



Asquith Nursery - Harpenden

Inspection report for early years provision

Unique Reference Number	EY289502
Inspection date	19 January 2006
Inspector	Gillian Charlesworth
Setting Address	Peel House, 15 Vaughan Road, Harpenden, Hertfordshire, AL5 4EL
Telephone number	01582 762981
E-mail	
Registered person	Asquith Court Nurseries Limited
Type of inspection	Integrated
Type of care	Full day 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?

Asquith Court Day Nursery is one of several nurseries run by Asquith Court Nurseries Limited which was taken over by new management and re-registered in June 2004. It opened in January 1999 and operates from six rooms in a converted building which was originally a police station. It is situated close to the centre of Harpenden town centre. A maximum of 51 children may attend the nursery at any one time with no more than 32 children under 2 years of age. The nursery is open each weekday from

07:30 to 18:30 for 51 weeks of the year. There are two separate secure enclosed outdoor play areas for younger and older children.

There are currently 51 children aged from 3 months to under 5 years on roll. Of these, 8 children receive funding for nursery education. Children come from a wide catchment area as many parents commute to work from the nearby railway station. There are no children attending with special educational needs or children who speak English as an additional language.

The nursery employs 16 staff. 10 of the staff, including the manager, hold appropriate early years qualifications. 2 staff are working towards a qualification. The setting is a member of the Pre School Learning Alliance (PSLA) who provides teacher/mentor support for the Foundation Stage.

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PROVISION

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is satisfactory.

Children are generally protected from the risks of cross infection through nursery procedures such as staff using gloves and aprons when changing nappies or different coloured cloths for cleaning different parts of the nursery. A hot air dryer is installed in toilets for children over 2 years, most of whom can use it confidently. Children learn the importance of personal hygiene as they are encouraged to wash their hands after visiting the toilet and before meals. They are acknowledged and supervised by practitioners when they ask to use the toilet although the gated facilities limit their growing independence. Knowledgeable practitioners help pre-school children begin to understand how to protect their health, for example, they discourage children from sweeping the table with a dust pan and brush used on the floor. Children's self care skills are encouraged but practitioners sometimes forget to prompt children to wipe their noses or, wipe children's noses for them. All documentation to protect children's health is effectively managed and practitioners are conscientious in their approach. Babies individual sleep routines are well met as they rest in a secluded part of the room, according to their needs. All other children have appropriate periods of rest according to the nursery routine. After lunch they settle, with comforters if appropriate, in a quiet room away from other play areas. Adults are careful to minimise disturbance when walking through to the office.

There are significant differences in the range of outdoor opportunities available for children to have plenty of fresh air. This is because all children over 2 years of age, based on the ground floor, have daily access to exercise in the garden in all weathers although children from 2 to 3 years old have few opportunities to build their strength and dexterity through climbing. Outdoor experiences for younger children and babies accommodated on the first floor are infrequent, especially in the winter months. This limits their opportunities to consolidate and develop their physical skills.

Children's individual dietary needs and preferences are clearly documented and understood by staff. Drinks are available in all rooms to ensure children can have

drinks at any time. Children are offered exciting menus which are planned in conjunction with a nutritionist to provide a balanced range of wholesome food such as curries, roast dinners and vegetarian options. They enjoy a variety of fruits or tea cakes at snack time which are offered in ample quantities. Older children can help themselves to whole fruits such as plums at any time and are aware of their dietary needs as they comment on foods that are served. Babies and younger children are fed according to their own routines by calm, relaxed staff. Reluctant eaters are offered more palatable alternatives to ensure they are well nourished. Practitioners work closely with parents to help babies become more receptive to new foods.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is satisfactory.

Attractive wall displays of children's work throughout the nursery enable children to feel a sense of belonging. Most areas used by the children are well maintained and resourced with a wide variety of suitable materials. This provides the majority of children with a warm, inviting environment where they flourish and can select from the range of resources presented at low-level. However, the environment and resources offered to children from 2 to 3 years of age is less inviting. This limits their ability to develop to their full potential, fully explore their interests or relax in a cosy environment. Children have limited access to natural materials which are sometimes in short supply. Some areas of the garden are not always well maintained and as a result are off limit to children. This, together with large fixed apparatus that can only be used in fine weather and by older children, contributes towards a restricted range of outdoor experiences for children.

Children in all areas of the nursery are very well supervised and cared for in a safe and secure environment. For example, risk assessment procedures are in place; there is a secure entry system to the front entrance including CCTV and hazard signs are put over spillages to avoid children slipping and tripping. Practitioners help children begin to learn safe practices as they provide children with explanations as to why, for example, children should not climb on wet wooden apparatus outside.

Children are protected from possible harm because the setting has policies and procedures in place to do this. Practitioners understand these procedures and ensure that children are only released to authorised individuals. The induction procedure ensures that practitioners have the basic knowledge to follow the child protection policy and reporting procedures. As a result practitioners know who to report concerns to in order to safeguard the children.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is satisfactory.

Children throughout the nursery are happy and settled and benefit from the friendly practitioners and positive interactions.

Younger children under two years enjoy the range of planned and unplanned

activities that helps them to make connections through their senses. These are being developed to follow the 'Birth to three matters' framework. Babies thrive on routines which are consistent with their experiences at home. They are supported by effective adult practitioners who offer plenty of reassurance and comfort, chatting freely and listening to their babble which encourages them to communicate.

Children from 2 to 3 years are offered a range of activities around the daily routine. Examples include, reading stories on demand, exploring media through craft, free play, outside play, music and construction. Children have freedom to choose activities for a large part of the day, but they are not always able to explore natural materials, to fully represent their own experiences through role play, or follow their impulses to play imaginatively because resources are limited. However, some children's patterns of learning, such as an interest in rockets, are acknowledged and encouraged. This helps individual children be excited and interested in what they do. While most children enjoy group activities such as musical instruments, some children are reluctant to join in and practitioners do not always recognise this or identify that resources are not sufficiently rotated to inspire them.

Nursery Education

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. Children are making satisfactory progress towards the early learning goals and are progressing well in their personal, social and emotional development. The pre school practitioners are in a development stage of their practice and have recently begun a transition towards delivering activities based around observations of children's patterns of learning. This enables children to be excited and motivated to learn through meaningful experiences based on their interests. However, although plans to December show that each area of learning and some stepping stones have been covered; the new planning system is not sufficiently detailed or systematic to reflect areas and aspects of learning or extension activities. As a result, there is no evidence to support children's learning in some aspects such as music, health and body awareness, calculation, writing, and linking sounds to letters. There has been poor progress in the use of assessment of children's achievements over time. As a result, records do not show children's progress or identify the next steps in children's learning. Parents do not have the opportunity to fully contribute towards their child's progress at parent's evenings due to the limited information available. This is largely due to a change in key practitioners. However, it is intended that future assessment will be implemented to improve information to help children move to the next stage of their learning. Practitioners recently assigned to lead the preschool on a temporary basis have a broad understanding of the Foundation Stage. They inspire the children to learn through their detailed knowledge of each individual child when presenting new activities. But, learning intentions of specific activities are not always identified to help nursery assistants develop and extend children's learning. There are systems in place to support children with special needs

Children have formed very good relationships with adults and peers and work together collaboratively as part of a group, taking turns and sharing fairly. However, sometimes their independence is limited because of room lay-out, for example through the sighting of computer equipment. They behave well because practitioners use effective behaviour strategies. Children play harmoniously and show care and

concern for each other as they offer help to others, arranging and watering spring bulbs in compost. They are confident communicators and talk with practitioners and peers about elements of nature such as the light that plants need to grow. They share ideas for suitable pot storage and extend their vocabulary and the meaning of new words such as roots, compost and pots which some children initially describe as cups.

Children have positive attitudes towards learning and are motivated because they are usually absorbed in a variety of activities that are well supported and enjoyable. Most children enjoy listening to group stories as they sit quietly but are sometimes distracted by unrelated peers and adults using the room as a thoroughfare. They communicate well, developing turn taking in conversation and through games such as 'Wake Up Mr Bear'. Children show exceptional concentration and are eager to take part in activities they enjoy, for example, computer games and a baby clinic. They demonstrate an understanding of number and counting in familiar situations such as when lining up together. They have some opportunities to recognise numerals through past planned activities. Opportunities to practise calculation and recognise numerals are not consistently supported in the daily routine to help children develop and practise this skill.

Children have opportunities to share feelings through familiar puppet friends such as 'Bleat a Lot'. They show awareness and sensitivity towards others through familiar props, for example, 'Humpty Dumpty has no friends'. They have meaningful experiences based around their interests. For example, they delight in designing and making aeroplanes with blocks then continue the theme later by constructing and colouring paper aeroplanes, developing their control and hand-eye coordination whilst making links in their learning. Children use their imagination as they express and communicate their ideas making a den on a large scale; developing their special awareness and physical skills as they move chairs and arrange sheets and blankets. They have some opportunities to develop their creativity through planned activities such as painting and art and craft activities but these are not always freely available.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

Children are valued as individuals and have many opportunities to develop their self esteem. Practitioners understand the importance of placing children's individual needs first. As a result children's care routines are prioritised and activities such as group times are adapted to accommodate individual children who prefer an alternative activity. All children are warmly welcomed into the nursery and their sense of belonging and happiness is very well fostered. This is because knowledgeable practitioners are familiar with children's likes and preferences that are acted upon. For example, comforters are close by for children who like to be surrounded by these during the day, they feel secure in the structure of the daily routine, knowing what happens next, and are offered genuine choices for meals and free play. Children experience diversity through play as they select from the range of diverse resources that are usually freely available. They are encouraged to learn about the world through activities that are planned to reflect individual circumstances such as moving

abroad. There is a particular emphasis on developing children's interests through play as practitioners observe older children to find out their interest and organise activities accordingly.

Children are very well behaved and learn responsible behaviour through the practitioner's positive methods and attentiveness. Older children are developing a strong sense of care and concern for others, for example, in the Pre School, children offer to help latecomers to complete a planting activity. They willingly help to tidy away, developing a sense of responsibility. This positive approach fosters children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

The quality of the partnership with parents and carers is satisfactory. Children benefit from the positive partnership that practitioners have developed with parents. Parent feedback confirms that practitioners are friendly and approachable. They help parents to have a general overview of their child's progress through informal daily feedback and organised parents evenings. However, parents have few opportunities to look at or contribute to their child's assessment records which are incomplete and therefore, fully share in the development of their child's learning. Up to date displays, notices and newsletters provide additional information to reassure and inform parents. This includes information on the 'Birth to three matters' framework and the Foundation Stage. In addition parents receive a generic pre school guide and a handbook relating specifically to the site which includes some policy information and the complaints procedure. The complaints log is very comprehensive although written responses need to be acted upon more swiftly.

Organisation

The organisation is satisfactory.

This is the first inspection under new ownership who appear to be committed to a child centred approach. Professional systems are in place to ensure that practitioners working with children are safe to do so. There is a clear understanding of manager's responsibilities under the National Standards. They have a high regard for the protection of children and liaise with Ofsted to share appropriate information. Managers who are supernumerary are committed to implementing effective staff deployment to ensure that children have suitable adult support throughout the day. For example, practitioners effectively communicate their requirements to meet ratios and managers employ additional familiar practitioners on a daily basis to cover breaks and absences. The practitioners enthusiastically work together to create and maintain a caring environment for the children. However, the operational plan has not been sufficiently developed to consider areas identified for improvement from previous inspection visits. For example, disturbance from people walking through base rooms to access other areas and role play for toddlers. This continues to impact on the quality of experiences for children aged from two years. Over half the practitioners have appropriate qualifications and are committed to extend their knowledge to help young children to develop to their full potential. For example, they have attended initial training in the 'Birth to three matters' framework.

The quality of leadership and management of the nursery education is satisfactory.

The nursery are committed to improvement to enhance experiences for children and are introducing planning linked to a child centred approach to learning, although this is not yet fully operational. Managers are sensitive to the impact of such significant changes on parents and are implementing gradual changes to ease the transition. However, due to the secondment of the manager to another site, there have been oversights in the monitoring and developing of some areas of the nursery. For example, there is no action plan in place to address weak areas in the nursery education. There is a comprehensive induction procedure for new staff and systems are in place to develop promising students and thus ensure good continuity of care for the children. An annual appraisal system is in place for practitioners and documentation and policies are efficiently managed to safeguard and protect the children. Overall the range of children's needs are met.

Improvements since the last inspection

The previous care inspection recommended that the nursery ensure that staff are deployed effectively, implement procedures for staff to communicate from one floor to another, review arrangements to minimise disruption when children and adults pass through base rooms, the accessibility of role play resources for toddlers and procedures to ensure regular nappy changing.

Arrangements for staffing have had a positive impact on the children's wellbeing. Intercoms have been installed in all base rooms which enable staff to communicate their needs without compromising the care and safety of children. In addition, managers work conscientiously to ensure that practitioners are deployed effectively to meet children's individual needs. There has been little improvement to the disruption resulting from children and adults passing through base rooms on the ground floor. Pre-school children disturb 'big walkers' as they pass through to collect their coats or visit the computer room. In addition, 'big walkers' interrupt activities when they visit the toilet facilities located in the pre-school. Although adults are careful to minimise disruption for sleeping children when they access the office, this can cause disturbance for light sleepers. Suitable nappy changing procedures are in place to meet children's care needs.

The previous nursery education inspection identified weaknesses in three areas (1) resources and equipment for the science aspects of knowledge and understanding of the world (2) opportunities for children to explore calculation and mathematical problem solving skills through practical activities and (3) improve the planning of activities to highlight learning intentions to ensure children are sufficiently challenged.

There is no action plan in place to address the above weaknesses and as a result very little progress has been made in ensuring children are challenged through every day maths activities and the planning. However, resources such as bug-finders, magnifying glasses, magnets and figures reflecting diversity have been provided for children to develop their exploration and investigation skills.

Complaints since the last inspection

There have been no complaints made to Ofsted since the last inspection.

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

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 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 operational plan in relation to the organisation of rooms on the ground floor for children aged between 2 and 5 years to make areas as self-contained as possible and minimise disruption of activities as a result of practitioners and children walking through base rooms
- improve the environment and range of resources for children aged 2 to 3 years to offer a warm and stimulating play environment

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):

- ensure planning and assessment meets the Foundation Stage curriculum requirements
- ensure that the curriculum is sufficiently robust to offer full breadth and balance of activities linked to the stepping stones
- ensure that there is sufficient monitoring of the quality of nursery education to influence children's progress, especially during periods of management secondment.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the leaflet *Building better childcare: Compliments and concerns about inspectors' judgements* which is available from Ofsted's website:

