

Tiddlywinks Playgroup

Inspection report for early years provision

Unique Reference Number	133889
Inspection date	20 March 2008
Inspector	Sonjia Nicholson

Setting Address	The Playgroup Building, Alder Drive, Ambrosden, Bicester, Oxfordshire, OX25 2RD
Telephone number	01869 256555
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Registered person	Tiddlywinks Playgroup
Type of inspection	Integrated
Type of care	Full day 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?

Tiddlywinks Playgroup was established in the early 1960's and moved to the current location in February 1997. It is a committee run group based in a purpose built building in the heart of Ambrosden, a village with a large Ministry of Defence (MOD) presence just outside Bicester. The group is open to children from civilian and MOD families.

The playgroup is open from 09.10 to 14.45, Monday to Friday, for 39 weeks each year. It is registered to accept up to 48 children under the age of eight years, with a limited number of children under two years. There are currently 87 children on the roll, of whom 12 are in receipt of nursery education funding. There are several children who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities or who speak English as an additional language.

There are ten members of staff who are employed to work with the children along with a manager. Of these, five have a recognised qualification to level two or above, and three are currently working towards a level three qualification. The playgroup is a member of the Pre-School Learning Alliance.

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PROVISION

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is satisfactory.

Children learn good hygiene habits as they wash their hands at appropriate times for example, before having their snack. Staff frequently use tissues to wipe children's noses and follow good hygiene routines designed to prevent the spread of infection. These include wearing an apron and gloves during nappy changes, disposing of dirty nappies in suitable nappy bins to prevent unpleasant odours, using an anti-bacterial spray to clean tables before snacktime and ensuring the detailed cleaning rotas are completed to keep the kitchen clean and tidy. The setting is registered with the district council as a food business and staff follow guidance from the Environmental Health Officer such as, checking the temperature of the refrigerator on a daily basis. There is a written sickness policy in place which is shared with parents so they understand their role in keeping everyone within the playgroup healthy. The manager is aware that Ofsted must be informed of any notifiable diseases or serious injuries to a child.

Accidents to children are recorded appropriately and signed by parents to acknowledge the basic treatment given to their child. Many staff hold current first aid certificates and have been trained to deal with minor injuries using items from the first aid boxes situated in each room. Staff obtain parents written consent to seek treatment in the event of a more serious injury; they have open access to the adjacent doctors surgery which means children can be examined immediately and receive further treatment if necessary. There are good systems in place for children who require medication; details of their condition and necessary treatment and/or medication required are kept on file and medication is stored safely in the office out of children's reach. Staff complete an accurate record when it is administered. During hot weather, children stay safe in the sun as parents give their written consent for staff to apply sun cream which children rub in. Children wear a hat and cover up with a t-shirt to prevent exposure to the sun; they benefit from the many large trees in the playgroup garden which provides shade for them.

Children have snacks that are generally healthy for example, fresh and dried fruit, crackers with butter and toasted hot cross buns to celebrate Easter, however, some items offered such as, chocolate mousse provide little nutritional value for children. Children are beginning to learn about healthy foods through discussions with staff at lunchtime and know that chocolate and sweets are bad for them. The setting provides parents with information about healthy options for children's lunchboxes and has good storage solutions to keep food fresh and tasty for example, putting perishable items in the refrigerator during summer months. Children's allergies are well-documented so they do not have food that may harm them. Children have a drink of fruit squash or milk at snacktime, however the healthy option of water is not offered and there is no opportunity for them to access a drink independently throughout the day to ensure they are not thirsty. Lunchtimes are disorganised as staff do not effectively implement the written routine on display. For example, they do not sit with the children whilst they are eating or plan for the time when children have finished; this results in children becoming noisy and frequently leaving the table during their meal with no staff intervention. At snacktime three and four year olds do not have the opportunity to pour their own drink as staff do this at a central point; children get up from their chair to collect their drink which means there is unnecessary movement and noise. Food is presented on pieces of card which are thrown away after use; this is not very appropriate or environmentally-friendly.

All rooms are spacious so children can move and play freely. There is easy access from all rooms to the fully enclosed outdoor area where children move in different ways. They climb on the

climbing frame, crawl through tunnels and push or pedal a selection of ride-on toys. Older children develop their fine motor skills as they use a plastic knife to spread butter on their crackers at snacktime and use pencils and paintbrushes during creative activities. There are many planned activities that involve practising using scissors for example, cutting along pre-drawn lines on a piece of paper.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is satisfactory.

Children's artwork and photographs are on display throughout the building which creates a welcoming environment. All rooms are bright and well-ventilated due to the many large windows present. Children enjoy playing in the large garden which is mostly laid to lawn with a patio area and pathway that is ideal for them to ride the trundle toys. There are plans to extend the side area into a wildlife garden with the help of the local authority Conservation Officer; currently children use this area to feed and observe the birds. Children access a satisfactory range of toys within each room which staff rotate every half term to ensure a variety. Some toys appear well-used, however new toys and equipment are on order to supplement the range in place. There are procedures in place for staff to clean and check toys and they immediately remove any broken items for example, a member of staff takes a plastic stool to the office that has split so children cannot injure themselves on it.

The building remains secure as the front gate is kept locked and is monitored by closed circuit television; the manager carefully observes who approaches the gate to ensure undesirable adults do not enter. As the playgroup is set within a military community, safety and security is paramount in most people's minds. Children stay safe within the playgroup as staff undertake daily risk assessments of all areas including the garden; this means any potential hazards are identified before children come to harm. During their daily practice staff are vigilant in keeping cupboards and doors locked so children cannot enter unsuitable areas such as, the toy cupboard or kitchen. As a precaution fire extinguishers are sited throughout the building and a fire blanket is attached to the wall in the kitchen. All staff are familiar with the fire drill which they practise regularly so that all children take part and know how to leave the building quickly and safely. Details of evacuation drills are logged for future reference.

There are good arrangements in place to keep children safe on the 'walking bus' as they walk to the Foundation Stage Unit at the local school to attend an afternoon session. Staff maintain a high adult to child ratio and ensure they follow a safe journey on pathways away from the main road; they use the recently installed crossing to help children reach their destination safely. Outings further afield do not take place but parents give their written consent for children to take walks in the local area for example, to the post office to post letters and parcels. Policies relating to a child becoming lost or a parent failing to collect their child lack some detail. Children are protected from possible abuse or neglect as staff have a satisfactory understanding of safeguarding procedures. Some staff have completed relevant training but others are due to attend courses so they feel confident and able to recognise the types and signs of abuse. The settings child protection policy does not contain up to date information or contact details but staff can refer to the Local Safeguarding Children Board procedures document in place; this is not shared with parents so they fully understand the staff's role and responsibility to protect children. There are good arrangements in place to monitor visitors to the playgroup; they sign the visitors book on arrival and as they leave so staff know who is in the building and contractors checking the fire alarm system are accompanied by the manager at all times during their visit.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is satisfactory.

Children are organised into rooms by age and have a key worker who knows them well following several pre-visits where they discuss any care issues with parents. Staff effectively follow the Birth to three matters framework and make observations about what children can do. This informs their decision as to whether a child is ready to move onto the next room. At this stage staff share children's records and discuss any relevant concerns to ensure a smooth transition. Children experience a wide range of activities and toys set out each day; they enjoy sand play with a variety of tools, build models with construction equipment, use scissors and glue to make pictures using old magazines and dress-up in a variety of costumes. Younger children enjoy exploring their surroundings as they crawl on the soft play equipment, use crayons to colour, watch the goldfish in the tank and paint freely. Staff take lots of photographs of the children which they share with parents so they can see what their child enjoys doing; they even have the opportunity to buy a copy to keep at home. Staff interact well with the children and encourage their language development by talking freely to them and asking lots of questions. Children take part in a range of interesting activities linked to themes, currently 'Spring and New Life'. They make daffodils using egg boxes, do marble painting, celebrate St. David's Day and learn about the life-cycle of a frog, butterfly and duck.

Nursery Education

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. Some staff working with the three and four year olds are new to this age range and have not received sufficient training in the Foundation Stage curriculum. They work under the supervision of the manager who oversees most of the planning which results in them not always knowing how to interpret some activities such as, decorating Easter eggs. This activity is poorly executed due to the lack of resources for example, staff borrow a table from another room so that the whole group can sit together but then realise there are not enough glue sticks for everyone. It also means staff cannot spend quality time with the children and question them effectively. Staff monitor what the children are doing well by making lots of observations and transferring them into their Foundation Stage profile or observation book. They use this information to create a separate sheet which highlights areas of development for specific children and helps them plan activities such as, developing scissor or pencil control. Staff evaluate planned activities; they record comments made by the children and factors affecting the outcome. Children are making satisfactory progress at this stage.

Children have opportunities to speak within large group times and particularly like sharing things with their friends during 'show and tell' sessions. Staff encourage them to speak out loud by asking questions about their item for example, 'what's your wrestler's name?' Children generally behave well but during these large group times staff do not always gain children's attention which leads to a situation whereby children become silly and their behaviour deteriorates; this in turn affects their ability to learn and develop a respect for others when they are speaking. Children develop independence as they hang their coat on their peg after outdoor play. Staff choose a child to be a helper at snacktime which makes them feel important and develops their self-esteem, however, opportunities to be more independent are limited at this time.

Children enjoy looking at books in the book corner; they turn the pages and read the story out loud to themselves using the pictures as clues. Large group story times are less successful as some children do not listen attentively. The environment is rich in print with posters, a birthday

board and alphabet frieze. Children play in the sand and water area surrounded by labels containing relevant words such as, 'dripping', 'floating', 'emptying' and 'wet'. Opportunities for children to make marks are plentiful; they access the writing area with jotter pads, pencils and Easter pictures and make marks with large chalks on the patio area outside. However children are not encouraged to write their name on their work independently.

Children play simple games that help them recognise shapes and colours and are beginning to use mathematical language in their activities for example; they wrap presents and cut the paper to the correct size estimating whether it is too 'big' or too 'small'. There are limited opportunities throughout the day for children to count or make simple calculations. Children investigate change as they take part in cooking activities where they make pizzas, apple crumble, traffic light jam tarts and chocolate Easter baskets. They make bird cakes every week using seeds, nuts and lard which they hang from trees in the garden. Children show great interest in observing the birds and use binoculars and books to help identify them. They learn about the weather as they complete the weather board at the beginning of the session; they agree it is sunny but cold. Children also talk about the days of the week and months of the year at this time. They make models with a range of construction equipment and have worked together to make a large tree from paper and card; they intend to make changes to it to reflect the seasons for example, adding or removing leaves. Children have fun as they excitedly take part in an Easter egg hunt in the garden as part of their Easter celebrations. Children use computers with appropriate programs to develop an understanding of technology but as staff do not monitor their use children gain little from this experience.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is satisfactory.

Children have many opportunities to learn about diversity by celebrating world events and religious festivals such as, Chinese New Year and Australia Day. There are many resources to support children's learning including a calendar of festivals, toys, books and posters. Children experience food from other cultures such as, naan bread and mango chutney, egg fried rice and prawn crackers to develop an awareness of different tastes and textures. Parents from other cultures are welcomed into the setting to share their knowledge for example, a Chinese parent explains why and how Chinese people celebrate Chinese New Year and gives all the children a good luck decoration to take home. The manager works well to help families of military personnel from British Commonwealth countries settle in and understand our culture and educational system. She offers home visits to all families to get to know the children and their family and complete the necessary paperwork. Several children and their parents speak another language but use English to communicate sufficiently. Children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is fostered appropriately.

The playgroup manager is currently taking the role of Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO) on a temporary basis and she and the staff offer good support to children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. If they have concerns about a child's development they raise this with parents and urge them to seek advice and support from other agencies. Those children with identified needs receive specific help in the form of an Individual Educational Plan with set targets and extra staff support. The Area SENCO visits regularly to ensure staff keep up to date with general issues as no one is currently available to attend Cluster Group meetings held by the local authority.

Children generally behave well and play together with little or no incident. Staff use a reward system of stickers, certificates and prizes to encourage children to tidy up and behave well.

They implement some aspects of the behaviour policy effectively so that children begin to learn right from wrong for example, a child who throws sand at another child is given an explanation as to why this is unacceptable and asked to take time out away from the sand tray. Children sing their 'Please and Thank you' song before snack time but staff do not always insist they say 'please' and 'thank you' as they are given their snack and drink. Children's behaviour at large group times often becomes unruly and they do not listen attentively due to the staff's inability to be consistent and manage these situations effectively; this affects children's ability to learn.

New parents receive lots of information about the setting including a welcome letter and prospectus detailing the service provided; this is in the process of being updated. Children have two free visits to help them settle during which time their key worker gathers pertinent information so appropriate care is offered for example, details of any allergies. Parents complete an enrolment form and sign several consent forms to give their permission for staff to seek emergency treatment, go on local outings and take photographs of the children. Regular newsletters are produced to ensure parents know about news and events and the welcome letter encourages parents to volunteer their time within the setting helping the children and staff. There is a complaints policy in place for parents to follow if they are not happy with the care their child receives, however this does not reflect changes to regulations or contain the correct contact details.

The partnership with parents and carers of children receiving nursery education funding is satisfactory. Information about the planned activities is on display for parents to see but there is little opportunity for them to become involved in their child's learning at home. There is some information about the Foundation Stage curriculum in the setting's prospectus that they are given when their child commences at the playgroup but by the time they receive their funding it is not highlighted to them again. As a result most parents are unaware of the progress their child is making. Staff assess children's development and progress by making regular observations, creating a profile of their work and completing a Foundation Stage profile. Again most parents have not seen their child's record as there is little information to encourage them to do so. On transfer to school staff write a report which they share with parents and the school.

Organisation

The organisation is satisfactory.

The setting is currently undergoing a period of change due to some recent staff movement. Some staff are still adapting to the changes and are having difficulty grasping their new roles, as a result older children in particular are not experiencing the highest levels of education with many gaps evident in the quality of teaching and the curriculum. The manager is aware of this and senses the frustrations of the staff who struggle to enthusiastically implement planning they do not feel fully involved in and with limited resources. There are opportunities for staff to attend relevant training courses to increase their skills and knowledge and the committee places a high emphasis on staff gaining a professional childcare qualification. This is sometimes difficult to achieve as many staff move at short notice due to new military postings.

The playgroup offers a flexible service to all families especially those of military personnel; many staff have connections to the military too and have a good understanding of the needs of these families. For example, they involve the children in sending letters and parcels to soldiers on a tour of duty as a link to home. The manager has formed good relationships with the Area SENCO, local teachers and the MOD Welfare Officer to ensure children receive appropriate care. There are suitable procedures in place to recruit new staff but the committee do not

gather information from candidates about their physical and mental health which could have implications. All regulatory records are in place along with written policies but some lack detail or need amendments to ensure they contain the correct information. Records are stored confidentially in the office in a locked cabinet to protect children's identity.

Leadership and Management is satisfactory. The manager has close links to many of the committee members who she sees on a regular basis. Formal committee meetings are held every quarter with regular correspondence taking place via e-mail or telephone. The manager aims to hold team meetings every term but finds this is not always possible; therefore she communicates through a staff newsletter, addresses issues at the time and operates an 'open door' policy where staff can speak to her. New staff undertake an initial meeting with the manager and another if they successfully complete their three month probationary period to review their ability and conduct. Existing staff have an annual appraisal to review their progress and discuss any training needs; however the committee do not hold an appraisal for the manager so they are not aware of her management style or if funded children are making satisfactory progress within the setting. The manager is aware of the settings strengths and weaknesses through completing a self-evaluation form in great detail; she also has a clear action plan in place to address issues raised at the last inspection. The setting meets the needs of the range of children for whom it provides.

Improvements since the last inspection

At the last nursery education inspection one key issue was raised; to develop the planning tool so it clearly shows what activities are available each day and provides a means of ensuring the curriculum is balanced for all children.

Since then staff have worked together at team meetings to develop a short term planning sheet that clearly shows what activities are available each day. This is now in use and on display for staff and parents to see.

At the last care inspection three recommendations were raised; to avoid having staff distracted by mundane tasks and changes in routine, to ensure consistent supervision and behaviour management, to keep an accurate record of children's arrival and departure times and include Ofsted's contact details in the complaints policy and notify Ofsted of any child protection concerns raised, and include contact details of referral agencies in the child protection policy.

These recommendations have been addressed since the last inspection although staffing and the management of children's behaviour remains an issue and have been raised during this inspection. Records now contain the necessary detail except for Ofsted's contact details in the complaints policy which have changed since the last inspection.

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 staff follow the guidance in place regarding the organisation of mealtimes to ensure they run smoothly; provide suitable crockery or placemats for children to use and ensure they can independently access fresh drinking water throughout the session
- ensure the committee devise and implement a system to evaluate the playgroup manager's performance and introduce further opportunities for management and staff to meet, raise issues and share good practice.

The quality and standards of the nursery education

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

- review the organisation of activities for three and four year olds; provide enough resources for all children to take part and include staff more in the planning of activities so they can deliver them appropriately
- introduce strategies in order to gain children's attention and develop their listening skills, particularly during large group times so they behave appropriately
- provide further information about the Foundation Stage curriculum and opportunities for parents to become involved in their child's learning
- provide more opportunities for children to count and make simple calculations during everyday activities and encourage them to write their name independently on their work.

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