

St Michaels Playgroup

Inspection report for early years provision

Unique Reference Number	EY295043
Inspection date	16 January 2008
Inspector	Cheryl Langley
Setting Address	Margaret Wix Junior & Infant School, High Oaks, St. Albans, Hertfordshire, AL3 6EL
Telephone number	0781611 8130
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Registered person	The Trustees of St Michaels Playgroup
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?

St Michaels Playgroup has been established for over 30 years and moved to its present location in Margaret Wix School, St Albans, in September 2004. It operates from one classroom of the school and children have access to an enclosed outdoor play area. A maximum of 26 children may attend the playgroup at any one time. It is open each weekday from 09.00 to 11.00 during term time. A parent and toddler group meets on Fridays from 13.00 to 14.30.

There are currently 30 children on roll aged from two years to under four years. Of these 11 children receive funding for nursery education. Children come from a wide area. The playgroup supports children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those who speak English as an additional language.

The playgroup employs five members of staff, three of whom have appropriate early years qualifications, including the manager. One member of staff is working towards a National Qualification Level 3 (NVQ 3) and one is working towards the Foundation Degree. They are members of the Pre-School Learning Alliance and receives support from the local authority.

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PROVISION

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

Staff are aware of Health and Safety guidelines which promote the children's well-being. Regular routines ensure the premises, toys and equipment are clean and suitable for use. All of the required policies and documents are in place to enable the staff to act in the children's best interests if they become unwell or need medical attention. For example, parental consent to seek emergency medical treatment and advice is requested when the children start, sick children are excluded from attending to prevent the spread of infection and a member of staff with current first aid is always on site.

Children are beginning to understand the benefits of good health and hygiene practices. They prevent the spread of germs by washing their hands at appropriate times, covering their mouth when they cough and using clean tissues for sneezes and discarding them properly. Children have fun washing toys and cups and plates to make them clean for use. They rest according to their needs so that they feel comfortable and do not over-tire.

Children develop and enhance their physical skills. A good range of equipment, activities and support and guidance promotes the balance and co-ordination of their bodies. Children manoeuvre sit-on rides, negotiating space and travelling in different directions. They climb on and over soft balance beams and step on mats to operate the sounds. Children become adept at kicking and catching with large and small balls. They use a range of tools, utensils and mark making equipment developing their hand and eye co-ordination. Children enjoy cutting paper to make collage pictures and use rolling pins and cutters to shape play dough.

Children are nourished. Healthy snacks are provided at each session, such as wholemeal toasted bread with fresh and dried fruits. Water is available to the children freely as well as being offered at snack time with a choice of milk. Drinking is encouraged and children learn that it is important to drink after exertion and during hot weather. An interest in food to promote knowledge and understanding is provided by a range of planned activities and discussion during snack times. For example, children grow fresh vegetables in the outside play area and enjoy regular cooking activities. Health and dietary needs are met because the staff work well with parents to establish each child's individual requirements.

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 environment. Regular risk assessments are carried out and potential hazards minimised. Policies and procedures are in place which support the children's safety. For example, children are only released to adults authorised to collect them, fire drills are practised regularly and staff deployed to supervise the children in all areas. An array of both stimulating and purposeful toys and equipment are set out within easy reach. Low level individual coat hooks, child-size furniture and displays of their creations give the children a sense of belonging and independence. They learn to hang their own coats and bags and make choices and decisions about their play and care needs. Areas are organised effectively so that children move around freely and safely to take part in the play and activities on offer.

Safety is promoted with the children. They learn to protect themselves and others. Children have fun practising to cross the road safely and are aware of the dangers of fire. Playgroup rules are reinforced with sensitive reminders from the staff to take care on the climbing equipment to avoid accidents. Children become aware of the hazards of sharp tools, utensils and using the oven. They sweep up loose sand around the sand-pit to prevent slipping on the sand. Children and the staff talk about the need to listen and stay close to adults to remain safe.

The children's welfare is safeguarded. Staff have a sound understanding of child protection issues. They regularly update their training in this area. A suitable policy and procedures have been devised to support the staff should they have any concerns about a child in their care to protect them from further harm.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

Children become happy and settled in this supportive and caring environment. They develop self-assurance and confidence which enables them to separate from their carers and become independent. Children make positive relationships with the staff and peers. They feel comfortable initiating play with their friends, talking to adults, making choices and decisions or rising to challenges, such as catching a ball or trying to put their own coat on.

Children acquire knowledge and skills. Staff take time to listen and talk to them to develop their language and communication. They enjoy singing simple songs and rhymes. Children listen attentively to stories brought to life by enthusiastic staff. They use their senses and natural curiosity as learners to explore and investigate water, sand and earth. Children dig in the outside area and use vessels and tools to discover movement and changes to the water and sand. They express themselves creatively. Children make pictures with various materials to put on display in their gallery. They develop an interest in books, turning the pages correctly from left to right. Children use their imaginations to act out their feelings and experiences. They have fun in the home-play corner caring for dolls, putting bandages on them or preparing meals for their friends and dressing up as different characters. Regular topics and themes reinforce their knowledge and awareness of shape and colour.

Children are motivated and interested in a range of purposeful and developmentally appropriate indoor and outdoor activities. Staff are aware of the 'Birth to three matters' framework and plan activities which provide suitable levels of challenge for the children's age and stage of development.

Nursery education

The quality of teaching and learning is good. Children are making progress. Planning is linked to the six areas of learning in a balanced way. An effective observation system is in place and each keyworker is aware of the next step required for learning for each child in their group. However, documentation and procedures to support this lacks detail to ensure children continue with their individual programme in the absence of their keyworker. There is therefore, the potential for a child's progress to be hindered in this situation. Assessments are written under each area of learning, although there is not always a clear connection to the stepping stones to show parents and other staff the progress a child is making towards the early learning goals. Evaluations of adult led activities does not always state clearly if the purpose of the activity has been met or the next course of action. Staff join in with the children's play to make it fun

and give guidance when it is needed. They talk and listen to the children, showing an interest in them and asking open questions to make them think and reinforce their learning. There are good systems in place to support children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those who speak English as an additional language.

Children express and communicate their ideas, thoughts and feelings in various ways. They use a wide range of materials for imaginative play or art and craft activities. Children have fun caring for dolls in the play hospital, use tools to repair items around the room and decorate paper snakes for their wild animal topic. They recognise simple songs and tunes, singing the words from memory and make loud and soft sounds with musical instruments. Children use tools, utensils and programmable toys with increasing control. They operate keyboards and telephones and take part in regular information technology sessions.

Children develop a sense of time. They are aware of the routine of the session, responding to cues for tidy up time and snack. Children talk about past and present events with the staff and their peers. They are aware of the seasons and identify changes and the features of living things, such as growing plants. Children are encouraged to ask about why things happen and how they work through planned activities. For example, they experiment with magnets to see which types of materials attract or repel. Children compare similarities and differences as they mix the ingredients in play dough. They extend their vocabulary describing how it feels, such as 'sticky' or 'soft'. Good use is made of information books to encourage their use. For example, children look at pictures in reference books to help them create pictures of wild animals to put on display or take home. Children enjoy painting pictures of camels, making lion masks or decorating paper snakes. They listen attentively to stories told with props or from books, responding to questions and sharing their views in a group.

Children begin to recognise their names and link sounds to letters. More able children begin to trace letters correctly and count beyond 10 with confidence. Children distinguish between quantities as they count different numbers in two groups. They learn mathematical language and become aware of addition and subtraction as they sing simple rhymes, such as 'five little monkeys jumping on the bed'. Children know what is meant by 'empty' and 'full' or 'heavy' and 'light' and correctly name different shapes. Using trial and error they fit different shaped blocks together to make models of aeroplanes and flags. They think about ways to solve problems, such as how to create a bridge for cars and lorries with card and books. Children are aware that we write for various reasons. They make notes whilst speaking on the telephone, create shopping lists and menus, and write in cards for anniversaries or label their pictures.

Children form good relationships and are sensitive to others. They work as part of a group to help each other tidy large items away and share toys and equipment. Children are interested and motivated to learn. They concentrate and sit quietly when appropriate to complete a picture, play contently with the marble run or complete a puzzle. Children respond with enthusiasm to sing and follow the actions to songs such as 'The wheels on the bus' or join in with whole group activities to control the 'parachute'. Overall, children make good progress in their learning and achieve well given their capability and starting points.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

Children are cared for by staff who work with parents to meet the children's individual needs and ensure they are included in all the play and activities provided. Good practices are used by the staff to support children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. For example, children

are given one-to-one care if required and staff work closely with parents and other agencies to support them. Gentle encouragement and comfort are given by the staff to new settlers who soon become relaxed and content in the setting. Children make positive relationships and rise to challenges. Conversations with the friendly and approachable staff, along with written information in the parents prospectus and notice board keep parents up-to-date. Home and playgroup links are established through activities and social occasions. Effective systems encourage parent volunteers to take part in sessions or attend to share their talents to aid the children's learning. For example, parents provide an additional adult to oversee routine activities during sessions, play musical instruments or bring items or animals for the children to observe. These strategies help to provide consistency in the children's care and development and keep parents informed of their progress.

A positive view of the wider world and an increased awareness of diversity is promoted by a range of toys and resources and planned activities. Children learn about different cultures, customs and festivals, such as Chinese New Year, Ramadan and Diwali. They play with dolls depicting positive images of varying ethnic backgrounds and people of differing abilities.

Children are beginning to behave well. The staff manage behaviour effectively and use sensitive reminders to encourage consideration, care and respect for others. Children take turns, share and help their peers during play. They are praised and complimented on their achievements and positive behaviour. Children are given responsibilities and encouraged to be independent. For example, they help at tidy-up time, make decisions about when they will have their snack and help themselves to protective clothing. Children develop confidence and self-esteem in this calm and friendly atmosphere. Children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is fostered.

The partnership with parents and carers of children in receipt of nursery education funding is good. Parents are encouraged to be involved with their children's learning by sharing topic related items and continuing their learning at home. They receive information about the playgroup and the areas covered in nursery education. A short report is sent at the end of each term with a final report linked to the six areas of learning provided when the children are ready to move on to nursery. This keeps parents informed of the progress their children are making.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

Children benefit from staff who have knowledge and training in place to support the care and development of the children. Stringent vetting procedures are followed to ensure children are cared for by people who are suitable to work with them. Ratios are maintained at all times and staff are well organised and effectively deployed. This means the children's safety, health and individual care and learning needs are attended to. They plan their time effectively to ensure their main focus is on the children. This ensures a high level of attention and support throughout the session. Staff have a clear sense of purpose and commitment to continual improvement to ensure the children make progress. The premises are organised to contribute to the children's well-being. They move around safely and freely to make choices and engage in their play.

The required documentation is in place, stored securely and information shared appropriately with parents. Most of the necessary policies and procedures have been devised to keep children safe, healthy and safeguard their welfare. However, Ofsted have not been notified of changes to the operational policy. This is to make sure the regulator is aware of any changes that may impact on the children. Overall, the children's needs are met.

Leadership and management of the nursery education is good. The staff work well together as a team. They are well organised and have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities. Regular formal and informal meetings take place to plan and share information for the children's nursery education. Plans are monitored and evaluated regularly to ensure all six areas of learning are covered in a balanced way. The professional development of the staff is promoted by the manager and an effective appraisal system highlights strengths and training needs. Staff are enthusiastic about updating their skills and knowledge and attend training regularly. The committee meets annually with the staff and they have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities with regard to the playgroup.

A strong relationship has been developed between St. Michael's Playgroup and Margaret Wix Junior and Infant School. Children have regular use of the school facilities and visit the nursery class to meet the staff and other pupils. This helps to make the children feel comfortable and settled when their routine changes and they move on to nursery school.

Staff are committed to promoting an inclusive and stimulating environment. They enjoy working with the children, encouraging them to learn and become independent and confident. Staff work hard to meet their aim of enabling children of all abilities to participate fully, to learn and to have fun.

Improvements since the last inspection

At the last inspection the staff agreed to make more effective use of resources to provide children with wider choice, ensure their security on arrival and record weekly safety checks. There is an extensive range of toys and equipment. A large selection is put out for each session and rotated frequently to give children different experiences and learning opportunities. Effective systems have been devised to ensure children arrive safely with their parents on the premises and weekly risk assessments are recorded to monitor and minimise any potential hazards and keep the children safe.

To improve the provision for nursery education staff agreed to increase the opportunities within everyday activities and routines to develop children's understanding of numbers, calculating and problem solving. Throughout the session counting is encouraged, such as counting the number of girls and boys in attendance. During play staff ask questions to promote calculation and problem solving. For example, children investigate how many balls will fit into a coat pocket. Staff also agreed to improve the information shared with parents about the Foundation Stage and their child's progress towards the early learning goals. As a result details are provided on the parent notice board and in the prospectus about nursery education and the six areas of learning. A short report is sent at the end of each term with a more detailed assessment prepared at the end of each child's time with the playgroup to show the progress made. Staff were also asked to make a link of the planned activities to the stepping stones. Plans have been developed and a connection made to the six areas of learning but not clearly linked to the stepping stones. This recommendation has been raised again so that progress towards the early learning goals is clear for parents to see.

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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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):

- make sure the regulatory body is informed of any significant changes to the operational plan.

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 suitable systems for ensuring the next steps required for each individual child is always used to inform planning, to make sure assessments show how progress is being made through the stepping stones towards the early learning goals and for evaluations to state if the purpose has been met.

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