

St Thomas Playgroup

Inspection report for early years provision

Unique Reference Number	254499
Inspection date	18 September 2007
Inspector	Elaine Poulton
Setting Address	St Thomas Church, St. Thomas Close, Aldridge, Walsall, West Midlands, WS9 8SL
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Registered person	St Thomas Playgroup Management Committee
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 satisfactory.

WHAT SORT OF SETTING IS IT?

St Thomas Pre-school Playgroup has been registered since 1996 and is run by a committee. It operates from a self contained porta-cabin unit in the grounds of St Thomas Church, Aldridge, West Midlands. A maximum of 20 children between two and five years may attend the playgroup at any one time. The group has access to a secure outdoor play area.

There are currently 28 children on roll who are all under three years of age. The setting is registered to provide nursery funded education, however there are no children in receipt of funding currently on roll. Children attend a variety of sessions each week. The group can support children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in partnership with parents. The playgroup opens each week day from 09:30 to 11:45 school term time only.

Four part-time staff work directly with the children. All of the staff hold an appropriate early years qualification. Parents are also encouraged to be actively involved in the sessions. The setting has membership with Pre-school Learning Alliance and receives support and advice from the local authority early years unit.

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PROVISION

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

Children are developing a good understanding of appropriate hygiene routines. They are encouraged to wash their hands after using the toilet. They help themselves to tissues in order to wipe their noses, and wash their hands independently after messy play using a bowl of warm soapy water and paper towels. As a result children's awareness of good hygiene practices is consistently promoted.

Children benefit from staff who have good knowledge in first aid procedures. Should a child become poorly or sick whilst at the playgroup they are well cared for until the parents' earliest arrival. Parents are requested to keep their child at home if they are unwell. This ensures that contact with other children is kept to a minimum to prevent the spread of infection. Written consent is obtained from parents for staff to seek emergency medical advice or treatment where necessary. This ensures children's good health is well supported in the setting.

Children enjoy a variety of healthy snacks and drinks during the session. The older children are able to pour out their own drinks and this helps to develop their independence. Snack time is a social occasion where children sit down and chat amongst themselves. Snacks provided for children meet their individual dietary needs and include toast, bread sticks, fruit mix and raisins. Parents share children's information so that individual needs, allergies, likes and dislikes are known.

Children benefit from regular physical activities both inside and outside. Staff make every possible use of the outdoor area and weather permitting often replicate indoor activities outside. On warm, sunny days children play 'on the beach' making sand castles. On windy days children put their coats on and enjoy running to and fro in the fresh air. They play on the climbing frame and with the wheeled toys, they throw and kick balls and chase after them. This helps children develop a healthy attitude to exercise and keeping healthy.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is satisfactory.

Children are kept safe by a staff team who ensure that visitors to the playgroup are closely monitored, all being required to produce identification which is checked carefully and to sign a visitors book before gaining entry. Children play in a safe environment which is well organised and resourced providing as much choice as possible. Staff endeavour to make the mobile unit inviting and welcoming. The outdoor play area is kept safe and tidy for children to access. For example, overhanging tree branches are lopped and the grass is mown regularly.

All equipment provided for children is checked for safety on a regular basis. Health and safety assessments are undertaken to identify hazards and minimise risks. For example, electrical goods testing is carried out on a regular basis and toys, large pieces of equipment and outdoor resources are steam-cleaned as and when necessary. The two play rooms are checked at the beginning of each session to ensure that hazards for children are minimised. For example, individual door alarm batteries are checked and replaced when needed. Staff also carry out checks on the outdoor play area perimeter fence and ensure gates are bolted. This ensures children's safety is maintained.

Children have a growing understanding of their own personal safety. For example, they learn about crossing the road through themed topics such as 'People who help us'. Fire drills are practised with children to ensure that they are familiar with leaving the setting quickly and safely in an emergency.

Children are protected from harm as most staff demonstrate a sound understanding of the child protection policy and procedure to follow should they have concerns about a child being abused. Not all staff are familiar with the procedure should there be an allegation of abuse made against the provider. The written documentation lacks clarity regarding the implications for children, parents and other staff. However, ongoing child protection training is accessible and staff are encouraged to attend to update their knowledge.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

Children enter the pre-school playgroup and select activities and resources that they enjoy. New starters generally settle well and those who are less confident or unsure are well supported and reassured by staff. Some younger children are helped to feel more at ease in this new environment by their parents remaining with them during the first few sessions.

The two play rooms are well organised to ensure different activities can be easily accessed by children. The staff set out the rooms to represent different play and learning areas such as a home corner for imaginative and role play, construction area for joining building blocks together, a colouring and drawing area to promote writing skills and a book corner to develop communication and listening skills. This ensures that children are provided with a good range of activities to promote all aspects of their development.

Planned activities take account of the age and stage of each child to ensure that they are involved in their play and learning. Staff use the 'Birth to three matters' framework to enhance play opportunities for the younger age group. Staff interact well with the children and engage them in conversation. Children are excited to play outdoors with their peers, they have fun running, jumping and climbing on the outside resources. They also enjoy exploring outdoors and take particular interest in investigating what lies beneath the damp sand.

Children are encouraged to play alongside others to develop their imagination and creativity. For example, a small group of younger children enjoy listening to a member of staff tell a story. Another group of children enjoy painting their own pictures to take home.

Nursery funded education.

The quality of teaching and learning for children in receipt of nursery funding is satisfactory. Staff demonstrate a sound understanding of the early years curriculum. They are able to clearly explain how they provide a wide range of play experiences to support children's progress. However, plans do not link effectively to the stepping stones. Most evidence provided through discussion, documentation and photographs shows how staff would use the pre-school resources to support children's learning and to help them make progress toward the early learning goals. During focused activities staff state that they observe children in their play and ask appropriate questions to assess children's knowledge and understanding.

Staff explain that they ensure children are purposefully engaged in activities and discussions. There are currently no children in receipt of nursery funding attending the setting, so

consequently no observations or assessment records are available to use as evidence of children's progress. Staff stated that they observe children in their play to assess their progress and record findings in children's development profiles. Staff explained that there are new children's profiles being introduced and it is intended that these records will be shared with parents.

Staff state that children are encouraged to be independent. For example, through selecting activities, resources and creative materials of their own choice or by helping themselves to their own drinks. Through stories, role play and planned games and activities children learn to share and take turns. Staff provide regular opportunities for children to become independent learners. This suggests that children's personal, social and emotional development is appropriately fostered.

During discussion, staff talk about encouraging children's language development through reading stories and by the introduction of initiatives such as 'chatter box'. Staff plan to offer opportunities for group discussions to talk about the past, present and future, the weather and days of the week to help children to use talk to organise, sequence and clarify ideas, feelings and events.

Some evidence displayed around the rooms, such as reference to a birthday chart, show opportunities for developing number work, ideas and mathematical concepts. Staff explained that children have opportunity to weigh and measure out ingredients to make cakes. Through discussion staff acknowledge that currently there are fewer opportunities to explore numbers. As such, planning for mathematical development is an area identified for future improvement.

Photographic evidence shows that children partake in regular physical exercise and staff explain how much fun the children have. A good range of resources such as 'sensory floor tiles' encourage children to walk on, feel with their feet and talk about differences in soft, rough, hard and smooth surfaces. Staff explained that they help children to extend their ideas and imagination by encouraging spontaneity. For example, one child was interested in pirates, so the outdoor sand-pit became a pirate ship and children climbed aboard and sailed away.

Staff acknowledge that the current planning arrangement does not lend itself to fully exploit all of the setting's resources. For example, developing sensory skills in the outdoor environment.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is satisfactory.

Children are beginning to learn about festivals, celebrations and cultures that may differ from their own. They are provided with resources and activities that promote positive images of gender, ethnicity, culture and disability. They celebrate Chinese New Year and learn about St. George's Day and other festivals and events are incorporated to develop children's awareness of diversity. All children regardless of gender have access to the available resources. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is fostered.

There are currently no children on roll with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. However, the setting's special educational needs co-ordinator demonstrates a satisfactory understanding of referral procedures and working closely with other professionals to support children with additional needs. Staff understand the importance of first seeking parent's consent before involving and working with other agencies. They endeavour to meet the needs of all children in consultation with their parents, ensuring that space, resources and activities are planned effectively so that all children are included.

Children are beginning to learn how to play co-operatively with others by sharing and taking turns with the resources. Any unacceptable behaviour is dealt with fairly and sensitively through discussions, explanations, stories and role play. Staff involve parents and their views are taken into account to manage children's inappropriate behaviour.

Children benefit from a staff team who have developed good working relationships with parents. For example, parents are invited to offer their support as parent/helpers during sessions. Parents are able to speak to their child's key person on a daily basis. They receive regular updates informing them of daily routines and weekly activities. Staff share information with parents and listen to parents' accounts of their child's development and any concerns, wishes, or individual needs. This is used as a starting point to plan for younger children's play and development. This ensures children's individual needs are met.

The complaints policy is prominently displayed on the notice board but omits to inform parents of the updated procedure.

The partnership with parents whose children receive nursery funded education are satisfactory. Staff describe how, as the curriculum is relatively new to them, they are building on their understanding of the Foundation Stage and the six areas of learning. Reference is made to the Foundation Stage in the playgroup information booklet. Planning for the educational curriculum is not currently displayed for parents to view. Assessment profiles have not yet been implemented. During the period whilst there are no funded children attending the staff team are reviewing systems for observing and assessing individual children's progress and are in the process of introducing new profiles to share with parents. The pre-school playgroup receives support from the local authority to support staff in curriculum planning and delivery of the foundation stage. For example, the setting has been provided with an number of resource folders that cover a different topic for each month of the year. For example, Pets, Autumn, Myself, Water and Harvest to name but a few.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

New starters are beginning to settle into their new environment and are cared for by staff who have been suitably vetted. The person in charge ensures that new members of staff have the clearances to work directly with children and are appropriately inducted to ensure that the quality of care provided is consistent.

Space and resources are well utilized and children's safety, care and well-being is promoted well by effective organisation. There is a good adult to child ratio which is well maintained. Children are cared for by staff who are qualified, experienced and demonstrate a sound knowledge and understanding of how children learn. Appropriate child care training is encouraged. Risk assessments on the setting are in place and most of the staff team hold a current first aid certificate. This in turn benefits children's care, play and learning.

There are a good range of policies and procedures in place and most contain relevant information to ensure children's welfare is promoted.

Leadership and management is satisfactory. The committee is experienced and supportive of the staff team. The person in charge is reviewing the current system for planning and assessment. This in turn will highlight strengths and areas for improvement. Regular training is provided for staff to cover all areas of the curriculum therefore ensuring they have an up to date

knowledge of the Foundation Stage and a sound understanding of the learning intentions for activities.

Overall, evidence suggests that the provision meets the needs of the range of the children for whom it provides.

Improvements since the last inspection

There were six recommendations from the last inspection. To conduct a risk assessment on the premises identifying action to be taken to minimize identified risk to door used for access to toilets; to develop and implement an action plan detailing how at least half of all childcare staff will hold a level two qualification in childcare; to develop staff's awareness and understanding of effective ways to manage children's behaviour, taking into account their age and stage of development; to devise and implement a policy about the exclusion of children who are ill or infectious and make sure parents are made aware of it; to ensure good hygiene practices are in place regarding hand washing and to ensure that copies of first aid certificates are sent to Regional Centre.

The group has made suitable progress in addressing all of the recommendations. The pre-school group have moved from St Thomas Church Hall to the self contained porta-cabin unit within the grounds of St Thomas Church. A risk assessment for the new venue is place and action has been taken to minimise identified hazards. For example, all doors are alarmed; side and rear gates are bolted; only staff are allowed to open the main door; and all volunteers, visitors and parent helpers sign the visitors book on entry and exit.

All four staff hold an appropriate early years qualification.

There is a behaviour management policy in place that is shared with parents. Staff have an awareness of managing a range of children's behaviour, which takes into account their age and level of understanding.

There is suitable sick children's policy in place and procedures to exclude children who are sick. This is a measure taken to prevent infection spreading to others using the provision.

Owing to the unit being self contained there are a sufficient number of toilets and hand wash basins for children to use. There is also a bowl full of warm soapy water in the craft area and individual paper towels for children to use after taking part in messy play. For example, painting or sticking and gluing.

First aid certificate are displayed in the entrance foyer for all parents to view.

These measures have improved the quality of care, safety and welfare of children in the setting.

Complaints since the last inspection

Since the last inspection there has been one complaint received by Ofsted and this related to National Standard 2 - Organisation, National Standard 6 - Safety and National Standard 14 - Documentation.

A Childcare Inspector visited the setting to investigate the allegations made. During the visit, the Inspector reviewed policies and procedures, interviewed staff and made observations. As a result of the enquiries made and evidence gathered, the Inspector noted that the incident

had occurred and therefore set a number of actions for the Registered Person to address within set timescales.

The Registered Person provided a written response within the timescales set which has been reviewed by the Childcare Inspector Team Manager. The Team Manager is satisfied that the National Standards are now met and that the Registered Person remains qualified for registration.

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):

- make sure that procedures in the child protection policy give accurate guidance in the event of a child protection concern or an allegation being made against a member of staff
- update and implement the complaints procedure in line with the Addendum to the National Standards (October 2005)

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 planning to ensure that it clearly links to the stepping stones and that it is differentiated for the varied abilities of individual children so that they are sufficiently challenged in all six areas of learning
- ensure that progress records are completed rigorously, that the information gathered is used to plan for the next steps in children's individual learning and ensure these records are shared with parents

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