

Squirrels Pre-school

Inspection report for early years provision

Unique Reference Number	511345
Inspection date	15 October 2007
Inspector	Michelle Ann Parham

Setting Address	West Totton Community Centre, Hazel Farm Road, Totton, Hampshire, SO40 8WU
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Registered person	The Trustees of Squirrels 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?

Squirrels Preschool is managed by a voluntary committee of parents and opened in 1989. It operates from West Totton Community Centre and the community room within Hazelwood School. The pre-school has access to the school playground for outside play. The preschool is registered for children from two to five years however current work practice is to accept children from aged 33 months. The preschool serves the local community. There are 61 children on roll and of these 48 receive funding for nursery education. The setting is able to support children who have learning disabilities and/or difficulties and who speak English as an additional language. Children attend for a number of sessions and there is also a lunch time club in operation. It is the setting's aim to provide at least one session a week on the infant school site prior to the children going into school.

The setting operates from the community centre hall on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday from 09:30 to 12:00 and from 12:45 to 15:15, and on Wednesday from 12:45 to 15:15. In addition, from the community room on Wednesday from 09:15 to 11:45, and on Thursday and Friday from 09:15 to 11:45 and from 12:45 to 15:15.

There are 16 members of staff who work with the children of which 10 are qualified with a further two currently working towards relevant qualifications. The setting is a member of the Preschool Learning Alliance and has recently achieved accreditation status. The setting also receives support from the Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership.

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PROVISION

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

Children develop a positive attitude to physical exercise and benefit from regular opportunities for outside play as they are able to use the infant school and the community room playground each session. Children also enjoy physical play during poor weather as the room is cleared and they participate in large group games and activities such as using the parachute or music and movement to Sticky Kids action songs. Children are gaining confidence and develop large motor skills using the good selection of equipment during outside play. They enjoy using the balancing beams, carefully stepping over the obstacles. Some children do this tentatively with support as practitioners hold their hands whilst others display confidence and a sense of achievement as they walk across the beam independently. Practitioners provide a sufficient variety of outside play resources which ensures all children are occupied and have fun using, for example, the climbing frame and slide, rolling hoops, bouncing balls or throwing them in the basketball hoop.

Children benefit from practitioners promoting healthy eating and enjoy a very good selection of nutritious snacks such as fresh fruit, raisins and breadsticks. They are able to serve themselves using serving tongs which helps to develop effective fine motor skills and hand eye co-ordination. Children have healthy drinks of water and milk provided however do not always have the opportunity to serve themselves or continuous access to fresh water which would further contribute to their independence and good health.

Children experience an environment which is clean and well maintained as practitioners have effective systems in place to deep cleanse resources when required and to prevent the spread of infection with the use of colour coded cleaning cloths. Children become aware of the importance of good hygiene through worthwhile topics about, for example, oral hygiene and through discussion and daily routines. They benefit from practitioners providing a portable sink unit for the preschool room which ensures children have ready access to hand washing facilities.

Effective systems are in place to monitor and record accidents ensuring parents are informed and five practitioners hold relevant first aid qualifications. The first aid box is well maintained, easily accessible and accompanies the children when they go to outside play. As a result practitioners are able to deal with accidents or ill-health effectively and efficiently.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

Children benefit from a bright, attractive well maintained environment both within the hall of the community centre and the community room within Hazelwood Infant School. Safety is a high priority and all hazards have been identified and minimised with effective systems such as use of electric socket covers, safe storage of chemicals and areas such as the kitchen being inaccessible to children. Comprehensive risk assessments are undertaken to ensure all areas are suitable for use and children's safety is maintained. Equipment and resources are very well

organised and well maintained which ensures they do not present a hazard to children. Specific procedures are in place to ensure safety when walking to the infant school and simple rules are discussed with children to help them gain an understanding of staying safe. Children also learn about other dangers and road safety through visits from the local police officer as part of the curriculum.

The preschool operates within a community building however practitioners have suitable systems in place to monitor children's arrival and departure and access to the room. Good procedures are in place for the collection of children with parents using photographs or passwords for alternative adults. Consequently effective systems are in place to keep children secure within the setting.

Children's welfare is well maintained as the manager of the setting has sound knowledge and understanding of child protection. She has experience of working with relevant agencies in regard to safeguarding children and ensures there are effective systems in place to record and report concerns. Practitioners have an awareness of varied signs and symptoms that would cause concern and are clear of their role and responsibility to highlight these to line management.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

All children within the setting are effectively supported and their care needs met. Practitioners have received in house training on Birth to three matters and make use of the framework to encourage and support younger children to become strong, healthy, skilful communicators and competent learners. They are now becoming familiar with the new Early Years Foundation Stage and are using the practice guidance to consolidate their existing knowledge of Birth to three matters and the Foundation Stage to ensure a stimulating curriculum for all children. Children benefit from the close warm relationships they form with the practitioners which help them feel secure and happy at the setting, evidenced well as they enjoy a cuddle as they listen to stories at group time. Practitioners operate a key worker system which contributes to children's needs being effectively addressed. They recognise that children are individuals and have their own requirements and, for example, if a child wants to have a comforting toy from home or has made a special relationship with one particular adult then this is beneficial to them and contributes to them feeling settled and happy at the setting.

Nursery education

The quality of teaching and learning is good. Practitioners have a clear understanding of the Foundation Stage and ensure all aspects are included in the curriculum. They plan as a team and individual targets are currently set for some children to help with their next steps of learning. Records of achievement are completed from regular observations which show children are making good progress in their learning. Some evaluations of activities are completed however this is not a consistent practice which does not ensure focus outcomes for children are achieved. Activities are adaptable and differentiation is planned to provide all children of varying abilities with sufficient challenge. Practitioners understand the importance of flexibility and following children's own interests and are versatile to respond to spontaneous play and ideas. For example practitioners have changed planned themes to cover animals as a number of children have recently got puppies or responded to requests for building materials and pipes from the children so they can extend their construction ideas. Children respond well to practitioners and from the good quality interaction they receive. Practitioners spend the majority of their time with the children building close working relationships and supporting them as they learn through

play. They use effective questioning to promote independent thinking and individual participation. For example when using the building blocks practitioners ask children about colours and shapes and use descriptive positional language, contributing to children's mathematical understanding, designing skills and problem solving. Children benefit from an attractive stimulating setting as practitioners promote independence in most areas well. They provide a child led environment where resources and equipment are easily accessible on open storage trolleys for children to initiate their own choice of play and learning. This has recently been introduced and appears to be working well in practice and as a result children have strong exploratory impulses and show increasing independence in selecting and carrying out activities.

Children thrive on lots of praise and encouragement for effort and achievement which has a positive impact on their self-esteem and levels of confidence. Their self care skills are promoted well. For example, practitioners encourage children to attempt to put on their outside shoes and coats independently, assisting when required and being particularly vigilant for those children who have managed to put their own shoes on the wrong feet! Children are confident at the setting and leave their parents and carers without upset, keen to start the day. They are greeted personally on arrival and have good opportunities to recognise their own full name through the self register system. Children are happy at the setting and their behaviour is good. They are encouraged to share and take turns and, for example, will offer children equipment if they see they are upset showing care and consideration to others.

Children have a well resourced mark making area where they practise emerging skills. Here they enjoy making cards and drawings for family members and can hold writing implements well. Children are becoming increasingly aware of letters and sounds and some are beginning to write their own names, however this is not consistently encouraged by all practitioners at activities which would further contribute to children's written communication abilities. Children sit well and listen to stories and there is a bright, comfortable reading area provided with comfortable cushions for their independent enjoyment. They join in familiar stories with enthusiasm and enjoy predicting, and participation with the good selection of props such as 'The Old Woman Who Swallowed a Fly' doll. Practitioners make very good use of these props and of including children in the story which contribute to them being truly interested and fostering an enjoyment of reading for pleasure.

Children benefit from some exciting planned activities which promote their knowledge and understanding, for example, as they participate in construction work in the playground using building materials such as sand, pipes, wheelbarrows and bricks or as they make waterways with pipes and slides. Purposeful activities help children gain concepts of floating and sinking and how things work and opportunities to investigate further using magnifying glasses. Children have good opportunities to build and design their own models as they stack and build small towers and towns from the wooden blocks or construct with Sticklebricks, large Mechno or junk modelling. They have a well resourced construction trolley which they can freely access to explore their skills in design and construction. Access to information technology is good and children have fun using the laptop, developing skills with the mouse and Infogrip. They are able to follow simple instructions and use worthwhile programs which help them to match colours and identify shapes as well as have fun.

Children join in confidently with familiar songs and rhymes practitioners respond to requests for favourites such as Baa, Baa, Black Sheep and action songs such as Buzzy Bee. The setting has a lovely goodbye song that personally includes children by name which helps all children feel involved, fostering a sense of belonging and boosting self esteem. Music tapes are also used to announce changes to the routine and children respond well as they know it is now time

to tidy up. Practitioners also give children plenty of time reminders so that they can make the most of their play and activities. These methods are highly effective in helping children gain an understanding of time and of the routine of the session which can be particularly comforting for new children as they settle in. Children have fun at the setting and are encouraged to enjoy and achieve, making good progress in their learning and development.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

The partnership with parents and carers is good. Children's needs are very well met as practitioners develop close working relationships with parents and ensure information and records accurately record children's personal requirements. Parents and children are personally greeted each session which contributes to a welcoming environment. Parents are fully informed about the setting as the preschool provides a wealth of information such as a comprehensive prospectus outlining policies and working practices of the group and the curriculum. Parents also benefit from information evenings prior to children starting where they have the opportunity to meet the staff and also from personal visits to the group where they liaise with their child's key worker to share key information and ensure individual needs are identified and addressed. Parents play a vital role in the preschool and their contributions are actively sought and highly valued. A prominent notice board is in place in the entrance hallway detailing relevant information and planning and parents receive regular newsletters which ensure they are informed of what themes the children are covering and how they can be involved and help extend learning at home. Parents are regularly informed of their child's progress and learning through general discussion and consultation appointments where they can meet formally to discuss progress. Effective systems are in place to seek parents' views such as using questionnaires and practitioners are happy to discuss issues or concerns whenever required. Parents are fully aware that practitioners complete records of achievement and that they are able to view these records at any time. Parents interviewed on the inspection visit expressed their support of the group and practitioners and were very happy with their children's care, learning and development.

Children develop good self esteem and a sense of belonging as practitioners valued them as important individuals. An inclusive environment is provided at the setting where all children are welcomed and able to participate. Any specific requirements or additional needs are catered for and if required extra resources are provided such as one to one workers to support children's attendance. Planning evidences differentiation which ensures practitioners provide appropriate challenge and stimulation for all children's learning and development. Children are valued as individuals because practitioners have a good understanding of equal opportunities. Positive images and resources that promote diversity are in place throughout the setting as the group have books, posters, dressing up clothes, small world play, puzzles and dolls that portray positive images of all members of society. As a result children become aware of a wider society and develop self-esteem and respect for others.

Children behave very well in the setting. Practitioners use lots of praise and encouragement for children's effort and achievement which has an impact on their good behaviour and willingness to be a positive member of the group. Any occasions of unwanted behaviour are successfully handled with a minimum of fuss and upset using successful methods such as gentle discussion, explanation and helping children learn the effect their behaviour has on others. Children enjoy the opportunity for having responsibility or a task. For example, as they work well together packing up the equipment at the end of the session and carrying it to the storage cupboard, feeling important as a helper. Children learn acceptable behaviour because practitioners are good role models as they encourage good manners, sharing and taking turns.

Parents are informed of how children's behaviour is managed and specific behaviour plans are used for some children to enable them to form effective strategies to deal with conflict and frustration. Children's social, moral, spiritual and cultural development is fostered.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

Leadership and management are good. The management team have a good understanding of the National Standards and ensure they are effectively met to promote positive outcomes for children. A high number of practitioners are qualified in early years, as a result children are working with staff who have a good understanding of how children learn and develop effectively through natural free play and purposeful activities. Practitioners are well supported, having clear roles and additional responsibilities which helps them feel valued and opportunity for personal development. Further attendance at training and information workshops is highly encouraged to ensure they are aware of new initiatives and to consolidate their work practice. Yearly appraisal also contributes to development of work practice, monitoring of performance and identifying training needs. Practitioners work effectively as a team and meet regularly to discuss working practice, for in service training and to plan the curriculum. The setting is proactive in evolving their work practice to embrace the Early Years Foundation Stage using the new guidance to plan learning and development effectively.

Robust recruitment and vetting procedures ensure the safety of children within the facility and sound procedures are in place for the induction of new staff to ensure that they are aware of the setting's working practices and policies. However no systems are currently active to monitor current practitioners' continued good health and suitability.

The setting maintains all documentation to a good standard and has policies and work practices in place to promote children's health, safety, enjoyment and achievement. They operate ratios above the required National Standard which contributes to children being well supported and supervised. The deployment of practitioners has a positive impact on the relationships they build with the children and the organisation of the group. The setting meets the needs of the range of children for whom it provides.

Improvements since the last inspection

At the last care inspection the preschool was required to ensure that procedures are in place to monitor new and current staff's health and to request written permission from parents for seeking emergency medical advice or treatment.

Forms are now used to ensure written permission is obtained from parents for emergency medical treatment and for health checks for new staff. However no systems are yet active for monitoring current practitioners' health and therefore suitability. The improvements made so far however do have a positive impact on children's good health and welfare.

At the last education inspection the preschool was required to continue to develop planning and assessment to ensure equal emphasis is given to each aspect in all areas of learning, and that activities are presented at the right level for all children; to increase opportunities for children to count, recognise numerals and solve simple problems during everyday activities; and provide opportunities for children to develop independence in selecting resources and express themselves creatively.

The setting has developed planning to ensure all aspects are clear and covered and have included differentiation so that all children whether less or more able receive sufficient challenge. To increase knowledge and understanding of mathematical concepts the setting has included rulers and number lines on the mark making trolley and displays number runs in the setting. Practitioners now extend learning through effective questioning and by using mathematical concepts and language in free play and daily routines. For example, when lining up for outside play practitioners discuss shorter and longer or when building with bricks they talk about shapes and 'how tall'. Practitioners have now changed their work practice to promote children's independence within the setting as they have provided wonderful open storage trolleys around the room which enable children to initiate their own choice of play and resources. Therefore developing responsibility and independence and having ample opportunities to express their imagination and creativity. These improvements have a positive impact on children's enjoying and achieving and contribute to them making good progress in learning.

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.

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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):

- increase opportunities for children to self serve and further promote being healthy by allowing children free access to fresh drinking water which they can decanter independently
- implement a system to monitor practitioners' health on a regular basis.

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 promote children's independent writing skills by, for example, ensuring all staff give children encouragement and opportunities to write their own names on their work
- ensure consistent evaluations are undertaken on activities to review for success and improvement and whether outcomes for children are met.

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