

Small Beginnings Playgroup

Inspection report for early years provision

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| Unique Reference Number | 123591 |
| Inspection date | 08 November 2007 |
| Inspector | Gail Groves |
| Setting Address | The Scout Hut, Oakdene Way, St Albans, Hertfordshire, AL1 4TL |
| Telephone number | 079701 39417 |
| E-mail | |
| Registered person | Julie Diane Walsh |
| 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?

Small Beginnings Playgroup opened in 1990 and operates from the main hall in a Scout Hut in St Albans, Hertfordshire. A maximum of 32 children may attend the setting at any one time. The playgroup is open each weekday from 09.15 to 12.00 during school term times only. All children share access to a secure enclosed outdoor play area.

There are currently 38 children from two to four years on roll. Of these, 20 children receive funding for nursery education. Children come from the local area. The group currently has no children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and no children who speak English as an additional language.

The playgroup employs five staff. Four of the staff, including the manager hold appropriate early years qualifications. One member of staff is working towards a qualification.

The group receives support from a qualified teacher.

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 because staff follow current and appropriate environmental health and hygiene guidelines, policies and procedures. For example, they clean tables and surfaces with anti-bacterial spray, exclude children with infectious illnesses for appropriate periods of time and wash their hands before preparing food to prevent the spread of infection. In addition, children are encouraged to learn to understand simple, good health and hygiene practices so that they are developing good hygiene routines for later life. They wash their hands after messy play and use paper towels to dry them, clean their hands with wipes before eating snacks or taking part in cooking activities and learn to wipe their nose with a tissue and dispose of it carefully in the bin.

Children enjoy a range of healthy snacks and a list of these is displayed each week so that parents are aware of what their children have been eating. Drinking water is readily available and children can ask for a drink if they are thirsty so that they do not become dehydrated. They have some opportunities to learn about healthy eating and living through planned topic work. However, these opportunities are limited and as a result, children's awareness of what they need to do in order to lead a healthy lifestyle is not fully supported. Children have their health and dietary needs met because staff work closely with parents. For example, staff discuss children's particular needs with parents before they begin to attend and take these into consideration when they are planning snacks and cooking activities.

Children take part in regular physical activity both indoors and outdoors. For example, in the outside play area they develop pedalling skills and balance as they use trikes, scooters, sit and ride toys, and a range of different sized slides. They throw, catch and kick as they play with balls and hoops and run around throwing the dry autumn leaves at each other. To provide more challenging physical play and exercise they visit the neighbouring park to use the large scale climbing, balancing and sliding equipment. Inside they explore different ways of moving as they pretend to be polar bears, penguins and mice and learn to crawl, balance and jump as they take turns to move through obstacle courses. As a result, they are developing good coordination and muscle skills and are learning to enjoy exercise and fresh air. Active play is balanced with less energetic play and the daily routine is carefully planned so that children can choose to rest or be active according to their needs.

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 indoor and outdoor environment in which the risks to their safety are minimised. For example, the premises are secure and staff are careful to monitor the door when parents are arriving or leaving so that children cannot leave unnoticed. Dangerous areas such as the kitchen are made inaccessible to children and regular checks and risk assessments are carried out so that appropriate procedures can be put into place to minimise any identified safety issues. As a result, children can move around and access resources safely and independently. In addition, they use good quality, suitable and safe equipment which is well maintained and meets their differing needs. Staff check the toys and equipment regularly and ensure that any broken items are thrown away, repaired or replaced. Consequently, children are able to play and take part in activities safely.

Appropriate procedures are in place to ensure that children are kept safe when they visit the park. For example, they walk in pairs holding hands and do not let go until they are inside the enclosed play area, they walk along the path in the park, do not walk near any roads and staff are vigilant about ensuring that they are aware of any adults within the vicinity. Children learn to keep themselves safe through planned topic work and practical experiences within their daily routine. For example, they learn road safety rules and begin to understand why they must hold an adult's hand and use a zebra crossing to cross the road. This is reinforced as they play with the cars and bikes outside by developing role play scenarios with the staff. They have visits from police officers and fire fighters and they practise the emergency evacuation procedure each term so that they know what they must do if there is a fire.

Children are also safeguarded because the staff understand their role in child protection and are able to put appropriate procedures into practice when necessary. They attend child protection training courses, new staff receive comprehensive information about child protection issues as part of their induction pack and all of the necessary contact details for reporting concerns about children's welfare are readily available in the policy file. A password system is used to ensure that children are only given into the care of authorised adults and visitors are asked to sign the visitors' record and to show identification in order to protect children from people who have not been vetted.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

Children arrive eagerly and quickly become involved in the play activities that are laid out for them. They move around the room confidently, accessing activities and resources independently and show good levels of concentration as they play together in small groups, in pairs and alone. Any new children are carefully supported to ensure that they become happy and settled and consequently, they quickly become confident to join in with all of the play opportunities provided for them. Children are involved in a broad and interesting range of planned activities and spontaneous events which support all areas of their development and learning. Staff make good use of the 'Birth to three matters' framework and plan activities which extend and develop young children's interest in the world around them. In addition, they provide opportunities for children to make decisions, explore and investigate resources and the environment to extend their thinking and learning. For example, children look closely at a construction toy and explore the ways that it connects together, investigate what happens when they press the buttons on a pop up toy and discover the consequences of deciding not to wear their coats to play outside on a cold day.

Children gain self-esteem because their efforts and achievements are acknowledged and valued. For example, staff value their art work by displaying it attractively and acknowledge those children who have helped to tidy away the toys at snack time by praising them and rewarding them with stickers. Staff interact with children at all times and are interested in what they do and say. They discuss significant events at home such as the birth of a new baby or a child's birthday and listen carefully to what children have to tell them. As a result, children are developing good communication and social skills and relate well to others. Staff know and understand the children well and provide appropriate support to ensure that their individual needs are met.

Nursery Education

The quality of teaching and learning is good. Staff work extremely well together as a team, have a good knowledge and understanding of the Foundation Stage and plan a curriculum which promotes children's progress towards the early learning goals. Planning systems are clear and enable staff to monitor that over time, adult directed activities cover appropriate stepping stones for all of the areas of learning within the Foundation Stage. Staff carry out regular assessments and observations of children's achievements. They use these records to show children's progression through the Foundation Stage and to influence the planning of activities and to guide their teaching. Consequently, they challenge children appropriately and expect the most from them. However, because their assessments are not dated staff cannot fully monitor children's progression over time. Consequently, there is the potential for children's individual learning needs to be missed.

Staff use a variety of methods to help children learn effectively which take account of their age, level of development and individual needs. There is a good mix between adult-led and child-initiated activities and practical experiences are used to develop children's understanding in meaningful ways. For example, as part of a topic on safety children feel a soft doll and a hard car to help them understand why people are injured if a car runs into them. Staff make effective use of their time, the available resources and the accommodation in order to develop and support children's learning. They spend all of their time interacting with the children and are always alert to what is happening in the room. Consequently, they know what children are doing and are able to offer them support whenever and wherever it is most needed. Staff manage children well and have appropriate expectations for their behaviour. They use rewards such as praise and stickers, to encourage positive behaviour and children clearly understand what is required of them.

Children join in readily with group activities and offer information and answer questions at circle time. Snack times are used as social occasions during which children are encouraged to communicate freely with each other and with the staff. They talk about their families and home life and learn to listen to others and to take turns when speaking. Children's early reading skills are encouraged. For example, they learn to find their own name cards when they arrive and they are helped to become aware of phonic sounds as staff draw their attention to the sounds of the letters in an alphabet puzzle or the sound at the beginning of some words such as the day of the week. Children also have regular opportunities to enjoy mark making activities and to use crayons, pencils, paint brushes and scissors so that they can develop the dexterity and hand to eye coordination required for writing.

Children are developing appropriate counting skills and enjoy singing number rhymes and songs to reinforce their understanding of number sequences. Some children are also beginning to recognise some numerals. They develop their ideas about shape, size and volume as they play in the sand and with water and compare their height to the gladioli or sunflowers that they have grown or to the tall towers that they have built with bricks. However, opportunities for children to develop calculation and problem solving skills through practical experiences within their daily routines are limited. Consequently, these aspects of children's mathematical development are not being fully supported and extended.

Children are developing their understanding about the world around them through carefully planned topic work and activities. For example, they learn about the seasons, grow sunflowers and feel the difference between hot, cold and warm water. Spontaneous opportunities for learning such as exploring the properties of snow after an unexpected snowfall are used well to extend children's understanding in meaningful ways. Children develop design and making skills as they build using a variety of resources such as boxes and tubes as well as construction

toys such as Duplo. They learn about everyday technology as they explore what they can do with a typewriter, mobile phones and calculators. Regular opportunities to cook, paint, use dough, glue and crayons help children to begin to explore their creative skills in a variety of interesting ways and music and singing forms an important part of the daily routine as children join in enthusiastically with the group's 'good morning' and 'goodbye' songs or take part in action songs such as 'Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes'.

The role play area offers children exciting opportunities to extend their imagination and is changed into different scenarios such as a travel agent's shop, a beach or an optician's shop. Taking part in 'Fancy Dress Day' and acting out stories such as 'The Enormous Turnip' develop children's role play still further. Children's physical development is well supported. They learn to jump, climb, slide, crawl, throw, catch and balance using a range of play equipment and enjoy making patterns and sequences of movements as they move their bodies in different ways during music and movement sessions.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

Children are valued and included and feel a strong sense of belonging. For example, staff use check lists to ensure that all children are given the chance to take part in activities and that each child has a turn to take 'Honey Bear' home for a night. Children record what they and 'Honey Bear' have done together on his diary sheet and share this with the other children at circle time the next morning. This encourages the links between home and pre-school and helps to develop children's feelings of belonging still further. There is a structured settling in procedure for new children and information about their family background, personality and likes and dislikes is sought before they begin to attend in order to support the process still further. Every child receives a certificate at the end of their first morning at playgroup and this helps to develop their self-esteem. As a result, they quickly become settled and happy in the provision. Children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are well supported. Close liaison with their parents is maintained in order to monitor and record their progress and they are always fully consulted and involved in developing their child's individual education plan.

Children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is fostered. They learn to respond to appropriate expectations for their behaviour and are developing good social skills. Staff deal with inappropriate behaviour calmly and consistently and provide good role models for children. For example, they value politeness and remind children to say 'thank you' when they are given sweets by a child because it is his birthday. Children are able to make choices and take decisions throughout their daily routines and are developing independence. For example, they choose what activity they wish to take part in during free play periods and decide whether they wish to wear their coat when it is time for outside play. The need to share and take turns is encouraged at all times so that children become aware of their own needs and are learning to respect the needs of others. They learn to work harmoniously together and are developing social skills as they help to tidy away the toys and work together to carry heavy boxes or help staff to move a table to another area of the room. Children benefit from some activities and resources which help them value diversity. For example, when the role play area is set up as an optician's shop they try on glasses and learn that some people cannot see as well as others. They learn about a range of different religious festivals such as Eid, Ramadan, Hanukah and Diwali and look at food and clothing that comes from other countries. Consequently, they are developing a positive awareness of the differences and similarities between people.

The partnership with parents and carers is good. Informal daily discussions with staff keep parents informed about children's achievements and progress and when children first begin to attend parents receive a written report telling them how their child has settled. They receive another report at the start of the autumn term because children can sometimes find it difficult to settle back following the long summer break. Records and observations of children's progress, samples of their work and a final written report are put into individual books which are given to parents when their children leave the playgroup. These books are available at all times for parents to look at and to discuss with staff if they wish to do so. Parents are encouraged to share what they know about their children. For example, they are asked to fill in a developmental check list in the form of a flower diagram before children start to attend and staff use this to begin assessing children's individual needs. Newsletters containing information about the topics to be covered and suggestions for activities linked to these which can be carried out at home encourage parents to become involved in their children's learning and to support and extend the play and learning experiences provided at playgroup. All new parents are given a starter pack containing copies of the playgroup's policies and they are kept fully informed about the playgroup and how it operates through the newsletters, notices and displays. However, the written complaints procedure does not fully reflect recent changes to legislation. As a result, parents are not fully informed about how the playgroup ensures that their views and concerns are respected and acknowledged and their children's welfare and well-being is monitored and protected.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

Good use of time, space and staff deployment significantly contributes to children's overall development and their ability to take an active part in the setting. For example, the premises are well organised and the indoor and outdoor space is laid out to maximise play opportunities for children and to allow them independence. As a result, children enjoy a stimulating environment in which they are able to play and learn effectively. Staff have a high regard for the well-being of all children and form a very strong, well knit team who work together very effectively. Consequently, children are well supported and sessions run smoothly.

All of the necessary documentation for the safe and efficient management of the provision is in place and record keeping systems are used well to meet children's needs. In addition, the pre-school's policies and procedures generally work in practice to promote children's health, safety, enjoyment, achievement and ability to make a positive contribution. Recruitment and vetting procedures contribute to children being protected and cared for by staff with appropriate knowledge and understanding of child development and staff are encouraged to attend training courses in areas of interest as well as areas which will benefit the playgroup. As a result, they regularly update and improve their skills and consequently the quality of the care and education they provide for children is enhanced.

The leadership and management is good. The setting is well led and staff are committed to improving the care and education that they provide for children. They monitor and evaluate the curriculum effectively and regularly assess children's attainments and discuss and evaluate the learning activities that they provide. Consequently, they are able to assess the group's strengths and weaknesses well and as a result, improve the provision for children's learning. For example, they are in the process of developing new observation and record keeping processes to make them more effective and are developing the way that they provide outside play for children.

Overall, children's needs are met.

Improvements since the last inspection

At the last care inspection the playgroup agreed to improve their records of medication and to increase the range of activities and experiences which help children appreciate and value racial, cultural and religious diversity. They now ensure that all records of medication administered to children are shared with and signed by parents and as a result, children's health is more fully protected. They have purchased new resources such as books, puzzles, small world figures and cooking resources for the home corner play area that reflect cultural diversity and plan activities around topics about religious festivals such as Eid, Ramadan, Divali and Hanukah. They have also developed learning activities such as looking at differences in the way people dress or what they eat in different countries. As a result, children have more opportunities to develop a greater understanding of the similarities and differences between people.

After the last nursery education inspection the playgroup agreed to improve the staff's knowledge and understanding of the Foundation Stage and to develop the planning system and assessment records. Staff have now attended a range of courses which have covered planning and assessment in the Foundation Stage, developing outside play and developing information, communication and technology without computers. They have also now put into place effective planning systems which clearly show the learning intentions of adult directed activities and assessment records that allow them to monitor children's progression through the Foundation Stage. These measures have enabled them to extend and develop both the curriculum and the learning environment for children. The children's assessment records require further development and a recommendation has been made following this inspection.

The playgroup also agreed to increase the opportunities for children to regularly explore and develop information, communication and technology skills and to share information with parents in relation to the Foundation Stage. The group now offer children opportunities to use computer keyboards, mobile telephones, calculators, a cassette tape recorder, hole punches and a typewriter within their imaginative play scenarios. They have a written curriculum policy which is given to all parents which includes information about the Foundation Stage and have notices and displays around the room to reinforce their understanding still further. This allows parents to become more involved in their children's learning.

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):

- promote the good health of children by developing their knowledge and understanding of healthy eating and healthy living
- review the complaints procedure to ensure that it fully reflects changes to the legislation.

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):

- provide more opportunities for children to calculate and solve mathematical problems in everyday situations
- ensure all observational records of children's progress are dated.

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