child's home.

All parents are also invited to play an active role in the daily life of the setting by joining the 'parent rota' to help at the group. This enables them to experience at first-hand the work of the group, and further support their child's learning at home. The playgroup committee has a parent representative to feed-back any issues they may have and bring forward ideas and suggestions. News letters are issued each term, and the parent notice board contains a wealth of relevant and interesting information. Parents are greeted warmly by staff each day and encouraged to spend as long as necessary with their child before leaving to ensure they are happy, and able to make best use of their session. The contribution made by parents and carers is valued greatly by staff who establish strong partnerships with them to produce good outcomes for children. This positive approach fosters children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

The leadership and management of the setting are good. The manager has a clear vision of how to further develop and extend the already good practice of the group for the benefit of the children. She also acts as a good role model for her team. The manager's strong focus on working in partnership with parents ensures they are fully informed about the nursery education programme and the progress of their child. The effective working relationship the group establishes with parents also has a positive impact upon the children's sense of well-being and contentment.

Rigorous recruitment procedures are in place to ensure that all staff working with the children are suitable to do so. The work of the staff is assessed informally on an on-going basis by the manager. Formal appraisals are also held to ensure high standards are maintained. Staff have a clear understanding of their role and responsibilities and focus on the needs of the children at all times. They work well as a team and are deployed appropriately throughout the halls to ensure the children are safe and well supported. The high ratio of appropriately qualified staff benefits the children as they apply their experience and knowledge to their work to give children a positive experience.

Children receive good support in a well organised environment that promotes their wellbeing. They are able to make decisions and choices about the activities they engage in, which fosters confidence and good self esteem. Children's health, safety and welfare are safeguarded as all the required documentation is maintained and readily available for inspection. Therefore the setting meets the needs of the range of children for whom it provides.

Improvements since the last inspection

At the last inspection it was recommended that the group promote children's physical development by providing more opportunities for children to engage in vigorous physical play. Children are now having greater access to the second hall and garden. Suitable play resources are provided to enable children to climb, balance and ride bikes, as well as run around in safety.

At the last inspection a recommendation was also made to enhance the education programme by enabling children to explore and investigate natural resources. Sand, water play and dough are available at every session and nature tables are regularly established to enable children to explore a variety of sensory experiences.

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):

- improve hygiene standards at snack time to promote the good health of 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):

- develop the use of garden to enable children to experience the full curriculum outdoors.

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