

One Step Ahead

Inspection report for early years provision

Unique Reference Number	EY236469
Inspection date	21 November 2007
Inspector	Patricia Mary Champion
Setting Address	Nevendon Playcentre, Nevendon Road, Wickford, Essex, SS12 0NL
Telephone number	01268 765675
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Registered person	One Step Ahead
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?

One Step Ahead is owned by a formal business partnership. The pre-school opened in 2002 and operates from two rooms in a play centre located within walking distance of the main shopping area in Wickford, Essex. All children share access to a secure, enclosed, outdoor play area. A maximum of 34 children may attend the pre-school at any one time. The pre-school opens five days a week during school term times. Sessions times are from 09:15 until 11:45 and 12:15 until 14:45.

There are currently 59 children aged from two to five years on roll. Of these, 38 children receive funding for nursery education. Children attend for a variety of sessions. The pre-school serves the local community and surrounding areas. The setting supports a small number of children who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities or who have English as an additional language.

The pre-school employs eight staff, of whom six of the staff, including the managers hold appropriate early years qualifications. The setting receives support from the local authority.

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PROVISION

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is satisfactory.

Children's health is promoted as the staff maintain generally sound levels of hygiene. Children are developing their self-care skills. They know to put used tissues in the bin and they are encouraged to wash their hands before eating and when taking part in cooking activities. Liquid soap and a warm air dryer is provided to reduce the risk of cross-infection. Step-stools are offered so that children can reach the hand basins independently and there are potties available to assist children when toilet training. Any toileting accidents are very discreetly dealt with to preserve children's dignity and self esteem. Policies and procedures relating to medication and sickness are in place to protect children from illness. There is always a staff member with a current first aid certificate on site to deal with any minor injuries and the first aid kit is easily accessible. However, the staff may not always be able to deal with all emergencies because they have not yet requested parental permission to seek any necessary emergency medical advice or treatment.

Children enjoy eating a variety of fruit each day at snack time and talk about the food that is good for you. The menu is displayed for parents to see and information is gathered about any allergies and special dietary requirements so that children's individual needs are met. Although children are offered a drink at snack time, fresh drinking water is not readily accessible to children throughout the session so that they can help themselves to a drink whenever they are thirsty.

Children are developing a positive attitude to physical exercise. They show great excitement when they have the opportunity to go outside and enthusiastically run in the fresh air, moving with pleasure and confidence. They negotiate space successfully when playing racing and chasing games and adjust their speed and direction to avoid obstacles. There is a range of outdoor apparatus so that children can climb, balance, slide or jump. There are also opportunities for children to relax and play quietly when they read a book or complete a jigsaw puzzle.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is satisfactory.

Children are cared for in suitably safe and secure premises. They are protected from potential risks because the staff have attended relevant health and safety training. The rooms used by children are warm and reasonably well maintained. The staff undertake a daily risk assessment and check that most potential hazards are minimised. Children are prevented from entering the kitchen area and guards fitted onto hot radiators protect children from harm. There are effective security precautions to prevent access by an unauthorised person or a child exiting unnoticed. A clear system is in place for answering the door and recording all visitors to the pre-school.

Children begin to learn how to keep themselves safe. They practise fire drills with the staff and understand how to swiftly evacuate the premises in an emergency. They are reminded that it is safer to walk rather than run whilst indoors and use tools such as play dough utensils carefully and in safety. Children select from a range of generally clean and safe play materials. Toys are regularly rotated to provide added interest. Play equipment is routinely checked for damage.

Children are safeguarded because staff understand their child protection responsibilities. They hold the current child protection handbook from the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) and are currently updating the written safeguarding policy. This ensures that staff know the procedures if they have concerns about the welfare of a child.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is satisfactory.

Children enter the pre-school confidently each day and have fun and are interested in the activities. Play materials are organised so that children are encouraged to make choices and take decisions about their play. Interaction between the staff and children is lively and friendly. Staff spend their time playing with and talking to the children and ask carefully formed questions to encourage interesting answers. The key worker system ensures that children are supported and staff get to know them well. Although the staff adapt some activities to meet the needs of children aged under three years, they are not yet using the 'Birth to three matters' framework when planning learning experiences or assessing the development of the youngest children in the pre-school.

Nursery Education

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. The staff are developing a sound understanding of the Foundation Stage and plan a broad range of activities to support the children's learning. The long term plan ensures that all areas of learning are covered over two years. A seven week rota of basic resources and equipment with clear links to broad learning outcomes has been devised. Each week staff plan a focussed learning experience, however, the written activity plans do not clearly link to the stepping stones to help staff understand the intended focus for learning. Staff do include differentiation when they plan to ensure that sufficient support or challenge is offered. Due to children being offered the same resources everyday, by the end of the week there is insufficient challenge to inspire the older children to achieve as much as they can.

Sessions are reasonably well paced. The indoor environment is resourced to provide a balance of adult-led activities and choices that children make for themselves. For example, children ask for games stored in the cupboard. Staff try to use the outdoor area as much as they can but they do not have an all weather outdoor play surface. Children do not always bring suitable clothing to wear when playing outside on the grass after a heavy downpour of rain. The staff do not currently include reference to the outdoor area when they planning activities to enable children to develop in all areas whilst they play outside.

Children are making steady progress towards the early learning goals. Staff observe children as they play and record their progress and achievements. These observations and assessments are used to help formulate future planning.

Children's independence skills are developing satisfactorily. They understand the routine, respond confidently to the register and are independent in their self-care. Children respond generally well to the staff's expectations for responsible behaviour and most listen attentively. They are starting to form friendships and seek out others to share their experiences. Children communicate easily with staff and discuss their experiences at pre-school and at home. They respond with interest at story times and are interested in looking at books independently. Children handle books competently and are aware that print and pictures carry meaning. They are starting to recognise sounds and letters of the alphabet and some of the older children can

adeptly write their names on their artwork. Although a drawing table is offered each day, writing materials are not always provided in the role play area. For example, children cannot practise their emergent writing by taking notes as they speak on the telephone.

Children use mathematical language and count as they play. When they find numerals they recognise them and point them out to staff. During the hedgehog game they count the number of dots on the dice and find the corresponding number of sticks to insert in the hedgehog. Children sort and categorise items such as bricks according to shape, size or colour. Volume, weight and capacity are investigated as children scoop sand into containers. Calculation is explored as children work out how many chairs they need as they sit with their friends. They calculate using their fingers to find out how many mince pies are left when they sing number rhymes.

Children develop their knowledge and understanding of the world through themes and topics. They develop an understanding of their own and other cultures, by making diva lamps to represent Diwali and listen and ask questions about the Christmas nativity story. Children explore and experiment as they examine the changes that happen when water is mixed with icing sugar and the mixture is then spread onto biscuits. Children observe changes in the weather. They animatedly tell staff that it is frosty and discuss what happens when the sun melts the ice. Children construct with purpose using large construction toys and tools. They work out the best way to balance their models through discussion with staff. Each day, children have access to two computers and effectively develop their knowledge of technology. They use simple educational computer programs and adeptly click on and drag the cursor using the mouse to control movements on the screen.

Children's imagination is developing well. They explore colour mixing with paint and incorporate their own ideas when sticking pre-cut shapes to make Christmas cards. They manipulate play dough into shapes using a variety of tools. Children readily express their ideas, real life experiences and feelings through role play. They use musical instruments and sing with gusto. As children prepare for their end of year concert, they are building up a repertoire of interesting Christmas songs.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is satisfactory.

Children are confident and play happily together. They behave generally well due to the consistent, positive strategies that staff employ to help them understand right from wrong and how to get along with others. Children learn all the necessary social skills such as sharing and taking turns and staff encourage them to remember to say 'please' and 'thank you' at snack times. Children's artwork is displayed around the pre-school, which makes the environment more attractive and gives children a sense of belonging. Named pegs are ready for children to find on arrival and they know where to hang their coats and put their bags. There is a sticker reward system for children who bring an item for show and tell, which helps boost their confidence and self-esteem.

Children's individual needs are met well. A system is in place to support children that have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Staff have attended relevant training relating to children's special educational needs. They liaise with parents and other professionals in order to provide the best possible care and ensure that all children can participate fully and are included in the activities.

Children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is fostered. There is a range of play resources that support children's understanding of the lives of others. Children learn about the wider world as they celebrate festivals such as Diwali and Christmas. Activities are planned to encourage children to explore and show respect for the differences and similarities between themselves and others. Children learn to greet each other and the staff cheerfully at registration time and they celebrate each others' birthdays. They take part in charity events, for example, by icing biscuits for 'Children in Need'. They learn about the need to behave responsibly and willingly help staff tidy away the table top toys.

Partnership with parents and carers is satisfactory. Children benefit because there are effective systems to help children settle and new parents are welcome to visit. Parents are willing to take part in fundraising for new equipment and charity events. The prospectus is currently being reviewed and updated. Notices displayed in the entrance and regular newsletters inform parents about the themes and topics, but they are not notified about the early learning goals the children are working towards. Parents are invited to become involved in their children's learning when they contribute items linked to the letter of the week. Staff give verbal feedback regularly to update parents about what the children have been doing. A formal open day is held each year, where progress and achievements are shared. However, parents are not sufficiently aware of information which informs them about the Foundation Stage. The majority of parents speak positively about the pre-school. They appreciate the efforts of the staff team and say that they are caring and very approachable.

Organisation

The organisation is satisfactory.

Children are cared for by an experienced and caring staff team. Sessions mostly run smoothly and staff use available time and space to make children feel secure in their daily routines. The setting meets the required minimum staffing and qualification levels at every session. Staff are vetted and checked through the Criminal Records Bureau and there are appropriate recruitment and induction procedures for new staff.

Leadership and management of the nursery education is satisfactory. The owners of the pre-school also act as managers and there is a deputy who efficiently provides management cover in their absence. The staff team are enthusiastic and understand their roles and responsibilities within the daily routine. Regular staff meetings are held to plan and monitor the curriculum. The managers attend training courses and workshops held with the local Foundation Cluster group. Information is then cascaded back to the staff team. There is a system for staff appraisal, although, this has not been completed recently. Focussed activities are usually evaluated to help staff reflect and determine how they can make improvements to the delivery of the curriculum.

Most of the essential paperwork that supports the efficient and smooth running of the pre-school is in place. The staff are well aware of the need for confidentiality and records are securely stored. However, details within the accident and incident books are not recorded confidentially. There is not yet an operational plan that effectively explains how the setting runs as paperwork has not all been systematically filed or collated. The management have only recently received information regarding the changes made to the National Standards in 2005 and as a result they are currently updating the pre-school's written policies and procedures.

Overall children's needs are met.

Improvements since the last inspection

At the last inspection the provider was asked to devise and implement policies and procedures regarding administering medication, settling children, uncollected children and special educational needs. All the required policies and procedures are now in place. The provider was also asked to ensure that good hygiene practices are in place regarding hand washing. Children now use fresh running water when they wash their hands. Consequently, these improvements have enhanced children's welfare, safety and ability to participate fully.

At the last inspection for nursery education the provider was asked to develop the planning of the curriculum to ensure that all six areas of learning are covered on a regular basis and that clear learning intentions are identified. The weekly rotation of resources has been amended so that all six areas of learning are covered. The activity plans still do not indicate the learning intentions, therefore, a further recommendation has been made.

The provider was also asked to ensure that activities are evaluated, differentiation is included and children's assessments are used to help formulate future planning. Staff now observe children and assess using the stepping stones to see how planning may need changing to meet the next stage of development. The pre-school was also asked to encourage parents to become involved with their child's learning and extend children's learning opportunities at home. A yearly parents' evening is held, an information board has been installed and parents are invited to contribute items for show and tell relating to the letter of the week. These measures contribute to improving the children's learning experiences and the partnership with parents.

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 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 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 details regarding accidents and incidents are recorded confidentially
- ensure that fresh drinking water is freely available to children at all times
- develop the operational plan so that it effectively explains how the setting runs

- request parental permission to seek any necessary emergency medical advice or treatment
- improve outcomes for children aged under three years by using an approach in line with the 'Birth to three matters' framework.

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):

- ensure that more challenge is offered to the older and more able children so that they are consistently inspired to achieve as much as they can
- develop the planning to show how the outdoor area can be used imaginatively to enable children to make progress in all areas of learning and ensure that activity plans include clear learning intentions linked to the stepping stones
- provide more detailed information for parents and carers about the activities and how they link to the areas of learning within the Foundation Stage
- provide more opportunities for children to write for a purpose, for example, within their role play.

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