

The Learning Tree

Inspection report for early years provision

Unique reference number	127693
Inspection date	14/07/2009
Inspector	Stacey Sangster

Setting address	The Parish Rooms, Cranbrook Road, Maidstone, Kent, TN12 0AZ
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Telephone number	01797 260843
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Type of setting	Childcare on non-domestic premises
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by Ofsted under Sections 49 and 50 of the Childcare Act 2006 on the quality and standards of the registered early years provision. 'Early years provision' refers to provision regulated by Ofsted for children from birth to 31 August following their fifth birthday (the early years age group). The registered person must ensure that this provision complies with the statutory framework for children's learning, development and welfare, known as the *Early Years Foundation Stage*.

The provider must provide a copy of this report to all parents with children at the setting where reasonably practicable. The provider must provide a copy of the report to any other person who asks for one, but may charge a fee for this service (The Childcare (Inspection) Regulations 2008 regulations 9 and 10).

The setting also makes provision for children older than the early years age group which is registered on the voluntary and/or compulsory part(s) of the Childcare Register. This report does not include an evaluation of that provision, but a comment about compliance with the requirements of the Childcare Register is included in Annex B.

Description of the setting

The Learning Tree nursery has been registered since January 2000. It operates from a hall and two rooms in the Parish Rooms, Staplehurst, Kent. The setting is registered on the Early Years Register and on the compulsory and voluntary parts of the Childcare Register. The setting may care for a maximum of 24 children in the early years age range at any one time. The nursery is open on a sessional basis from 09:00 to 12:00 each weekday during the term time.

There are currently 34 children aged from two to under five years on roll. The setting participates in the nursery education funding scheme. Children come from the local area. The nursery supports children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those who speak English as an additional language.

The nursery employs six staff including the manager. The manager and two other staff have an NVQ 3 the other three staff hold NVQ 2 qualifications.

Overall effectiveness of the early years provision

Overall the quality of the provision is satisfactory. Effective systems are in place to record the assessment of children's progress within the Early Years Foundation Stage, this is used to inform the planning and is a key factor in supporting children's development towards the early learning goals. Parents involvement in the setting is given high priority. There is a good partnership established in regard to sharing of relevant information in relation the children's education. Parents are regularly consulted on the aspects of the setting that they wish to see improved and this is acted upon. The leadership and management of the setting is weak in areas. The self evaluation is poor and this impacts on the setting's ability to effectively prioritise what needs to be improved. Documentation provided for the staff to use is not always good quality. Staff work hard but are overstretched, they are often unable to provide consistency in relation to sustaining good quality interactions with the children. The layout and organisation of the premises, results in staff spending large amounts of time on ancillary tasks and as a result staff have limited opportunities to engage fully with the children without interruption. Time spent in direct contact with children is limited and this impacts of the staff's ability to meet children's needs effectively.

What steps need to be taken to improve provision further?

To further improve the early years provision the registered person should:

- expand the risk assessment to reflect in full the checks that are carried out with regard to the building and outings
- update the 'information about the children forms', to ensure that information collected is consistent, that the emergency collection details are clearly explained and that important details such as children's religious and cultural background is requested

To fully meet the specific requirements of the EYFS, the registered person must:

- ensure that staffing arrangements are organised to effectively meet the needs of the children

07/09/2009

The leadership and management of the early years provision

The leadership and management of the setting is satisfactory. The provider has completed the self evaluation form and updated it as improvements have been accomplished. There is also evidence that the setting have been working with Kent County Council Development workers to support them in identifying areas for improvement. The setting have organised the refurbishment of the toilet facilities and identified through recent questionnaires that parents consider the outside play space needs improving. Funding has been secured to redevelop this area which will enhance its usability and attractiveness to children.

All of the required systems for recording are in place, but there are weaknesses in the arrangements for reviewing these and some documents are in use with important areas omitted. The forms used to record the information about each child, has three versions in use, resulting in subtle differences in the information gathered about children. This along with the failure of the setting to ask about children's religious backgrounds impacts on the setting's ability to be fully inclusive. The risk assessment although comprehensive as a daily visual check is insufficient as it does not identify dates for significant safety checks such as the servicing of for example fire safety equipment, central heating systems or professional checks on electrical equipment. Staff are aware of the checks that are carried out, but are not part of the process of developing or contributing to the risk assessment systems put in place. Senior staff are consulted briefly about the self evaluation but it is primarily produced by the proprietor.

The setting meet the minimum legal staffing ratios in terms of numbers, however because of the layout of the premises and organisation of resources, when staff need to undertake paperwork and ancillary work (which is frequently) the staff left directly caring for children often have to position themselves between groups of children to monitor them, rather than work with them. This results in limited chances for staff to spend uninterrupted time in direct contact working with the children. There is evidence suggesting that the issue of staffing levels has been raised. Despite it being a significant factor in reducing the effectiveness of the setting, it is not featured in the self evaluation or as an issue that has been identified as a priority for improvement. It is a legal requirement that 'Staffing arrangements must be organised to ensure safety and to meet the needs of the children'. Although safety is not being compromised by the arrangements, overall they do not effectively meet the needs of the children which is a breach of legislation.

Recruitment procedures are robust and meet the requirements, this ensures that

adults working with and having contact with children are suitable to do so. Staff turnover is low and staff work well as a team. They strive very hard to try to meet the needs of the children. Children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are identified and supported effectively and the setting are open to working with other agencies.

The quality and standards of the early years provision

Overall, the quality of the provision is satisfactory. The practitioners have the knowledge and skills to be able to support children appropriately through the planned activities, use of the wide range of resources and through their interaction with children, however a reoccurring issue which impacts negatively on the performance of the setting is the organisation of the staff's time, which is often spent engaged in monitoring the toilets, tidying resources and carrying out essential observations and paperwork, while being part of the adult to child ratios. This impacts negatively on most areas of the setting and weakens the quality of the interactions, the focus of activities led by adults and the ability for staff to spend quality time in direct contact with the children. Children do enjoy their time at the setting. They are being kept safe by staff who see this as a high priority. Staff are observed at times to offer good quality advice, pitched appropriately for the children's ages and levels of understanding in relation to how to behave well and how to keep themselves and their friends safe, but the time staff have to respond to children is inconsistent resulting in one child receiving a good quality interaction and the next a hurried response due to staff needing to support too many children at once. Staff are knowledgeable about how children learn and confident in the delivery of the EYFS. Although observation time is allocated to each member of staff, it is frequently interrupted as staff break away to attend to children's needs, however the observations are used effectively to identify what children enjoy and what stage they have reached in the six areas of learning. Staff also spend time outside of the opening hours planning a range of activities which key workers identify as being of interest to their key children and ensuring that there is differentiation within them to make them accessible to children working at different stages of development.

The assessment arrangements are a key strength of how the setting helps children to make progress. Staff are confident in their new system of assessing children. The setting have adopted the 'My Unique Story' scheme, which provides a very personal account of the progress that children are making, clearly identifies what the key workers will be supporting a child to do next and is shared with and contributed to by parents resulting in a full and comprehensive picture of each individual child's learning journey. Children's care needs are satisfactorily met. Despite a sometimes hectic atmosphere, children are relaxed and enjoy the freedom to move between activities and join and leave groups at will, they love going outside and make good use of the water play offered, take pleasure in digging in the peat and hiding in the den. Children in this setting have positive relationships with staff, who try hard to make sure that children who need attention are given it. Older children who are nearing school age have special rising-fives sessions in a separate room, where more challenging and focused, adult led activities are provided. Regrettably when these are in progress the other

children are prevented from having free flow into the garden area as it cannot be staffed successfully.

Overall the children receive adequate levels of interaction and guidance to keep them safe and encourage them to be healthy. Toileting and hand washing are very well monitored and this is an area where staff are able to give good quality information which children remember and understand. As a result most children remember without prompting to wash and dry their hands after using the toilets. The use of antibacterial spray and hand gels for cleaning tables and hands throughout the day helps to minimise the risk of cross infection. Children learn about healthy eating from the snacks on offer, staff talk to children as they prepare snacks about what foods are good for them and which ones they need to eat in moderation. Drinking water is freely available from a child sized water cooler and helps to ensure that children remain hydrated and thirst free. Children learn to cooperate, share, take turns and understand that they may sometimes need to be patient if wanting adult support. They learn about celebrations and festivals which are relevant to them and their families as well as those important to the wider world and community. Children make good use of the computer, but are not engaged by the layout of the book corner, which is unappealing and not a comfortable place to relax with a book. Children do however take books into other areas and create their own comfortable place, for example flopping down on the home corner bedding and reading to each other. Books are enjoyed at story time, when children come together as a group and enjoy tales such as 'Wibbly Pig', which is clearly a favourite, while the remaining staff put away the main activities and get out the ride on toys and physical play equipment for the last part of the session. Children and staff appear in high spirits at the end of the session. Parents receive verbal information from the staff about how their children have been during the session. Staff bid children affectionate goodbyes and ensure that the hall is cleared ready for the next day.

Annex A: record of inspection judgements

The key inspection judgements and what they mean

Grade 1 is Outstanding: this aspect of the provision is of exceptionally high quality

Grade 2 is Good: this aspect of the provision is strong

Grade 3 is Satisfactory: this aspect of the provision is sound

Grade 4 is Inadequate: this aspect of the provision is not good enough

Overall effectiveness

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage?	3
How well does the provision promote inclusive practice?	3
The capacity of the provision to maintain continuous improvement.	3

Leadership and management

How effectively is provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage led and managed?	3
How effective is the setting's self-evaluation, including the steps taken to promote improvement?	3
How well does the setting work in partnership with parents and others?	2
How well are children safeguarded?	3

Quality and standards

How effectively are children in the Early Years Foundation Stage helped to learn and develop?	3
How effectively is the welfare of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage promoted?	3
How well are children helped to stay safe?	3
How well are children helped to be healthy?	3
How well are children helped to enjoy and achieve?	3
How well are children helped to make a positive contribution?	3
How well are children helped develop skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being?	3

Any complaints about the inspection or report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

Annex B: the Childcare Register

The provider confirms that the requirements of the compulsory part of the Childcare Register are:	Met
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The provider confirms that the requirements of the voluntary part of the Childcare Register are:	Met
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