

Saplings Pre-School

Inspection report for early years provision

Unique Reference Number	123565
Inspection date	30 November 2007
Inspector	Paula Durrant
Setting Address	The Scout Hut, Birchwood Way, Park Street, St. Albans, Hertfordshire, AL2 2SE
Telephone number	0798 5968 759
E-mail	
Registered person	The Trustees of Saplings Pre-School
Type of inspection	Integrated
Type of care	Sessional care

ABOUT THIS INSPECTION

The purpose of this inspection is to assure government, parents and the public of the quality of childcare and, if applicable, of nursery education. The inspection was carried out under Part XA Children Act 1989 as introduced by the Care Standards Act 2000 and, where nursery education is provided, under Schedule 26 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998.

This report details the main strengths and any areas for improvement identified during the inspection. The judgements included in the report are made in relation to the outcomes for children set out in the Children Act 2004; the National Standards for under 8s day care and childminding; and, where nursery education is provided, the *Curriculum guidance for the foundation stage*.

The report includes information on any complaints about the childcare provision which Ofsted has received since the last inspection or registration or 1 April 2004 whichever is the later.

The key inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding: this aspect of the provision is of exceptionally high quality

Good: this aspect of the provision is strong

Satisfactory: this aspect of the provision is sound

Inadequate: this aspect of the provision is not good enough

For more information about early years inspections, please see the booklet *Are you ready for your inspection?* which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

THE QUALITY AND STANDARDS OF THE CARE AND NURSERY EDUCATION

On the basis of the evidence collected on this inspection:

The quality and standards of the care are good. The registered person meets the National Standards for under 8s day care and childminding.

The quality and standards of the nursery education are good.

WHAT SORT OF SETTING IS IT?

Saplings Pre-School is a committee run provision. It originally opened in the Old School, Park Road, St Albans approximately 20 years ago and relocated to its current premise in the Scout Hut in 1999. The provision is situated to the rear of residential housing, mid-way around the crescent of Birchwood Way. The group have access to a central room with storage, kitchen and toilet facilities off of the main hall. They also have access to an enclosed outdoor play area. A maximum of 28 children may attend at any one time. The Pre-School is open each weekday, sessions are from 09:30 until 12:00 presently, although consideration is currently being given to extending provision to two afternoons on a Tuesday and Wednesday between the hours of 12:30 until 15:00 early 2008. The group operate term time only.

There are currently 39 children from two to four years on roll. Of these, 24 children receive funding for nursery education. A vast majority of the children in attendance live locally, although some travel in from wider geographical areas, which excludes local community catchments. The pre-school has systems in place to support children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and for whom English is an additional language.

The group employs eight staff, of these three hold a recognised childcare qualification, two are currently working towards a qualification and three are designated to commence training in early-to mid 2008. The group are members of the Pre-School Learning Alliance

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PROVISION

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

Children are protected from infection and are well taken care of if they have an accident or become ill as staff rigorously adhere to environmental health guidance in relation to the storage and preparation of food, management of bodily fluids and the stipulated quarantine periods for childhood communicable diseases. This means that the potential for cross-contamination is effectively minimised. A vast majority of staff hold a valid first aid qualification and there are sufficient medical supplies to administer emergency aid. Accidental injuries and medication administered are documented in line with National Standard requirements.

Children learn to understand simple good health and hygiene practices as they adhere to the daily routine. They know, for example, to wash their hands after messy craft activities, following use of the toilet and prior to eating. Children understand the purpose of this task, as discussions about germs and the affects they have on their bodies, making their tummies poorly are frequently held.

Children benefit from a nutritious and healthy diet. The pre-school provides them with a varied choice of snacks. These comply with all special dietary requirements to ensure children remain healthy. Snack-time is an effective integrated learning experience for the children. They independently pour drinks, share the snack and chat with staff about 'milk and cheese being good for you, helping teeth and bones to get strong'. Children remain well-hydrated as drinking water is freely available.

Children enjoy a good range of physical activities including indoor and outdoor play, together with more structured skills lessons such as music and movement. They benefit in developing an awareness of the effects physical exercise has on their bodies as staff skilfully introduce stretching exercises to warm up their limbs and discussions about their heart rates quickening as they run and jump. Children rest and are active in accordance to their needs.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

Children's safety and welfare is given due attention in this well-organised and vigilantly monitored premises. Staff help keep children safe inside and outside because they understand and comply with written health and safety procedures. All necessary precautionary safety measures are in place and risk assessments are undertaken frequently. Access to the premises is vigilantly monitored through the supervision and management of the entrance area. Visitors to the pre-school are requested to provide identification and to record their presence on site in the visitors log book.

Children access an extensive range of safe, high quality, developmentally appropriate resources which are well-organised in child-height furniture to encourage independent access. Staff skilfully explain safe practices such as the need to play with equipment in the manner intended. For example, a child is encouraged to place the child-sized broom on the floor not over their

shoulder as they may inadvertently catch another child in the face. They are also reminded of the group rules such as to walk and not run inside as there is insufficient space. Children therefore may collide and cause injury to themselves or others. Attentive policing and provision of opportunity by staff enables children to learn to take responsibility for keeping themselves and others safe.

Staff protect children well. Strong recruitment and induction procedures ensure that adults are suitable to work with children. This includes experience, training and vetting checks. Children remain the primary focus of care in this well-organised and managed setting. Staff are vigilant in their practice and are confident in their knowledge of child protection, reporting concerns appropriately to senior staff. The pre-school leader is the designated person for liaison and has a sound knowledge of how, where and when to refer concerns in line with the Local Safeguarding Children Board procedures.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

Children truly do enjoy and achieve within this inviting and stimulating environment where play is central to learning. Staff work extremely well as a team, with more experienced staff providing a positive model for those whom have yet to gain a formal qualification. This in turn aids the quality in delivery of care. Staff work religiously to the detailed planning structures. They use this as a base in which to focus their intended learning objectives when playing and interacting with the children. For example, children are encouraged to name familiar colours and shapes when drawing freely with a range of mediums. Sound relationships between child and adult and regular maintenance of attainment profiles means that staff know the children well and can intuitively stretch and challenge their thinking in both formal and impromptu situations. For example, children are encouraged to test out the concept of cold and warm in line with the current topic theme when re-enacting the roles of 'mummy' and 'daddy' in the home corner. They make sure that the baby dolls have plenty of blankets when they are sleeping to keep them warm and that the bottled milk is cooled before they feed them. Conscientious staff embrace these opportunities nurturing the outcomes for children. This provides a really positive base for supporting the foundations of children's learning.

Nursery Education

The quality of teaching and learning is good. Children are engaged and motivated by a varied range of stimulating, practical activities related to their needs. They access an extended range of good quality resources, which support their learning across the Foundation Stage. All children are keen to learn, self-assured in their play and confident to try new experiences. They listen with considerable levels of concentration to stories and are able to re-tell familiar books. Many children use marks readily to represent their ideas. For example, drawing a repetitive range of vertical stripes to represent jet fighters flying up into the sky. Children are highly imaginative. They use their creativity of design in role play such as when putting on dressing up clothes. Children delight in making up a story of the fairy princess being saved by a superhero as they take on the character of their clothes. They are beginning to make sense of the world around them as they celebrate cultural festivals throughout the year. Children gain confidence in using number in their play and respond well to challenges to extend their mathematical vocabulary and skills in planned activities and some daily routines. Children gain opportunities to develop their physical skills such as through daily access to the garden and regular music and movement sessions.

Staff find out about children's skills, interests and needs and try to build on this information to help children achieve their full potential. Planning systems are appropriately detailed and provide a clear tool to guide staff in the delivery of a balanced curriculum. A flexible approach to the session and a balance between energetic play and quiet spells allows children to learn at their own pace. Staff are perceptive to children's interests during self-initiated play and use questions successfully to encourage children's thinking and language skills. The pre-school have in place a system to observe and record children's achievements although these require further development. Whilst children are in receipt of a good planned curriculum, present delivery can on occasion be overly adult-directed. This is partially due to development of a new staff team, some of whom are currently in the process of training and the systems that have been put in place by senior staff to support them through this period. For example, some art and craft activities offer limited challenge as the plans direct the activity to the end product rather than the process with all parts being pre-cut. This does not enable opportunities to develop physical dexterity or uniqueness in creativity of design for children. This is not because children are unable to undertake the challenge but more so that some staff require greater support and guidance. This is therefore more of an organisational area for development.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

Children's individual uniqueness is truly valued and encouraged within this setting. Staff work collaboratively with parents and carers to support children whom have English as a second language and those whom have defined needs. This in turn maximises children's involvement and the contributions they make. Staff's exceptional management of inclusion enables all children to value and respect diversity, both on a local and wider level. For example, children enjoy sharing their cultural heritage as they name everyday objects in both their mother tongue and English in group activities and general play. Children also benefit in developing connections between spoken and written languages as staff label projects such as the colours in the rainbow in both English and French. This is expanded upon further, through resources and culinary delights such as snacks. Children are able to truly appreciate culture as they taste a range of food from different countries and continents throughout the year within their snack provision. This supports children in developing a heightened awareness of diversity. Highly skilled staff implement excellent systems to ensure that children with specific needs receive appropriate support in the setting. This enables them to join in with all activities and make very good progress given their age and starting points. Children are extremely well-behaved and very polite in response to the consistent expectations of caring practitioners. Children take turns and show concern for others. Children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is fostered.

The partnership with parents and carers of funded nursery education children is good. Children benefit from the positive relationships between their parents and staff. Parents receive a comprehensive range of information about the day-to-day organisation of the pre-school and the Foundation Stage and how it is implemented. This enables parents in part to be involved in their children's learning. Whilst the pre-school have in place formal assessment records these are currently not openly shared with parents. This means that attainment is therefore only obtained through one source as parents do not contribute their comments. The group openly share their complaints summaries with parents.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

A committed and dedicated staff team, sound and detailed documentation and positive working relationships with external childcare practitioners ensures that children benefit and enjoy their time at this provision. Senior staff are exceptionally skilled and competent in their childcare practice and provide a good role model for those less experienced individuals within the team who are presently in the process of training. Staff demonstrate a real affinity with children. They use their wealth of experience as parents or carers and their childcare training to provide a wide range of practical and stimulating learning opportunities. The pre-school has clear self-evaluation procedures and works closely with external agencies to develop and enhance their practice. They are receptive to improvement. For example, they have met all previous recommendations set from both the care and education inspection. Whilst the group retain a high level of quality in their provision a minor area for further development is to review delivery of the routine and planning objectives so that children are enabled in maximising their independence and creativity, especially when undertaking set art and craft activities linked to the topic theme.

The leadership and management of the nursery education is good. Staff are dedicated to the concept of continued improvement and enhancing the quality of their educational curriculum. They have worked hard as a team with support from the advisory teaching services and external childcare practitioners. Planning is sound, sufficiently detailed and draws on what children know and can do and what they need to learn. However, assessment profiles still remain an area for further development. Although staff know the children well and can clearly articulate every child's level of ability current written systems are not openly shared with parents or their comments obtained. This means that presently assessment structures do not reflect the child as a whole. 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 group were required to; ensure accurate records of both the staff and children's hours of attendance and the arrival and departure times of visitors are kept. Children's welfare is upheld as systems for recording attendance for all have been revised and are actively monitored as part of their ongoing self-evaluation structures. They were also required to ensure hygiene procedures with regard to hand washing are consistently applied. Children's health is actively promoted as hygiene routines are stringently adhered to with significant emphasis given to reinforcing children's understanding through discussions about germs. Lastly they were required to ensure that the premises are secure and that access to the provision is monitored and that safety procedures are reviewed both inside and outside. This referred to the fire extinguishers and smoke alarm and the outside play area and gate. Children's safety remains paramount. The group have revised their safety measures linking this to their risk assessments, this includes supplementary locks on the main door and external gate, batteries remaining intact in the smoke detectors and fire extinguishers now being wall mounted.

At the last Nursery Education inspection the group were required to extend staff's knowledge of the Foundation Stage. Most staff have a sound awareness of this guidance and those that do not are actively supported by senior staff. They were also required to increase opportunities for children to develop their awareness of letters and the sounds they make, through unstructured play as well as more focused activities. Children are developing good connections of letters and sounds as they build their knowledge through the letter of the week and as they reflect when looking at the written word such as their name cards at snack time. Lastly they

were required to improve staff's organisation during snack time, to further children's independence skills, maximise learning opportunities and communication. Snack time is an effective learning experience as children take turns to lay the tables, independently pour their own drinks and talk amongst themselves and staff about the provision offered such as cheese being a good source of calcium like the milk they drink aiding their teeth and bones in growing strong.

Complaints since the last inspection

Since the last inspection Ofsted have received one complaint on 5 March 2007, raising concern about behaviour management and suitability checks. These concerns related to National Standard 1 - Suitable Person. Ofsted asked the provider to conduct an internal investigation and report back. A response was received on 13 March 2007. As a result, Ofsted set one action under National Standard 1: to update Criminal Records Bureau checks. A satisfactory response was received and verification that all staff are now suitably vetted. 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 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):

- enhance further current provision through reviewing the delivery of the routine and planning objectives so that children are enabled in maximising their independence and creativity.

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 formalised assessment systems to enable parents regular access and greater opportunities to comment on their child's attainment.

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