



The Hardman Centre Playgroup

Inspection report for early years provision

Unique Reference Number	311883
Inspection date	23 May 2006
Inspector	Kathleen Snowdon

Setting Address	Hardman Centre, Dryden Road, Low Fell, Gateshead, Tyne and Wear, NE9 5HP
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Registered person	Committee of The Hardman Centre
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 good. The registered person meets the National Standards for under 8s day care and childminding.

The quality and standards of the nursery education are good.

WHAT SORT OF SETTING IS IT?

The Hardman Centre Playgroup is based in the hall of a former Methodist church in Low Fell, Gateshead. It is now a day centre and host to several community groups. The playgroup is close to all local facilities including schools, shops and leisure facilities. It is open every weekday morning in term times, from 08.45 until 11.30.

The children who attend live in the local and surrounding communities. There are currently 21 children on roll, aged from three to five-years-old, 17 of whom receive

funding for nursery education. There are four appropriately qualified staff who work directly with the children. In addition, the playgroup receives professional support from the local authority and is a member of the Pre-school Learning Alliance.

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PROVISION

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

Children help themselves to a range of nutritious and appetising snacks during the playgroup session. These include bananas, grapes, apples and bread. However, plates are not made available to the children to put the snacks on. The children eat their snack with relish, while they sit beside and talk with their friends at the snack bar area. These arrangements show the children that eating is an enjoyable and sociable experience.

During snack time, the children are encouraged by their friends and by supportive staff to try to put straws into the cartons of milk that they drink. This requires the children to concentrate, develops their hand-eye coordination and encourages independence.

The daily routine offers the children good opportunities to exercise. For example, the children learn to negotiate space as they move with increasing self-control between play areas. They love to take part in group games, for example, when they play parachutes. Simple and very clear instructions from the staff help the children to understand their role in the game. Consequently, the children have a fantastic time as they dart and scramble for the ball and waft the parachute up and down. Extremely enjoyable activities like these provide terrific fun for the children and increase their stamina and fitness levels overall.

Satisfactory arrangements are in place to promote the development of good personal hygiene. For example, a dish of water and paper towels are placed beside the snack bar area to encourage the children to wash their hands before eating. However, there are no serviettes or hand wipes available to encourage the children to keep themselves clean and fresh while they eat and afterwards. Staff accompany children to the toilet, where the children must wash their hands before coming back into the playgroup room. Sensible practices like these, along with the policy for dealing with sick children, minimise the risk of infection and the spread of common illnesses.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

Interesting visitors, such as the road safety officer, come to the playgroup to talk to the children. Together, they have lively discussions about related issues, such as always holding an adult's hand before crossing the road and wearing seat belts in the car.

During these visits, the children are riveted as they watch the fate of an unfortunate

doll, which sits unsecured in a toy car seat. They reveal their understanding of accidents and injury when they ask whether the doll's head is bleeding after it falls to the floor. Thought provoking sessions like these encourage the children to think about safety issues and teach them practical ways to avoid danger.

Effective routine practices are in place. For example, the children take part in frequent fire drills. They understand that the sound of a whistle means that they must form a line and listen carefully to their teachers to find out what happens next. This familiarises the children with procedures that help them to survive in emergencies.

Regular checks are carried out by the staff for breakages and damage to toys and equipment. This ensures that the children play with items that are safe and minimises the risk of injury. Access to the playgroup is regulated by a secure door, which can only be opened from the inside. These arrangements, along with the staff's satisfactory knowledge of child protection, keep the children secure and safe from unsuitable people.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

Easy access to a very good range of equipment encourages the children to make independent choices and helps them to make progress in all areas of their development. They paint, handle play dough and draw, to help them to express their creativity. They sing songs and rhymes with gusto and respond with delight to music, which includes classics like Vivaldi's Four Seasons. This helps the children to understand the link between music and emotion.

They play with and alongside their peers in the home corner, where they dress up with hats and scarves, to help them to imagine what it is like to be somebody else. These experiences offer the children very good scope in which to enjoy themselves.

The children form very good relationships with staff and with other children. The children approach adults with confidence. They feel sufficiently secure to enlist adults' help to try out new techniques, such as when they stick building blocks together with tape and other materials. This boosts the children's self-esteem and encourages originality and experimentation.

Nursery Education

Several children show a great interest in books. Throughout the playgroup session, they frequently use the inviting and comfortable library corner, where they show obvious pleasure as they look at colourful illustrations and photographs. They tell stories, in their own words, to others or simply to themselves, to demonstrate their awareness of narrative structures. The children identify comic characters like Dennis the Menace on their milk cartons. Beneficial opportunities like these help the children to understand that writing and illustrations carry meaning and reveal their familiarity with a widening range of texts.

Most of the children are developing very good communication skills. For example,

they listen, enthralled, to favourite stories like Dear Zoo or The Gruffalo. They speak articulately and use language expressively, when they exclaim, for example, what fun they are having as they play a group game. The children practice writing when they use pens and pencils, during adult directed activities and spontaneously, when they draw up shopping lists in role play.

Very good opportunities help the children to understand basic mathematical concepts, such as weight and measure. For example, they pile sand onto scales and use comparative language, like heavier and lighter, as they watch the scales adjust accordingly. The children use rulers and more unusual means, such as sheets of paper or their own hands, to determine how long or tall certain items are. Many of the children count competently, as part of a group and individually. For example, they establish that there is room for one more, when they count three children sitting at the snack bar, which accommodates a maximum of four. This encourages the children to apply mathematics in practical situations.

The quality of teaching is good so the children make good progress towards the early learning goals. Staff have very good relationships with the children. They make daily observations of the children during play to find out and understand their needs and preferences. This enables the staff to plan activities, based on individual starting points, that offer sufficient challenge to children of different abilities. Staff have a good knowledge of the Foundation Stage and use a range of effective teaching methods to help the children to master new skills, like recognising initial letters and their corresponding sounds.

Staff greet the children when they arrive at the playgroup. Most of the children leave their carers happily and settle quickly. Useful and well planned activities like circle time and clearly defined play areas encourage the children to engage fully in their chosen activity. As a result, they are focused, highly motivated and interested in everything around them. The well balanced daily routine has a good mix of quiet and busy times, which ensures that the children benefit from as many different experiences as possible. Staff are deployed effectively to support the children during their time at the playgroup.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

Very good routine practices, like tidy up time, promote the development of positive personal qualities, such as helpfulness and cooperation. Consistent guidance from staff teaches the children boundaries and acceptable behaviour. As a result the children are developing self-discipline and are learning right from wrong. This fosters the children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

There are satisfactory opportunities for the children to form positive views of gender, disability, culture and ethnicity. For example, from time to time, the children celebrate festivals from this and other cultures. They look at books, such as Going to the Hospital and play with small world items, which convey different aspects of diversity. These experiences help to widen the children's knowledge and understanding of the world, although they are fairly limited.

Partnership with parents is good. Parents have very positive views of the staff and the service that they provide. They describe staff as friendly, helpful and approachable and they think that their children have made good progress during their time at the playgroup. Parents are encouraged to take an active part in playgroup life. For example, they accompany the children and the staff on outings and are invited to remain with their child in playgroup until the child has settled into the playgroup routine. Parents receive written information before their child starts the playgroup, while daily discussions and a dedicated notice board keep them fully informed for the duration of their child's attendance there.

Organisation

The organisation is satisfactory.

Induction procedures are sufficiently rigorous and ensure that suitable people are employed to work with the children. All staff hold appropriate qualifications and some take part in additional training, such as first aid and the Birth to Three matters framework, to meet requirements and to keep abreast of current trends in child care.

All records are in place and readily available for inspection. However, insufficient attention is given to documentation in general. For example, although the registration certificate is displayed to allow parents to scrutinise it should they wish to, out of date information is displayed too, such as first aid certificates dating from 2002.

There is a set of policies and procedures, which is available to parents on request. While this contains all essential information, such as child protection and complaints procedures, it also contains pointless information, like an out of date insurance certificate. The written policies do not reflect the desirable outcomes for children and do not have much relevance to what actually happens in the group on a day to day basis.

Leadership and management is good. Staff have high expectations of the children and have good working relationships with parents. They work well as a team and each person has a clear understanding of their role. Consequently, the daily routine runs smoothly and efficiently.

Staff are skilled at capitalising on the children's existing interests. For example, one child's fascination with horses provided them with a perfect opportunity to introduce all the children to new information, such as the notion of using hands to measure things with. Planning is effective and shows clear links to the early learning goals. It includes opportunities for the children to work independently and in small and large groups.

Staff have daily discussions during which they evaluate how effective the playgroup session has been. This enables them to identify strengths and weaknesses in their practice. For example, they strive hard to improve the quality of play in the home corner area and they recognise that this requires further work and continuing effort from them.

They have the children's interests at heart when they make good links with local

schools that the children attend when they leave the playgroup. This eases the children's transition into mainstream school and reduces their anxiety as they enter a new chapter in their lives.

Overall, the provider meets the needs of the children who attend.

Improvements since the last inspection

At the last child care inspection, 11 actions were raised. These related to records, including child protection procedures and vehicle documentation, partnership with parents and behaviour management.

There is now a written policy about child protection procedures, which names the member of staff responsible for taking forward concerns and includes arrangements for staff against whom an allegation has been made. Parents are made aware of this and other policies and procedures, such as how to make a complaint. All essential records are in place, including vehicle documentation and an operational plan.

Daily discussions with staff keep parents well informed about their child's day at playgroup. As well as this, there is a designated member of staff who is responsible for managing the children's behaviour.

At the last nursery education inspection, a recommendation was raised, which related to the size of group activities. The daily routine now includes both small and large group activities. These improvements help the children to get the best out of their time at playgroup.

Complaints since the last inspection

There are no complaints to report. 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):

- provide utensils to make snack time more interesting and provide children with the means to keep themselves clean and fresh while they eat and afterwards
- increase children's opportunities to learn about other countries and cultures (also applies to nursery education)
- review and update written policies to make them relevant to the outcomes for children and the day to day practice within the group

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):

- make improvements as indicated in the care section above.

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