

Pre School at St Albans

Inspection report for early years provision

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Inspector Martyn Richards

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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

The Pre-school at St Albans is run in association with St Albans Roman Catholic Primary School. It opened in 2004 and operates from two rooms in a purpose-built nursery building. It also makes use of several outdoor activity areas, one of which is covered. It is situated in the centre of Harlow, at the front of the primary school. The pre-school is registered for a maximum of 15 children at any one time. There are currently 30 children aged from three to under five years on roll, all of whom receive funding for nursery education. Most come from the school's local area, and 13 were present at the time of the inspection.

The pre-school welcomes and supports children with special educational needs and/or disabilities, but does not have full facilities for wheelchair users. It also supports children who are learning English as an additional language. It is open each weekday from 9.00am until 11.30am and 12.40pm until 3.10pm during term time only.

The pre-school employs two full-time members, and one part-time member of staff, including the supervisor. There are also two part-time members of staff supporting individual children with particular needs. The head teacher of the primary school is the overall manager, and is responsible to the trustees for the effective running of the pre-school. All pre-school staff have appropriate early years qualifications and two are working towards higher level qualifications. The pre-school works closely with, and receives a high level of support from, staff at St. Albans Roman Catholic Primary School. It is on the Early Years Register.

The overall effectiveness of the early years provision

Overall the quality of the provision is good.

St Albans Pre-School provides a calm and safe environment for the children. It is an inclusive pre-school, which values the individuality of each of the children and meets their welfare and learning needs well. It has particular strengths in supporting the development of children with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those learning English as an additional language. While all children achieve well in the pre-school, these make especially good progress. The pre-school is managed very effectively, with enthusiastic and well-qualified staff. It is a self-critical setting, always alert to ways in which it might improve. It has been very successful in implementing the requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage, and has the capability and commitment to continue improving in the future.

What steps need to be taken to improve provision further?

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

- develop more learning activities which make an imaginative link between indoor and outdoor provisions

- promote children's independence and creativity by avoiding tasks requiring them to use templates.

The effectiveness of leadership and management of the early years provision

Safety is rightly the top concern of staff in the pre-school. The building and surrounding play areas are kept secure from intrusion or from children slipping away unseen. Regular annual and daily risk assessments of the facilities and equipment are carried out to identify any possible hazards to the children. The suitability and qualifications of all adults working, or wishing to work, with the children are checked carefully. All staff have training in child protection and know what is required of them if they have concerns for a child's welfare. The pre-school, together with its adjacent primary school, holds regular fire drills, and ensures emergency exits are kept clear.

The leaders have developed rigorous procedures for circumstances in which a child might not be collected at the usual time, or might be met by an unauthorised adult. They take careful note of individual children's dietary or medical needs and keep parents fully informed in the event of minor accidents. Staff have recognised the need to clarify the complaints procedure at the setting.

While children from local Catholic homes have priority for admission, this inclusive pre-school welcomes all children who attend. A high proportion of children who come to the pre-school speak English as an additional language, and the excellent progress they make is one of the pre-school's main strengths. Children with special educational needs and/or disabilities also do very well because their particular needs are clearly identified and supported. Links with external specialist support agencies and with staff from St Albans School, together with a substantial record of additional training, underpin the high quality of this aspect of the provision. Links with parents, and consultations with them, have a high priority since most of the children transfer to the host primary school. Staff have made good use of the training opportunities provided locally to enhance their skills in areas such as paediatric first aid and safeguarding. They value the advice they receive from local authority bodies, and share the insights gained from training.

The pre-school is well equipped both internally and in its outdoor play area. Staff are deployed well in support of the children, and a highly effective key person scheme is in place. This means a named staff member has close oversight of the welfare and development of a small group of children, and is able to share concerns and information with their parents both at planned events such as open days, and less formally. This is an example of the good progress leaders have made in implementing the requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage.

Staff work well together as a team, and share an ambition to make the pre-school as good as it can be. Working with staff from their host school they have developed a thorough self-review process which helps them identify the pre-school's strengths and weaknesses and to set priorities for the future. They aim now to build up staff numbers in order to make better simultaneous use of indoor

and outdoor spaces. Their record of recent improvements in the provision, together with an enthusiastic commitment to on-going training, indicate a good capacity to continue developing the pre-school in the future.

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

The children enjoy coming to the pre-school and settle quickly and calmly to the day's activities. These begin with an informal group chat, with an adult, when they have an opportunity to share significant experiences from home, to ask questions about the programme planned, or to talk about holidays and friends. Staff enable them to speak at length when necessary, without interruption, while other children listen politely and with interest. As they search for the words and expressions they need to make their meaning clear the children extend their grasp of English, and confidence in using it. The emphasis staff rightly place on developing language is a major factor in bringing about the good progress children make over time. It is especially valuable for those learning English as an additional language, and underpins the excellent headway they make. These conversation times also contribute to the pre-school's ethos of a friendly, supportive family.

Activities are carefully planned, using termly themes such as 'pattern' to link different elements of the programme together. Staff ensure a good balance between new activities, such as making 'grass head' in the outdoor area, and activities children choose for themselves. Staff chat, work and play alongside the children, commenting on the activity, asking questions and gently challenging children's thinking, without removing the initiative from them. Plans also show a good balance of indoor and outdoor activity, although staff could think of more imaginative ways to link learning activities between the two areas. The sheltered outdoor area means children can have fresh air and exercise even when the weather is unpleasant. The children's vegetable garden is an excellent initiative. They grow a range of crops, learning about how seeds germinate, that plants need water to flourish and, when they cook their own produce, where food comes from. It is an activity which captures the children's interest, and introduces an exceptionally varied range of learning. Staff make careful observations of children's progress in all areas of learning. When set against descriptions of children's capabilities on entry these demonstrate the good achievements the children make in the pre-school.

Children are taught to be kind to others, polite and helpful. They take some responsibility for their own activities and are mature enough to take turns when necessary. They behave very well. Indoor space is sometimes limited when children are involved in practical activities, but they move around calmly and use materials sensibly and safely. They usually remember to wash their hands before eating their fruit snacks and they help themselves to drinks of water whenever they wish. Children enjoy stories and listen intently as adults read to them. They know which way round a book is held and some can retell a story while turning the pages correctly. They recognise their own names and some of the letters and sounds involved. They have made pictures with regular shapes and some can identify triangles and circles or squares. Many can count accurately to 10 or above.

Children are confident at moving characters about on a computer screen, using a mouse very carefully. They like making large collage pictures of the seashore, or signs of spring for example, and they use paint, glue and scrap materials well. Some of the children's creative work is unnecessarily limited by the use of adult templates which reduce their contribution and their learning. Through using tools such as pencils, brushes and scissors they extend their manual skills, while outdoor play on large equipment enables them to improve skills such as balancing and jumping. Their personal, social and academic learning equips them well for their future education.

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?	2
The capacity of the provision to maintain continuous improvement	2

The effectiveness of leadership and management of the early years provision

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

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Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage

Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The extent to which children achieve and enjoy their learning	2
The extent to which children feel safe	2
The extent to which children adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which children make a positive contribution	2
The extent to which children develop skills for the future	2

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