



St Helen's Pre-School

Inspection report for early years provision

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| Unique Reference Number | EY312453 |
| Inspection date | 24 January 2006 |
| Inspector | Patricia Mary Champion |
| Setting Address | Cathedral Hall, Ingrave Road, Brentwood, Essex, CM15 8AT |
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| E-mail | |
| Registered person | St Helen's Pre-School |
| Type of inspection | Integrated |
| Type of care | Sessional care |

ABOUT THIS INSPECTION

The purpose of this inspection is to assure government, parents and the public of the quality of childcare and, if applicable, of nursery education. The inspection was carried out under Part XA Children Act 1989 as introduced by the Care Standards Act 2000 and, where nursery education is provided, under Schedule 26 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998.

This report details the main strengths and any areas for improvement identified during the inspection. The judgements included in the report are made in relation to the outcomes for children set out in the Children Act 2004; the National Standards for under 8s day care and childminding; and, where nursery education is provided, the *Curriculum guidance for the foundation stage*.

The report includes information on any complaints about the childcare provision which Ofsted has received since the last inspection or registration or 1 April 2004 whichever is the later.

The key inspection judgements and what they mean

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

Good: this aspect of the provision is strong

Satisfactory: this aspect of the provision is sound

Inadequate: this aspect of the provision is not good enough

For more information about early years inspections, please see the booklet *Are you ready for your inspection?* which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

THE QUALITY AND STANDARDS OF THE CARE AND NURSERY EDUCATION

On the basis of the evidence collected on this inspection:

The quality and standards of the care are satisfactory. The registered person meets the National Standards for under 8s day care and childminding.

The quality and standards of the nursery education are satisfactory.

WHAT SORT OF SETTING IS IT?

St Helen's Pre-School is owned and run by an informal partnership. It was originally established in 1986 and transferred to the present location in 2005. The pre-school operates from a hall within a newly converted building in the grounds of the Cathedral in the centre of Brentwood. A maximum of 26 children may attend the pre-school at any one time. The pre-school opens 5 days a week during school term times. Session times are from 09.00 to 11.30 and 13.00 to 15.30 from Monday to Thursday

and 09.00 to 11.30 on Fridays. A lunch club operates on Monday to Thursday.

There are currently 57 children on roll. This includes 50 children who receive funding for nursery education. Children attend for a variety of sessions. The pre-school serves the local community and surrounding areas. The setting currently supports a small number of children who have special needs, and or, speak English as an additional language.

The pre-school employs seven staff, of whom four of the staff, including the manager hold appropriate early years qualifications. There is one member of staff currently working towards a recognised early years qualification. The setting receives support from the Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership (EYDCP) and the Pre School Learning Alliance (PSLA).

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PROVISION

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is satisfactory.

Children benefit from a healthy diet. They enjoy eating a wide variety of food at snack time. Children and staff discuss how nutritious food such as fruit promotes healthy growth and development. Drinking water is freely available throughout each session. The staff ensure that they are aware of any allergies or dietary requirements so that the children's individual needs are met. A lunch club operates when children bring in packed lunches. They eat in a social group with staff and learn to manage drink containers and unwrap sandwiches in preparation for starting school.

Children learn about the importance of effective personal hygiene through the daily routine. They wash their hands after using the toilet. However, the children's health could be compromised as they wash their hands in a communal bowl in the hall prior to eating. Children are protected from illness and infection. There are written guidelines that cover the procedures in the event of a child being unwell. Staff have attended first aid courses and keep clear records of any accidents.

Children have regular opportunities for physical play, which contributes to their good health. Although there is no outdoor play area for children, space is made indoors in the hall for apparatus to enable children to climb, balance or jump with confidence. Children move expressively and energetically when taking part in action songs or playing with the parachute.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is satisfactory.

Children are cared for in a generally safe, welcoming environment. The hall is bright and spacious with dedicated areas for messy play or for quieter activities for children using books or puzzles. Children's welfare and safety receive careful consideration. Risk assessment is undertaken to ensure that all toys and accessible areas to

children remain safe for the children. Health and safety training ensures that proper precautions are taken to protect children in the hall. However, the children's safety could be compromised because there are high stacks of adult sized chairs stored in the hall and the portable partition is not secure. Staff are vigilant about the children's security as they carefully monitor any visitors who enter the premises.

Children learn to keep themselves safe as they practise emergency evacuation procedures and are reminded to walk indoors rather than run. Furniture and equipment is of appropriate size and in a suitable condition so that children are able to take part in their play safely. Children are able to freely select from the toys on offer and they learn to carefully use tools such as play dough utensils and scissors.

Children are safeguarded as staff are aware of their child protection responsibilities. A child protection policy is in place and staff know whom to share their concerns with both in the setting and externally.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is satisfactory.

Children are confident to make their own choices about the activities and the games they play. When they arrive they quickly find an activity to interest them or select a toy to play with. They have fun as they play. Role play is well-resourced and the children spend time imaginatively dressing up, shopping or working for the emergency services. Children use their initiative as they play with large cardboard boxes; turning them into vehicles or hiding places. Staff are starting to look at how the 'Birth to three matters' framework can be used to plan activities for the youngest children attending the pre-school.

Nursery Education

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. The staff are developing a sound understanding of the Foundation Stage. A broad range of activities are planned to cover all areas of the curriculum and are linked to themes and topics. However, staff are not yet identifying how the continuous basic resources are used to promote learning objectives. The learning environment is organised to allow children to make choices, as equipment and materials are readily available. The children benefit from the interaction with the staff who play alongside them and encourage their verbal skills. Good use is made of carefully formed questions to encourage children's thinking, problem solving skills and descriptive language to extend their vocabulary. Children are busy and interested in the activities when working individually or in small groups. However, large group activities are not always organised efficiently. Due to the problematic acoustics in the hall, noise levels rise and this is having some impact on the children's concentration. At other times the pre-school routine dominates and as a result there are missed opportunities for children to persevere or work in depth at an activity.

Children show interest and ask questions in what they do. They enjoy recreating the Great Wall of China from large building blocks. Children acquire new knowledge and skills as they observe what happens when they mix powder paint with water and

washing up liquid. Interesting outings and visitors to the premises enhance children's knowledge and understanding of the world. They visit the theatre and the library and road safety is discussed with the children. Staff effectively use cooking and food activities to cover all areas of learning. Children develop their fine motor skills as they mix, spread and work with kitchen utensils. They measure and observe quantities using words such as 'more' or 'less than'. Children talk about the food they like at home and discuss the countries various food comes from.

Children make steady progress towards the early learning goals as staff are starting to observe, assess and record their achievements. Staff are not yet using their observations to plan the next steps in learning and they do not include differentiation to ensure that children can achieve as much as they can. At times insufficient challenge is offered to the older children as they are working well within their capabilities.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is satisfactory.

Children have made warm and friendly relationships with each other and their carers. There are effective settling in procedures for new children and the majority enter the pre-school with confidence. Children generally understand the boundaries set for them. They learn social skills such as turn taking and sharing and develop their confidence and self esteem when staff praise positive behaviour. Children are made to feel special as they celebrate their birthdays with friends.

The individual needs of children are met well. Detailed records and opportunities for discussion with parents ensure that staff get to know the children well. Children become aware of wider society and start to develop a positive sense of themselves and others. Festivals and traditions from around the world are celebrated and children have access to toys and books that reflect positive images of gender, culture, ethnicity and disability. Children learn simple sign language. Suitable systems are in place to support children with special needs.

The partnership with parents and carers is satisfactory. Information is displayed and newsletters are sent out. Parents are involved in the successful fundraising and they contribute items for the interest table. Activity planning is not yet shared with parents. All parents know that they can speak to their child's key worker at any time. However, there are no formal opportunities to share the children's developmental records or discuss their progress, achievements or targets. Several parents were spoken to during the inspection. They are all happy with the care and education the children receive.

The children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is fostered.

Organisation

The organisation is satisfactory.

Children's development and welfare are promoted satisfactorily because the staff work effectively as a team when carrying out their duties and responsibilities. The majority of staff have been vetted and are suitable to work with children. The manager is now making sure that she is fully acquainted with changes to legislation so that recruitment systems remain robust in accordance with the National Standards. The pre-school operates a lunch club; this is popular with both children and parents. However, due to a misunderstanding, registration requirements for the session times are not currently being met.

The required documentation to promote the welfare, care and learning of the children is in place. However, the operational plan is still in draft format and has not yet been collated or organised systematically. Written policies and procedures have not yet been updated to reflect the changes to the National Standards implemented in October 2005.

Leadership and management of the pre-school is satisfactory. The owners of the pre-school have worked hard to ensure that children have confidently settled into the new premises. The staff team remain enthusiastic and motivated even though there has been considerable upheaval, with the pre-school moving twice within two years. Staff are actively encouraged to progress their own professional development by attending training. Regular staff meetings are held and all staff are involved in delivering the curriculum.

Overall the range of children's needs are met.

Improvements since the last inspection

Not applicable.

Complaints since the last inspection

There have been no complaints since registration.

The provider is required to keep a record of complaints made by parents, which they can see on request. The complaints record may contain complaints other than those made to Ofsted.

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WHAT MUST BE DONE TO SECURE FUTURE IMPROVEMENT?

The quality and standards of the care

To improve the quality and standards of care further the registered person should take account of the following recommendation(s):

- review the arrangements for hand washing, particularly prior to the children eating snacks
- assess the risks to children in relation to the stacks of adult size chairs and portable partitions and take action to minimise these
- ensure that where two sessions are offered in any one day, there is a break between sessions with no children in the care of the provider
- review and update policies and procedures to meet the revised National Standards. (This refers to changes made in October 2005.)

The quality and standards of the nursery education

To improve the quality and standards of nursery education further the registered person should take account of the following recommendation(s):

- continue to develop the planning cycle by ensuring that staff identify how continuous basic provision is used to promote broad learning objectives, how activities are adapted to support or challenge children to achieve as much as they can and how staff use their observations to plan the children's next steps in learning
- review the organisation of the daily routine in order to maximise children's learning. Improve the management of whole group activities such as snack time and ensure that children are allowed to persevere for extended periods of time at an activity of their choosing
- develop further the partnership with parents by providing regular opportunities to share children's progress, achievements and targets.

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