

# Imagine Co-operative Childcare

Inspection report for early years provision

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<b>Inspection date</b>	11 January 2008
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<b>Registered person</b>	The Midcounties Co-Operative Limited
<b>Type of inspection</b>	Integrated
<b>Type of care</b>	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](http://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 inadequate - notice of action to improve.

### WHAT SORT OF SETTING IS IT?

Imagine Co-operative Childcare opened in March 2004 and is one of three childcare settings in the Oxfordshire area owned by Mid-counties Co-operative limited. The nursery is situated in the Rosehill area of Oxford and serves the local and surrounding areas. It operates from four playrooms with integrated bathroom facilities and an additional communal area in a purpose-built single storey premises. All children share access to a secure, enclosed outdoor play area with an integrated sandpit and grass, paved and impact absorbent surfaces.

A maximum of 61 children under five years may attend at any one time. There are currently 91 children on roll who attend for a variety of sessions. Of these, 21 children receive funding for nursery education. The nursery is open each week day from 08.00 until 18.00 all year round, apart from bank holidays. The nursery currently supports a number of children who speak English as an additional language.

The Co-operative employs 19 staff to work with the children and a cook. Of these 10 staff hold appropriate early years qualifications to level 2 and 3. The manager holds the National Nursery Examination Board qualification and a management qualification to Level 4. All staff have

attended first aid training. The setting receives support from the Local Authority and has close links with the local Children's Centre and Rose Hill playgroup.

## **THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PROVISION**

### **Helping children to be healthy**

The provision is satisfactory.

The premises are clean and well maintained because staff implement thorough cleaning routines and use cleaning checklists and rotas to monitor the cleanliness of the milk kitchen, changing areas, toilets and all toys and furniture. This promotes children's health and minimises the spread of infection. The children are learning simple good health and hygiene practices because tissues are easily accessible for them to blow their nose and hand washing is encouraged throughout the day. Staff protect the children from cross contamination through wearing aprons and gloves for nappy changing, wiping the changing area, cots and sleep mats after each child and regularly washing their hands. However, the younger children are not encouraged to wash their hands after a nappy change, to promote their awareness of hygiene routines, and anti-bacterial spray is not consistently used in line with company policy to prevent it from touching children's skin or face.

Children are learning to take care of their personal care needs generally well, accessing soap and paper towels easily. They use individual flannels to wash their face and a named toothbrush at lunch time to brush their teeth. Children show good understanding of the importance of hand washing on their healthy well-being and describe with clarity how they have germs on their hands, which can make them ill and that they need to brush their teeth after lunch to minimise germs in the mouth and ensure their teeth do not fall out. Staff act in the best interest of children when they are ill, have an accident or require medication, through sound knowledge and implementation of the setting's robust health and safety policies and procedures.

Children are well nourished and enjoy a wealth of healthy, freshly cooked food on a four week rota basis. Occasional reviewing of the menu and discussion with children and parents helps to introduce different menu suggestions. The enthusiastic staff encourage the children to make healthy choices and select snacks from an extensive and varied range, such as fresh fruit, vegetables, cheese, taramasalata and creamed crackers. Meal times are a social occasion but children's involvement in helping to lay the table, serve the food and pour their drinks is not consistent to aid their independence and enjoyment of food. The children are beginning to explore healthy foods through occasional healthy topics and practical activities, such as growing a few herbs and developing a growing area in the garden.

Children rest and relax according to their needs and most increase their understanding of healthy living through daily exercise and fresh air. Young babies learn to crawl and develop muscle control as they are provided with plenty of space to balance while sitting, reach for toys, hold onto the furniture and support their weight on their feet as staff hold their hands while they bounce up and down to the music. However, walks to the lock, play park and local children's centre to explore the sensory room and different surroundings are rare. The older children enjoy occasional use of the soft play equipment and readily join in music and movement. They are protected from the weather as they wear wellington boots in winter and sun cream and hats in the sunshine.

The pre-school children enjoy plenty of opportunities to develop their fitness and large muscle control as they practise running, pedalling tricycles and learning to move their body in different

ways through obstacle courses. However, equipment to extend and challenge the physical skills of the more able children is limited. The children build strength and co-ordination as they build with milk crates to make a boat and dig in the large sandpit and are learning to use basic tools, such as rolling pins, scissors and cutlery, with growing control and support from an adult.

### **Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe**

The provision is satisfactory.

The children have ample space to move freely and good emphasis is given to making sure the environment is accessible and welcoming to aid children's independence and development. For example, there are clearly defined quiet areas, role play areas and creative areas where children move from one area to another independently. All furniture is age appropriate and clearly labelled low-level storage units enable the children to access the well-maintained resources freely for themselves. However, resources to extend and challenge children's physical skills and their exploration and knowledge of everyday technology are weak. Display boards are used successfully to show children's creations, although many of these are above children's eye line, to enable them to contribute to the displays and encourage interaction. Child-height coat pegs, low-level paper towel dispensers and interlinked toilet facilities allow the children to access when necessary. This significantly enhances their development.

Children's safety and security is given utmost priority by daily rigorous safety checks and risk assessments in most group rooms that ensure hazards to children are effectively minimised. The buzzer entry system and keypad operation on internal doors ensure access to the children is monitored and supervised at all times. Staff are vigilant and supervise the children closely both indoors and out and most staff regularly count the number of children present and check names against the daily register to ensure they are all accounted for and safe. However, explanations about safe play are not always given to help children learn how to keep themselves safe and gain awareness of potential dangers.

Children's welfare is well protected because staff demonstrate sound awareness of their roles and responsibilities. For example, they request passwords and photographs of persons collecting the children, maintain an accurate daily record of attendance and practise the emergency escape plan each month. As a result, children describe with clarity how they need to go to the car park to line up and call 999 in the event of an emergency.

Children are generally well protected from abuse and neglect because staff show a generally good awareness of the signs and indicators and line management process. Staff have completed child protection training and review aspects of the policy and training during staff meetings. However, up-to-date referral procedures are not recorded should staff have concerns that a child may be at risk.

### **Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do**

The provision is satisfactory.

Children gain confidence and self-esteem and begin to feel special to someone because staff implement the key person approach well. They are gaining social confidence as they play alongside each other, begin to share ideas and join in whole group activities, such as group singing and dancing. The children enjoy an interesting range of activities that encourage different aspects of their development, such as playing with the cars, jigsaws and building with construction, although the new toddler group lead recognises the need for more innovative ideas to broaden the younger children's interests and experiences. The planning of activities

and children's play in the toddler room is currently too prescriptive and activities such as sand, water and painting are not available consistently to enable the children to explore, discover and develop their creativity independently using all their senses on a daily basis.

The babies investigate freely the treasure basket, balls, mirrors and musical instruments, smiling, laughing and responding to staff's positive interaction and occasionally joining in creative activities, such as hand painting. This helps them to discover and learn about their bodies and develop confidence in experimenting and playing. The children settle quickly to activities and toys set out by the staff. They make cups of tea in the home corner for familiar staff and eagerly share stories, choosing familiar books for the adults to read. The children excitedly help to mix the flour and water with their hands, squeezing, pulling and stretching the mixture, exclaiming confidently 'we are making play dough'. Occasional questioning about the texture and how it feels on their hands begins to encourage children's language. Planning for the Birth to three is currently in transition as present systems are not effective and do not link to the children's development records, individual needs or interests.

### Nursery Education

The quality of teaching and children's learning is inadequate. Children's progress towards the early learning goals is hindered by a number of significant weaknesses in teaching. Children are not sufficiently challenged because staff lack training and secure understanding of the planning process. They demonstrate little awareness of where children are at on the stepping stones because observations are not completed routinely to inform the assessments. These are not up-to-date to give a true record of attainment or used to inform planning. As a result, staff feel they do not know the children as well as they should do to provide effective challenge and support.

The planning covers all six areas of learning each day and offers a broad range of stimulating and interesting activities with clear learning intentions. Daily focus activity plans are detailed, including key questions, key learning and extension for three- and four-year-olds. However, these do not radiate from the children's interests and next steps, as none are in place and not all aspects of the curriculum are covered sufficiently. Consequently, there are many gaps in children's learning and their individual learning needs are not met. Structure and planning of purposeful activities for children attending the afternoon sessions is weak, resulting in children wandering aimlessly through lack of challenge.

The learning environment is bright, spacious and conducive to learning because resources are well labelled and accessible to promote children's independent learning. Children enjoy outside play and readily use available equipment. However, effective planning to enable children to choose where they wish to play and learn is currently restricted.

Children are forging new relationships and talk freely about their home and family with their peers and staff. The children that are more able are beginning to accept the needs of others, explaining confidently they need to turn their ears on and turn their mouths off so they can listen carefully to the story. However, a number of children show increasing difficulty with sitting still, showing interest or persisting with activities, making it difficult for all children to get the most out of activities and whole group times. Children are developing a sense of community and use their own experiences in role play, taking on familiar roles in the aptly named Imagine shop, garden centre, hairdresser and hospital.

Practical daily activities, such as using the children's own names to begin to link sounds and think of rhyming words, increase their interest and understanding. A small number of children are able to sound the first letter of their name, recognise their name in print and refer to these when finding their coat peg or named drawer to store completed work. However, they are seldom asked to practise their emergent writing by making marks to represent their names because staff write their names on their pictures. Innovative and practical activities to help encourage early writing skills and co-ordination during play are lacking, meaning formalised teaching methods, such as worksheets, are used.

Children gain awareness of shape through building with construction sets and formalised worksheets. They seek help from staff to support problem solving and begin to use mathematical language and reasoning with adult encouragement during planned activities. For example, pairing socks and gloves and grouping compare bears depending on pattern, size and colour. However, opportunity to count during play and daily routines, such as calculating the number of children present, counting how many cups and plates are needed at meal times and talking about the day and the date and using terminology such as today, tomorrow and yesterday rarely takes place.

Children show curiosity and interest in how things change and participate in a broad range of activities that engage children's interests. For example, they explain how squeezing tea bags into the warm water has made the water turn brown, exclaiming excitedly 'it's vanished'. They observe how paper changes when placed in the water and how their sunflowers grow when given plenty of water. However, children have few opportunities to access additional resources, such as torches, magnifying glasses and prisms, that enable them to investigate and experiment with their surroundings for themselves. Children gain no awareness of everyday technology because there are no programmable toys and the computer has been broken, or not planned for, for over six months.

Children enjoy making music and listening to the different sounds the instruments make. For example, a child sings a favourite song and taps the shaker in time to the rhythm of the song. They explore different media during planned activities, such as making pictures with wax and water colours. However, daily opportunity to explore media such as sand, water, paint and household recyclable materials is restricted, limiting the children from being able to explore materials freely for themselves.

### **Helping children make a positive contribution**

The provision is satisfactory.

Children gain good awareness of the wider society and benefit from a wide range of activities and resources that help them value diversity. For example, they celebrate numerous festivals that are relevant to their own backgrounds and those of others, experience food from around the world and take an active part in carnival time as they dress up, play different instruments and dance to music from other nationalities. Children are beginning to forge closer links with the local community and gain awareness of those less fortunate than themselves through taking part in fund raising events. The setting fosters children's social, moral, spiritual and cultural development.

Children are happy, settled and feel special to someone because the key person approach works successfully with the younger children. Strong emphasis is given to promoting children's individual emotional well-being and parents are happy and reassured with the induction programme for new children and communication regarding their transition through the nursery.

However, some children's individual learning needs are not effectively met because criteria for moving children into the next age group do not focus sufficiently on their individual needs and ability. Staff have acceptable understanding of the care of children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. They know basic procedures to follow, such as observing and monitoring and sharing concerns about development with parents.

Children are generally well behaved and most respond appropriately to staff instruction. Boundaries are clear, however, these are not devised or discussed regularly with the children or implemented effectively to ensure a consistent approach throughout the nursery. Explanations are given occasionally to enable children to learn to manage their own behaviour. Children are confident and self-assured because all staff offer frequent praise and implement effective systems to promote recognition of good behaviour and achievement. For example, they use stickers, group praise and a 'Well done tree' in pre-school when children are being helpful and kind to each other. As a result, many children show pride in what they do and most eagerly help with tidying away their toys.

Children benefit from a positive and friendly relationship between staff and their parents. Parents value the information given about the Co-operative and the setting and contribute to improvement through the yearly parent survey forms and participate in the monthly Friends of Imagine group. Notice board articles for each group, parent information packs, meetings with their children's key person and a translator service to support parents speaking Urdu, Punjabi and Hindi ensure parents are well informed about the setting and their children's daily care, although some policy information requires up-dating to provide parents with accurate information. Photograph displays of activities based upon the Birth to three matters, individual daily diary sheets and informal daily discussion at the beginning and end of each day keep parents well informed about their children's development.

The partnership with parents and carers of children receiving funding for nursery education is satisfactory. Parents value the friendliness of staff and feel they are approachable and communicate essential information. They receive generally good information about the education provision and their children's learning through the parent pack, which contains generally good detail about the six areas of learning, displaying of the planning behind the door, a timetable of daily routines and twice yearly parent evenings. However, because individual assessments are not up-to-date, staff do not have an accurate knowledge of children's progress to share with parents and useful ways to encourage parents' involvement in their children's learning in the setting and at home have not been devised. This limits parents' understanding of the stepping stones and how their children can build on what they already know and can do.

## **Organisation**

The organisation is satisfactory.

Children benefit from a good balance of qualified and experienced staff and generally good organisation of play areas and resources to significantly enhance their independent play. Very good staffing levels and effective contingency arrangements means ratios are well met and children receive appropriate support. Children are happy and relaxed because the staff work well as a team and implement the key person approach with the younger children successfully. The staff feel well supported by the manager and are confident to seek advice and guidance. Useful weekly support from the society and monthly meetings with other Imagine day care managers provide valuable opportunities to share and discuss ideas to aid improvement. The setting meets the needs of the range of children for whom it provides.

The operational plan is mostly complete. Recruitment and vetting procedures are generally good to ensure children are cared for by suitable staff with relevant skills, knowledge and experience. Induction procedures are comprehensive and follow a 26 week programme outlining all aspects of the setting's and Mid-counties Co-operative's values and principles. As a result, staff have a secure understanding of most of the setting's policies and procedures. Staff are committed to attend additional training to enhance their knowledge and skills and management review and track staff's personal development generally well through six-monthly appraisals, although delays in attending training on the Foundation Stage have had a significant impact on children's learning. Documentation and records are accurate, clear and maintained to a high standard.

The leadership and management of the setting is inadequate. There are significant differences in the learning and activities available to the children attending the pre-school in the morning compared to the limited learning experiences for children attending in the afternoon because staff lunch breaks impinge greatly on the afternoon session. In addition, the criteria for children attending and moving into the pre-school room are not appropriate to ensure all children are emotionally, physically and intellectually able to cope with the transition.

The pre-school lead is a good role model to the new member of staff and is providing excellent support and guidance. They work very well together, are very enthusiastic, motivated and committed to the children and have high expectations on improving the education provision. However, limited allotted time to review and up-date children's assessments to link these to the planning more effectively and lack of effective monitoring of the nursery education means the education provision is not sufficiently meeting children's individual learning needs.

### **Improvements since the last inspection**

The last care inspection recommended the provider made drinking water more readily available to all children and enhanced children's involvement in mealtime routines. Introduction of small drinking bottles with portable name labels for children over two years means they are able to access water when they are thirsty. However, systems for the younger children are yet to be devised to ensure they keep well hydrated. Some progress has been made to increase children's involvement in meal time routines. However, they seldom help to lay the table, missing valuable learning opportunities to follow instructions, count, calculate and recognise letters.

This is the first nursery education inspection since registration, therefore not applicable.

### **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 inadequate - notice of action to improve.

### 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 organisation of key staff during the lunch time period is effective to maximise children's play and learning in the afternoon and make sure procedures for children moving onto the next group are robust and meet their individual needs
- increase staff's knowledge and understanding of how the Birth to three matters framework works to ensure planning is innovative and provides a wide range of experiences based upon children's individual developmental needs and interests
- extend the resources and play materials available to challenge children's physical skills and increase their knowledge and exploration of their surroundings and everyday technology
- take positive steps to raise children's awareness of good hygiene practices and routines and make sure cleaning detergents are used carefully and in line with company policy.

#### The quality and standards of the nursery education

To improve the quality and standards of nursery education, the registered person **must** take the following actions:

- increase staff's knowledge of the Foundation Stage so that they may plan a stimulating curriculum and provide opportunity for children to plan and organise their free play to ensure they are adequately engaged throughout the session
- devise a system for the observation and assessment of children's progress to ensure these show an accurate record of attainment and link closely to the planning and children's next steps so that they may build on what they already know and can do
- improve systems for monitoring the quality of the nursery education provision and evaluating its impact, especially in relation to children attending the afternoon session and children who require a lot of support.

These actions are set out in a *notice of action to improve* and must be completed by the date specified in the notice.

The Department for Education and Skills and the local authority have been informed.

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](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)