



Office for Standards
in Education

COMBINED INSPECTION REPORT

URN 123565

DfES Number: 581171

INSPECTION DETAILS

Inspection Date 14/07/2004
Inspector Name Gail Groves

SETTING DETAILS

Day Care Type Sessional Day Care
Setting Name Saplings Pre-School
Setting Address The Scout Hut
Birchwood Way, Park Street
St. Albans
Hertfordshire
AL2 2SE

REGISTERED PROVIDER DETAILS

Name The Committee of Saplings Pre-School 1038142

ORGANISATION DETAILS

Name Saplings Pre-School
Address The Scout Hut
Birchwood Way, Park Street
St. Albans
Hertfordshire
AL2 2SE

ABOUT THE INSPECTION

The purpose of this inspection is to assure government, parents and the public of the quality and standard of day care in accordance with the National Standards for Under Eights Day Care and Childminding; and that the nursery education for funded three and four year old children is of an acceptable quality. Inspection of nursery education also identifies strengths and weaknesses so that providers can improve the quality of educational provision and help children to achieve the early learning goals (elgs) by the end of the Foundation Stage. This inspection report must be made available to all parents.

If the setting has been inspected previously, an action plan will have been drawn up to tackle issues identified. This inspection, therefore, must also assess what progress has been made in the implementation of this plan.

Information about the setting

Saplings Pre-School opened approximately 20 years ago. It operates from the hall of the Scout Hut in Park Street near St Albans and serves the local area.

There are currently 44 children from 2 to 4 years on roll. This includes 23 funded three year olds and 1 funded four year olds. Children attend for a variety of sessions. The setting currently supports a number of children with special needs and who speak English as an additional language.

The group opens five days a week during school term times. Sessions are from 09.30 until 12.00 Monday to Friday and also on Wednesday from 12.30 until 14.45 for rising 3's.

Seven part-time and one full-time staff work with the children. Two of the staff have early years qualifications to NVQ level 2 or 3. In addition two staff are at present applying for places on courses to gain a recognised level 3 early years qualification and two are applying for places on recognised level 1 courses.

How good is the Day Care?

Saplings Pre-school provides satisfactory quality care for children. It provides a stimulating environment in which children are encouraged and supported in their play by well deployed staff. New staff are offered a carefully structured induction procedure and there is an action plan in place to increase the amount of staff who are trained to an appropriate level. The group has a wide variety of resources and a comprehensive system of documentation is in place. However, some documentation lacks detail.

Staff are aware of hygiene and safety issues and some procedures are in place to minimise the risks to children. There is a clear system in place for easily identifying children with special dietary needs or allergies and there are effective procedures to make staff aware of child protection issues during their induction.

The group offers a wide variety of play opportunities to children. Staff spend time interacting with the children and encourage their development both through talking with them and by listening carefully to what they have to say. They know and understand the children well and use this knowledge to meet both their individual and specific needs. Resources are provided and activities are planned to reflect and value children's differences and equality of opportunity is given due consideration in all activities.

The group values its partnership with parents and regularly shares information with them through newsletters, the parental notice board and informally at the end of sessions. New parents are offered a flexible settling in procedure which meets the needs of both the child and family and there is an open door policy for all parents. When children leave the group, they are given their child's records and these are also shared with the next setting to ensure continuity. Parents give positive feedback on the care their children receive.

What has improved since the last inspection?

At the last inspection the group agreed to provide an action plan to ensure safety in all areas of the garden and to ensure that policies were updated with Ofsted's contact details.

During outside play three members of staff are now deployed to monitor and prevent children's access to dangerous areas of the garden such as the sides of the building and the gate. A further recommendation has been made to ensure safety within the outside play area. The group have now included updated contact details in the complaints procedure.

What is being done well?

- Play activities are carefully planned using the six areas of learning in the Foundation Stage using a broad variety of resources. Staff are effectively deployed to support, encourage and interact with the children and by careful intervention in their play, stretch their thinking, language and social skills.
- The staff provide a warm, welcoming and colourful environment for both parents and children. They display children's artwork attractively around the room and divide the large space up into smaller, well defined areas by the use of rugs and small pieces of furniture. They work hard to create this cosy atmosphere and have enhanced it still further by painting the hall themselves using bright, cheerful colours.
- Equal opportunity is given a high priority. Staff ensure that all children have the chance to access activities by keeping lists of children who have participated. This ensures that children are not discriminated against due to their pattern of attendance. Resources and activities are carefully selected and planned to meet the needs of all children and this enables them to participate at their own developmental level.

What needs to be improved?

- the details included in the recording of both staff and children's hours of attendance and the presence of any visitors
- the safety measures to ensure that the risks to children are minimised
- the procedure for keeping the premises secure and monitoring access
- the consistency of application of some hygiene procedures.

Outcome of the inspection

Satisfactory

CONDITIONS OF REGISTRATION

All registered persons must comply with all conditions of registration included on his/her certificate of registration.

As a result of this inspection conditions of registration have been imposed / varied / removed and a new certificate of registration will be issued.

WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE NEXT?**The Registered Person should have regard to the following recommendations by the time of the next inspection**

Std	Recommendation
1	Ensure accurate records of both the staff and children's hours of attendance and the arrival and departure times of visitors are kept.
6	Review the safety procedures both inside and outside. This refers to the fire extinguishers and smoke alarm and the outside play area and gate.
6	Ensure that the premises are secure and that access to the provision is monitored.
7	Ensure hygiene procedures with regard to hand washing are consistently applied.

INSPECTION OF THE NURSERY EDUCATION PROVISION FOR FUNDED THREE AND FOUR YEAR OLDS.

How effective is the nursery education?

The provision for nursery education at Saplings Pre-School is of good quality overall. Children are making generally good progress towards the early learning goals within all areas of learning.

The quality of teaching is generally good. Staff provide an interesting curriculum, which overtime reinforces children's development within all six areas. Staff offer valuable support to the children, they praise and encourage them on a regular basis. Activity plans are theme based and highlight learning objectives and how children are appropriately challenged. Staff work hard linking weekly themes to most activities and resources, to reinforce learning. Staff have limited training within the Foundation Stage, which impacts on the spontaneous challenges offered towards the early learning goals.

Staff are using inconsistent methods of observation and assessment to monitor children's progress, these are currently under review.

The leadership and management of the Pre-School is generally good. The manager has been in post for three years; is enthusiastic, influences practice and is committed to the improvement and development of education within the provision. Staff work well as a team, they are involved in curriculum planning, monitor their keyworker groups and meet regularly to discuss aspects of the setting. Staff training and assessment are areas identified for development.

The partnership with parents and carers is generally good. Parents are welcomed into the Pre-School and provided with regular verbal information on their child's progress and written information regarding topics and activities. Parents speak positively of the setting and speak confidently of the staff and provision. Staff make time to speak to parents on an informal basis, however, there are no regular formal methods to share information. Parents receive the children's progress report when leaving the setting.

What is being done well?

- Children's creative development is promoted effectively through a wide variety of activities and resources. Children are confident to explore a good range of creative materials and use them imaginatively.
- Staff plan and offer an interesting balance of structured and free play activities for the children. They fully participate within the children's self-chosen activities and encourage their thinking and imagination within their play.
- Staff enthusiastically interact with the children and know them well, thus caring relationships with staff and children are developing well. Effective staff

ratios ensure all children receive ample support and attention.

- Partnership with parents is effective. Parents are provided with information on themes and 'conversation sheets' are used to indicate specific activities or learning, the children are working towards, thus encouraging parents to support their child's learning at home.

What needs to be improved?

- opportunities for children to increase their awareness of letters and the sounds they make
- staff's knowledge of the Foundation Stage
- staff's organisation during snacktime.

What has improved since the last inspection?

Not applicable, as first nursery education inspection.

SUMMARY OF JUDGEMENTS

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Judgement:	Generally Good
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Children are confident to access their environment, selecting resources for themselves. They show good levels of concentration when completing puzzles, matching games and moulding play dough. Children are busy, happy and settled, with good relationships forming with staff and their peers. Children's independence skills are sometimes limited during practical routines of the session.

COMMUNICATION, LANGUAGE AND LITERACY

Judgement:	Generally Good
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Children are learning to recognise their names on arrival and during snacktime. They are developing their vocabulary and ability to use more complex sentences. They interact well with others, take turns in conversations and use language to imagine and recreate roles and experiences. Children are developing increasing control, utilising pens, paint brushes and glue spatulas effectively. However, limited opportunities exist for the promotion of linking letters and their sounds.

MATHEMATICAL DEVELOPMENT

Judgement:	Generally Good
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Children are confident to count up to 10 and beyond. They effectively match and complete puzzles, some incorporating numbers, and access a variety of resources to develop their concepts of colour, pattern, shape and size. Many opportunities exist for children to participate in number songs and rhymes. However, during practical routine activities, there are some missed opportunities to extend children's experiences and knowledge of problem solving, calculating and comparing.

KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING OF THE WORLD

Judgement:	Generally Good
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Planned topics are utilised well. Children explore a variety of materials using all of their senses. Children have access to battery operated toys to carry out simple functions. Opportunities exist for children to utilise construction equipment and materials to join, build, assemble or shape. A range of resources and activities promote diversity, cultures and celebrations from around the world. Children have limited opportunities to develop curiosity and investigative skills on a regular basis.

PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT

Judgement:	Generally Good
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Opportunities and resources are provided to enable children to handle and control small objects and develop hand-eye co-ordination, such as scissors, glue spatulas, puzzles, painting and cooking. Children confidently and carefully move around their environment. Through staff's encouraging support, they are developing skills of catching, throwing and kicking. Plans do not highlight the introduction and progression of new physical skills and challenge.

CREATIVE DEVELOPMENT	
Judgement:	Generally Good
Children regularly explore textures of play dough, paint and sand. Children participate within singing sessions using appropriate actions. They enjoy role-play, dressing up in a variety of costumes, to enact imaginative scenarios. Stimulating curriculum plans ensure many opportunities exist for children to respond in a variety of ways to what they see, hear, smell, touch and taste. Opportunities are missed during a music session to reinforce children's knowledge of sound and rhythm.	
Children's spiritual, moral, social, and cultural development is fostered appropriately.	

OUTCOME OF THE INSPECTION

The provision is acceptable and is of good quality overall. Children are making generally good progress towards the early learning goals. The next inspection will take place in three to four years time.

WHAT THE SETTING NEEDS TO DO NEXT: THE KEY ISSUES

- increase opportunities for children to develop their awareness of letters and the sounds they make, through unstructured play as well as more focussed activities
- extend staff's knowledge of the Foundation Stage
- improve staff's organisation during snacktime, to further children's independence skills, maximise learning opportunities and communication.

The provider must draw up an action plan within 40 working days of receipt of this report showing how the key issues detailed above will be addressed. The action plan must be made available to all parents and to the Local Authority if required. An evaluation of the action taken will form part of the next inspection of funded nursery education.

SUMMARY OF NATIONAL STANDARDS

STANDARD 1 - SUITABLE PERSON

Adults providing day care, looking after children or having unsupervised access to them are suitable to do so.

STANDARD 2 - ORGANISATION

The registered person meets required adult: child ratios, ensures that training and qualifications requirements are met and organises space and resources to meet the children's needs effectively.

STANDARD 3 - CARE, LEARNING AND PLAY

The registered person meets children's individual needs and promotes their welfare. They plan and provide activities and play opportunities to develop children's emotional, physical, social and intellectual capabilities.

STANDARD 4 - PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

The premises are safe, secure and suitable for their purpose. They provide adequate space in an appropriate location, are welcoming to children and offer access to the necessary facilities for a range of activities which promote their development.

STANDARD 5 - EQUIPMENT

Furniture, equipment and toys are provided which are appropriate for their purpose and help to create an accessible and stimulating environment. They are of suitable design and condition, well maintained and conform to safety standards.

STANDARD 6 - SAFETY

The registered person takes positive steps to promote safety within the setting and on outings and ensures proper precautions are taken to prevent accidents.

STANDARD 7 - HEALTH

The registered person promotes the good health of children and takes positive steps to prevent the spread of infection and appropriate measures when they are ill.

STANDARD 8 - FOOD AND DRINK

Children are provided with regular drinks and food in adequate quantities for their needs. Food and drink is properly prepared, nutritious and complies with dietary and religious requirements.

STANDARD 9 - EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

The registered person and staff actively promote equality of opportunity and anti-discriminatory practice for all children.

STANDARD 10 - SPECIAL NEEDS (INCLUDING SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS AND DISABILITIES)

The registered person is aware that some children may have special needs and is

proactive in ensuring that appropriate action can be taken when such a child is identified or admitted to the provision. Steps are taken to promote the welfare and development of the child within the setting in partnership with the parents and other relevant parties.

STANDARD 11 - BEHAVIOUR

Adults caring for children in the provision are able to manage a wide range of children's behaviour in a way which promotes their welfare and development.

STANDARD 12 - WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS AND CARERS

The registered person and staff work in partnership with parents and to meet the needs of the children, both individually and as a group. Information is shared.

STANDARD 13 - CHILD PROTECTION

The registered person complies with local child protection procedures approved by the Area Child Protection Committee and ensures that all adults working and looking after children in the provision are able to put the procedures into practice.

STANDARD 14 - DOCUMENTATION

Records, policies and procedures which are required for the efficient and safe management of the provision, or to promote the welfare, care and learning of children are maintained. Records about individual children are shared with the child's parent.