

Inspection of Friends Together

St. Dominic RC School, Southdown Road, HARPENDEN, Hertfordshire AL5 1PF

Inspection date: 11 January 2024

Overall effectiveness	Outstanding
The quality of education	Outstanding
Behaviour and attitudes	Outstanding
Personal development	Outstanding
Leadership and management	Outstanding
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Outstanding

What is it like to attend this early years setting?

The provision is outstanding

The nurturing manager and staff are extremely successful in building on what children know and can already do as they play. They follow the children's interests, show a genuine interest in what the children are doing and carefully steer their learning. Time and thought go into planning a wide range of learning opportunities which ignite the children's curiosity and interest. Children demonstrate enthusiasm and a willingness to learn. They thoroughly enjoy developing friendships and sharing experiences with their peers and the staff.

Staff provide children with a wide range of activities to support their hand-to-eye coordination and muscle strength. Children show high levels of concentration as they connect magnetic shapes together and use the wand to make bubbles. They demonstrate perseverance, precision and control as they stretch elastic bands over pegs, forming recognisable shapes and patterns. Staff praise children for their achievements, which is extremely effective in supporting their self-esteem. Children smile in response and look very proud. Staff ask questions about how they might use resources, such as the toy train track pieces. This is very successful in supporting the children to differentiate between the different sizes and shapes of the track pieces. Children spontaneously count the number of track pieces and work together very well to achieve their goal. During role-play activities, staff skilfully know when to enable the children to develop their own ideas and when to intervene to extend the children's learning. For example, the children's discussion about teeth leads to staff asking questions about the importance of brushing their teeth and visiting the dentist.

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

- The provider, who is also the manager of the pre-school, and staff put children's welfare, safety and development at the centre of everything they do. They are extremely dedicated, respect each child's individual needs and ensure that all children are included in the wide range of learning experiences provided.
- Partnerships with nursery staff and the reception teacher at the school are extremely positive. The consistent sharing of information is very effective in supporting continuity in the children's care and education. There is an excellent breadth of qualifications, experience and skills.
- There is a very strong team ethos. Staff highly praise the manager, who actively supports their well-being and ongoing professional development. For example, staff attendance at training on autism has been very effective in broadening their understanding of how to support children with autism. This has led to new techniques being introduced to support children to manage their emotions and enhance their speech.
- The manager and staff demonstrate high-quality teaching and enthusiastically

join in the children's play. They respond to children's interactions with genuine interest and adapt their teaching according to the development needs of the children. The manager and staff skilfully extend children's thinking and broaden their knowledge as they play while asking relevant questions to check their understanding. They use the available resources and equipment very well to promote the children's focus on learning.

- The manager and staff demonstrate that they know the children extremely well. They treat all children as unique individuals, developing kind and caring relationships with them. This is very effective in helping the children to feel safe and secure and supports their emotional well-being very well. Children confidently ask for help and readily seek reassurance if required.
- The manager and staff place a high priority on supporting children's mental health and well-being. They are very effective in supporting children to understand and manage their emotions. Furthermore, children are taught breathing, relaxation and stretching techniques during yoga activities, and they learn why the body sometimes needs time to rest.
- Staff are very effective in supporting children's communication and language skills, including children who speak English as an additional language. Consistent back-and-forth animated conversations help to support the foundations for language development. Additionally, children are provided with a range of experiences to use and embed new words in a range of contexts. For example, children have daily opportunities to sing rhymes and listen to stories. They learn to use phrases such as 'ready, steady, go' as they roll toy cars, and older children confidently use language to share their ideas during role-play activities.
- The manager and staff provide a breadth of experiences, which is very effective in broadening children's knowledge and understanding of the world around them. For example, children learn about the story of the lamp during Hanukkah celebrations and use colourful sequins to decorate clay pots during Diwali celebrations. Additionally, children have opportunities to learn about the roles of others, such as the police, dentist and fire services.
- Children who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are supported well. Staff thoroughly understand children's needs. They work well with other professionals and involve parents in discussions about their child. This support ensures that all children are constantly included and make good progress.
- Parents are extremely complimentary in their praise of the pre-school. They state that staff support children's emotional development very well and provide a safe and nurturing environment. Furthermore, parents state that the pre-school is 'action packed' with fun and education and that they receive frequent updates about their child's care and learning.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

There is an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts children's interests first.

Setting details

Unique reference number	EY472887
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10301017
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	3 to 11
Total number of places	48
Number of children on roll	160
Name of registered person	Heggie, Juliette Christina
Registered person unique reference number	RP904471
Telephone number	07933046834
Date of previous inspection	16 January 2018

Information about this early years setting

Friends Together registered in 2013 and is situated within St. Dominic RC School, in Harpenden. The setting employs eight members of childcare staff. Of these, three hold appropriate early years qualifications at level 3 or above. The setting opens a breakfast club from 7.45am until 8.45am, a pre-school from 12.30pm until 3.30pm and an after-school club from 3.15pm until 6pm during term time only. The setting provides funded early education for three- and four-year-old children.

Information about this inspection

Inspector
Ann Austen

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 their evaluation of the provider.
- The manager and inspector completed a learning walk across all areas of the pre-school to understand how the early years curriculum is organised.
- The inspector observed the manager and staff's interactions with the children during indoor and outdoor activities and assessed the impact these have on the children's progress and achievements.
- The manager and the inspector carried out a joint observation of an activity.
- A sample of the pre-school documents was reviewed by the inspector. This included evidence of staff suitability and training.
- The inspector took account of the views of parents from reading written information and by speaking to them.

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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