

Marshmallows

Inspection report for early years provision

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Inspector

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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*.

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Description of the setting

Marshmallows Nursery is owned by Marshmallows Limited. It opened in 2002 and operates from four rooms in a converted domestic property. The nursery is situated in a residential area close to Darwen town centre. Babies and toddlers are cared for on the ground floor which comprises a main play room, conservatory, messy play area and sleep room, and children aged over three years are cared for in the pre-school unit on the first floor. Children have access to an enclosed outdoor play area.

Marshmallows is open each weekday from 07.30 to 18.00 for 51 weeks of the year. The nursery is registered on the Early Years Register. A maximum of 56 children may attend the nursery at any one time. There are currently 61 children aged from birth to under five years on roll, some in part-time places. Marshmallows provides funded early education for three and four-year-olds.

There are 14 members of staff, 10 of whom hold appropriate early years qualifications to at least NVQ level 2. The manager holds a level 4 qualification.

The overall effectiveness of the early years provision

Overall the quality of the provision is satisfactory.

Committed and sound leadership results in a steadily developing setting which is meeting requirements and has significant, ongoing plans to build further on improvements made so far. Systems to evaluate the impact of practice and improvements are generally effective though not always systematic enough to identify specific weaknesses in the provision. Consequently, despite some aspects of good provision, there are inconsistencies in quality across the setting. Some practitioners provide an enabling environment where children learn independently whilst other areas are less effectively planned and resourced. This leads to children overall, making satisfactory progress in their learning and development. The nursery works well with parents and other agencies to ensure each child's individual needs are known and met.

What steps need to be taken to improve provision further?

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

- further develop systems for monitoring and evaluating the provision assessing what the setting does against robust and challenging criteria to identify and address any weaknesses particularly in teaching and planning for learning
- review and develop the learning environment to provide all children with continuous access to rich and varied resources and play experiences which support their learning and development and gives them the confidence to explore and learn in safe yet challenging indoor and outdoor spaces

- extend risk assessment procedures to include a record of the risk assessment undertaken for swimming trips, to consider the risks associated with the thorny branch in the garden, the broken air conditioning unit and flooring in the baby area, and to ensure suitable action is taken to minimise the risks identified.

The effectiveness of leadership and management of the early years provision

There is a strong emphasis on safeguarding with comprehensive policies and procedures clearly understood by staff and designated individuals. Clear vetting procedures ensure that all staff working with children are suitable to do so. Generally effective risk assessment procedures along with staff awareness ensures children's safety, however, a record of the risk assessment for weekly swimming trips has been overlooked. Whilst regular safety checking procedures identify most potential hazards to children on the premises, action is not always completed quickly. For example, a broken air conditioning unit is accessible in the baby room and a thorny branch is growing in the children's garden. Some aspects of safety with regards to the deployment of space, furniture and equipment within the setting have not been considered. Floor surfaces throughout the nursery are mostly laminated, which although provides for very effective hygiene poses a hazard to babies in their attempts to become mobile. The slippery surface hinders their attempts to climb to crawling position and results in bumped heads. There are narrow steps on decking and steps between levels within the premises which also hinder accessibility. The nursery is reviewing and steadily developing its provision in relation to providing equal opportunities. A range of positive images and welcome signs promote a basic sense of value for all.

The manager is highly motivated to seek further improvement. She works closely in partnership with local advisors who assist with the provision of tools to evaluate the effectiveness of aspects of the provision, such as an environmental rating scale. Most plans for development are accurately targeted to bring about the most needed improvements to the quality of the provision, such as systems for planning for children's progression, and the development of the outside area. Self-evaluation draws from some staff and parental feedback and is used positively to provide action plans which drive some improvements. As yet, however, there are no clear systems to monitor children's progress in order to evaluate the quality of teaching. Consequently there are differences in the quality of provision for children in different areas of the setting, particularly babies.

The provision of resources across the setting is variable. Staff ratios are organised to meet children's needs and the majority of staff hold suitable early years qualifications. Essential training is routinely updated and the manager is beginning to introduce 'in house' practice based training sessions to further develop staff skills. The deployment of space is effective in meeting the developmental needs of different age ranges and some babies benefit from a separate sleep room. Mostly children have ample space in which to access quality play materials, although some restrictions hinder some children's ability to access the full range of continuous provision.

The pre-school unit is well resourced with good quality equipment that is organised to support children's independent thinking and learning across all areas of the curriculum. In contrast the baby area is bland and basically resourced with few items to self-select and areas of interest to freely explore. There is little provision to enable babies to relax, look at books and pictures or play on the floor in comfort.

Partnerships are valued and contribute to ensuring that each child's individual needs are known and met. Effective communication arrangements ensure that both the start of the placement and as children leave to go on to school, information is clearly shared to work towards a seamless transition between carers. Parents are provided with useful information about the setting including regular newsletters, which along with the sharing of children's learning journals keeps them well informed of children's activities, achievements and progress. Parents comment that they value the learning journals and also the regular discussions with practitioners.

The quality and standards of the early years provision and outcomes for children

The quality of the provision across the setting is variable. Overall, staff have a sound understanding of the EYFS. They appropriately use a key person system to support children's care and learning and as a result children are happy, confident and enjoy their time in the setting. Staff observe their own key children and keep records of their progress using learning journals. From their observations they plan next steps for each individual. However, the delivery of activities to promote progress towards these next steps is inconsistent as planning to incorporate individual needs is not securely in place across the setting. Key workers are generally aware of each child's basic learning needs which provides for their steady progress. The quality of teaching is variable. Some staff question children well which extends their thinking. They offer appropriate explanations to support children's understanding and they grasp opportunities for learning in everyday situations, such as extending children's interest in looking at the world outside the window by offering binoculars. Other staff are not as confident in focussing on learning outcomes through play and some routines do not prioritise learning. Staff use story and video times as 'fill-in' activity whilst children take part in hygiene routines before or after mealtimes. The frequent disruption to the activity hinders children's ability to listen and follow the story.

The provision of play and activities to extend children's experiences is variable. Pre-school children freely access a good range of continuous provision. They operate with good levels of independence becoming active learners as they are able to think for themselves and follow through their own ideas. They independently access mark-making tools and some draw recognisable images. By the time they go to school they have an understanding of sounds and letters aided by the print rich environment in which they play. They learn to take responsibility as they are encouraged to put on, take off and hang up their aprons for messy play and they access and use the computer with decreasing levels of support.

Children also learn about the world in which they live when they are encouraged to recycle paper and plant seeds. However, younger children's access to the range of provision is restricted which limits their ability to make choices. The separate messy play area provides toddlers with some interesting and exciting opportunities for exploring and investigating, though its is sectioned off from the main play room. Here some children watch with interest as the 'gloop' drips through their fingers and they scoop and make marks in the tray of oats. They enjoy free painting at the easel in addition to exploring sand or water play. The planning of activities and the environment for babies lacks some focus and as a result at times children wander aimlessly as there is too little to keep them continually occupied and stimulated.

The nursery has developed procedures which encourage children's learning about healthy lifestyles. Menu's have been re-designed to reflect healthy options and as a result meals are freshly prepared, varied and nutritious. All children recognise and respond to their need for drinks and are able to access their own individual cups when thirsty. Established routines encourage good hygiene as children wash regularly and clean their teeth after meals. Children enjoy being outside, however, access to outside play and the attractive large equipment provided is restricted. Children are brought out in groups for short sessions each morning and afternoon. When the grass is wet they are unable to access much of the equipment. This hinders children's ability to run around freely, exercise vigorously and use equipment which contributes to their physical development.

Children form close relationships with adults and other children in the setting. They seek out their friends for play and demonstrate a clear sense of security. Many are relaxed as they chat freely to staff during social occasions, such as meal times. Established routines make children aware of being safe, for example, holding the rail and walking carefully down the stairs from pre-school in addition to singing songs with safety as a theme. Good use of visitors, such as the road safety team have raised children's awareness of specific issues. Older children are encouraged to take part in routines which contribute to their safety, ie sweeping up spilled sand. However, the lack of action taken to prevent babies accessing broken equipment hinders their understanding of dangers. Behaviour is generally good as children are well supported. Staff implement suitable strategies to monitor children where needed and they reward positive behaviour to encourage children to behave well. Good motivation techniques encourage the children to take part in tasks and develop a sense of responsibility. For example, children try to beat the egg timer during tidy-up time. Older children know what is expected of them and recite the 'marshmallows motto'.

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

The overall effectiveness of the early years provision

How well does the setting meet the needs of the children in the Early Years Foundation Stage?	3
The capacity of the provision to maintain continuous improvement	3

The effectiveness of leadership and management of the early years provision

How effectively is the Early Years Foundation Stage led and managed?	3
The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	3
The effectiveness with which the setting deploys resources	3
The effectiveness with which the setting promotes equality and diversity	3
The effectiveness of safeguarding	3
The effectiveness of the setting's self-evaluation, including the steps taken to promote improvement	3
The effectiveness of partnerships	2
The effectiveness of the setting's engagement with parents and carers	2

The quality of the provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage

The quality of the provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
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Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage

Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
The extent to which children achieve and enjoy their learning	3
The extent to which children feel safe	3
The extent to which children adopt healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which children make a positive contribution	3
The extent to which children develop skills for the future	3

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