

St Marys Kindergarten

Inspection report for early years provision

Unique Reference Number	129391
Inspection date	28 November 2007
Inspector	Susan Ennis
Setting Address	St Marys School, New Road, Northchurch, Berkhamsted, Hertfordshire, HP4 3QL
Telephone number	01 442 389040
E-mail	
Registered person	The Trustees Of St Mary's Kindergarten (Northchurch)
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 satisfactory. The registered person meets the National Standards for under 8s day care and childminding.

The quality and standards of the nursery education are satisfactory.

WHAT SORT OF SETTING IS IT?

St. Marys Kindergarten opened in 1997. It operates from the nursery classroom of St. Mary's Church of England School in Northchurch, Berkhamsted. A maximum of 24 children may attend the kindergarten at any one time. The kindergarten is open each weekday during term time from 13.15 to 15.30 and 11.45 to 13.15 for a lunch club. All children share access to a secure enclosed outdoor play area.

There are currently 31 children aged from three to under five years on roll. Of these nine children receive funding for nursery education. Children attend mainly from within the local catchment area. The kindergarten can support children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and can also support children who speak English as an additional language.

The kindergarten employs four staff within the kindergarten and a further seven for lunch club. Two of the staff, including the manager hold appropriate early years qualifications and two members of staff are working towards a qualification.

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PROVISION

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is satisfactory.

Children are cared for in a comfortable, clean environment. There are sound daily hygiene practices which minimise the spread of infection and promote children's health, for example, children wash their hands after creative activities and wipe their noses with the tissues provided. Children are soundly nourished as they are encouraged during lunch club to eat the savoury items in their lunch box first. During the kindergarten session children freely help themselves to the drinking water and cups available, preventing them from becoming dehydrated. They are also becoming aware of their own needs as they identify when they are thirsty and so have a drink of water. Children's special requirements with regard to health and diet are suitably documented and parents' wishes are respected. Their immediate safety and welfare is soundly promoted as staff are trained in first aid and permission to seek treatment in an emergency situation is in place.

Children enjoy a varied range of physical activities which contribute to their good health. They freely access the outside play area where they balance on stepping stones, peddle bikes and climb on the climbing frame. All of which assist them in developing control of their bodies and improving their physical and coordination skills. Children also participate in adult-led activities, such as singing and acting out 'Farmers in the den'. Their fine manipulative skills are developing as they, for example, use scissors to make Christmas gift labels and build models with art straws. Their confidence and self-esteem is then positively encouraged as they keep their models to show their parents at home time.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is satisfactory.

Children benefit from a warm, welcoming and suitably maintained environment. They have access to a range of activities and resources which are regularly rotated promoting challenge. They are encouraged to develop independence by choosing their own activities, initiating their own play and learning with adult support. The range of child-height furniture and equipment enables children to play in comfort. Toys and resources are regularly checked and cleaned ensuring that they remain safe, age-appropriate and suitable for the children to use.

Children feel secure in the premises and the effective arrival and departure procedure promotes this further. Children's safety is suitably promoted as staff have a sound understanding of the risks involved and take positive steps to reduce most of the hazards. However, a free-standing water butt and bucket of water affect children's safety as they are a hazard in the outside play area. Daily checks of the building generally take place and formal risk assessments are being updated. Emergency escape plans are regularly practised ensuring that staff are fully aware of the procedures to follow maintaining the children's safety in an emergency situation. Children's understanding about keeping themselves safe is encouraged as they firstly discuss the story 'Barn on fire' and then talk about what happens when the alarm goes off in the kindergarten. They are also reminded to hold the scissors carefully in case they hurt themselves and when children start running around inside, they are reminded 'We don't run in kindergarten. You need to go outside if you want to run.'

Children's welfare is suitably protected by staff that have a sound knowledge of child protection policies and procedures. Their training is consistently developed ensuring that they have the latest information enabling them to meet the children's needs effectively.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is satisfactory.

Children are happy and settled in the kindergarten. They are keen to participate in the activities and play opportunities provided according to their needs and interest. The staff are skilled in encouraging the children to extend their experiences by listening and talking to them. For example, whilst talking about Christmas presents a member of staff asks 'what would you like' to which they reply 'I'd like a big girl's bike. That's very grown-up.' Therefore, raising the children's confidence, self-esteem and self-belief. Children also generally relate positively to each other making pictures for each other and suggesting 'shall we play with the play dough?'

Children's ability to make independent choices is promoted throughout the session. They are given various opportunities to access resources inside and outside. They make their own choices and decisions in initiating their play, for example, choosing to play with the dolls house, in the home corner or to do some printing with paint. During registration time children have the opportunity to contribute to the questions asked by staff. They eagerly recall what day it is and note that an extra person is present during the session pointing to the inspector and being told by the staff that they can talk to her whenever they wish as she is a friendly visitor.

Children's developmental progress is promoted through staff interaction and monitoring children's use of activities. As children start at the kindergarten when they are three years old they are normally observed and assessed within the Foundation Stage framework. However, most staff are trained in the 'Birth to three matters' framework and generally adapt the activities to meet the children's individual level of development. For example, less experienced children are given scissors that are easier to hold, enabling them to cut the paper with confidence building their self-esteem as well as their cutting skills.

Nursery Education

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. Children are making suitable progress and their overall development is soundly promoted. This is because staff know the children well and mostly plan the curriculum promoting their progress within the six areas of learning and towards the early learning goals. However, the planning does not consistently demonstrate the differentiation made to meet all children's individual developmental needs, therefore limiting some children's progress. Staff partially use assessments to guide their planning and teaching. Children are observed in their play with their progress recorded on stickers or focused activity sheets. Staff then discuss their progress at a weekly planning meeting. However, the children's progress is not clearly indicated in relation to the stepping stones limiting their further development and challenge. Also as children's starting points are not fully discussed or documented potential areas of concern are not quickly highlighted or early progress assessed.

Children participate in a range of activities which ensure that their play is fun and purposeful and staff make effective use of the session time, resources and accommodation ensuring that the children are not needlessly waiting for activities and also allowing the routine to flow seamlessly. Staff use their sound knowledge of the Foundation Stage curriculum to extend children's learning opportunities often through themed topics, such as dinosaurs, the seaside and once upon a time. Whilst covering the story of the three little pigs the children made their

own pig masks and rein, acted the story in front of the other children who enjoyed the performance taking photographs with the digital camera increasing their imagination and their use of equipment.

Children's behaviour is positive as they enter the setting leaving their parents and carers confidently. They communicate effectively listening and speaking to each other in small groups and on a one to one basis. Their independence is developing as they put on their own coats and shoes before going outside and fetch their own aprons before messy play. They are starting to recall recent events as they happily discuss the activities they have participated in during the afternoon and answer staff questions, such as 'who enjoyed themselves this afternoon?' and 'who got messy?'

Children enjoy stories both individually and as a group. They eagerly discuss why 'Elmer the Elephant' is no longer recognised and his colour has turned into grey. They also enjoy practising their Christmas songs and confidently stand at the front of the group singing their version of one of them. They are learning to link sounds to letters as they look for their name card sounding out the first letter. Once found they then copy their name onto their hand made gift tags. They have access to a range of mark-making resources and show enthusiasm in using them drawing a picture for a member of staff.

Children are beginning to recognise that numbers carry meaning. They join in with number songs, such as three little monkeys and 10 fat sausages holding up the correct number of fingers at the right time. They then start to use problem solving techniques by working out how many monkeys are left once one has fallen off the bed. They are becoming familiar with mathematical language discussing and comparing the weight and size of three wrapped parcels and learning how to put them in size order. They are also learning to solve their own questions. When they ask 'How many years is it until I'm 10?' they are encouraged to count on from four and then count the six fingers remaining.

Children are developing an understanding of the uses of information and technology. They confidently use the computer and mouse to make a colourful picture and know how to use the programmable 'Bebop' toy directing it backwards and forwards through a pile of leaves. Their knowledge of the natural world is increased as they make a hedgehog house in the wild garden and go looking for insects with bug viewers. They investigate different materials by playing with snowflakes and jelly and use equipment, such as hole punches and staplers.

Children enjoy a wide range of physical activities developing their coordination and spatial awareness. They move confidently negotiating the available space avoiding knocking into each other whilst, on their bikes for example. They sit on the carpet very aware of their own space and that needed by those around them. They are mostly aware of their own needs as they identify when they need the toilet and independently take themselves.

Children's creative development is encouraged as they, for example, describe how the paint feels whilst doing feet printing and as they discuss the changes that occur when two different coloured paints are mixed together. They enjoy exploring music and sound as they hold an impromptu musical concert outside making sounds with recorders, shakers and hand bells. Their imagination skills are being extended as they participate in role play situations, such as using the home corner as a veterinary surgery or as they pretend to be the teacher telling the other children a story whilst sitting on the carpet.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is satisfactory.

Children are valued and respected as individuals. Staff ensure that they are available to greet them on arrival and make them feel safe and secure. Children are happy, settled and confident in the kindergarten and in their relationships with staff and each other. They receive encouragement and support from staff encouraging their independence and self-esteem. When trying to cut around a drawn shape and demonstrating a lack of confidence by saying 'I can't do it' children are supported by staff saying 'Yes you can. Just do your best.' This gave the children the impetus to continue with the activity and to see it through to the end receiving praise for their efforts.

Children's understanding of other cultures and other ways of life is generally promoted as they play with resources, such as dolls and dressing-up clothes and celebrate festivals, such as Diwali positively reflecting the diverse society in which they live. However, as these are not consistently available to them throughout the kindergarten sessions their further understanding is limited. Children who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities have their requirements clearly identified and met, as there is a practical policy relating to this and staff have a sound understanding of it.

Children's behaviour is generally good. They have a clear understanding of the boundaries in place and what is expected of them. For example, they know to sit on the carpet at the beginning and end of the session and to put their shoes on before going outside. They are starting to take responsibility for their own actions. When not wanting to join in with an action song because they could not be the lead, children are encouraged to watch from the sidelines until they are ready to rejoin the group. This is also accompanied by age-appropriate explanations from staff about sharing and taking turns. Children are consistently praised for positive behaviour and achievements, for example, when they independently indicate that they need to use the toilet they are given a sticker for doing so well. Staff provide positive role models for the children carrying out their tasks in a quiet and calm manner encouraging respect and thought from all. Therefore children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is fostered.

The partnership with parents and carers is satisfactory. Children's needs are suitably documented and met as the staff have a positive relationship with parents. A new parents' brochure is being devised ensuring that they receive all the relevant information they need about the kindergarten and ethos of the setting. A key worker system is also being introduced to ensure that the parents have a link person for their child improving the communication between those involved. Parents are currently able to discuss their child's development and progress at any time with the staff and parent consultations are being planned for the future. The new staff team are very enthusiastic about their role and have prepared a parents' questionnaire to ensure that they are meeting the needs of all those who attend the kindergarten. When questioned those parents spoken to were very positive about the setting saying the setting is 'Superb. My child has come on in leaps and bounds' and 'The staff are very approachable and helpful.'

Organisation

The organisation is satisfactory.

Overall children's needs are met. They are happy, content and are cared for by staff who are committed and enthusiastic about their roles. Most staff hold appropriate early years qualifications and all are committed to ongoing professional development ensuring that their practice remains effective and that they continue to meet the needs of the children. Sound

procedures for the recruitment and vetting of staff are in place. However, procedures for the ongoing monitoring of staff suitability and development are limited potentially compromising the effective staff team already in place. Policies and documentation have recently been reviewed ensuring that all are up to date and current.

Sessions are well planned with a balanced range of activities. Children are given sufficient time and resources enabling them to complete their activities and tasks. They benefit from well deployed staff who consistently interact with them and provide effective support and encouragement helping them feel confident and secure.

The quality of leadership and management is satisfactory. The staff are responsive to the needs of the children, parents and carers. The manager acts as a good role model demonstrating enthusiasm and commitment for her new role. The new staff team are motivated and also show commitment to ongoing improvements. They have developed a clear vision for the kindergarten and for the continuation of improvements to the children's care and education. They are developing the necessary skills to improve the quality of monitoring and evaluating the children's learning and are continuing to develop the partnership with parents ensuring that they can contribute and feel involved in their child's learning.

Improvements since the last inspection

At the last inspection the kindergarten was asked to develop procedures regarding lost and uncollected children and the administration of medication. These are all now in place ensuring the children's safety and well-being. They were also asked to review the risk assessment procedures and expand records regarding the fire drill. These have also been put into place protecting the children's safety further.

With regard to the nursery education the kindergarten was asked to develop strategies for the ongoing support of children for whom English is an additional language. Documentation is now available in different languages and systems and support networks are in place. They were also asked to encourage parental involvement in the children's learning. Parents now receive weekly theme sheets informing them of the areas of learning being covered. This is also an area that the new staff team are proactively improving to benefit the outcomes for 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.

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WHAT MUST BE DONE TO SECURE FUTURE IMPROVEMENT?

The quality and standards of the care

To improve the quality and standards of care further the registered person should take account of the following recommendation(s):

- ensure that the outside area is made safe, refers to water butt and bucket of water
- ensure that resources and activities positively promoting the diversity in society are made readily available to the children
- develop a system for the ongoing monitoring of staff.

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 the use of planning to show how activities are adapted catering for children's individual learning and developmental needs
- develop further the assessment methods to clearly show children's starting points ensuring that potential areas of concern are highlighted and early progress assessed
- improve the recording of observations to further demonstrate children's progression within the stepping stones and to assist in planning their further development and challenge.

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