

Cottontails Pre-School

Inspection report for early years provision

Unique Reference Number 221770

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Inspector Caroline Wright

Setting Address Cottontails Pre-School, Cotton Hall, Cambridge Road, Girton, Cambridge, Cambridgeshire, CB3 0PN

Telephone number 07935 224 607

E-mail

Registered person Cottontails Pre School

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?

Cottontails Pre-school is run by a voluntary management committee made up of parents of children at the pre-school. It opened in 1974 and operates from the Cotton Hall in Girton, Cambridge. A maximum of 28 children may attend the pre-school at any one time. The pre-school is open each weekday from 09:00 to 12:00 during term times only. All children share access to a secure enclosed outdoor play area.

There are currently 32 children aged from two to under five years on roll. Of these, 28 children receive funding for early education. Children come from the local area. The pre-school currently supports a number of children who speak English as an additional language.

The pre-school employs five members of staff: all of the staff, including the manager, hold appropriate early years qualifications.

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PROVISION

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

Children learn about personal hygiene through regular routines such as washing their hands before eating and they know that they need to wash their hands 'because it makes your snack dirty'. Staff act as good role models, wiping down surfaces before serving snack and after children have eaten to help children to stay healthy. Children learn about leading a healthy lifestyle through everyday, practical experiences. For example, they are able to run around and exert themselves in the outdoor play area, so that they learn the importance of regular fresh air and exercise. They develop new physical skills such as running, pushing, pulling and climbing using the outdoor equipment. They are aware of changes that occur in their bodies due to physical exertion and comment 'I'm hot' when they have been running around. However, opportunities for children to develop new physical skills at adult-led activities such as snack time are limited.

In addition, children learn about healthy eating during discussion with staff at snack time. The healthy eating policy encourages parents to provide fresh fruit or other healthy options for their children to share for snack. Children are offered a drink of milk or water mid morning to help them to remain well hydrated so that they can think effectively. In addition, children learn about healthy eating through meaningful activities such as making fruit salad or healthy dips to eat with vegetables for their snack. Children visit the 'Life Education Bus' regularly where they learn about the benefits of enough sleep and eating healthily. These activities generate discussions between adults and children and as a result children demonstrate a good knowledge and understanding of the benefits of leading a healthy lifestyle. For example, they know that 'milk makes your teeth grow strong' and that 'fresh air is good for you.'

The needs of children are well met by adults who have a sound understanding of their developmental needs. If the children become unwell or have an accident whilst they are in the care of the pre-school, essential records are in place to make sure that good care is given. Information is recorded about children's allergies or food intolerances to make sure that their individual needs are met.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

Children move around safely under the expert supervision of the pre-school staff. They demonstrate their knowledge of how to keep themselves safe when they wear 'crash helmets' when they drive their imaginary 'racing car' and remind each other to 'put your seat belt on.' Adults help younger children to learn about safety, reminding them that they should 'be careful' when they use scissors or not to run indoors. Children use a suitable range of resources that are appropriate for their age and stage of development, and these are checked regularly by the pre-school staff to ensure they are in good condition and are safe for children to use. Furthermore, staff help children to learn about how to keep themselves safe in the event of a fire through regular fire drills and discussions. As a result, children talk with understanding about what they have to do in the event of an emergency evacuation of the premises, describing how they 'go outside and wait for the fire engine to come.'

Children's welfare is safeguarded and promoted by staff who have a good understanding of child protection procedures, which are in line with those set out by the Local Safeguarding

Children Board. A wide range of written policies and appropriate procedures are in place. In addition, the system for arrival and departure of children is effective in keeping children safe. High handles and non-return locks on entrance doors prevent children from leaving the premises unaccompanied and members of the public are unable to enter the playroom without being invited. This promotes children's ongoing safety and well-being.

A daily risk assessment of the premises is effective in making sure that all areas accessed by children are safe. In particular, staff make sure that children are safe when they play outdoors; they are exceptionally vigilant when children play at the front of the play area adjacent to the road to make sure that they are well supervised at all times.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

Children are happy, confident and enjoy their time at the setting. They generally engage themselves in the range of free play activities that are provided during the session to help them to learn. They enjoy playing with ice and rocks to learn about change, texture and everyday materials. Children's experiences are enhanced by the interaction of the staff who encourage children to become confident communicators and to learn about the world they live in.

Nursery Education

The quality of teaching and children's learning is good. Children use their imagination in a wide range of situations such as the role play 'dress shop' or building houses for the dinosaurs with the Duplo blocks. They use number names in their play and count groups of items reliably. They recognise 'how many' items in a small group without counting. Staff provide children with opportunities to use writing for a purpose and use numbers and calculations in everyday activities. They use number names as they press the buttons on the telephone and cash register. Children write in books and on stickers using pencils and crayons provided in the role-play area. Children initiate conversations and communicate effectively. They use a wide range of vocabulary to express their ideas and talk about what they know. They understand that writing carries meaning and recognise some familiar words. They know the initial sounds in their own names and use their voices to experiment with sounds and word patterns, growling like dinosaurs and squeaking like mice. They use language effectively to respond to their sensory experiences, telling adults that fabrics feel 'smooth and rough'. Children talk with understanding about what they do at home; they show an understanding of time and place when they talk about where they like and how they travel to pre-school by car because 'it's too far to walk.'

Children look at books alone and with adults in the well book corner; they turn pages from front to back carefully and listen with interest to stories. The effective use of open ended questions and opportunities for children to relate the story to their own experiences engages children in the stories and helps children to discover an enjoyment of books and to develop early reading skills. Children enjoy singing songs at circle time, moving their bodies to the rhythm and joining in with finger rhymes. Children enjoy painting on the easel and they use materials such as dough to explore their imagination and creativity. They spend long periods of time perfecting skills such as using the 'ripper' to create special effects with paper and are proud of their successes.

However, some activities lack challenge for children. For example, staff do not ask children to write their name on their artwork unless they know they can do it already; adults lay the table and prepare snack for children. They over direct some activities, such as sticking and sorting

for 'opposites' or making price tickets in the dress shop, concentrating too much on the end result. Consequently, opportunities for children to develop new skills and extend their learning independently through first hand experiences are missed. This affects progress.

All of the staff working with children have a sound knowledge and understanding of the Foundation Stage and clear curriculum plans enable them to know how activities contribute to children's progress. They plan a suitable range of activities so that children access a broad and balanced range of learning opportunities over a period of time. However, the range of resources available for children's access is limited. Staff put out the same resources every day for a week and children are unable to initiate their own activities by accessing additional equipment independently. Staff do not include the provision for outdoor play in their planning. Consequently, opportunities to promote learning in the outdoor environment are missed. Key-workers monitor children's progress towards the early learning goals and use the stepping stones to track development. However, they do not use their observations of what children enjoy to plan activities that build on what children already know. As a result, some activities lack challenge and some children 'cruise' around in search of play opportunities that interest them. This impacts upon behaviour and affects progress.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is satisfactory.

Children show a strong sense of belonging as they greet key-workers and each other upon arrival at the pre-school. They are confident and show positive self esteem. Children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is fostered. They work together co-operatively during activities; they know that 'we have to share, don't we?'. Adults carefully explain what they expect children to do in a way that they can understand, to help children to behave appropriately. Staff encourage children to respect each other's needs and to use conventions such as 'please' and 'thank-you', acting as positive role models themselves. Children's daily access to resources that reflect diversity and help them to learn about other members of society through their play is satisfactory. In addition, children talk with each other at activities about their families and circle time discussions enable them to talk about what they do at home so that they learn about each other's family cultures and traditions. They celebrate a suitable range of cultural festivals, which helps them to develop a positive attitude towards diversity.

Children move around the room freely, choosing from the activities provided by staff during the first half of the morning. However, the overall organisation of the session and large group activities such as snack do not encourage children's decision making or promote positive behaviour. Adults call children to tidy away resources even when they are involved in learning through self-chosen activities. Children are then kept waiting at the snack table for extended periods of time without purposeful activity. The same activities are put out for the whole of the week and children are unable to access additional resources easily to enable them to pursue their own interests. As a result, some children become unchallenged and bored; this affects behaviour and learning.

A suitable system is in place to support children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities so that they make good progress. Staff have attended training in how to support children who speak English as an additional language. However, staff do not have a consistent approach to helping these children to become confident communicators by building on what they already know. In addition, plans do not show how activities will be adapted to enable children who speak English as an additional language to join in effectively. This affects progress.

The partnership with parents and carers is good. Positive relationships effectively support children's care and contribute to the progress of children who receive early education. Parents are regularly consulted about areas for development in the setting and influence the day to day practice in the pre-school as active members of the parent committee. They receive regular information about pre-school activities in newsletters and on the notice-board, so that they are well informed about the pre-school activities. A successful key-worker system enables parents to share information informally on a daily basis and comment on written reports of children's progress. Parents take part in the parent helper rota, working alongside staff in the pre-school and helping children in activities. This enables children's individual needs to be met and parents are able to support their children's learning at home more effectively.

Organisation

The organisation is satisfactory.

The organisation of the pre-school promotes positive outcomes for children. All areas of the physical environment are attractive and provide enough space for children to move around independently. The induction programme for new staff ensures that everyone is aware of procedures for child protection and knows about safeguarding children. All of the legally required documents, including a procedure to record complaints or concerns, which contribute to children's health, safety and well-being, are in place. However, some documents are not well maintained. For example, parents do not always sign to acknowledge that they have been informed if their child has an accident and information for parents does not reflect current practice in the setting.

Staff engage in suitable training to enable them to provide a balanced curriculum that meets the developmental needs of the children in their group and to help them to learn about effective behaviour management techniques. However, recommendations from the previous inspection have not been carried out successfully and the organisation of activities during the session does not promote children's independence effectively nor does it develop positive attitudes towards learning. Adults do not provide adequate resources for children to choose from, the programme lacks variety on a day to day basis and children are kept waiting without purposeful activity; this hinders learning.

Leadership and management of nursery education are satisfactory. The manager and staff have regular opportunities to meet as a team and share information and exchange practice ideas. In addition, the pre-school team access support from the advisory teacher in the local authority to identify areas for further development. A questionnaire to parents helps the nursery staff to identify any areas for additional improvement and reflect upon nursery practice. However, there is no system to monitor the programme for nursery education to ensure that areas for professional development are effectively identified and addressed. This affects the quality of teaching and impacts upon learning.

Overall, children's needs are met.

Improvements since the last inspection

At the last inspection the pre-school agreed to improve staff and children's knowledge of the emergency evacuation procedure and to improve organisation of the sessions to ensure activities meet the needs of all the children. The fire drill is practised regularly and all staff and children are now aware of the procedure to evacuate the premises in an emergency. This has improved the overall safety of children. However, the organisation of session has not been improved

enough and children are kept waiting for long periods of time during the snack time activity without purposeful occupation. This affects learning and will be carried forward for further improvement following this inspection.

At the last inspection of funded education there were no areas for improvement but the pre-school were asked to give consideration to improving children's opportunities to ask questions and speculate thereby enhancing their own learning. Children now have very good opportunities to ask questions and to consider their responses to questions that key-workers pose for them.

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 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):

- set up a consistent strategy to support children who speak English as an additional language; make sure plans for activities show how they will be adapted to suit these children's individual needs
- set up a system to monitor and evaluate practice: make sure that key-workers' individual training and development needs are effectively met and that documents and records are consistently maintained and reflect current practice in the setting (this also applies to nursery education).

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):

- improve the organisation of the session and of resources and equipment to provide children with more opportunities to pursue their own interests, make decisions and extend their learning independently; make sure children are not kept waiting for extended periods of time without purposeful occupation (this also applies to care)

- improve the system for planning activities: use key-workers' observations of what children enjoy and do well to plan activities both indoors and out that offer enough interest and challenge for all children.

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