

The Big Top After School Club

Inspection report for early years provision

Unique reference number	130544
Inspection date	20/05/2009
Inspector	Jane Richmond
Setting address	Meryfield School, Theobald Street, Borehamwood, Herts, WD6 4TJ
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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).

Children only attend this setting before and/or after the school day and/or during the school holidays. The judgements in this report reflect the quality of early years provision offered to children during those periods.

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 Big Top After School Club has been registered since 1999 and operates from a large school hall within Meryfield Primary School in Borehamwood in Hertfordshire. The group have direct access to seven toilets. There are both small and large secure outdoor play areas available to the children. A maximum of 40 children may attend the group at any one time. The group is open Monday to Friday from 15:15 until 18:00 term-time only. The group is registered on the Early Years Register, compulsory and voluntary parts of the Childcare Register.

There are currently 60 children from four years to 12 years on roll. The children who attend come from the local area. The after school club collects children from one local school and some children come independently from other local schools. The group supports children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and also supports a number of children who speak English as a second language. The accommodation provides easy access to those with disabilities.

The group employs 10 staff in all. Of these, six staff hold early years qualifications and three other members of staff are working towards a further qualification. The number of staff on duty depends on the number of children booked into the group. The group achieved the Hertfordshire Quality Standards Award as a provider of quality early years childcare and education in 2006. The group is a member of the '4children' organisation which provides support and guidance.

Overall effectiveness of the early years provision

The provision at Big Top After School Club is outstanding. It meets the needs of the early years children exceptionally well. The dedication of the manager and her staff is evident in the work that has been done to ensure the happiness, safety and security, health and well-being of all children.

Highly effective systems are in place to ensure the safety and security of the children. Inclusive practice is outstanding because the needs of every child are carefully monitored by the very knowledgeable and experienced staff. The capacity of the provision to maintain continuous improvement is good because there are very good systems in place to evaluate what needs to be done to improve. An increase in the rigour with which improvements are evaluated will improve the club even further.

What steps need to be taken to improve provision further?

To further improve the high quality early years provision the registered person should consider:

- increase the rigour with which improvements are evaluated.

The leadership and management of the early years provision

The outstanding leadership and management of The Big Top After School Club ensures that every child is cared for, supported and enabled to learn and develop through stimulating and exciting learning experiences. As a result of the careful selection processes, the club has recruited staff who actively seek to extend and develop their own learning. Their commitment and determination to improve their practice for the benefit of the children is exemplary. The manager has exceptionally high expectations and has a clear vision of the quality of provision she is striving to achieve. Consultation with staff, parents and children through discussion and regular questionnaires which are almost always positive, enable accurate self-evaluation for improvement. The self-evaluation form has been drafted in consultation with all staff. However, the current review process needs to be more evaluative.

The recently introduced learning journeys accurately assess what children can do and have the potential to record the progress of individual children more rigorously in all areas of the Early Years Foundation Stage. Staff are very aware of how to support the needs of children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those with English as an additional language. They spend time playing constructively with the children. In this way they successfully build trusting relationships. While talking and listening with children, they create opportunities for observation and assessment. All staff have received child protection training which is regularly updated.

All safeguarding procedures are fully in place. Rigorous systems for checking staff histories before being employed and very effective registration and collection systems ensure a safe environment of the children. All staff have relevant first aid qualifications, the majority already have appropriate childcare qualifications and the others are currently participating in training programmes. Regular health and safety checks are rigorously undertaken

All relevant policies are in place and the active supervision of the manager ensures that all staff adhere to them in their practice. There is an exceptionally strong relationship with parents who are kept informed through newsletters, the website and day to day contact. A very welcoming display at the entrance attractively displays much information needed by parents. The welcome pack provided to all new parents fully explains expectations and translations are available for parents with little or no English.

The club's location within the attractive, light and airy school hall and the involvement of staff from the school provides exceptionally strong links with Meryfield school. Regular staff meetings are held to discuss children's needs and identify areas for improvement. These also provide opportunities for staff development sessions, sometimes using outside organisations.

The quality and standards of the early years provision

The very high quality, wide ranging activities available are suitable for all children of early years. Children interact extremely well together and care for each other within this warm, friendly and welcoming environment. Staff strive continually to ensure that the very high standard of provision is maintained. Children who attend the provision are very happy because relationships between themselves and the staff are trusting and open and staff are perceptive in recognising when children need directing and supporting and when they prefer to be left alone to play.

The carefully selected very well-planned activities stimulate learning exceptionally well in all areas of the Early Years Foundation Stage and there is an excellent balance between adult-led and child-initiated activities. For example, children are supported when taking part in colour mixing painting activities and investigating the environment and enjoy choosing between playing in the role play area or in the sand. Through these activities children very successfully learn investigative and social skills. The large outdoor area provides opportunities for sports activities and exploration and discovery through which children develop observation and physical skills exceptionally well. Visitors from outside agencies, such as the reptile exhibition, dance sessions and the police, extend the children's understanding of wild animals and their responsibilities within the community outstandingly well. Informative records of events in the provision are captured in the colourful 'scrap books' stimulating discussion and reflection on learning.

The exceptionally well organised activities for promoting the children's health and well-being enable them to develop highly positive attitudes towards regular physical exercise and healthy eating. The carefully planned systems for children's safety and external visitors effectively develop their knowledge and understanding of how to stay safe.

Children are very aware of how to keep safe and are confident to confide in adults if they are concerned or worried. They develop healthy lifestyles exceptionally well through their enjoyment of the healthy snacks provided and their use of the range of good quality equipment with which to play physical, social and academic games. Children successfully develop their skills for economic well-being through cooking activities and in the role play area. As a result of their observations in these activities, staff are able to assist children in improving their skills. Fund raising activities enable the children to make a highly positive contribution to the community both locally and globally through sponsoring a child in Africa.

Through the support and encouragement of well trained and highly motivated adults, children make exceptionally good progress in a range of skills from the start of their time at the club.

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?	1
How well does the provision promote inclusive practice?	1
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?	1
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?	1
How well are children safeguarded?	1

Quality and standards

How effectively are children in the Early Years Foundation Stage helped to learn and develop?	1
How effectively is the welfare of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage promoted?	1
How well are children helped to stay safe?	2
How well are children helped to be healthy?	1
How well are children helped to enjoy and achieve?	1
How well are children helped to make a positive contribution?	1
How well are children helped develop skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being?	2

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Annex B: the Childcare Register

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

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