

Squirrels Pre-School

Inspection report for early years provision

Unique reference number	203962
Inspection date	23/06/2009
Inspector	Sarah Johnson

Setting address	St John's & Highwoods Community Centre, Highwoods, Colchester, Essex, CO4 9SR
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Type of setting	Childcare on non-domestic premises

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).

Description of the setting

Squirrels Pre-School registered in 1999. It is run by a voluntary management committee made up of parents of children who attend the setting and representatives from the St John's and Highwoods Community Association. It operates from a large room within St John's and Highwoods Community Centre in the Highwoods area of Colchester, Essex. The premises is accessed via a ramp leading to the main entrance and there are accessible toilets available. The pre-school sessions run from 09.30 to 12.00 on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday, with afternoon sessions from 13.00 to 15.30 on Monday and 12.15 to 14.45 on Wednesday. These sessions run during school term time. Children attend for a combination of sessions and share access to an enclosed outdoor play area.

The provision is registered by Ofsted on the Early Years Register. A maximum of 24 children in the early years age range may attend the pre-school at any one time. There are currently 51 children on roll, all of whom are within the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) years. Children live in the local area and some children also attend early years sessions at other nearby pre-schools and nurseries. The setting is currently supporting a number of children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and children who are learning English as an additional language. The setting is in receipt of funding for early education for three and four-year-olds.

There are nine members of staff, including the manager, who work directly with the children. Six of these staff hold relevant qualifications to at least National Vocational Qualification Level 2. The setting is currently being assessed as a part of the Pre-school Learning Alliance accreditation scheme.

Overall effectiveness of the early years provision

Overall the quality of the provision is good. Children are provided with good levels of care and make positive progress in their learning and development in the inclusive setting. They are confident, independent and clearly enjoy a wide range of play opportunities, most of which are planned and organised with their individual needs and learning priorities in mind. Partnership with parents is well promoted as the staff strive to provide meaningful opportunities for parents to become involved in their children's learning. The manager and staff have established effective systems for self-evaluation and demonstrate a good capacity for continuous improvement.

What steps need to be taken to improve provision further?

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

- develop the short-term planning further to show how adults will support individual children to achieve the next steps in their learning and development
- review systems to ensure they are flexible enough to respond to and meet

the needs of individual children, this particularly relates to the organisation of snack time and the grouping of children during story and song activities.

The leadership and management of the early years provision

The manager and staff work together as a motivated and cohesive team, supported well by the management committee. They have completed a wide range of training to ensure they have the knowledge and understanding they need to promote children's welfare, learning and development. The good practice at the setting is promoted by the comprehensive written policies and procedures which are shared well with parents, staff and visitors. The manager and staff are keen to improve the provision for children and regular self-evaluation and reflective practice take place through discussions at regular team meetings. These discussions, along with comments gathered from parents, are included in the setting's detailed Ofsted self-evaluation form and have been used to identify realistic targets for future improvement.

Children benefit from good levels of continuity in their care because staff take time to form effective partnerships with parents. Each child benefits from a key person who takes time to understand their individual needs and routines. For example, they gather a wide range of information about children's starting points when meeting with parents during settling-in visits. Numerous displays, regular newsletters and meetings are offered to ensure parents are kept very well informed about activities, events and children's developmental progress. Opportunities for parents to be involved in pre-school life are very well promoted, as they are invited to join sessions via the parent rota, and help their children to bring items from home which strengthen their learning at the setting. The staff have established good links with the local primary schools to support children's transition into full-time school. For example, they organise visits so children can become familiar with the school environment and invite the teachers into the pre-school to meet the children.

Children are cared for in a very safe and secure environment. Thorough daily risk assessments are carried out by the manager to ensure children's safety in the premises. In addition, detailed risk assessments are completed and recorded before children are taken on visits outside of the premises. Children are effectively safeguarded from harm and neglect by staff who have attended safeguarding training and have good understanding of child protection issues.

The quality and standards of the early years provision

Children make good progress across all aspects of their learning and development, supported by staff who demonstrate good knowledge of the EYFS. Staff are well aware of the children's individual progress as they regularly observe their developmental needs and interests. Many of these observations are collated in the children's individual 'developmental matters' records, along with well-prepared scrapbooks containing meaningful photographs and examples of the children's work. In practice this information is assessed effectively to map children's progress

and to identify the next steps in their individual learning. However, information about how the staff plan to support children to achieve these next steps is not always clear in the short-term planning. Staff work well with parents and outside professionals to provide effective support for children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. For example, the staff gather activity ideas from the speech and language therapist to support children's specific developmental needs.

Children benefit from a very bright, welcoming and child-friendly learning environment. The main playroom affords children with ample space to explore the array of play resources and equipment. Well-resourced imaginative areas are established to promote children's role play, for example, children play alongside each other as they put on medical gloves, create a hospital bed with a blanket and apply bandages to their patient's injuries. Children make good progress in communication and literacy. For example, they show confidence in recognising their name in print on their name cards, learn to communicate using sign language and develop their mark making skills for a purpose as they write medical notes on the clipboard. There is very good provision for daily access to the popular outside learning environment for all children, and the staff ensure all areas of learning are delivered through outdoor play. Children delight in throwing and catching balls with the staff, pedalling ride-on toys along the pathway and mastering their balancing skills whilst climbing on the apparatus. Although children are offered time to make choices and lead their own play, at times the organisation of the daily routine does not allow sufficient flexibility to meet the differing needs and interests of individual children. For example, some children become unsettled when their self-initiated play is interrupted to accommodate a structured group snack time, and the grouping of children during story and song sessions does not always maximise the active involvement of all children.

Good emphasis is placed on encouraging children to learn about aspects of a healthy lifestyle. The staff plan meaningful opportunities for children to grow strawberries, carrots and tomatoes in the outdoor area, helping children to gain a deeper understanding about the food they eat. Children manage their personal hygiene routines independently as they access the child-friendly facilities to wash their hands before snack time and after using the toilet, prompted by the colourful hand washing themed posters displayed. Children are also supported to develop a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe as the staff creatively address road safety scenarios in role play situations and arrange for local police officers to visit the setting.

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?	2
How well does the provision promote inclusive practice?	2
The capacity of the provision to maintain continuous improvement.	2

Leadership and management

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

Quality and standards

How effectively are children in the Early Years Foundation Stage helped to learn and develop?	2
How effectively is the welfare of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage promoted?	2
How well are children helped to stay safe?	2
How well are children helped to be healthy?	2
How well are children helped to enjoy and achieve?	2
How well are children helped to make a positive contribution?	2
How well are children helped develop skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being?	2

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