

St Thomas's Playgroup

Inspection report for early years provision

Unique Reference Number	131742
Inspection date	17 September 2007
Inspector	Liz Corr
Setting Address	St Thomas's Church, Monsell Road, Islington, London, N4 2QY
Telephone number	020 7354-9347
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Registered person	The Committee of St Thomas's Playgroup
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 satisfactory. The registered person meets the National Standards for under 8s day care and childminding.

The quality and standards of the nursery education are satisfactory.

WHAT SORT OF SETTING IS IT?

St Thomas's Playgroup opened in 1994. It is situated in the St Thomas's church community hall in the N4 area of the London borough of Islington. The playgroup is managed by a voluntary management committee made up of parents. Children have access to a large play room and toilets. There is a courtyard at the back of the premises and a front garden for outdoor play. The playgroup serves the local community and provides daily sessions from Monday to Friday during term time from 09:30 to 13:00.

There are currently 18 children aged from two to five years on roll, 10 of whom receive funding for nursery education. The setting supports children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and children who speak English as an additional language.

The playgroup employs four full time and one part time member of staff. All full time staff hold appropriate early years qualifications. The setting receives support from Islington Early Years Service.

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PROVISION

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is satisfactory.

Children benefit from positive measures in place to ensure their physical, nutritional and health needs are promoted. They are learning the importance of hand washing before snack time as they practise this at each session. Children can easily reach the sink with the use of a step and easily reach the water and soap provided. However, they are not protected from the risk of cross infection as they are sharing towels and use the same water when they wash their hands after creative activities. One member of staff is responsible for ensuring that the sinks, toilets and kitchen are hygienic for the children's use.

Children's health is generally well promoted. A sickness procedure is discussed with parents but is not available in writing. Details of children's individual health needs are recorded including any food allergies. A good ratio of staff hold first aid certificates which means that children will be well cared for if they have an accident. However, permission has not been given by parents for emergency medical advice or treatment which compromises their health.

Children enjoy regular opportunities for energetic play, fresh air and exercise. An outdoor area is available at the front of the building and children are developing physical skills as they run, jump, play ball games and ride bikes and scooters.

Children enjoy healthy snacks at each session. Fruit, salad and vegetables are provided along with toast and crackers. Drinks are available at both snack sessions. Children are learning about healthy eating as four children are taken to the local green grocers each week to choose fruit and vegetables for their snacks. Three members of staff hold food hygiene certificates.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is satisfactory.

Children play in a generally safe and spacious setting. Their artwork and photographs are attractively displayed making the environment more welcoming. There is ample furniture for children to eat and play comfortably at appropriately sized tables and chairs. The play equipment is organised so children can easily make choices.

Children are well supervised indoors and out. Staff carry out daily risk assessments to identify potential hazards within the setting. A detailed emergency evacuation procedure is displayed in the setting and practised regularly with children. Consequently they are learning how to keep themselves safe in an emergency. Appropriate organisation ensures that children are safely collected by appropriate adults. However, the daily register does not record the times of their arrival and departure unless children arrive late or leave early. Children understand that before they can play outside a member of staff must check the garden. They know that when she gives them the thumbs up sign, it is safe to go outside.

Staff have an appropriate understanding of their role in safeguarding children with a written procedure in place. However, the procedure does not contain information for reporting allegations against staff. Therefore children are not fully protected.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is satisfactory.

Children settle quickly into the setting as they choose from an appropriate range of activities that are organised in advance. On arrival they become involved in playing with play dough, construction toys, painting, the home corner and looking at books. This helps to promote their independence as they make choices about their play. The environment is well organised to make the most of the available space. Photographs demonstrate that children have enjoyed a variety of activities, including outings to the local shops and parks, planting in the garden, cooking, and road safety awareness.

Children benefit from a Key Worker system which is used to give new children special attention when they are settling-in and for informing parents about their child's progress. However, this system does not work so well if the core staff are off sick or on leave. Consequently new children are not able to spend time with their special member of staff.

Children enjoy opportunities to socialise as a large group at circle and snack time. They talk with staff about their morning and the activities they have taken part in. However, opportunities to promote their independence skills are limited. Although they are sometimes able to spread toppings onto their crackers or bread they are not able to serve their own drinks. During circle time they wait for one child to give out their toast. As a result some children become restless.

Nursery Education

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. Staff have attended training in the Foundation Stage. They work well together and are aware of their responsibilities for organising the day. Activities are planned in advance and provide children with a satisfactory curriculum. There are systems in place to observe and assess children but not all records are fully detailed as to how staff will plan for the next stage of their learning. The environment is organised so children can learn to be independent as they make choices from the equipment. However, there are periods in the day when opportunities for children to practise their independence skills are not fully promoted. For instance, during a hand painting activity staff paint their hands for them and children do not have the opportunity to try this for themselves. Children make satisfactory progress from the quality of teaching carried out by staff. They use circle and snack time to promote children's interest in the themes they are involved in. However, when staff initiate a discussion about pets and invite children to talk about pets they have at home children begin to lose concentration and become restless as there are no props or stories to promote their interest.

Children are making satisfactory progress in their personal, social and emotional development. They settle quickly and persist at their chosen activities. Some children have made firm friendships and enjoy chatting to each other during activities or playing together outdoors. They clearly enjoy singing their 'welcome song' at circle time which makes them feel part of a group, one child asks if they will sing the 'welcome song' to him as he was late.

Children are developing their communication, language and literacy skills as they recognise their names at circle time which are written on a card on their seats. They respond well to familiar songs during the session and request their favourite songs during circle time. They enjoy opportunities for group stories and listen well together. During an interactive Goldilocks and the Three Bears story children are keen to play one of the characters. However, some

children observing the story become restless as they are not fully involved in telling the story with the adult while the others act out the parts.

Children have some opportunities to explore numbers as staff promote their interest when singing counting songs and rhymes. They enjoy counting backwards from five while singing the speckled frog song. They are beginning to use mathematical language during the Three Bears story as they are told about the large, medium and small chairs and bowls.

Children are making satisfactory progress as they explore and investigate their environment. They independently use the well resourced construction area. A small group of children are very pleased with the robots they have made and enjoy showing them to staff and visitors. Children have access to some programmable toys such as a tape recorder and a cash register.

Children have sufficient opportunities to develop creative skills. They are developing knowledge of texture, colour and shape as they play independently with play dough. They enjoy manipulating the dough as they roll and make shapes using the appropriate range of tools available. They have fun as they play an imaginary game in the garden, one child runs inside and shouts excitedly 'there's a wolf outside'.

Children have appropriate opportunities to develop their fine motor skills as they draw around templates of shapes with pens and pencils. During play dough activities they manipulate the dough using their fingers and tools to carefully break off small pieces as they make pies.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is satisfactory.

Children are generally happy and settled at the setting as staff are aware of their individual needs and backgrounds. They have access to an appropriate range of equipment to promote positive images of diversity. They easily access multi-cultural dressing up outfits and dolls in the home corner and some posters are displayed in dual languages. Parents sometimes organise cultural cooking activities at the setting. This promotes awareness of diversity and helps to develop the self-esteem of their own children.

There are good systems in place to identify and support children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Staff work well with outside professionals and parents in order to support children's needs.

Children are generally well behaved and enjoy their time here. Staff use some effective techniques to promote their good behaviour. For instance, they are praised for saying please and thank you at circle time. Staff mostly speak softly to the children, they are reminded of the rules for using the trampoline indoors when too many of them try to use it. These techniques help to foster their social, moral, spiritual and cultural development. There are times, however, when children become restless and lose their concentration. For instance, when they are not fully involved during activities and spend time waiting.

Children benefit from an effective partnership between parents and staff. Appropriate systems are in place to share information at the beginning of the placement for children's records. Staff are available to discuss any concerns with parents each morning and provide verbal feedback at the end of the session. Children's artwork is shared with parents as it is sent home at the end of each week. All parents are members of the management committee and attend monthly meetings where the playgroup leader and the chair of the management committee provide

reports. A complaints procedure is in place but does not contain details of the regulator. Parents views are valued and they are encouraged to complete evaluation forms each year. Several parents comment that they are happy with the lovely atmosphere and friendly staff team.

The partnership between parents and carers of older children is satisfactory. Staff record information about what each child can do at the start of the Foundation Stage which helps staff plan activities and experiences that are suitable for their age and stage of development. Staff meet with parents twice a year to discuss children's progress and a report is prepared at the end of their time at the playgroup detailing their progress. At the monthly committee meetings the playgroup leader discusses future plans for activities for the Foundation Stage. However, the weekly plans displayed in the setting are quite general and do not give details about how each activity will help children reach their early learning goals.

Organisation

The organisation is satisfactory.

Children benefit from a generally well structured environment. A range of policies and procedures are in place and discussed with parents. However, these do not contain information for the sickness procedure, guidance for dealing with an allegation against a member of staff and the regulators details for the complaints procedure.

There are good systems in place to ensure that staff are appropriately vetted and are suitable to work with children. This has a positive impact on children's development and helps to keep children safe. The staff team have regular meetings and an appraisal system has just been developed.

The setting is organised to maximise play opportunities for children. Different areas of learning ensure that children can move around and make choices. Children are familiar with the routine and enjoy opportunities for going outdoors and coming together as a large group for circle and snack time. However, they sometimes become restless if they have to wait for their snack or are not fully involved in a group story.

Children access a generally safe environment which is risk assessed each morning. They are learning how to keep themselves safe by regularly practising the emergency evacuation procedure. There are suitable procedures in place to ensure that adult to child ratios are maintained in the event of staff absence. However, systems to ensure that staff deputising for the manager are aware of all the policies and procedures are not fully in place. This compromises the smooth running of the setting.

The leadership and management is satisfactory. The manger has an appropriate understanding of the Foundation Stage and provides appropriate support and training opportunities for staff to enhance their knowledge in this area. The manager organises opportunities for staff to observe and assess children. However, not all records contain specific plans for advancing the children to the next stage of their learning. Although activities plans are displayed for parents they do not provide details of how they will help children reach the early learning goals. Therefore partnership with parents is not fully developed.

The setting is meeting the needs of the range of children for whom it provides.

Improvements since the last inspection

At the last inspection a recommendation was made to ensure that parents gave written permission for emergency medical advice or treatment. However, this recommendation remains outstanding which compromises children's health.

Complaints since the last inspection

Since registration there have been no complaints made to Ofsted that required the provider or Ofsted to take any action in order to meet the National Standards. The provider is required to keep a record of complaints made by parents, which they can see on request. The complaints record may contain complaints other than those made to Ofsted.

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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 children's health by providing children with individual towels
- improve safety by ensuring the child protection procedure contains details of what to do if an allegation is made against a member of staff
- improve opportunities for children to learn independence skills at circle and snack time
- update the complaints procedure in line with current guidelines and ensure it contains details of the regulator
- improve the organisation of the setting by ensuring that staff deputising for the manager are fully aware of all aspects of the setting's policies and procedures

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 planning, evaluation and recording of children's development to ensure their next stage of learning is identified and how they will be supported in this

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