

The Castle Montessori

Inspection report for early years provision

Unique reference number	129395
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Inspector	Karen Molloy / Maura Pigram
Setting address	Spring Garden Lane, Berkhamsted, Hertfordshire HP4 3UL
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Type of setting	Childcare - Non-Domestic

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*.

The provider must provide a copy of this report to all parents with children at the setting where reasonably practicable. The provider must provide a copy of the report to any other person who asks for one, but may charge a fee for this service (The Childcare (Inspection) Regulations 2008 regulations 9 and 10).

The setting also makes provision for children older than the early years age group which is registered on the voluntary and/or compulsory part(s) of the Childcare Register. This report does not include an evaluation of that provision, but a comment about compliance with the requirements of the Childcare Register is included in Annex B.

Description of the setting

The Castle Montessori Day Nursery opened in 1999. It is one of nine provisions operated by Sunhill Daycare (Europe) Ltd. The nursery operates from four main rooms in an adapted building, set in a semi-rural part of Berkhamsted. The building is easily accessible via a small step to the main entrance. Children also have access to a spacious and fully enclosed outdoor area. The nursery serves the local area and surrounding villages. The nursery is registered on the Early Years Register and the compulsory and voluntary parts of the Childcare Register and a maximum of 87 children may attend the nursery at any one time. Children attend for a variety of sessions. The nursery is open each weekday from 07:30 to 18:30, 51 weeks of the year.

There are currently 82 children on roll within the early years age group. The nursery supports children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those who speak English as an additional language. The nursery employs eighteen staff to work with the children. Twelve members of staff hold appropriate Early Years qualifications and one member of staff is working towards an Early Years Foundation Degree. The nursery follows elements of the Montessori methods of teaching.

Overall effectiveness of the early years provision

The Castle Montessori provides effectively for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Staff create a safe and welcoming environment where children are included and supported. Children enjoy a variety of activities and play opportunities, although some areas of the nursery have limited resources and lack some challenge. Organisation of the routine generally enables children to make choices and promotes their progress. The partnership with parents is a key strength and contributes to ensuring that children's needs are met well and they receive any additional support they need. The group have some systems in place to monitor aspects of their practice. They have a positive attitude to improvement and are beginning to develop their self-evaluation to enable them to clearly identify areas for improvement.

What steps need to be taken to improve provision further?

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

- develop the use of monitoring and self-evaluation to enable all staff to reflect on their practice and identify areas for improvement
- plan and organise systems to ensure that every child receives an enjoyable and challenging learning and development experience that is tailored to meet their individual needs; this refers to large group times and enabling children to become absorbed in their play and learning without interruption
- ensure there are sufficient resources across the nursery that are easily accessible to children, to encourage their independence and meet all areas of

learning.

The leadership and management of the early years provision

The setting is led and managed by the manager and deputy, who work closely together to meet the needs of the staff team. All the necessary policies and procedures are in place and records relating to children's welfare are generally well-maintained. There are sound procedures in place for the induction and appraisal of staff and a mentor system has been developed to support new staff. A rolling programme of core training such as first aid and child protection ensures staff are kept up-to-date with current practice. Termly team meetings and weekly room meetings enable staff to discuss any issues and ensure they meet the needs of the children.

The setting has some practices in place to monitor practice and identify areas for improvement; they receive unannounced quality checks from an assessor employed by the company and the manager and deputy carry out 'spot checks' in rooms to ensure processes are being carried out correctly, for example, that registers are completed accurately. The manager is aware of some inconsistencies in practice and is in the process of introducing procedures for closer monitoring of the provision. Managers are beginning to evaluate the overall practice within the nursery and have plans to improve some areas, such as introducing a staff training co-ordinator, to identify staff training needs. Managers are booked to attend training in the new year to support them in the self-evaluation process. Most of the recommendations set at the last inspection have been successfully addressed and contribute to positive outcomes for children.

There are satisfactory procedures in place to ensure that children are safeguarded. Staff know what to do if they have any concerns about children. The setting works very well in partnership with parents and has begun to forge informal links with local schools and other agencies involved in the children's progress, sharing information to meet their needs as they move from one setting to another. Information is shared effectively with parents through a variety of ways; parents evening, welcome pack, diary and they are invited to various events. Parents and carers are encouraged to be involved in supporting their children's learning and development by adding comments to the individual communication books, that go between home and nursery. Staff gather information from parents about the children's needs when they first start, although this is not regularly updated. Parents feedback positively on the service they receive.

The quality and standards of the early years provision

Children enjoy the variety of activities and play opportunities available to them and are happily involved in their exploration. Staff generally support children's learning well; they interact positively, ask questions, listen to them and offer challenge to extend their learning. As a result, children have a positive attitude towards learning and make sound progress. However, there are inconsistencies in rooms; whilst some offer a variety of stimulating resources and opportunities that children can

access independently, others have limited resources and children are observed wandering and not engaged in an area of play or learning.

Staff generally have a sound knowledge of children's learning and development and a positive attitude to the Early Years Foundation Stage. They have been developing planning, observation and assessment systems to reflect the EYFS and to ensure a balanced approach across the areas of learning. Therefore, planning is beginning to be led more by children's interests and meet the individual needs of children. A tracking system enables staff to see where children are thriving, showing interest or needing support. New observation systems are effective as they are beginning to feed into planning and monthly progress sheets shared with parents have been successful in sharing information and inviting their comments. However, the organisation of the routine does not always meet children's needs, For example, large story and singing times makes it difficult to cater for all children and children's play and learning is often interrupted for snack or outdoor play times. Consequently, children do not always have the opportunity to become really absorbed in their area of learning or to be able to develop their concentration skills.

Children have opportunities to explore a variety of materials such as sand and paint and to learn about numbers and shapes. They develop physical skills as they crawl through tunnels and enjoy interesting experiences such as re-creating the story 'We are going on a bear hunt' outdoors. Children have set times to access the outdoor play area which does not enable them to move freely between the indoors and outside or encourage their independence. Children's early communication skills are encouraged, for example, a member of staff talks enthusiastically to a baby, who waves their arms around and shows great excitement. Low resources and mirrors encourages young children to explore and investigate. Children enjoy a range of activities to support their creative development, older children independently access glitter and glue to create festive pictures. Staff take an interest in children's stories and promote their communication skills, for example, children are encouraged to share their recent experience at the dentist.

Staff respond sensitively to children's needs, particularly when children are upset, offering comfort and reassurance. Consequently, children form close bonds with these staff and approach them confidently. Records such as child entry records and individual care plan's are completed for each child detailing their needs. This helps to ensure they settle easily when they start and a smooth transition as they progress from room to room. Staff have a good understanding of creating a safe and welcoming environment in which risk is minimised and children are beginning to learn to take care of themselves. Managers carry out daily checks both indoors and outside to ensure a safe environment. There is a balanced and healthy menu on offer and staff are aware of any special dietary needs. Appropriate medical procedures are in place and promote children's well-being. Children behave well and staff have established sensible rules to encourage positive behaviour. They develop their confidence and self-esteem as they are given praise and encouragement.

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

Overall effectiveness

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage?	3
How well does the provision promote inclusive practice?	3
The capacity of the provision to maintain continuous improvement.	3

Leadership and management

How effectively is provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage led and managed?	3
How effective is the setting's self-evaluation, including the steps taken to promote improvement?	3
How well does the setting work in partnership with parents and others?	2
How well are children safeguarded?	3

Quality and standards

How effectively are children in the Early Years Foundation Stage helped to learn and develop?	3
How effectively is the welfare of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage promoted?	3
How well are children helped to stay safe?	3
How well are children helped to be healthy?	3
How well are children helped to enjoy and achieve?	3
How well are children helped to make a positive contribution?	3
How well are children helped develop skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being?	3

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Annex B: the Childcare Register

The provider confirms that the requirements of the compulsory part of the Childcare Register are: Met

The provider confirms that the requirements of the voluntary part of the Childcare Register are: Met