

Buffer Bear Nursery

Inspection report for early years provision

Unique Reference Number	130628
Inspection date	07 February 2008
Inspector	Jane Mount
Setting Address	Watford Junction Station, Station Road, Watford, Hertfordshire, WD17 1AB
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Registered person	Buffer Bear Ltd
Type of inspection	Integrated
Type of care	Full day 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 good.

WHAT SORT OF SETTING IS IT?

Buffer Bear Nursery at Watford is one of a large chain of nurseries. The setting opened in May 1994 and operates from five rooms with associated facilities in a purpose-built single storey premises. Also, a fully secure, large outside area is available for outdoor play. The property is situated at Watford Junction Station, close to Watford Town centre and serves the local and wider community.

The nursery is registered to care for a maximum of 55 children under the age of five years at any one time. There are currently 49 children on roll and of these, 13 receive funding for nursery education. Children can attend for a variety of sessions including full day care. The setting is able to support children who have English as an additional language and children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The setting operates Monday to Friday from 07.00 to 19.00 all year round.

Buffer Bears Nursery employs 13 permanent staff who care for the children and of these 10 hold an early years childcare qualification. The remaining staff are in the process of completing either a NVQ Level 2 or Level 3 qualification.

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PROVISION

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is satisfactory.

Children's health is overall protected because staff are aware of some good hygiene practices to prevent the spread of infection. For example, staff wear disposable gloves and aprons when changing nappies, they clean tables and low chairs before and after meals and snacks and usually ensure they wash their hands prior to serving or handling food. Staff implement the settings health and hygiene policies and procedures in a generally consistent manner for children to remain healthy. For example, they ensure toys and equipment are regularly cleaned with cleaning rota's in place in each room although these are not always kept up-to-date. Accident and medication procedures are clear and informative and required parental signatures are always obtained. Consequently, children's health is safeguarded. First aid kits are available in each room and for outings. Procedures are in the process of being developed to ensure the first aid kits are regularly checked and re-stocked. Also, priority is given to ensuring most of the staff team have current approved first aid knowledge through training and their knowledge is regularly updated. Consequently, children's health is protected in an emergency or if an accident occurred.

Children are cared for in an environment where they have some opportunities to learn how to stay healthy with staff offering children support and guidance with simple hygiene practices. For example, staff help children wipe their noses and to dispose of tissues appropriately. Tissues are easily accessible in all areas to encourage children's independence. Children are reminded to wash their hands and are beginning to understand they must wash them after visiting the toilet and before eating. Children enjoy using the liquid soap to make bubbles and paper towels are easily accessible to dry their hands on. Staff sometimes explain to children why it is important to wash their hands and when asked some older children are able to say it is because their hands may have germs on them which could make them unwell. Hand washing posters are also displayed in some areas as a reminder to children to wash their hands. Consequently, children remain healthy and the risk of cross-infection is minimised.

Children participate in a varied range of activities which contributes to their physical health and promotes a positive attitude towards exercise. They develop self-confidence in their physical ability as they are able to use a range of indoor and outdoor equipment on a daily basis. Resources allow children to run, jump, climb and balance. Children show expertise as they ride on bikes and skilfully manoeuvre around obstacles or throw and catch balls. Children are learning that physical exercise can be fun and enjoy music and movement and fitness sessions which are planned into the routine. Children have some opportunities to learn about the physical effects exercise can have on their body such as discussing how they feel warm after running outside. Younger children have clear space to practise their crawling and walking skills and staff support and generally encourage very young children as they gain control over their bodies. Children can rest or sleep according to their needs with babies regularly checked when asleep and sleep records maintained.

Children benefit from a healthy, balanced diet. They enjoy nutritious meals and snacks with menu's displayed for parents to see. All meals are freshly prepared and cooked on the premises and the menu takes account of children's individual dietary needs and preferences. Special dietary requirements are met well to ensure children's health is safeguarded with all staff fully informed of children with specific food allergies or preferences. Mealtimes are used as a time for social interaction with staff generally sitting and talking with children while they eat. Older children participate fully in mealtimes and snack time. For example, a snack bar is available to

pre-school children which enables them to choose when they have their snack during the morning or afternoon and it is carefully monitored by staff. Pre-school children wash their hands and sit down to have their snack when they want to and confidently select some fruit and pour themselves a drink. Overall, younger children are fully supported by staff with mealtimes used as an opportunity to help them enjoy their food and become independent in feeding themselves. Children can access drinks at all times and water is freely available. For example, for older children jugs of water and cups are always available and children enjoy pouring themselves a drink. Younger children have cups or beakers with their names on. Children have some opportunities to learn about healthy eating through discussion and play. For example, at mealtimes staff discuss the benefits of eating vegetables such as broccoli. Recently pre-school children enjoyed tasting and learning about a variety of unusual fruits and photographs are displayed in the hallway to share the experience with parents, visitors and the rest of the nursery.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is satisfactory.

Children are cared for in a child-friendly environment where they can move around safely because generally effective precautions are taken to prevent accidents and to minimise potential hazards. There is a designated member of staff responsible for health and safety whose role is to oversee and support staff and ensure the nurseries health and safety policies and procedures are implemented correctly and to a high standard. Risk assessments are completed of all areas of the nursery by the health and safety officer on a monthly basis. However, staff are not always proactive in ensuring they are vigilant as daily room safety checks are not carried out or recorded. Consequently, some potential hazards are overlooked such as replacing socket covers after use or ensuring electric cables are not trailing. Therefore, children's safety is potentially not fully protected. When playing outside children's safety is promoted as safety checks are completed by staff and a record maintained. The staff are familiar with the settings health and safety policy and procedures and some appropriate safety precautions are in place to keep children safe. For example, fire drills are practised regularly and all emergency exits are kept clear. Also, supervising entry to the nursery is well managed by staff with clear security systems in place to ensure no unauthorised persons can gain access and that children are not put at risk. There is a locked coded outer door with a viewing panel and intercom and parents and visitors use a buzzer to make staff aware of their arrival and to gain access. All visitors are asked to sign in and out. Children are beginning to learn how to keep themselves and others safe with staff explaining some safe practices. For example, explaining to a younger child what may happen if they are not careful when climbing onto a push-along toy or showing a pre-school child how to hold scissors correctly without hurting themselves or others.

Children are able to use a range of safe and developmentally appropriate resources and equipment to promote their learning and development. All areas including the outside environment have recently been reviewed and re-organised to create a more child-friendly environment and to encourage children to independently access resources. For example, furniture is child-height and now includes low-level storage units in all rooms to encourage children to explore and select resources easily. Resources are in a satisfactory condition and are now regularly checked by staff to ensure they are safe and have no broken or missing pieces. Children's welfare is protected as staff have a sound knowledge of child protection issues and give priority to children's safety and welfare. A child protection policy is in place which is informative and all staff are familiar with and know how to implement. Children are protected from harm and neglect as all staff are familiar with correct recording and reporting procedures

if they did have any concerns. There is a designated member of staff responsible for child protection who supports and guides the staff team. Consequently, children remain safe and are not at risk.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is satisfactory.

Younger children's learning is generally promoted because the staff have a sound knowledge of child development and the 'Birth to three matters' framework. They use the framework to plan and organise play experiences for children under three years which are developmentally appropriate and these activities are sometimes evaluated. Younger children's progress is monitored through the completion of achievement records by key workers on a regular basis. Achievement records are linked to the 'Birth to three matters' framework and generally show how children are progressing. The information gained is sometimes used when planning future activities and play experiences. Overall, children are experiencing a varied range of activities and play opportunities which are developmentally appropriate and contribute to their development and learning.

A key worker system is in place with staff knowing their key children and their families well. Subsequently, children's individual needs are met well and they develop confidence and self-esteem and feel at ease in the nursery environment. Younger children are able to participate in a range of activities which provide a balance of free play and more structured play opportunities. There is a daily routine which has a balance of adult-led and child-initiated play. Children's independence is encouraged as they are able to make some independent choices in their play. Children regularly enjoy sensory play with opportunities to explore paint, water, sand and other mediums. For example, they delight in exploring the consistency of paint when finger painting or the texture of dry pasta and sand in the sand tray. Staff encourage and develop children's early communication skills such as when looking at books together and reading stories. Children enjoy singing and enthusiastically participate with the actions when singing 'Twinkle, twinkle, little star'. Children's imaginative development is promoted as they enjoy opportunities to visit the 'hairdressers' or 'talk' on the telephone in the home corner.

Nursery Education

The quality of teaching and learning is good. The pre-school leader has a very secure knowledge and understanding of the Foundation Stage and the pre-school staff team work well together to ensure that children take part in activities that enable them to make progress in all areas of learning. Children are motivated in their learning and making good progress towards the early learning goals with resources organised to allow them to make choices and gain independence. Staff provide opportunities to encourage children to think and to demonstrate what they know and understand and are able to intervene to provide explanations when needed. Staff build trusting relationships with children and are very supportive. They talk about safety and behaviour within routines and children's behaviour is managed in a calm manner which develops their self-esteem.

Curriculum planning includes long, medium and short term plans and is linked to the six areas of learning. It is generally informative and reflects a varied and balanced curriculum. However, short term plans do not clearly show how activities can be adapted for individual children who learn at different rates. Therefore, some children's individual learning needs may not be met and potentially their progress may be limited. Activities are always evaluated and this information is used to inform future planning. A key worker system is used and staff regularly observe and

assess their key children to identify their achievements and progress over time. Assessment records clearly show how children are progressing and are used to inform future planning. Consequently, activities are planned which identify the developmental needs of individual children and ensure they make progress towards the early learning goals.

Children enjoy their surroundings and show an interest in what they do. They arrive happy and quickly settle and engage in activities. Children are aware of boundaries and behavioural expectations such as sharing and taking turns or listening when someone else is talking. Children show excellent independence skills through being able to freely access their environment. For example, going to the toilet on their own, helping themselves to drinks of water and being actively involved in serving their own meals. They keenly help to tidy away toys and are praised by staff which develops their confidence and self-esteem such as when they spontaneously sweep up spilt sand. Children eagerly participate in activities and are keen and motivated to learn. They have regular opportunities to experience music, imaginative play and explore varied materials and media on a daily basis. For example, they use their imaginations when dressing up in the home corner or experience music when playing outside with musical instruments. They regularly enjoy sticking, cutting, gluing and painting activities. For example, they enjoy investigating the changes to colours when mixing paints or exploring the texture of paint through adding glitter and glue. Mathematical concepts are reinforced through books, singing and counting during the daily routine. Children show confidence and understanding in their mathematical learning through varied activities which involve numbers, shapes, patterns and problem solving. For example, when asked children are able to confidently name a variety of shapes they have made from plasticine for a wall display. Staff encourage the use of mathematical language. For example, they talk about 'bigger' or 'smaller' when playing with construction bricks. Children have opportunities to explore concepts such as quantity and volume such as when using sand or water. For example, comparing how much water will fill a variety of different sized and shaped bottles.

Children listen and respond with enjoyment when listening to stories, songs and rhymes. They enjoy looking at books and can often be seen sitting and looking at books with friends. They are beginning to understand that print carries meaning and have many opportunities to become familiar with the written word. For example, names on coat pegs, labelled toy boxes and name cards. Children are beginning to link sounds to letters through activities and when asked are able to confidently say that orange begins with an 'o' and are able to show how to write it. Children can freely access writing materials and enjoy writing for a purpose such as making shopping lists in the home corner or writing their names on finished art work. Children's physical skills are fostered with regular opportunities to exercise incorporated within the daily routine. Children are able to move with control and co-ordination as they manoeuvre around obstacles while riding bikes or pushing buggies. They skilfully throw and roll balls and develop hand to eye co-ordination when trying to hit the ball with a bat. Resources allow children to travel around or under and over balancing and climbing equipment and they show control as they run and jump. Children have some opportunities to learn about health and bodily awareness. For example, staff discuss changes to the body such as being hot after running. Children have regular access to resources that develop their knowledge of technology and the world such as developing their skills using the computer mouse and keyboard. In the home corner they confidently use the telephone to 'phone' home. Children learn about past and present when talking about their families and the people they know. They are learning about the living world through discussing items on the nature table and have recently enjoyed planting flower seeds and helping them to grow for the garden. Children are beginning to learn about the environment and recycling.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

Children have opportunities to learn about themselves, each other and the world around them. Their awareness of diversity and their understanding of others is promoted through the range of resources and activities they can select and take part in each day. Children begin to appreciate the customs and cultures of others through learning about festivals such as Hanukkah or Chinese New Year. For example, children and staff enjoyed dressing up in items of red clothing for Chinese New Year. Also, the pre-school children delighted in making a large dragon from cardboard boxes and then dancing to Chinese music while wearing the dragon over their heads. Displays and posters reflect positive images and help children to develop a positive attitude towards others and to help them be aware of the wider world. Children learn about the local community through outings such as walks to the park or to the pond to feed the ducks.

Children play well together and behave well throughout the nursery. Behaviour is dealt with in a positive and consistent manner with clear boundaries set by staff. They talk with children about helping each other in their play and children are beginning to learn how to share, take turns and to behave considerately towards others. Staff overall give clear explanations as to why some behaviour may be inappropriate and the effects it may have on others. Children are taught to be polite to others and the staff are generally good role models. Children can be heard saying 'please' and 'thank-you' throughout the nursery particularly at mealtimes. There are highly effective systems in place to provide appropriate care and support to children who have English as an additional language. Also, excellent strategies are in place for children with learning difficulties and/ or disabilities and their families. For example, the special needs co-ordinator (Senco) is proactive in ensuring that appropriate action is taken when a child is identified or admitted to the setting with an identified need. All children are fully included and their families supported. Children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is fostered.

Partnership with parents and carers is good. Children benefit from the effective relationships that staff have developed with parents and carers and this significantly contributes to children's well-being. A clear and flexible settling-in programme ensures children settle well and become secure in their surroundings. Children's individual needs are effectively met as staff obtain information from parents prior to their child commencing at the nursery. Information is then exchanged on a daily basis between parents and staff to ensure children receive appropriate care and support. For example, communication sheets are used to ensure vital information such as children's dietary intake, sleeps and nappy changes are shared with parents. Informative notice boards throughout the nursery, newsletters and a prospectus are also ways parents are kept fully informed about the provision. Parents are informed about the 'Birth to three matters' framework and the Foundation Stage through displays and written information they receive. Staff also encourage parents to be involved in their children's learning. For example, with requests for items from home for themes or topics to support children's learning. Parents are welcomed into the setting and children's achievements are discussed informally each day. Parents' evenings are also held twice yearly so children's progress can be discussed on a more formal basis. Also, parent questionnaires are sometimes used as a way of monitoring the quality of care and education provided and to ensure parents are fully informed. Parents spoken to at inspection felt well-informed about the nurseries policies and procedures including the Foundation Stage and feel able to help their children make progress towards the early learning goals in close partnership with the nursery.

Organisation

The organisation is satisfactory.

Children are safeguarded because there are systems in place to ensure all staff working with children are suitable to do so. Recruitment procedures ensure children are cared for by staff who have relevant experience, qualifications and skills to do their jobs. Appropriate checks are completed on all staff and any persons who have not been vetted would not have unsupervised access to children, therefore, children are not at risk. Induction systems ensure new staff are fully informed of the settings policies and procedures and all staff are clear on their roles and responsibilities. Priority is given to staff updating and increasing their knowledge through training and a training co-ordinator has been appointed who organises and oversees professional development. Staff training needs are generally identified through staff supervisions and staff training records show that staff are regularly updating their childcare knowledge. Ratios are always maintained and staff are well deployed with an effective key worker system in operation. Children are supported in their play and their needs are met because staff, time and resources have been reviewed and are now generally organised well.

Some documentation for the efficient and safe management of the setting are in place. For example, accident and medication records are accurate and appropriate written consents are obtained from parents. Registration systems are in place for staff, children and visitors. However, staff have not prioritised ensuring children's attendance is accurately recorded including their departure times. Also, records of staff attendance are inaccurate and not always recorded. Records for visitors are maintained. Consequently, children's care and welfare are not always fully promoted.

The leadership and management is satisfactory. The staff team are guided by a relatively new manager who has a clear vision for the nursery and is committed to ensuring it is a safe and secure place for the children who attend. She has been working extremely hard to improve the quality of care and education provided within the setting and significant improvements have been made since her appointment. She leads by example and is a good role model. She values her staff team and is beginning to know and utilise their skills well. Children are cared for by staff who are generally supportive of each other and are beginning to work together as a team. Staff are supported through regular staff meetings and information from staff meetings is used to monitor and evaluate the quality of care and education provided within the setting. All issues raised from the last inspection have been addressed and the manager acknowledges the need to continue to make improvements and to sustain the significant improvements already made. Overall, children's needs are met.

Improvements since the last inspection

At the last care inspection the setting was asked to ensure the premises are clean, toys and equipment are in good repair and drinking water is accessible to all children. They were also asked to ensure resources are organised so they are readily available to children and to review staff deployment to support children in their play. All recommendations have been successfully addressed. Children's health and safety are promoted as staff ensure the premises, equipment and resources are clean with cleaning rotas now in place which staff generally maintain. Rooms have been re-organised to enable children to independently access resources and fresh drinking water is available at all times. Staff deployment has been reviewed and improved and children are now supported in their play and learning.

At the last nursery education inspection the setting was asked to review planning to accommodate the learning needs of individual children, to develop systems for children who have English as an additional language and to extend the range of experiences and planned activities for children outdoors. All recommendations have been successfully addressed. Children's learning is overall supported with planning systems which show generally clear learning objectives such as how an activity can be adapted for an older or younger child. There are very effective systems in place for children who speak English as an additional language and staff work in close partnership with parents to ensure children's needs are met. The use of the outdoor area has been reviewed and children benefit because it is now used more effectively and on a more regular basis. For example, there is now an outside music area and plans for a gardening area. Children have access to a range of outdoor play equipment with additional resources taken outside on a daily basis. Consequently, children throughout the nursery are able to experience a range of play experiences in the outdoor environment.

Complaints since the last inspection

Since the last inspection there has been one complaint made to Ofsted that required the provider to take action in order to meet the National Standards.

Ofsted received a complaint raising concerns regarding poor supervision of children, a child being bitten and no continuity of manager. These concerns relate to National Standard 1 (Suitable person), National Standard 2 (Organisation), National Standard 11 (Behaviour) and National Standard 14 (Documentation). An unannounced visit took place on 06 July 2007 and the provider was found to be not meeting the National Standards. A compliance notice was issued relating to National Standard 1 requiring the provider to ensure a manager is in place who is suitable to care for children, and has the appropriate experience, skills and ability to do their job. Additionally actions were raised requiring the provider to ensure staff caring for babies are competent to do so, maintain a system for registering children's attendance on a daily basis, name a staff member within the setting who has responsibility for behaviour management issues, and inform Ofsted at the earliest opportunity of any changes in the person in charge. Ofsted visited again on 15 August 2007 and found that appropriate action had been taken to meet the National Standards and the provider 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.

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 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):

- review recording procedures for registers to ensure children and staff attendance is accurately recorded
- review and further develop safety procedures to ensure daily room checks are completed and records maintained.

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):

- review short term planning systems to ensure individual children's learning needs are identified.

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