

# Early Days Playgroup

Inspection report for early years provision

---

<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	146754
<b>Inspection date</b>	06 February 2008
<b>Inspector</b>	Lynne Kathleen Talbot

<b>Setting Address</b>	Oughtonhead School, Mattocke Road, HITCHIN, Hertfordshire, SG5 2NZ
<b>Telephone number</b>	01462 437643
<b>E-mail</b>	
<b>Registered person</b>	Early Days Playgroup
<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 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?

Early Days Playgroup operates from a large self-contained room at Oughton Primary School in Hitchin. The provision was registered in November 2002. This provision is included as part of a children's centre based from Oughton Primary School. The group serves the local and wider area.

A maximum of 27 children may attend the group at any one time. There are currently 65 children from two to under five years on roll including funded three- and four-year-olds. All children share access to the outdoor play area.

Sessions are offered either mornings or afternoon between the hours of 09:00 and 15:00 each weekday during term time only. Children attending the morning session may attend a lunch club between 11:30 and 12:00. Extended care is offered to children attending the school nursery, their care is for lunch club and the afternoon session. The provision supports children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and children for whom English is an additional language.

There are nine staff directly working with the children, including the manager, and five hold recognised early years qualifications. One staff member is currently working towards a recognised early years qualification.

## **THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PROVISION**

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

The provision is good.

Children are cared for in a comfortable, clean environment where there is plenty of space and separate areas to offer a wide range of activities and play opportunities. They develop an excellent knowledge and understanding of healthy lifestyles, passed on to them by staff in an enthusiastic and practical manner so that they understand the relevance of this area. Children have a good understanding of the importance of personal hygiene, for example, washing their hands before snack time and after outdoor activities. They independently and competently take responsibility for themselves showing a development of health awareness.

Children enjoy healthy and nutritious foods, including fresh fruit and vegetables, and hot snacks such as soup and noodles. They participate in a range of creative activities which have included making vegetable soup, preparing fresh fruit salad with a broad range of fruits, and cooking stir fry vegetables, or vegetables and rice. They have opportunities to learn about different foods, finding out which ones are healthy and how they affect their development. Children discuss ingredients, cooking methods and healthy growth, and give feedback about what they like and would like to try again. Children bring their lunch boxes, if attending lunch club, and independently seek storage within the fridge as they arrive. They show that they are learning, by example, to understand storage of food and be aware of health and hygiene with regard to their meals. This enables them to make fully developed and considered choices for supporting their own health as growing individuals.

Children enjoy an extensive range of physical activities which contribute to their good health. They explore, develop control of their bodies and improve their physical skills and co-ordination as they participate in adult-led activities such as movement sessions, and action rhymes. For example, children thoroughly enjoy specific music tapes such as the 'Lycra' song where they take part in stretching, leaning, manipulating and working as a team to explore the properties of the material and how they may use it. Children spontaneously dance to music played during 'tidy-up' time and this includes, for example, Chinese music as well as tapes of classical instruments. They use their bodies to sway and twist together listening to the turns and rhythms of the music being played. Children show emergent skill in the use of small tools and equipment, for example, children competently and safely use knives, under supervision, and small construction pieces. All children are able to participate as staff have a good understanding of individuals, adapting activities to suit their needs and working with children so that they are able to practise and master new skills. Children access the outdoor play area where they have ample opportunity to develop physical activity, thereby promoting their health, as they enjoy using the available space. This will increase in the near future because the staff and manager have development plans for the setting to enable them to fully utilise this area.

Children's general health and safety is supported by excellent relevant paperwork and records. Children's medical needs, both ongoing or of an emergency nature, are dealt with through clearly outlined procedures carried out by qualified staff. In the event of an accident children are well-protected because staff seek and attend specific training courses, such as for anaphylaxis, which extends their knowledge and ensures they are prepared for all eventualities.

Clear methods of recording and procedures underpin all aspects of physical care. These stringent, well-executed measures ensure that children's health is promoted at all times.

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

The provision is good.

Children's safety is given a high priority and risks of accidental injury are minimised because staff are vigilant and use risk assessments to reduce potential hazards. Policies, procedures and paperwork in this area are very well planned and reviewed by the management to continue assessing any potential risks to children's safety. Children explore their environment safely because staff carry out daily safety checks, repeating these throughout the sessions to ensure continuing safety. They inform each other when they are moving around the areas of the premises at all times. In this way they ensure that the supervision of children is thorough and maintained. However, there were identified issues regarding safety which included unsupervised access to small scissors, access to large scissors placed at work surface height during one session, access to a sharp knife during identified parts of the second session, and an unprotected socket within the playroom. These potential hazards are an unacceptable risk to children.

Children have a firm understanding about taking responsibility and keeping themselves safe as they take part in regular emergency drills. They are given explanations by staff and understand the importance of listening to instructions in order to prevent accidents. Children learn, through activities and discussion with staff, to think about their immediate surroundings. For example, staff ask them to think about what may happen if they do not walk around the interior of the setting, to consider what may happen if they lean back onto two legs of the chair, and to move some obstacles to think about the possibility of tripping over. This enables them to make predications and think about their surroundings.

Children are cared for in a welcoming setting where their work is creatively displayed on all areas and at child height. Continuous monitoring of the environment and staff's attention to detail ensures that children's access to play materials reaches a high standard of safety. This is further promoted by the provision of appropriate equipment such as correctly-sized slides, play houses and climbing frames. There is a very effective procedure, known by staff and parents, throughout the setting and the extended grounds of the school, which prevents unknown persons from entering the building. This was seen to work in practice during the inspection. Perimeter areas of the setting are secured and clear guidelines for bolting gates and using the double handles on main doors ensure children's safety.

Children are very well protected because staff have an excellent understanding of child protection issues and the appropriate steps to follow. They have continued to review their practice and made sure that procedures meet the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) requirements. There are robust procedures for induction of suitable staff and their ongoing suitability whilst employed by the group. Children are protected because the manager and staff build close relationships with children and families to support any additional care and assistance that is required from other agencies.

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

The provision is outstanding.

Children are extremely happy, secure and settled. They are eager to attend and participate in the activities and play opportunities provided. They settle eagerly to play areas, anticipating what they may be about to do each day. For example, when first arriving at the setting children

quickly place their lunch boxes into the fridge before immediately settling at a table or activity ranging from play dough, crafts on a theme, block play or choosing another area independently. Children are confident in their relationships with each other and with staff, participating in discussions and initiating conversations. Children engage in lengthy discussions about a variety of topics, for example, when playing with trains they extend that play into developing water and sharks, speaking about danger and then discussing the collection of flour to take to the mill to make bread. Children show that they can absorb information, bringing it into their play and explaining to others what it means. Their personal development and self-esteem are consistently promoted through sensitive support and interaction from experienced, caring staff.

Children show a high level of independence as they move around the setting and control their own activities and independent learning. This is because staff have equipped all areas with a variety of inviting materials, offer them additional choices where possible and have developed photographs set all around the setting which supports the choice of toys. Children access a very broad range of free craft materials where they decide what they want to develop with minimal help. Children are recognised as individuals with different rates of development and interest. Evaluation of planned activities is carried out by observations where staff watch what children are doing and offer support where needed. Assessment of children's progress is detailed and purposeful, staff are skilled in using a variety of methods. They ensure that assessments are always fed into planning so that all children are offered challenging opportunities and activities which are adapted to suit individuals. This helps to ensure that children are able to realise their full potential. All staff make good use of open questions and take opportunities to extend children's learning. For example, activities are offered and supported with very little intervention by staff other than to encourage children to look and question what they see. This was seen at both the fruit salad activity and within all other areas of play. Children develop their own skills when cutting various fruits, and begin to explore texture, surfaces, their skill at cutting, the smell and touch of fresh fruits, the colours and seeds within some fruits or the peel of others.

Children settle quickly due to the staff's care, understanding and planning. They ensure that they have all necessary information about children, including their likes and dislikes. Initial visits for parents and carers are encouraged at which staff will aim to obtain information that enables them to develop a profile of the children's development and assist the separation process. Younger children's learning and development is promoted because staff have a very good understanding of child development, staff have attended training for the 'Birth to three matters' framework and have worked out the practicalities of implementing this well.

### Nursery Education

The quality of teaching and learning is good. Children are making good progress and their overall development is promoted because staff have a thorough knowledge of the Curriculum guidance for the foundation stage, enabling them to plan and adapt activities appropriately. Children's progress in all areas is well balanced as staff use comprehensive methods for assessing them, making use of information gained from this to highlight areas to be covered. Planning of all activities is clear and is linked to the Foundation Stage, ensuring that all areas of learning are covered. However, there is as yet no clear baseline assessment, obtained through partnership with parents and carers, that would enable the staff to plan for children's development from initial attendance nor to establish exactly how far children have progressed.

Children demonstrate their enjoyment as they choose their play and activities from the wide range offered. These include: regular opportunities to engage in sand and water play, and

exploring other mediums such as dry rice; a variety of crafts and construction; reading and creative opportunities for role play, such as taking part in drama; and extending their previous activities such as restaurants and cooking. Children's knowledge is further extended as they participate in a range of themed topics which change on a regular basis. This enables them to look more closely at topics such as 'Chinese New Year' where they explore cooking, crafts and cultural greetings, script/symbols and language, authentic artefacts, and group construction projects. Inventive activities bring children closer to new opportunities for exploration.

The well-organised environment and daily planning means that children have good opportunities to develop the attitudes and dispositions that enable them to achieve in their learning. They are given sufficient time and appropriate resources to enable them to complete tasks, and their behaviour is very good throughout the sessions, enabling them to listen and concentrate. They are motivated to learn through the provision of exciting and interesting activities. For example, children have explored symmetry, hunting for bugs, patterns through fabrics and crafts, and cooking.

Children are making very good links and increasing their confidence within the group as they take part in group activities. This includes physical activities using tapes and singing as well as materials such as 'Lycra'. They sing enthusiastically and every child is seen to be engrossed in the song and action rhymes with the support of all the staff group. They make spaces for each other and follow instruction extremely well. This shows that they are developing clear social skills. Children take part in caring for Bill and Ben, the toy dogs, who can be taken home in rotation and cared for. The dogs come with 'diaries' and children and their families add photographs and stories about what they have done with the toys during their time at home. Children show great enthusiasm for this task and use it to learn about taking turns, showing responsibility and feeling part of the group.

Children are confident in using language to organise and explain their thoughts and play, for example, they enjoy a review at the end of stories to discuss what they have understood about the story told. They show that they are able to recall efficiently and can make predications about what could have happened instead. Children explain how they are feeling and can reflect that in talking about how the characters in stories must have felt. Children ask relevant questions such as 'what are these?' when seeing Chinese markings and script adjacent to numbers in the room. Children understand that print carries meaning and are beginning to use this as a means of communicating, recognising their names on their drawers and showing attention at story time with large books. They show a keen interest in stories and some will announce that they are going to read a story to the remainder of the group. They show the pictures to the others in the group and use the pictures to describe what is happening. In this way they are able to follow a story and understand that print carries a meaning that relates to the accompanying illustration. Children know that books may also be non-fiction as is seen when they are 'cooking' in the home corner and following recipes in cookery books.

Children recognise that numbers carry meaning, confidently and correctly counting the number of objects and using numbers in a meaningful context. For example, they count the number of blocks in a tower, with help, and explore capacity in the dry rice activity as they scoop, pour and fill containers. They discuss finding small or big objects and tell each other which one is smallest or biggest. Children enjoy counting by rote and will eagerly chant numbers together as far as 28, for example, when lining up cars and playing with trains.

Children have many opportunities to observe, explore and question in a wide range of activities that form the foundation of their later learning in subjects such as mathematics, science and

technology. For example, they have the use of a computer, calculators and tape recorders. They plant and grow seeds, including flowers, and watch with interest the effect of water and the sun on them. Children have very good opportunities to learn about the world around them through inventive topics on other countries and cultural celebrations. They explore with interest the living beings around them for example as they take part in hunting for bugs, and topics related to the underwater world. However, children have limited opportunities to explore and use everyday technology or programmable toys.

Children eagerly extend their play into drama and imaginary play, this is seen as they play, for example, with dry rice. Children state 'I am feeding the hens, I am sprinkling food for them!' They use things they have seen or heard to explore their surroundings. This was seen, for instance, when children playing with 'wands' started to talk about magic, making a circle of chairs and 'being shut in'. Later they changed this play into a cave and explored how they would be feeling scared if they were shut in. Children use previous experiences to extend their play when, for example, they have the materials to try things themselves. This was seen as they developed home corner play into making vegetable soup and then into cooking in a restaurant and take-away facility. Children involved were engrossed in this play using recipe books, writing orders, answering the telephone and reminding each other not to come near the oven as 'it is hot!' These role play experiences help children to develop things they have tried and extend them into further learning experiences independently.

Children's physical development is well promoted and they enjoy a wide range of activities that help them to develop their confidence and skills when using large and small apparatus, tools and equipment. This area is further supported by clear daily planning for physical play which demonstrates that children have opportunities to use tunnels and tents, use music, plant and garden, and explore matching games such as socks pairs in a line. They enjoy a wide range of opportunities to explore colour, texture, shape and form, for example, through activities such as painting, modelling with dough, sand play and the use of chalks and collage materials.

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

The provision is outstanding.

All children are welcomed and play a full and active part in the pre-school because staff value and respect their individuality and the family context for each child. Children are offered a wide range of opportunities which promote their understanding of other cultures and ways of life. These include exploring each others family heritage and taking part in varied celebrations from many cultural and religious backgrounds. For example, they focus on each themed topic such as Chinese New Year, for extended periods of time to enable them to carry out detailed activities linking all areas of learning through foods, customs, script and language. This helps them to take time to explore aspects of the wider world around them. Children explore the local community through regular visitors being invited into the group and they extend those visits afterwards by taking part in crafts, stories, role play and discussions linked to the people they have seen. However, they have not been given opportunities to fully explore and analyse their local community. Participation in realistic role play such as doctors and hospitals, restaurants and 'take-away' food establishments enables children to gain a clear and meaningful knowledge of these issues.

Children's social, moral, spiritual and cultural development is fostered. Children's needs are very well documented and met, and their welfare consistently promoted to a high standard because of staff's excellent relationship with parents and carers and the quality information about the provision given. Children are kind and considerate to each other and to staff. They

are encouraged to think about each others feelings and eagerly take care of each other. Children are able to develop a sense of caring and a link with the provision and bring photographs as well as taking time to explain to the group what they have done when they have taken home Bill and Ben the toy dogs. Children show pleasure and wonder. For example, when preparing the fruit salad they were fascinated by the insides of fruits and showed them to each other and staff eagerly. Children take pleasure in achievements and this is shown as they proudly show drawings and printed drawings from the computer to each other before placing them into their named drawers. Children enjoy the special 'certificate' system used in the group which recognises each child with a certificate of recognition at regular intervals for helping, caring or being involved with the group. This encourages a strong sense of pride and belonging for children within the group. They take pride in achieving daily 'stars' and grow in self-esteem as they make progress in all areas of their development. Their behaviour is good throughout the sessions as they take part in activities and competently organise turn-taking and sharing. Children are able to feel secure as staff make efforts to understand significant events in their lives and anticipate the possible disruption these may bring.

Children who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities have their requirements clearly identified as there is a detailed practical policy relating to this. Staff ensure, that this is fully and effectively implemented, working with individual children and parents to make sure that all are included in the activities and routines. This ensures that all children are recognised as complete individuals and may strive towards their full potential. Children for whom English is not the first language receive appropriate support as staff work hard to establish working relationships with parents and extended family. For example, the manager and staff have developed photograph albums to share with some parents and carers to demonstrate how children are integrated and taking a full part in the daily routine which enables them to reach their potential within the Curriculum guidance for the foundation stage. Staff work extremely closely with outside agencies in full partnership with parents and carers to ensure that each child is able to benefit within all areas of care and education.

The partnership with parents and carers of children in receipt of funding for early education is good. There is a strong commitment to involving parents fully in the setting and in their children's learning. Parents are kept very well informed of their children's progress through regular newsletters, consultation meetings with staff and open access to their children's files and assessment records. Each days activities are shared with parents through posters and the aims of activities are explained to them by displaying the topic, language used and aim of the activity each day. Specific play plans for all children are developed, although there is only limited involvement at present of parents and carers. Play plans are reviewed regularly by staff. Parents have opportunities to provide feedback to continue developing this aspect of care through questionnaires. The children's daily activity, with observations, is linked to progress and development. This positive attitude ensures that parents' views are valued, standards are maintained and high quality care can be provided for each child.

## **Organisation**

The organisation is good.

Overall, the provision meets the needs of the range of children for whom it provides. Children benefit from the care provided by experienced and skilled staff. Their daily comfort and enjoyment is enhanced by the quality of organisation and the attention to all details relating to their care and well-being. Children's varying needs are consistently met and they are offered a broad, planned range of activities and a wealth of play opportunities. Topic webs are identified and adapted according to the children attending and complement the rotating regular themes.



This enables specific interests to be catered for and children to become self-motivated learners. The well-organised environment means that children have good opportunities to develop the dispositions and attitudes that enable them to achieve in their learning.

Children's welfare and safety are promoted through the setting's clearly defined policies and procedures and the staff's practical knowledge and daily implementation of these. There is a clear induction process for new staff, providing information and support although the staff group have been in place and committed for 12 years. They show an absolute commitment to the setting and take part, as required, in supporting extended works such as operating a toddler group within another setting address. This offers care to children subsequently attending Early Birds itself. The continued development is continued through the staff assessment and appraisal system, which ensures that all training needs are identified and staff are able to work appropriately with all children.

The leadership and management of children in receipt of funding for early education is good. Children's overall welfare is promoted by the very good understanding that the manager has of her role and responsibilities. She ensures that she is aware of new regulations, carrying out research and reviews to implement any changes and carefully studying the implications of these to both children and staff. For example implementing the change to regulations regarding complaints and concerns into practice, and seeking training for all staff for the forthcoming Early Years Foundation Stage.

The manager acts as an excellent role model and staff are highly motivated, acquiring qualifications and regularly attending additional training. All daily pre-school sessions are very well planned, with a balanced range of opportunities throughout the day. The outreach works, whereby the manager seeks to share good practice with other settings through the work of the children's centre, offers continued development and review of the practice to ensure that children's changing needs are met. Staff pay attention to what children are doing and ensure that they are always given sufficient time and resources to complete their activities and tasks. Staff meet regularly to plan and evaluate future work and review each weeks activities. This ensures that the needs of individual children are met, the development of all children is promoted and the setting continues to provide high quality care.

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

At the last inspection for care the provider was asked to review aspects of identified policies and to update the procedure relating to child protection. They were also asked to extend the planning to provide challenge for older or more capable children.

Since that time they have continued to review all policies ensuring that procedures for lost or uncollected children are in place, that a procedure is in place to deal with sick or infectious children, and to ensure that child protection procedures comply with updated guidance. These actions ensure that children may be fully protected and their well-being assured. The provider has continued to review planning to show differentiation for children needing support and those to be challenged, and this ensures that all children are supported to reach their full potential.

At the last inspection for nursery education the provider was asked to extend the opportunities for children to explore numbers in problem solving, and to provide increased opportunities for mark making in role play and everyday situations. The provider was asked to provide

opportunities for children to use vocabulary for recall and expression, and for them to investigate construction materials.

Since that time the provider has continued to plan independent play opportunities for children to explore mark making and the use of construction materials throughout all sessions and within all areas of play. The provider has ensured that the planning gives opportunities for children to be challenged to consider problem solving and reasoning within daily routines, and to express verbal opinions and discuss what they are seeing and participating in throughout the daily sessions. These continued efforts ensure that children are becoming independent and self-motivated, initiating their own learning to continue development.

### **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 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):

- ensure that proper precautions are taken to prevent accidents (this includes assessing the risks to children in relation to large scissors, sharp knives between use by adults, electrical leads and the kettle, socket covers in all areas, and free access to children's scissors).

#### **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):

- ensure that development is led by a baseline profile showing areas of learning to enable children's progress to be supported by the planning fed from observations and assessment and that parents have opportunities to contribute so that they know about their child's progress (also applies to care)
- improve opportunities for children to learn about their local community and environment through first hand experiences that help them to observe, explore, question and gather information to extend their knowledge and understanding of the world.

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)