

Brambles Playgroup

Inspection report for early years provision

Unique Reference Number 221918
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Inspector Caroline Wright

Setting Address St Helen's County Primary School, Colne Road, Bluntisham, Huntingdon, Cambridgeshire, PE28 3NY
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Registered person Brambles 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

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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?

Brambles Playgroup opened in 2000 and is located within St. Helen's County Primary School, in a village near St Ives, Cambridgeshire. The playgroup is run by a voluntary management committee made up of parents of children at the playgroup.

A maximum of 26 children may attend the playgroup at any one time. The playgroup is open each weekday from 09:00 to 11:30 and 12:30 to 15:00 during school term times only. All children share access to a secure enclosed outdoor play area.

There are currently 50 children aged from two to under five years on roll. Of these 42 children receive funding for early education. Children come from the local area. The playgroup currently supports a number of children with learning difficulties and or disabilities.

The playgroup employs seven members of staff, four of the staff, including the manager, hold appropriate early years qualifications. Four members of staff are working towards further qualifications.

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PROVISION

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

Children learn about personal hygiene through regular routines, such as washing their hands before eating, they know that they need to wash their hands 'because they're dirty...germs make you sick.' Staff act as good role models, wiping down surfaces before serving snack and after children have eaten to help them to stay healthy. Children learn about leading a healthy lifestyle through everyday, practical experiences. For example, they are able to run around and exert themselves in the outdoor play area whenever they want to so that they learn the importance of regular fresh air and exercise and develop new physical skills, such as running, pushing, pulling and climbing using the outdoor equipment. Children are able to develop balancing skills using 'tiger feet' and they demonstrate their ability to throw and catch balls well as they use the basket ball net outdoors. However, opportunities for children to develop new physical skills at some activities such as snack time are limited.

Children learn about healthy eating through meaningful activities. For example, during discussion with their key workers at snack time. The healthy eating policy ensures that staff provide fresh fruit or other healthy options for the children to eat. Children are offered a drink of milk or water mid morning, and help themselves to water when they need to so they remain well hydrated and can think effectively. In addition, children learn about healthy eating through well-planned activities, such as making fresh fruit salad, bread and pizzas for snack. Staff have plans to develop a section of the school allotment in the future, to enable children to grow food, such as tomatoes or beans, further enhancing their understanding of healthy eating.

Activities, such as doctor or vet's surgery role play, enable children to learn how their bodies work through play based experiences. They are aware of changes that occur in their bodies due to physical exertion and comment 'I'm hot' when they have been running around. Children are skilled at dressing and undressing independently, and managing their own buttons and zips on their coats as they get ready for outside play. They handle small items, such as pencils, threading beads and buttons with good hand to eye co-ordination.

The needs of younger children are well met by adults who have a sound understanding of their developmental needs. If the children become unwell or have an accident whilst they are in the care of the playgroup, up-to-date records are in place to make sure that appropriate care is given. Staff are qualified in first aid and are able to offer appropriate treatment in the event of an accident or emergency.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

Children move around safely under the constant supervision of the playgroup staff. Children learn how to keep themselves safe, waiting for their turn to come down the slide so that they do not bump into each other. High handles prevent children from accessing areas that are not safe, such as the entrance area, without adult supervision. In addition, the playgroup has its own enclosed outdoor play area with a safety surface which contributes towards children's safety outdoors. Children learn about staying safe outside the setting, talking with police and fire officers about personal safety. Key workers build on these visits with the provision of role play activities and resources to enable children to dress-up as fire fighters to practise what they have learned. For example, children dial '999' on the role play telephone to call for a fire

engine, they talk with an understanding about keeping themselves safe at home, when they engage in role play with their key workers, saying, 'you must not touch the hot iron because you'll get burned.' In addition, staff provide further play based activities outdoors with zebra crossings and traffic lights to help children to learn even more about keeping themselves safe on the roads through meaningful experiences.

Children's welfare is safeguarded and promoted by staff who have a good understanding of child protection procedures, which are in line with those set out by the Local Safeguarding Children Board. Staff attend regular training and a designated person coordinates all safeguarding procedures. They keep good records of any worries about children's welfare and are confident to discuss their concerns to the other professionals if necessary.

The daily risk assessment of the premises, which adults carry out before each session begins, addresses any potential hazard to children's safety. A wide range of written policies and appropriate procedures are in place, including regular fire drills, to help children know what to do in the case of an emergency evacuation of the premises. Children select a wide range of interesting resources that are appropriate for their age and stage of development, and these are checked regularly by the playgroup staff to ensure they are in good condition and are safe. The environment is bright and attractive, with attractive displays of children's work, and plenty of space for children to move around and explore in safety.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

Children are happy, confident and enjoy their time at the setting. All children engage eagerly in the range of interesting activities that are provided, such as making 'lard balls' for the birds to help them learn about the natural world and caring for others. Children spend their time purposefully engaged and stimulated by the activities available during the free play part of the session. Children's experiences are enhanced by the skilful interaction of staff who use their knowledge and understanding of how children learn through their play to formulate challenging questions that encourage children to think. However, the organisation of the session limits children's ability to engage in long periods of sustained thinking. They have to tidy away resources, even when they are actively engaged in learning. Children's self-chosen activities are sometimes replaced with large group activities, such as snack time where they are not fully occupied or challenged.

Nursery Education

The quality of teaching and children's learning is good. Children use their imagination in situations such as the role play picnic, setting out a blanket and gathering the necessary equipment to 'make some dinner', or make cakes in the sand, they talk with their key workers about how they are, 'mashing it to make potatoes.' They explore their creativity using items from the graphics trolley or working at the craft table, sticking paper and card together with purpose. Staff provide children with opportunities to draw and paint freely, so that they can explore mark making techniques and develop early writing skills. They use sequins, stars and tissue to decorate their Easter cards and write their names inside, making marks for a purpose as they learn early writing skills. Interesting activities, such as choosing and sticking sugar paper letters to form their name, help them to link sounds and letters and develop early reading skills.

Children use the language of mathematics competently, and solve problems. For example, they talk about the bucket getting 'heavier' and take large toys out of the crate when tidying up,

to make space for the smaller ones first. They use number names in their play, and count groups of items reliably. Children use positional language well, telling their key worker what they intend to do with the 'Bee-Bot' programmable toy, as they expertly press the appropriate buttons to make it move 'backwards' or 'forwards' on the mat. They talk about shapes, recognising why they are the same or different, using the language associated with size to discuss 'big' or 'small' triangles and squares.

Children communicate effectively and use a wide range of vocabulary to express their ideas and talk about what they know. They talk about milk coming from cows and sand coming from the beach. They demonstrate that they notice patterns and changes in the weather when they engage in discussions at circle time with their key workers. They use language imaginatively to respond to what they see, telling adults that, 'I found a tiny leaf in the sand...It's all dried up and brown.' Children talk with understanding about what they do at home and know that 'Cambridge is a long way away, you have to go there by car'. They look at books alone and with adults, they turn pages from front to back carefully and listen with interest to stories. Children enjoy singing songs at circle time, moving their bodies to the rhythm and joining in with finger rhymes.

Staff working with children have a very good knowledge and understanding of the Foundation Stage curriculum. Key workers carry out regular observations and use them to monitor children's progress towards the early learning goals. However, assessment records do not contain all of the stepping stones or parents' observations of children's achievements at home and they are not yet used effectively to inform curriculum planning. This affects staffs ability to provide activities that build on what each child enjoys and can do well. As a result, some of the activities, such as snack time, lack challenge and interest for children. For example, staff set out the snack for children, with one piece of fruit and one bread stick. They do not always encourage children to write their name on their artwork and they sometimes use pre cut shapes and templates for craft activities. Consequently, opportunities for children to develop new skills and extend their learning across all areas of the curriculum are missed. This affects learning.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

Children show a strong sense of belonging as they greet key workers and each other on arrival at the playgroup. They are confident and show positive self-esteem. Children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is fostered. They work together cooperatively during activities, helping to tidy away resources, and they know that 'we have to take-turns, don't we?' Adults carefully explain what they expect children to do in a way that they can understand, to help children to behave appropriately. Staff encourage children to respect each other's needs and to use conventions, such as 'please' and 'thank-you', acting as positive role models themselves.

Children's daily access to resources that reflect diversity and help them to learn about other members of society through their play is good. In addition, children talk with each other about their families. Informal discussions at circle time enable them to talk about what they do at home so that they learn about each other's family cultures and traditions. Staff use topics, such as 'all about me' to get to know children and their families. They plan interesting activities, such as Thanksgiving or Family Easter treasure trails, to celebrate a suitable range of cultural and religious festivals, which helps children to develop a positive attitude towards diversity and to feel a sense of belonging to the wider community. Activities, such as 'Operation Christmas Child' and 'all about me' books, help children to develop positive self-esteem and learn to care about others.

Children move around the setting freely, choosing from the activities provided both indoors and out, selecting resources from the drawer units with confidence. They have free access to the outdoor play area, which enables them to develop a range of new skills in their preferred learning environment. However, the organisation of the session and of the children when they are getting ready to go home at lunch time, does not promote positive behaviour. For example, some of the children go outside to play or listen to stories with their key workers, whilst others put on their coats and sit and wait at a table to be collected. Children are kept waiting for extended periods of time without purposeful activity while adults serve snack. This affects behaviour.

A very good system is in place to support children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities so that they make good progress. Staff have attended a wide range of training in how to support children with a range of special learning needs. Staff work effectively with parents to support children who speak English as an additional language so that they become confident communicators.

A successful key worker system enables parents to share information when their children start at the setting and they are confident to talk informally with adults on a daily basis to discuss their children's individual needs. Parents receive regular information in newsletters and on the notice board, so that they are well informed about the playgroup activities. Parents regularly take-part in the parent helper rota, working alongside staff in the playgroup and helping children in activities. Parents are invited to share their skills in playgroup sessions and to join in with a range of social and community activities. This helps children and their families to develop a strong sense of belonging and helps children to settle into the playgroup easily. A suitable procedure is in place to enable parents to raise concerns about the provision if they need to. However, information to parents in the prospectus does not reflect current practice in the setting.

The partnership with parents and carers is good. Positive relationships effectively support children's care and contribute to the progress of children who receive early education. Parents and carers are invited to comment on regular written reports of children's progress. A regular questionnaire is provided for parents and carers to comment on the provision and staff use parents comments to inform changes to their practice. This enables children's individual needs to be met and ensures that parents are well informed.

Parents are able to look at plans for the sessions, which are displayed clearly for them to view, so that they know how activities contribute towards children's progress and they can support their children's learning at home.

Organisation

The organisation is satisfactory.

All areas of the playgroup environment are attractive and provide plenty of space for children to move around safely and independently. The management committee uses effective recruitment procedures, which ensure that the staff have appropriate experience and the necessary qualifications to carry out their role. All staff and committee members are rigorously vetted to ensure that they are suitable to have unsupervised contact with children. The manager has plans to develop a new system to enable her to oversee the progress of suitability checks on new staff and members of committee in the future.

All of the legally required documents, which contribute to children's health, safety and well-being, are in place. However, information for parents needs to be updated to reflect current practice in the setting.

The leadership and management of early education is satisfactory. Staff working with funded children have a good understanding of child development and understand how children learn through practical experiences. Regular team meetings enable staff to discuss planning of activities to ensure that they provide a broad and balanced range of learning opportunities. The team have developed a good system to provide them with an overview of the programme, and as a result, children access activities that will ensure they cover all aspects of learning in the Foundation Stage over time.

However, the system for monitoring overall practice in the playgroup has not identified minor weaknesses in teaching or in the organisation of the session. Although an action plan was devised to address recommendations from the previous inspection, it was not effectively reviewed and as a result, some aspects of the recommendations have not been completed in full. This affects children's learning.

The team have begun to engage in the Local Authority 'Quality Framework' self-evaluation programme and have been successful in identifying areas for improvement. However, they have not yet implemented an action plan to ensure that they address these areas with a systematic and informed approach. The appraisal system identifies areas for professional development and further training needs for all members of the team. All staff are highly committed to improving their practice and attend a wide range of training courses, including the new Early Years Foundation Stage in readiness to implement the new framework in September of this year.

Overall, children's needs are met.

Improvements since the last inspection

At the last inspection the playgroup agreed to conduct a risk assessment on the premises identifying action to be taken to minimize identified risks posed by unguarded heaters and partially blocked kitchen doorway, develop and implement an action plan detailing how at least half of all childcare staff will hold a level 2 qualification in childcare; outline how all staff will increase their knowledge and awareness of child protection and be able to implement the policies and procedures they must follow if they suspect a child is at risk, ensure that the child protection procedures are shared with parents before their child's admission to the group and consider how allegations against staff would be dealt with, review documentation and record keeping, particularly in relation to the policies for outings and lost child, for existing injuries and medication records and to ensure that information for parents is consistent and that they accurately reflect the National Standards and supporting guidance. The playgroup also agreed to review the organisation of routines and use of space, including the outdoor environment to ensure children's individual needs are met, taking into account their differing stages of development, to create more opportunities for children to make choices, to take responsibility, to select resources for their own use more often.

The risk assessment is now an effective procedure that is carried out each morning and the risk assessment document is updated regularly to review potential risks. As a result the physical environment is safe for children to use. Staff training has been completed and more than 50% of the team hold appropriate qualifications in Early Years, with some working towards additional

qualifications. Staff have received additional training in Safeguarding Children to enable them to be effective in protecting children from harm or neglect; the written child protection procedure, including a procedure to be followed in the event of allegations of abuse against a member of staff or volunteer, is shared with parents so that they are aware of the playgroups' duty to act in children's best interests in the event of concerns for their well-being. Documents and records have been reviewed, including those highlighted at the last inspection, and they now reflect requirements in the National Standards. However, the information for parents in the prospectus needs to be reviewed and a recommendation will be carried forward following this inspection to address this. Although the use of space has been reviewed so that children can access the indoor and outdoor environment freely to access learning in their preferred environment, the organisation of snack time and of the children when they collected at lunch time needs further improvement. This is carried forward as a recommendation from this inspection.

At the last inspection of nursery education the playgroup agreed to ensure that planning covers all areas of the curriculum and includes sufficient details about teaching methods, learning opportunities presented by everyday routines and shows how activities will be differentiated to support children's individual needs; devise management strategies to evaluate the delivery of the curriculum, in particular mathematical and physical development; develop the use of assessments to inform the planning for individual children, identifying the next steps and incorporating parents contributions.

Since the last inspection planning has been improved and shows clear links to the areas of learning, with clear learning objectives linked to the stepping stones. Plans also show how the activities link to the 'Birth to three matters' framework to support younger children's learning. However, there are no clear learning objectives identified for outdoor play activities and as a result opportunities to extend children's learning are missed. Strategies to monitor the delivery of nursery education have been successful in improving the programme for mathematics and physical development. The process for assessing children's progress has been developed but inconsistencies remain in the recording of children's achievements. Furthermore, staff do not use all of the stepping stones to monitor children's achievements; parents do not contribute their observations of children's achievements at home to enable key workers to build on everything that children already know and can do; key workers observations are not yet used effectively to identify the next steps for individual children or to plan activities that build on children's current interests on a day to day basis. As a result, some activities lack challenge for older or more able children and learning opportunities are missed. These issues will be carried forward in recommendations for further improvement following this 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 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 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 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):

- review information provided to parents in the prospectus: make sure that information is up to date and reflects current regulating bodies and procedures, and that the information relates to the areas of learning in current frameworks for learning (this also applies to nursery education)
- improve the organisation of large group activities, such as snack time, to provide adequate challenge and interest for all children according to their individual stage of development (this also applies to nursery education)

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):

- continue to develop the system for planning activities: use key worker and parents' observations of what children enjoy and do well to plan activities that offer challenge for all children according to their individual stage of development
- continue to develop the system for monitoring and evaluating the provision for early education: develop and review action plans to secure ongoing improvement in teaching and learning.

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