

Inspection of The Play Hut

347 North Road, Darlington, County Durham DL1 3BL

Inspection date: 22 February 2022

Overall effectiveness	Good
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The quality of education	Good
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Behaviour and attitudes	Good
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Personal development	Good
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Leadership and management	Good
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Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good
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What is it like to attend this early years setting?

The provision is good

Children show enjoyment, enthusiasm and excitement in their learning. Staff know them well and use this knowledge to prepare activities which reflect children's interests and broaden their experiences. Babies delight as staff sing to them and they choose items from the basket. They clap along to rhymes and begin to develop social skills. Young children enjoy using trucks to make marks in paint. Staff praise them and encourage them to explore paint with their hands. Older children choose to draw, read and play mathematical games with winter themes. Staff have high expectations for all children and focus their teaching to close gaps in learning. Children with special educational needs and/or disabilities are supported effectively. The manager has close partnerships with other professionals and promotes continuity of learning.

Staff have continued to support families during the COVID-19 pandemic. The manager ensures that parents are aware of new procedures and continues to gather their feedback on the impact of these. For instance, parents and families of children who are new to the setting attend settling-in visits in the nursery. This has had a positive impact on children's emotional well-being and they settle in quickly. Parents say that they are very happy with the quality of communication they receive about their children. Children benefit from continuity of care and some complete learning tasks at home.

What does the early years setting do well and what does it need to do better?

- The curriculum is interesting and exciting for children. Staff help children to build secure foundations for future learning and know their individual learning needs. For instance, staff alter the level of support and challenge during activities. They encourage some children to identify shapes in the dough, while others are challenged to see how many stars they can find.
- Staff focus on helping children to develop good communication and language skills. For example, they model and repeat new words to babies as they play. Young children join in with a 'hello' song and enjoy listening to simple stories in small groups. Staff use stories with older children to teach them new facts about creatures and extend their vocabulary. Children communicate confidently and develop good social skills.
- Older children are well prepared for the next stages in their learning, such as school. For example, they show high levels of focus and concentration as they draw pictures using their imagination. Staff praise them as they write their name without support. Staff use mathematical language during children's play and prepare activities indoors for children to access independently. Children enjoy using large number names, such as 'millions', and can organise objects into number groups.

- Staff promote children's good health, positive behaviour and independence throughout the nursery. Young children are given time to dress themselves in wellies and wetsuits for outdoor play. They show delight and a sense of achievement, saying 'ta da' to staff when they are finished. Older children serve their own lunch and have exceptionally good manners.
- Children benefit from plenty of opportunities to have fresh air outdoors and develop their physical skills. Young children show confidence as they whizz around on balance bikes. Older children learn about how things grow and plant vegetables. However, on occasion, staff do not engage deeply with children or encourage them to share their knowledge and some learning opportunities are missed.
- Staff know the children in their group exceptionally well and have strong bonds with them. Staff who work with babies know their individual routines and make sure that they are well prepared with comfort items and bottles. They recognise children's non-verbal cues and act swiftly to meet their care needs. However, some babies sleep in pushchairs which do not lay flat, and half of the room is regularly out of use.
- The manager is professional, friendly and supportive to her team and the families who attend. She shows high levels of commitment. Parents describe her as 'hands on' and 'dedicated'. Staff say that they feel happy in their role. The majority have worked here for over 10 years. This helps to promote consistency for families, and the partnerships are positive.
- Staff benefit from regular training which is specific to the needs of the children they work with. For example, staff have attended training to continually develop their skills in working with babies. Staff who work with older children have accessed mathematical consultancy. This has had a positive impact on children's progress.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Staff have a robust knowledge of child protection and safeguarding issues. They confidently identify potential signs of abuse and neglect. Staff know how to record and report concerns about children's safety and welfare, without delay. The manager provides staff with regular updates and understands the importance of sharing information with other relevant professionals. She follows safer recruitment procedures to help recruit new staff. For instance, she ensures that all staff and students have Disclosure and Barring Service checks before they work with children. Staff regularly complete risk assessments for indoor and outdoor areas. They teach children basic safety rules as they play, which helps to increase their awareness of risk.

What does the setting need to do to improve?

To further improve the quality of the early years provision, the provider should:

- enhance staff's teaching outdoors to maintain the high-quality learning experiences for children and maximise progress
- review the sleeping arrangements for babies, with specific regard to the use of pushchairs.

Setting details

Unique reference number	301135
Local authority	Darlington
Inspection number	10218256
Type of provision	Childcare on non-domestic premises
Registers	Early Years Register, Compulsory Childcare Register, Voluntary Childcare Register
Day care type	Full day care
Age range of children at time of inspection	0 to 10
Total number of places	69
Number of children on roll	94
Name of registered person	Play Hut Limited
Registered person unique reference number	RP525787
Telephone number	01325 362526
Date of previous inspection	27 September 2016

Information about this early years setting

The Play Hut registered in 1998 and is based in Harrowgate Hill, in Darlington. The nursery employs 16 members of childcare staff. All staff hold appropriate early years qualifications. The manager and one other member of staff also have qualified teacher status. The nursery opens from Monday to Friday all year round. Sessions are from 8am until 6pm. The nursery provides funded early education for two-, three- and four-year-old children. Children with special educational needs and/or disabilities attend the nursery.

Information about this inspection

Inspector

Michelle Lorains

Inspection activities

- This was the first routine inspection the provider received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. The inspector discussed the impact of the pandemic with the provider and has taken that into account in her evaluation of the provider.
- The inspector observed the quality of teaching during activities indoors and outdoors and assessed the impact this has on children's learning.
- A joint observation was completed by the manager and the inspector, indoors during a planned activity.
- The inspector held a discussion with the manager in relation to the leadership and management of the nursery. She looked at relevant documentation, such as evidence of recruitment, staff's qualifications and their suitability to work with children. She discussed children's learning and development with the staff team and the nursery manager.
- The inspector spoke to parents and obtained feedback.

We carried out this inspection under sections 49 and 50 of the Childcare Act 2006 on the quality and standards of provision that is registered on the Early Years Register. The registered person must ensure that this provision complies with the statutory framework for children's learning, development and care, known as the early years foundation stage.

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