

St Thomas Parish Pre-School

Inspection report for early years provision

Unique Reference Number	127632
Inspection date	08 November 2007
Inspector	Melissa Turner
Setting Address	St Thomas RC Primary School, South Park, Sevenoaks, Kent, TN13 1EH
Telephone number	01732 779517
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Registered person	The Trustees of The Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Southwark
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 good.

WHAT SORT OF SETTING IS IT?

St. Thomas pre-school opened in 1984. It operates from a room within the St. Thomas RC primary school, in Sevenoaks, Kent. A maximum of 24 children may attend the pre-school at any one time. The pre-school is open each weekday from 09.00 to 11:45 and on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday it opens from 12:45 - 15:15 for the older children. The group operates during school term times only. All children share access to a small outdoor area and have use of the school and early years playgrounds.

There are currently 41 children aged from three to under five years on roll. Of these, 37 children receive funding for nursery education. Children come from the local area. The pre-school supports children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and also supports children who speak English as an additional language.

The pre-school employs six members of staff. Of these, five hold appropriate early years qualifications.

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PROVISION

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is satisfactory.

Children are developing a sound understanding of keeping themselves healthy. They understand when they need to wash their hands and enjoy singing the 'wash your dirty hands' song. Staff support them in this activity; however children currently use a shared hand towel for hand drying, which does not help avoid the spread of infection.

Children enjoy an exceptionally healthy and varied range of food at snack time. They delight as they help to prepare pumpkin soup and breadsticks and they also enjoy snacks such as freshly prepared porridge, fruit and toast. Children frequently help to prepare snack, staff encourage discussions about healthy foods and help them to understand the process of baking from start to finish. Children benefit from being able to view their food cooking through the low glass wall in the kitchen. Children are developing a very good understanding of healthy eating through staff's positive approach to providing a varied, nutritious range of snacks on a daily basis, which children can become fully involved in helping to prepare. Children drink water or milk to stay hydrated and are able to help themselves to a jug of water at all other times.

Clear systems are in place to ensure that staff are aware of dietary requirements, and are able to deal with illnesses or emergencies. Currently, however, no staff hold a valid first aid certificate, which means minimum requirements are not being met. However, staff have a temporary back up of first aid qualified staff being available within the school, to help ensure no child is put at risk.

Children thoroughly enjoy the opportunities for physical activity. Indoors, they enjoy using equipment such as the see-saw and enjoy activities helping them to warm up and down, for example moving their hands like rockets or butterfly wings. Outdoors, children are able to access the recently developed garden area and also the playground and early years playground. Children thoroughly enjoy using ride-on toys, scooters and trikes and fixed play equipment. They show they have honed their skills well and navigate around one another with skill. Children enjoy these opportunities daily, and during poor weather staff have enough wellingtons and wet weather clothing to ensure children can still enjoy outdoor play and fresh air. These aspects encourage and enable children to develop an appreciation of physical activity and to make good progress in this area of learning.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

Children are cared for in a bright, welcoming pre-school environment. Their work is displayed and the atmosphere is inviting. Children arrive confidently and settle well in the child orientated environment, which is well organised and promotes all areas of learning. Children are freely able to help themselves to a wide range of toys and resources, which are of extremely good quality; many are also natural or wooden materials.

Children's safety is promoted and maintained at all times by staff. For example, they encourage children to be careful when trying the pumpkin soup they have made, and encourage children to be careful as they construct tall towers from large bricks. Children are well supervised indoors and out and are cared for in a safe environment. Risk assessments are completed annually and fire drills are completed at the same time as the school's. Records and details of these are kept.

Security is well maintained. Staff deploy themselves well and promote children's safety throughout the session. Clear procedures for outdoor play and local outings ensure children are kept safe when outdoors. The nominated child protection officer has a very good knowledge and understanding of child protection issues. Consequently, children's welfare and well-being is considered a high priority and is promoted by staff at all times. These aspects help keep children safe and, as a result, children understand safety and why keeping themselves safe is important.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

Children are happy, settled and extremely confident. They are familiar with the routines of the pre-school and new starters are exceptionally well supported by staff who take time to explain the routines of the day to them. Children move about their activities with enthusiasm and independence; staff support them as they play but also give them the space and time they need to explore independently. Children have developed good relationships with one another and staff. Children are offered a welcoming, stimulating and caring environment in which they are settled and supported and which enables them to make good progress at the pre-school. A quiet but busy environment pervades, in which children are extremely well established.

Nursery education

The quality of teaching and learning is good. Children are making good progress because staff are supportive, encouraging and enthusiastic. They sit at children's level and interact with them, offering them appropriate explanations and demonstrations, particularly when introducing an activity for the first time. Staff recognise children's level of individual ability and offer them fun challenges according to their levels. They also allow children the space and time to explore and play independently, whilst also offering them support as appropriate. They ensure children have plenty of time and space to communicate their thoughts and ideas, and give all children the space to communicate freely.

Staff have a good understanding of the Foundation Stage of education and use this to help promote children's learning throughout all activities, planned or spontaneously introduced by the children. A clear planning and observation system used alongside 'all about me' sheets, ensures all children are able to make good progress and are planned for as individuals. Work sheets are used on occasions, which are limiting to children.

Children make good progress in all areas of learning. They show strong levels of confidence and willingly help to tidy away when they are asked. They are developing friendships and good levels of independence, as they take themselves to the toilet, pour their own drinks and help themselves to the toys they would like to play with. Children count in many activities, for example the number of children at register or snack time. Children develop their understanding of simple challenges as they work out if they have enough bowls and glasses for the number of children seated at their table for snack time. They discuss shapes throughout several activities, for example the shapes they are moulding their bread dough into. Children communicate well and are encouraged by staff to tell their news or story from start to finish without interruption. Children enjoy plenty of opportunities to look at and handle books throughout the session. They thoroughly enjoy story time and being read to in small groups after snack. Children mark make in a variety of situations, including, for example, in the home corner where they use a note pad and pen to record each other's orders at the 'Chinese restaurant'.

Children thoroughly enjoy exploring, for example they have a wealth of opportunities to take part in cookery activities, such as bread, soup and porridge making. They discuss the pumpkin and how it looks after the seeds and flesh have been removed. They enjoy collecting leaves from the school grounds on their nature walks, and handle objects on the nature table, such as gem stones and pine cones. Children construct elaborate models and have a range of resources to do this with, such as wooden building bricks. They use the computer confidently, completing simple programmes; although this is not set up for use every day, children have access to other resources for technology. With staff support, they are beginning to understand how a photocopier works as they take a photocopy of their hammer and nail board pictures to keep. Children develop a good understanding of cultures and beliefs and they take part in a wide range of activities, such as food tasting from around the world, exploring music and songs from around the world and exploring events such as Chinese New Year.

Children delight as they create breadsticks and numbers from dough. They enjoy a wide variety of painting and art opportunities, for example they roll marbles in paint to create beautiful firework pictures, they drizzle glue and use coloured sand to create dramatic pictures and use paint and paint brushes that are set out for them on the easel. Children delight in their imaginative play area which is set up as an attractive, well organised home corner. They play for extended periods of time pretending they are different animals and characters, developing their imaginations. Children take part in regular musical activities. They warm up their voices, preparing for the songs, and explore sounds whilst doing this; 'clicking their tongues', humming and getting louder. They enjoy singing favourite rhymes and songs and playing musical instruments, exploring the different sounds they make. Consequently, children are making good progress and enjoy and achieve in all their activities.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

Children's individual needs are met to an exceptionally high standard. Staff welcome each child in to the pre-school and regularly talk about their families and home lives with them to help them feel settled. New starters are extremely well supported, with simple introductions of pre-school routines helping them to settle quickly. Staff have a very good understanding of each child's needs and meet these well; strong relationships have been established between all staff and children. Staff find out an extensive range of information about each child and their interests/needs and abilities. They have recently introduced an 'all about me' form which records detail that staff then use to help inform their plans. This includes information such as children's favourite songs or toys and this is referred to by staff regularly. Children are encouraged to bring in favourite items from home, for example a child brings in a favourite CD and the group listen to his favourite song 'Nellie the elephant'.

Staff ensure all children are included and involved, encouraging them to listen to one another at circle time and to take turns in making contributions. All children enjoy having a turn at different aspects throughout the day, such as holding the timer at register, as staff keep clear lists documenting this. Children are encouraged to have a real sense of belonging at the pre-school, for example through photographs of themselves and regular close liaison with parents to find out about their children. Children have access to a wide range of resources which include a good selection that promote diversity, for example books, skin tone colouring pencils, story sacks and also enjoy taking part in a range of activities that teach them about cultures and beliefs.

Children's behaviour is very good. They are praised frequently by staff and encouraged to feel good about themselves. Staff act as excellent role models to the children which encourages them to behave well and understand right from wrong. They are consistent in the way they manage any issues that arise, offering children very clear explanations about acceptable behaviour and are calm and positive in their approach. Children have very good manners and respond well to the praise that staff use. Staff always get down to the children's level and encourage them to resolve any issues, for example encouraging children to say sorry to one another. These aspects help children to feel extremely secure, valued and supported.

Partnership with parents is outstanding. Exceptional systems have been established and developed to keep parents very well informed about their children's care and education. Parents are extremely happy with the pre-school and are involved in all aspects of the running and operation of the setting. An exceptionally close liaison has been established to encourage all parents to feel they are an important part of the running of the pre-school and they are invited to become a 'parent rep' if they wish. This enables them to be involved in staff and planning meetings, encouraging their contributions and representing the views, ideas and wishes of all the parents. They are closely involved in helping with fundraising and practical aspects of the group. For example, parents recently helped to create the outdoor area for the pre-school and helped to raise money for their new kitchen.

Parents benefit from an extensive range of information, including the notice board, newsletters, policies and procedures and photographs. Staff also record information on a white board at the end of every session for parents, including information, such as activities completed and snacks the children have eaten. Parents approach staff confidently to discuss their children's progress which staff happily do at any point throughout the year as well as during annual parents' consultations. An annual parents' open evening also welcomes new parents with children due to start. They also benefit from the parents' induction programme, encouraging both them and their children to feel welcomed and begin to understand the routines and structure of the pre-school. Other aspects enable parents to feel included and supported, such as coffee mornings, a parents' rota, Fathers' Day events and 'parent forums'. Positive feedback from a variety of sources, including parental questionnaires, is a true reflection of the outstanding partnership with parents.

Organisation

The organisation is satisfactory.

Organisation of the pre-school is satisfactory, with most outcomes being stronger than this. Currently the majority of required documentation is in place, with some minor areas requiring updating. In addition, no staff currently hold a valid first aid certificate which is a requirement. Many areas of organisation are however strong; for example very good ratios are maintained and the majority of staff are qualified to a good level. All except one staff member are police checked, this is currently being completed and staff are aware of the requirement to ensure unvetted persons are not left unsupervised with children. Staff deploy themselves well, supporting children effectively. This enables them to offer a well run session, contributing to good learning opportunities for all children and helps ensure children are kept safe and well cared for. There are clear and thorough systems in place for recruitment, vetting and induction of new staff, including written documentation evidencing some of these aspects.

Leadership and management are good. Staff form a professional, supportive team who work well together; they are supported by an enthusiastic and committed manager, who has a clear focus for the development of the pre-school. Staff liaise regularly in staff meetings, reviewing

planning and ways of working, and benefit from annual appraisals. Staff are keen to make progress and change and are positively reflective, enabling them to develop and improve continuously in a number of ways. For example, a professional development plan indicates areas for improvement, as do action plans, and staff are encouraged to attend regular training. This is then shared and cascaded at staff meetings for all staff to benefit from. The manager also runs 'in-house' training, offering staff training in areas they wish to develop. In addition to this, the manager has recently been invited onto a 'leading early years team' which offers specialist training days and is in recognition of the standard of the pre-school. Completing a fast-track kite mark course also enabled the group to review and make changes to the pre-school. These areas contribute to promoting mostly strong outcomes for children. The setting meets the needs of the range of children for whom it provides.

Improvements since the last inspection

At the last education inspection in June 2004, the pre-school had no significant weaknesses to report but were asked to consider improving the outside space to encourage children to explore living things in their natural environment. This has recently been developed immediately adjacent to the pre-school and allows children the opportunity to experience this on a regular basis.

At the last care inspection in December 2004, the pre-school were asked to develop their child protection policy to ensure it includes the procedures to be taken in the event of an allegation being made against a member of staff. This policy has been drawn up and is now in place, containing all required aspects.

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

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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 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):

- improve methods for hand drying to avoid the spread of infection
- ensure there is at least one member of staff with a current first aid training certificate on the premises at any one time

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):

- consider alternative methods to work sheets

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