

# Young Discoverers Pre-School

Inspection report for early years provision

---

<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	EY337160
<b>Inspection date</b>	07 July 2008
<b>Inspector</b>	Gillian Charlesworth
<b>Setting Address</b>	South Hill Early Years Centre, Cemetery Hill, HEMEL HEMPSTEAD, Hertfordshire, HP1 1JF
<b>Telephone number</b>	01442 234617
<b>E-mail</b>	youngdiscoverers@southhillcentre.co.uk
<b>Registered person</b>	South Hill Centre
<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 satisfactory.

### WHAT SORT OF SETTING IS IT?

Young Discoverers Pre-school opened at its present site in 2006 having been situated for the previous 10 years in South Hill Church. It now operates from two rooms within South Hill Early Years Centre. This is a purpose-built building situated near the town centre of Hemel Hempstead, Hertfordshire. A maximum of 30 children may attend the setting at any one time. The pre-school is open each weekday from 09.00 to 12:00 and from 12:50 to 15.00 during school term times. A lunch club is also available each day and runs from 12:00 to 12:40. All children share access to a secure enclosed outdoor play area.

There are currently 75 children from two to four years on roll. Of these, 43 children receive funding for nursery education. Children come from a wide catchment area. The pre-school currently supports a number of children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and also a number of children who speak English as an additional language.

The pre-school employs 10 staff. Of these, eight, including the manager, hold appropriate early years qualifications to level two or above. Three members of staff are currently working towards

qualifications. The setting receives support from the Preschool Learning Alliance, the Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership and has links with Health Lane Children's Centre.

## **THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PROVISION**

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

The provision is satisfactory.

Children have regular opportunities to enjoy the fresh air and physically grow and develop indoors and out. This contributes towards a healthy lifestyle. For the majority of most sessions children can choose between indoor and outdoor play using the covered all-weather area where they enjoy growing and watering plants, exploring bubbles in the water tray, using large chalks on the easel, or hopping exercises. There is timetabled access to the larger playground and grassed areas where they can develop coordination, strength and control using a wide variety of wheeled toys, imaginative resources or the large fixed apparatus and sand-pit. Children have appropriate periods of rest according to their needs. They can choose to sit in the comfortable book area during the session and cuddle-up with practitioners who read stories. Those attending the lunch club can relax on chairs watching television after lunch.

Hygiene routines promote children's health. Children consistently wash their hands after using the toilet and before eating their snacks, encouraging others to use the requisites. Tablecloths are used and tables cleaned before and after children use them at snack and meal times. Many use the toilet independently and are developing their self-care skills as they put on aprons, hang them up to dry after use or peg collages up to dry. Children's health is protected from the risks of cross-infection because parents are aware of suitable exclusions for sickness and diarrhoea and receive basic information in the pre-school prospectus. Arrangements are in place to ensure that children have appropriate first aid treatment and medication procedures have been updated to make them effective.

Children can ask for water that is readily available during the session. They choose from a variety of drinks and pre-prepared fruit at snack time, and enjoy this well-supported social occasion. However, there are missed opportunities for children to learn about healthy eating, prepare snacks independently or make decisions about when they would like a snack. This limits children's healthy choices. Children bring packed lunches to the lunch club that are refrigerated appropriately. Children have their health and dietary needs met through procedures that identify any allergies or dietary needs on registration forms at the outset. These are summarised for staff to ensure children are appropriately nourished.

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

The provision is good.

Children are at ease in their surroundings and are cared for in a child-centred, welcoming and secure environment. The premises are purpose built and decorated with attractive wall displays. They encompass designated areas indoors and out that are often used by the children simultaneously. Accessible well-maintained, low-level toilet facilities encourage children's independence. Security is given a high priority with pin-code entry for authorised personnel; designated staff allocated to supervise arrivals and collections; and visitors consistently signed-in. Children can freely access good quality, suitable materials and resources that promote their learning and development.

Children play safely and are kept safe from harm through effective risk assessment procedures and the high adult to child ratios that promote good supervision. For example, practitioners who work with the children are vigilant and notice a tear in a child's dressing-up underskirt, taking steps to avoid a slip-and-trip hazard. Children are effectively encouraged to begin to learn how to keep themselves safe. For example, they talk about road safety at circle time and engage in discussion through open-ended questions to share safe strategies such as holding hands, walking to cross roads and wearing bright clothes 'to be seen'. This theme is extended outside when children stop their bikes on the pedestrian crossing and have discussions about allowing pedestrians to cross. When children are at potential risk climbing on a table they receive clear explanations and guidance that helps them to understand the consequences of their actions. Appropriate fire safety procedures and equipment are in place to protect children in the event of an emergency.

Children's welfare is suitably safeguarded and protected. Training in child protection is prioritised with six practitioners having attended courses within the last year and able to confidently identify signs and symptoms of abuse. There is an appropriate policy that includes procedures should allegations be made against staff and contact information for referrals. Local reporting contacts are displayed on notice boards and the preschool prospectus includes clear information for parents, outlining the settings' responsibility to protect the children.

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

The provision is good.

Children are at ease, happy and settled in the setting and the adult interaction promotes high levels of confidence and self-esteem. Settling in is organised so that parents can stay for as long as they wish and children proudly name their comforters and this promotes their emotional well-being and transition from home. Children arrive and settle quickly into activities because practitioners are available to support them, for example, helping a group of children who are eager to play on the computer. Children who occasionally arrive upset are soon distracted and offered a reassuring cuddle that helps them settle quickly. They can make decisions about their play and select from the range of play and learning opportunities, deciding whether they play outside with the water or inside using the painting easel or table-top activities.

Children have a strong impulse to communicate that is actively encouraged. For example, they explain to visitors that they enjoy activities such as water, painting and using chalks, and identify when it is tidy-up time. They develop ideas with practitioners as they enjoy using construction materials, talking about wolf stories and making jails or houses from the materials. Children confidently approach practitioners to ask for help, for example, when they are dressing-up. Role play is generally ably facilitated as children move freely between areas developing ideas. For example, children use phones to speak about parties; they move to the book corner with a practitioner to plan food, timing of the party and so on; and others make use of the table-top activities, identifying they are making 'invitations'.

Practitioners use the 'Birth to three matters' framework in their daily planning that combines both the morning and afternoon sessions. The younger children, most of whom attend in the afternoon session, benefit from spontaneous opportunities to play and learn from the broad range of resources that promote continuous learning opportunities. However, procedures to monitor young children's progress are informal and development records are not maintained and regularly assessed to build on starting points in their learning. Consequently, procedures do not ensure that all areas of children's learning and development are fully supported.

## NURSERY EDUCATION

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. Children are making progress in all areas of learning. Practitioners use the Foundation Stage and share in the planning and delivery of activities for children. Thoughtful planning covers six areas of learning. Medium term plans focus on themes rather than learning intentions and short term weekly planning identifies resources to be used; deployment of staff for routine events; and an early learning goal to focus on each week and guide children's learning generally. A more detailed activity sheet directs a daily targeted activity, for example, at circle time small world characters are used to talk about the different composition of families. Practitioners make regular observations of children's learning and generally, in their last term at preschool, link these to assessment records. However, the assessment recording system, within a limited range of stepping stones, is not used systematically throughout children's attendance at preschool or fully effective to identify appropriate stepping stones to plan the next steps for individual children, and of those who are older and more able. Consequently, the limited information restricts the planning and differentiation of activities based on children's different attainments. This potentially limits the challenges set for children in both free play and targeted activities.

Practitioners implement suitable methods to help children learn. They build easy trusting relationships that encourage high levels of confidence and self-esteem. For example, as children arrive on a rainy day they are warmly questioned by practitioners to help them delight in sharing what they wore to keep themselves dry. They demonstrate good self-care skills and independence as they choose from the range of activities both indoors and out and select and use aprons for water play, hanging them on the fence to dry afterwards. Sometimes, the more boisterous, active children who enjoy superhero play have limited focus to develop their play purposefully. Practitioners manage children well and have high expectations for their behaviour. Children play harmoniously and respond well to strategies that help them to share, for example, using egg timers that also encourage their sense of time. Practitioners explain about taking turns when children play boisterously in the camping area and this minimises unwanted behaviour. Children have positive relationships with one another and collaborate well together as they develop hand to eye coordination. For example, one child holds a bottle still while another pours in the water. When music is played, children delight in explaining to visitors that it is tidy-up time and the majority help practitioners to clear away activities, thus promoting responsibility.

Practitioners make mostly good use of the time and resources available. Practitioners work directly with the children for the majority of the time and set-up the environment so that children can be independent and move freely between indoors and outdoors for most of the session. Older children know and respond well to the daily routine, socialising in small key-working groups at snack time. Large group activities sometimes have overly high adult expectations for younger children who find it 'easy to tell and hard to listen'. This means that not all children get the most out of these activities. However, practitioners thoughtfully plan resources for large group activities and ensure props such as flash cards and fluorescent jackets are readily available to involve children in meaningful discussions when learning about aspects of road safety. Children talk about their families and what is important to them both individually and in small groups thereby learning to listen to others and take turns in conversations. Name labels on coat pegs and on a board within the preschool room encourage children to identify their names and that print carries meaning. Older children have time to explore these spontaneously and enjoy sorting them into short and long names. Children enjoy making marks using jumbo chalks in the outdoor area and colouring themed worksheets indoors. Practitioners help them link sounds to letters when some competently write the first letter of their name.

They identify numbers as labels as they are carefully guided to program a number code into an interactive toy and match colours and shapes. Outside, children enjoy nurturing and watering the strawberry and tomato plants, watching them grow and counting the flowers on the plants. They explore and investigate using a range of resources in the water tray and identify 'look, its running out' when using a sieve. They develop strength and control using large apparatus and wheeled toys, showing a sense of space when they stop to let pedestrians cross on the chalked pedestrian crossing, thereby underpinning their knowledge of road safety through practical activities. They show sustained interest as they competently use a range of tools and materials such as glue spreaders to stick pre-cut shapes onto individual 'fish' collages. They use the easel and paint brushes to explore and mix colour through paints, developing creativity. In the role play camping area children develop imaginative ideas and make stews moving resources between areas to develop their play.

Strategies to support children in line with the Special Educational Needs Code of Practice are being well developed. A Special Needs Coordinator attends regular training and works closely with parents and outside agencies for advice to improve children's involvement and develop shared strategies. Information is sought to establish the family backgrounds and languages of those who speak English as an additional language although there are missed opportunities to utilise this information and fully support children's identity through their home language.

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

The provision is good.

Children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is fostered. Children have a strong sense of belonging and are treated with equal concern. They are settled and happy in the setting and access the wide range of resources available, making choices and decisions for most of the time, within the structure of the daily routine. Anti-discriminatory practice is mostly well promoted though planned and unplanned activities. For example, children are encouraged to talk about their families at group time and appreciate others' home contexts. Girls and boys make full use of the range of activities, playing with computers or tea sets respectively. There are limited strategies to support the identity of those who speak English as an additional language although children's individual customs are respected such as washing hands under running water. Children have opportunities to learn about the local community and wider world through organised local events such as fun days and activities that focus on different countries. There is an ethos of Christianity within the setting therefore children take part in daily prayers before meals. Festivals such as Easter and Christmas are routinely celebrated. A range of multi cultural resources are provided that children use naturally in their play to help them appreciate diversity. The setting has a conscientious approach towards supporting children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and works well with parents and external agencies to promote individual needs. This ensures that children are well supported.

Children are actively encouraged to behave appropriately and strategies are in place to help them take responsibility for their own behaviour. For example, several large egg timers are readily available to help children manage turn-taking at the computer, water tray, or on bikes outside, therefore children play harmoniously. Practitioners are on hand to help children solve minor disagreements and children are chosen to take responsibility and be helpers at circle and snack time. They willingly help tidy away and are mostly purposefully engaged in this activity. Children are consistently valued and praised for their achievements and good behaviour and this promotes high levels of self-esteem.

Procedures are in place whereby parents can share their concerns and have them investigated and recorded appropriately.

The partnership with parents and carers of funded children is satisfactory. Parents are provided with a range of information about the setting through notice boards, newsletters, a parent prospectus and policies that are available on request. However, parents receive very little information to help them understand the Foundation Stage and therefore do not have a clear understanding of how activities help children make progress towards the Early Learning Goals. Although parents are told about their children's achievements informally, procedures are not sufficiently developed to involve parents in their children's written assessment and records of achievement. Consequently, children's development and progress is not fully supported by two-way flow of information, knowledge and expertise. However, parents are encouraged to share what they know about their children informally on a daily basis and they fully appreciate the friendly and relaxed relationships with practitioners. Most information sought is acted upon in relation to starting points for children's care and learning and their family background. Parents have some opportunities to be involved in their children's learning through settling-in procedures, organised activities such as farm visits and occasionally caring for the setting's teddy bear at home.

## **Organisation**

The organisation is good.

Overall children's needs are met. Children's welfare and development is protected and safeguarded because the setting has adequate recruitment procedures and suitable arrangements to protect children from persons who are not vetted. There is a strong emphasis on training and development for practitioners therefore they are knowledgeable and have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities. The majority of staff are qualified early years practitioners or working towards a qualification and have attended training workshops in areas such as child protection, observations, special needs, safe recruitment and development. The setting attained the Hertfordshire Quality Standards accreditation scheme in May 2007. This enhances experiences for children.

The organisation of space and resources meets children's needs effectively and the high adult to child ratios ensure that children are well supported. However, the daily routines within the operational plan sometimes limit children's spontaneous learning and the engagement of younger children. This is because children are gathered in large groups for circle time and the structure occasionally detracts from the child-centred focus. All the required documentation is conscientiously managed and in place for the safe and efficient management of children.

Leadership and management of funded children is satisfactory. The leader builds a committed staff team and promotes effective communication and relationships with staff, parents and children through team meetings, informal discussion, staff rotas and community events. Opportunities for professional training and workshops are promoted through various identification strategies including appraisal which develops practitioners' knowledge to support children. In some areas the setting is proactive in identifying and implementing improvements to support the overall children's individual learning and development. For example, several practitioners enthusiastically welcome additional responsibility. They develop thoughtful procedures for children with special needs and for the introduction of the Early Years Foundation Stage. However, not all aspects of the provision for Nursery Education are effectively evaluated, identified and acted upon for improvement and this potentially limits some children's learning and development. For example, stepping stones within the assessment recording systems are

limited and overseen by individual key workers rather than the senior staff team therefore the next steps and challenges for more able children's progress are not clearly defined; strategies for those who speak English as an additional language are limited; and those who enjoy active play are not always sufficiently challenged. There has been some progress in tackling the previously identified recommendations for improvement although areas such as partnership with parents, assessment of younger children's play and learning, and challenge for older more able children, remain areas for development.

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

The previous care inspection made three recommendations. Hygiene arrangements for children have improved through consistent hand washing procedures that are implemented at snack time. Children have some opportunities to learn about healthy eating through a varied diet of pre-prepared healthy snack options such as apple, raisins, carrot and so on and through informal discussions with parents discouraging chocolate in lunch boxes. However, there remain missed opportunities to learn about healthy eating through routine discussion and sharing in the preparation of snacks. This remains an area for improvement. Observations and records of attainments and progress of children under three are not yet in place to help plan the next steps for their play, learning and development. Ad-hoc observations are conducted for younger children who attend the afternoon sessions although these are not assessed to systematically monitor children's progress. The setting is developing systems to implement the Early Years Foundation Stage in September 2008 meanwhile this remains an area for improvement.

The previous nursery education inspection recommended that older or more able children are sufficiently challenged; that opportunities for parents to share the records of their children's progress are increased; and the information given to parents regarding the Foundation Stage and the preschool curriculum is improved.

Children's progress and continuity with parents for learning and development is not yet fully effective because procedures are not yet in place to address these recommendations which remain areas for development. Key workers are responsible to challenge the older, more able children within their group and specific activities are planned for regular targeted delivery. However, there is limited direction through the stepping stones assessment records to move more able children forward and identify appropriate challenges in both free play and targeted activities. When parents are new to the setting a key worker letter is provided setting out procedures for two-way communication. Parents are not informed explicitly of opportunities to share records of their children's progress. The prospectus provides only titles of national frameworks that the setting works with, rather than information to fully inform them about the curriculum and progression towards the Early Learning Goals. This remains an area for improvement.

### **Complaints since the last inspection**

Ofsted received concerns relating to the deployment of qualified staff and the lack of a manager being present at all times. A childcare inspector conducted an unannounced visit to the premises and interviewed the manager on 26 September 2007 to inspect in line with National Standards 2 (Organisation). As a result of the visit two actions were set: to ensure there is always a suitably qualified named deputy who is able to take charge in the absence of the manager; and that individual records are kept on the premises containing staff members training and qualifications. A response to these actions was received setting out a detailed procedure to ensure a suitable



deputy is in place and certificates and records of staff training and qualifications are available. The provider remains qualified for registration.

## **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 satisfactory.

### **WHAT MUST BE DONE TO SECURE FUTURE IMPROVEMENT?**

#### **The quality and standards of the care**

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

- review arrangements for snack-time to increase children's independence, decision making and opportunities to prepare food and learn about healthy eating
- develop an action plan with timescales to systematically monitor young children's progress and ensure that observations and records of attainment show how children progress in all areas of learning and development
- review the operational plan to ensure that daily routines are meaningful and appropriate for all children.

#### **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):

- identify and improve challenges for children in both free play and targeted activities, ensuring that assessments of children's progress is linked to appropriate stepping stones to inform the planning and differentiation
- provide parents with good quality information to help them understand the Foundation Stage and improve opportunities to share observation and assessment records
- ensure that procedures are in place to systematically monitor and evaluate children's learning and development and areas for improvement are identified and acted upon.

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)