

Little Elms Montessori Nursery

Inspection report for early years provision

Unique Reference Number	EY270613
Inspection date	15 October 2007
Inspector	Siobhan O'Callaghan
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Registered person	Little Elms Montessori Nursery
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

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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?

Little Elms Montessori Nursery opened in 2004. It operates from Elm Court Youth and Community Centre, which is in Potters Bar, Hertfordshire. This is a large building accessed by many people living within the local neighbourhood. The nursery have sole use of four rooms whilst they are in operation, one of these being an office. The kitchen and toilets are shared, therefore children are always supervised to these areas. The nursery have access to a very large outside play area which has extensive grounds.

A maximum of 40 children may attend the nursery at any one time. The nursery is open each weekday from 09:15 to 15:00 four days a week, on a Friday the setting closes at 13:00. The nursery is open term-time only which is approximately 37 weeks of the year.

There are currently 38 children aged from two years to under five years on roll. Of these, 20 children receive funding for early education. Children come from the local and surrounding areas. The nursery currently supports a number of children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and also supports a number of children who speak English as an additional language.

The nursery employs 12 staff, of these there are four specialist teachers who come in once a week to teach Yoga, Science, French and Music. There are four members of staff which includes the proprietors who hold appropriate early years qualifications. There are also three staff members who are currently working towards an early years Montessori qualification. The nursery receive support from a qualified teacher, the Pre-School Learning Alliance and the local authority. The setting achieved an accreditation in January 2006 receiving a Hertfordshire Quality Standards award for providing good quality child care and early years education.

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PROVISION

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

Children are establishing a positive attitude to healthy living and eating well. They are encouraged to bring in nutritious foods for snack time which are then shared amongst their peers. Children enjoy eating a variety of chopped fruits and vegetables, along with humus and bread sticks. Parents whose children stay for lunch receive valuable advice about the importance of providing balanced and healthy packed-lunches. This is clearly working in practice as children enthusiastically eat wholemeal bread rolls, chopped salad, vegetables, yoghurt and fruit. Children stay hydrated throughout the day as they help themselves to fresh drinking water as needed. Their individual dietary requirements are effectively managed as staff work in partnership with parents to protect and monitor children with allergies and food intolerances.

Children stay healthy as staff follow appropriate environmental health and hygiene guidelines. The environment and resources are impeccably clean and in good repair. Staff keep their training within food hygiene up-to-date which positively supports them in ensuring food offered to children is safe. There are effective policies in place to support children's welfare, appropriate procedures are in place if they have an accident or become ill whilst they are at the setting. There are always first aid trained staff on site to treat children when necessary. Staff demonstrate to children the importance of maintaining a clean environment as they wipe down tables after messy play activities and before and after serving food. Children are learning about the importance of personal hygiene as they are encouraged to wash their hands before eating and after using the bathroom. However, this is not consistently followed through during the sessions as children share a bowl of water to wash their hands after messy activities. Therefore children are not fully protected from cross-infection.

Children enjoy physical activity as they take daily walks around the grounds of the setting. They are excited to put on their wellington boots and coats in preparation for their walk. They discuss the need to have these important items as it is very muddy on the grass. Children have opportunities to develop their muscles and coordination as they ride a variety of wheeled resources, play parachute games and take part in activities that develop their catching, throwing and balancing skills. They participate in weekly yoga sessions and movement to music which are both taught by qualified teachers. Children have excellent opportunities to develop their finer manipulative skills as they access a broad range of Montessori practical life activities such as: spooning, threading, polishing, dressing frames, buttons, zips, poppers and pouring.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

Children are cared for in a welcoming, secure and safe environment. Staff maintain regular risk assessments of the premises and resources to ensure that they are safe and suitable for their

purpose. Children access an excellent range of good quality Montessori and more traditional equipment and resources to promote all aspects of their learning. These are clean and in good repair. Children's rooms are attractively displayed with examples of their work which adds to the welcoming atmosphere of the group.

Children learn to keep themselves safe as they climb up and down the stairs carefully when they are moving around the nursery. In the large garden they are aware of their boundaries as they remind each other of the need to stay close and not to wander off. Children expertly lift their chairs safely ensuring that legs are pointed down when they are creating a circle with their chairs for discussion time. They independently clear up any spilled water after they have been accessing pouring activities. Children's knowledge and understanding of staying safe is further supported as they experience visits from the fire, police and ambulance departments.

Children's welfare is safeguarded as the staff team have a sound knowledge and understanding of child protection procedures, a trained designated member of staff is in place to manage any concerns. The proprietors of the nursery ensure that all staff are party to stringent vetting procedures to assess their suitability to work with children. All required documentation and practices to support and maintain children's safety are in place. Children are involved in regular emergency evacuation drills which are monitored to ensure that they are effective. Accident records are assessed to identify any patterns of injuries to see if these can be reduced in any way. Therefore, children's safety is a high priority.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

Children are settled and happy in their environment. They are familiar and secure with the routine as they take off their coats and put on their inside shoes. Children immediately sit down for their morning circle time where they are keen to share items they have brought in from home. Each child is given the opportunity to speak to the group and those who are less confident are encouraged but not forced to take part in this very social occasion. Children's self-esteem is boosted as staff value their contributions and recognise their advances in their personal development when they can give an example of an item beginning with G which is the letter of the week. It is evident that children have established secure relationships with staff as they confidently participate in both group and one-to-one activities. Children play cooperatively with each other as they share popular playdough resources and take turns to speak during circle sessions. They demonstrate excellent concentration skills as they place cocktail sticks into small modelled pieces of clay as they create hedgehogs to tie in with their topic on hibernation. Children's easy access to their environment and resources fully promotes their independence skills. However, the preparation and management of snack time for younger children does not involve them in this process, therefore opportunities to develop these skills are lost. The nursery environment is very busy and yet calm as children engage purposefully in self-chosen activities. Younger children's needs are given due emphasis as planning takes account of the 'Birth to three matters' framework. Children have their individual needs met as staff work in partnership with parents to promote a happy, safe and stimulating experience for all children. Information is gathered prior to the children attending about their likes, dislikes and any fears they may have to support staff in helping to achieve a smooth settling-in process.

Nursery Education

The quality of teaching and learning is good. Staff demonstrate a good knowledge and understanding of the Foundation Stage and plan a broad and interesting curriculum which

supports children's progress towards the early learning goals. Planning generally gives due regard to all areas of learning although aspects of knowledge and understanding of the world require more focus. Children's individual starting points are assessed and this information is effectively used in planning for future learning. Children participate in a good balance of adult-led and child-initiated play with good opportunities for them to work as a group where they learn to value each others views and experiences. Children's learning is further enhanced as they have outside professionals coming in to teach yoga, music, science and French once a week.

Children participate in a range of stimulating and challenging experiences that engages their enthusiasm. Children are motivated as teachers follow their interests as they find a ladybird in the classroom. They are helped to catch the insect safely in a magnified container and discuss how they can take this outside to set it free. There is great excitement as children observe the insect and count how many legs and spots it has. Children take it in turns to hold the container and then finally set it free in a suitable area of the garden. Staff use these impromptu experiences well to extend children's knowledge and understanding in all areas of the curriculum.

Staff make good use of their time as they sit and engage with children throughout the sessions, whilst also having sensitivity to allow them the space to play and develop on their own. Staff organise a colourful and stimulating environment. There are a broad range of attractive resources for children which they are able to explore and use independently. Staff effectively use the large grounds to promote children's understanding of the natural world.

Staff have high expectations for children's behaviour which is promoted through all aspects of the provision including the need to listen and respect others. The impact is that children's overall behaviour is very good which supports their ability to learn. Children show positive attitudes to learning they take an active part in the setting as they eagerly participate in new activities and experiences. They are excited to observe, touch and smell a variety of fruits including a guava, passion fruit, mango and pineapple as they listen to the story 'Handas Surprise'. The story tells of a young girl living in Africa who wants to bring her best friend a selection of fruits and is guessing which will be her favourite. There is a funny ending to the story which all the children appreciate. They show interest in the story and learn that these type of fruits only grow in hot countries as they need lots of sun.

Children are learning good self-care skills as they put their rubbish in the bin after snack-time and their cups in a bowl of soapy water ready to be washed. They independently put on their coats and wellington boots in preparation for going outside. Children's communication and language skills are excellent. They confidently speak out in large group situations and can describe in detail their items brought in from home. Children listen to stories with interest and participate in rhyming stories such as 'Little Bunny Foo-Foo' with lots of actions and expression. Children have good phonic knowledge as they learn about letter sounds and how these are linked to letters and words. Planning focuses on introducing a new letter sound each week to develop children's confidence in this area. Children are developing an awareness of print in their environment they are able to self-register in the morning finding their own name. They handle books carefully and understand that print moves from left to right as this is reinforced by the teacher as she is reading the story. There is good emphasis on early writing skills as children practice making marks in a variety of ways including the use of Montessori resources such as sandpaper letters and alphabet cut-outs.

Children are developing good concepts of numbers as they confidently count that there are nine children present and two staff which in total is 11 people all together. Children enjoy

singing number songs and using visual aids to sing the traditional rhyme 'Five current buns'. This is extended by staff who use effective questioning skills to challenge children to find out 'How many more?' and 'What would happen if you took so many away?'. Children explore shape space and measure in practical and meaningful ways as they complete puzzles, pour water with jugs and compare the length of zips and fabrics to see which is the longest and shortest. Children have excellent opportunities to learn about the world in which they live. They are excited by nature as they go for daily walks in the garden. Children observe bugs, leaves and trees as they walk around the grounds. Older children collect sticks and leaves which are later used to create 3-D collages. They can discuss the colours they see and relate this to the season as being Autumn. From the classroom window older children observe a large chestnut tree, there is great excitement as a woodpecker is spotted in the garden. This is followed by lots of questions about why it has a red bit on its head and so forth. Children have good opportunities to gain an awareness of other cultures and beliefs through a range of positive resources and media. They are encouraged to celebrate our differences as they learn about festivals and traditions from around the world. Children's opportunities to show an interest in information and communication technology is currently limited and therefore they are not able to fully use technology to support their other areas of learning.

Children have many opportunities to develop creative skills. They enjoy exploring a range of media and materials such as playdough and clay which they manipulate to create desired hedgehog models. Their awareness of colours is heightened as they have a special colour of the week in which they must bring an item to nursery to share with everyone. Children are able to express themselves through music and movement sessions and through first hand experiences of handling a variety of musical instruments. Their imagination is developed through role play scenarios as they eagerly dress up and use props to re-enact the song of 'Ms Polly had a dolly'. All children are very keen to participate, hence the song is repeated until everyone has had a turn. Children are developing good physical skills, they use a variety of tools which help them to develop their hand-eye coordination, these include Montessori activities such as using tweezers to lift small items such as pom poms from one container to another. They effectively use a small wooden hammer and pins to create pictures and competently use playdough tools to make models. Children's larger muscles and their ability to balance and move with ease are developed through the use of wheeled resources and through focussed planned activities.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

Children are respected as individuals as they are all welcomed into the setting. Their personal items brought in from home are shared and handled with care in circle time. Children are confident and happy in their environment as they independently access all areas available to them. Small group sizes supports their confidence to participate in all discussions as well as taking part in role play scenarios. Children have their work attractively displayed which supports their growing self-esteem. Older children have their names displayed on the wall as they self-register in the morning, thus supporting a sense of belonging within the setting.

Children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is fostered. They become aware of wider society as they access a good range of multi-cultural resources which positively promotes diversity. They celebrate a full range of festivals and learn about different traditions and cultures through planned activities. Children are learning simple French, which develops their awareness that people speak different languages. They understand responsible behaviour as they help to keep their environment tidy. Children demonstrate good manners as they say please and thank you at snack time or when a friend has shared a popular resource with them. Clear behaviour

rules are displayed in the classroom, these are effectively promoted through positive staff role models. Consequently children are supported to work in harmony with each other.

Children's individual needs are met as staff clearly value working in partnership with their parents to provide appropriate care. Children have a designated key worker who is responsible for their initial settling in and then for monitoring their progression. Children's home interests are important to the nursery as their aim is for children to settle quickly and be happy at the setting. Therefore valuable personal information such as children's play preferences, any dislikes, or special requirements are recorded and formulated before they attend the setting. The nursery also works in partnership with the primary care trust health visitors to support children to reach their potential, this service is only used with parental consent. There are effective procedures in place to make sure children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are closely supported in their progress.

The partnership with parents and carers of children in receipt of funding for early education is good. Parents receive good quality information about the nursery, how it operates, its staffing and how the Montessori method promotes children's early learning and development. However, the parents prospectus does not mention the Foundation Stage and how this is implemented in unison with Montessori methods, therefore parents are not fully informed about the curriculum their children follow. Parents have access to topic plans which are displayed on the notice board. They are encouraged to be involved in their children's learning through bringing in items to support the letter, sound and shape of the week. They are encouraged to read with their children daily as they take books home from the nursery library. Parents are invited to come into the setting and spend time with all the children and where possible sharing any skills they may have with them. Discussions and parental questionnaires demonstrate that parents are very happy with the care and education their children receive. They express that staff are very approachable and always willing to talk about any arising issues. Parents feel well-informed about their children's progress and enjoy attending open afternoons where they can see some of their children's work.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

Staff have a high regard for the well-being of all children. Good recruitment, vetting and induction procedures ensure staff are suitable to be working with children. The staff team have relevant knowledge, skills and experience to carry out their roles efficiently. They are encouraged to develop their skills by attending training courses to keep their practice up-to-date. At present there are three members of staff studying for recognised child care qualifications as well as staff updating training in child protection and first aid. High staff ratios positively supports children's ability to enjoy and achieve and thus supporting them to make good progress in their early learning and development. All necessary documentation for the safe and efficient management of the setting is in place and record keeping systems are used well to meet children's needs. The nursery has comprehensive policies and procedures in place which are managed well to promote positive outcomes for children.

The leadership and management of early education is good. The proprietors of the nursery are committed to providing quality child care and education for children. They have high expectations for both children and their staff team. The quality of the provision is monitored through regular observations of teaching practice and through liaison with parents and children to get their views on how they feel the setting is moving forward. Good practice and effective teaching strategies are shared so that all staff are consistent in their approach, for example,

all staff are very calm and allow children good opportunities to talk and to follow their own interests. The staff team meet regularly to discuss, evaluate and reflect on their work so that improvements can be discussed and implemented. The proprietors are keen to improve their practice through training hence they embarked on the Hertfordshire accreditation scheme which they completed in January of 2006 receiving an award for providing quality early years childcare and education.

Overall the provision meets the needs of the range of children for whom it provides.

Improvements since the last inspection

At the last inspection the setting were asked to ensure that drinking water is readily available to children at all times. They were requested to display their fire procedures and to review their policies for uncollected children and for children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The setting has made effective improvements in addressing all issues, children now have independent access to water throughout the setting which ensures they remain hydrated. Fire procedures are displayed around the setting and on the parents' notice board which ensures that everyone has an opportunity to observe these and be aware of what to do in an emergency situation. The policies for both uncollected children and for children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities have been reviewed and where necessary brought in line with current legislation. This positively supports the overall welfare of the children.

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):

- ensure consistent hand-washing practices are implemented throughout the nursery
- improve younger children's opportunities to develop their personal independence through their participation in routines such as snack times.

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 opportunities for children to explore information and communication technology
- extend the information given to parents to ensure that they are informed of all aspects of the curriculum followed.

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