



Merry Go Round Under Fives

Inspection report for early years provision

Unique Reference Number	146799
Inspection date	03 October 2006
Inspector	Kelly Eyre
Setting Address	Hartsfield JMI School, Clothall Road, BALDOCK, Hertfordshire, SG7 6PB
Telephone number	01462 896322
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Registered person	Merry Go Round Under Fives
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?

Merry Go Round Under Fives is run by a voluntary management committee. It opened in approximately 1989 and operates from one room in a purpose-built building in a mobile classroom situated in the grounds of Hartsfield JMI School in Baldock, Hertfordshire. A maximum of 22 children may attend the setting at any one time. It is open each weekday during term-time and sessions are from 09:00 to 11:30. Afternoon sessions operate on Monday to Thursday and are from 12:30 to 15:00. All children have access to a secure enclosed outdoor play area.

There are currently 63 children aged from two to under five years on roll. Of these, 30 children receive funding for early education. The group serves the local community and surrounding areas. It currently supports a number of children with learning difficulties and is able to support children who have disabilities and those who speak English as an additional language.

The group employs ten members of staff. Of these, five hold appropriate early years qualifications and two are working towards a qualification.

The group has achieved the 'Hertfordshire Quality Standards Award'.

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PROVISION

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

Children enjoy a wide variety of physical activities which contribute to their good health. They develop control of their bodies and improve their physical skills and co-ordination as they participate in adult-led activities such as music and movement sessions and action rhymes. For example, children join in enthusiastically with rhymes where they nod their heads, move their arms up and down, stamp their feet and move quickly or slowly in time to the beat. They also regularly use the outdoor play area where they climb, run, roll hoops and throw and catch balls, showing their enjoyment as they learn new skills such as walking along the balance bars or using the scooter.

Children are cared for in a comfortable, clean environment. Their health is enhanced because there are clear policies regarding the exclusion of children who are unwell, with information regarding this displayed around the setting. There are good daily hygiene practices in place which prevent the spread of infection, for example, children wash their hands before snack times and cooking activities, and a cleaning rota ensures all areas are clean for children to use. Children's understanding of the relevance of these practices and the importance of a healthy diet is promoted because staff discuss these issues with them. For example, children discuss washing away the germs and dirt from outside and talk about fruits containing vitamins to keep us healthy. Children's health is further promoted because staff keep all appropriate records up to date, such as medication and accident records.

Children's special requirements with regard to health and diet are well documented and observed. They are offered healthy and nutritious snacks, promoting their growth and development. Snack times are viewed as social events and an opportunity for children to acquire valuable social skills. Children and staff sit together and use the time to discuss current topics and events such as the local fair.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

Children are cared for in a welcoming environment where there are colourful displays of their work and resources are well organised and easily accessible. Their daily safety is given a high priority and staff have a good understanding of this area. Daily safety checks are completed on all areas of the setting, ensuring that children are able to move around safely and independently. There are procedures in place covering most areas of work and possible emergencies, for example, there is a clear procedure for outings. Children's safety is further enhanced because a full risk assessment has been completed and this is reviewed regularly. However, children's safety is affected because there is currently no written procedure to follow

in the event of a child being lost or uncollected. Children are developing a good understanding about taking responsibility and keeping themselves and others safe. They are given clear explanations by staff so that they understand the importance of safety issues such as walking carefully down the steps and holding onto the hand rail.

Children's safety and comfort is further promoted by the provision of equipment which is appropriate for the age group using it. Children independently select toys and activities from a wide range of good quality resources which are easily accessible, for example, low-level storage which is clearly labelled enables children to see what is available and make choices about their play. This area is further enhanced because there is a policy regarding the appropriate selection of resources, and an inventory of all resources, enabling staff to select appropriate resources for specific activities and monitor the use of these. Children's welfare is well promoted as staff have attended additional training and have a thorough understanding of child protection procedures and are able to identify, report and follow up any concerns.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

Children thoroughly enjoy their time at the setting and are happy and settled. Their confidence and self-esteem are consistently promoted because staff are experienced and are sensitive to each child, offering appropriate support and encouragement whenever needed. Children's sense of belonging and self-value are promoted because their work and photos are displayed throughout the setting. Staff make good use of the keyworker system, taking time to get to know the children and their routines. This enables new children to settle quickly and become secure in their relationships with staff. An example of this is a member of staff noting that a child is becoming tired and easily upset at the end of the session. The child's comforter is fetched and the member of staff sits down with the child to enjoy the story.

The comprehensive planning of activities ensures that children are consistently offered a range of opportunities which are linked to their individual needs and capabilities. Staff have a good understanding of child development, enabling them to recognise and promote the next stage of development for individual children and ensure that their play is purposeful. The thoughtful creation of a stimulating environment and well-planned staff deployment mean that children's play experiences are further enhanced and staff are able to play alongside the children, ensuring that their play has meaning. For example, a member of staff notices that a child is using finger puppets to transform toy animals and dinosaurs and talks with the child about how clever they have been and what they have turned the animals into. The child proudly shows off the animal creations to other children and staff, further experimenting with other combinations.

Staff are caring and show their genuine enjoyment of their work, demonstrating this through their constant interaction with the children. They are skilled in making the most of incidental learning opportunities to maximise children's learning and enhance their play. For example, whilst a group of children are playing with the water tray, a member of staff introduces jugs of warm or cold water, encouraging the children to feel the temperature and describe this before adding it to the water tray. Despite their young age, children confidently and competently make choices about their play and activities throughout the session, moving happily from one activity to another. This area is further supported because staff are vigilant and notice quickly

if children need support or if resources need changing in order to maintain interest. For example, a member of staff notices that the train set has not been played with for a while and replaces this with a construction set which immediately catches children's attention and a group settle down happily to play with this.

Nursery Education

The quality of teaching and learning is good. Children are making good progress and their overall development is promoted because staff have a thorough knowledge of the curriculum for the Foundation Stage, planning and adapting activities appropriately. Children's progress in all areas is well balanced because staff use comprehensive methods for assessing them and for evaluating individual activities, using information gained from this to influence planning and determine future activities. An example of this is where staff noted that children needed more time and support to improve their skills in using smaller tools such as scissors. This area is now programmed into each week's timetable, allowing children to practise these skills through a range of activities.

Children demonstrate their enjoyment as they participate in the wide range of activities and play opportunities offered. These include regular opportunities to engage in role play, cooking, music sessions, reading and a wide variety of crafts and construction. Their knowledge is further extended as they participate in a variety of themed topics which are changed each half term. This enables them to look more closely at subjects such as 'Ourselves', where they talk about relationships, explore other cultures and languages, develop their self-awareness by examining their features, and learn to express themselves through activities such as role play and junk modelling.

Children are offered daily opportunities to develop the appropriate attitudes and dispositions which enable them to achieve in their future learning. They are motivated to learn because they are consistently offered a wide range of exciting and interesting activities. They are developing their self-confidence and self-esteem and are beginning to learn right from wrong and the importance of respecting each other. For example, during a group discussion, children recognise that only the person holding the teddy bear can talk, listening carefully to this person and eagerly awaiting their turn to talk. Children are confident to initiate conversations and are able to concentrate and listen to instructions and directions. For example, when group time is over, they follow instructions to take their mat to a staff member, go to a certain table to find their name and sit by this whilst parents come in.

Children are beginning to understand that print has meaning and enjoy numerous daily opportunities to link sounds to letters, through the use of name cards, labels, stories and rhymes. They are beginning to communicate through writing and are offered many opportunities to practise early skills in this area. For example, they enjoy exploring tactile letter shapes, writing their names, chalking, writing lists and using ink stamps. Children show a keen interest in books and handle them carefully. When it is time to use the setting's library, children eagerly choose new books and talk about what they have chosen. They are beginning to use numbers in a meaningful context and use basic mathematics to solve everyday problems. They are able to compare groups of objects and are beginning to recognise when they have a greater or smaller number. An example of this is snack time where children count the pieces of fruit and help sort

pears and apples into groups, noting the differences in shape and number. However, there are limited displays of written numerals, thus limiting children's understanding of the concept that written numbers carry meaning and can be used as labels.

Children are beginning to make sense of the world around them and have opportunities to observe, explore and question in a wide range of activities, forming the foundation of their learning in subjects such as geography, science and technology. An example of this is children at the water tray pouring water from different containers, noting which ones hold the most, looking at the water pouring through the sieve, counting the fish and naming their colours. They have opportunities to use information and communication technology equipment, enabling them to become familiar with its uses. They regularly use the computer, remote-control cars and cash registers, and use tape recorders to play sound games and to record their own voices. Children enjoy discussing their local community and environment and their understanding of this area is promoted through activities such as walks to the local school and library.

Children enjoy a wide variety of physical activities which help them to develop their confidence and skills when using large and small apparatus, tools and equipment. For example, they climb on the large tyre and climbing frame, play basket ball, balance on beams, thread reels and shapes and enjoy parachute games. They enjoy a varied range of opportunities to explore colour, texture, shape and form, for example, through painting, chalking, junk modelling and exploring the textures of sand, dough, clay and paint. Children are able to identify colours and enjoy exploring the mixing of colours through activities such as hand printing, where they paint each hand a different colour, mix these together and name the new colour produced. Regular music sessions and displays of musical instruments enable children to explore and experiment, discovering different rhythms and noting how sounds can be changed.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

Children feel welcome and valued because staff respect their individuality. There is a clear system for confidentially recording any ongoing issues which may affect children's lives and their ability to play and learn whilst at the group. This awareness enables staff to work appropriately with children to ensure that they are included in all daily activities and routines. Children's self-esteem is promoted and they are developing a positive self-image as a result of the appropriate praise given by staff, and the encouragement to discuss their views and ideas and to listen to others. Children's individual needs and special requirements are discussed in detail with parents. Special needs of children are recognised and met sensitively and there is a genuine understanding of the concept of 'inclusion', with staff considering all aspects of their practice to ensure that all children are offered appropriate opportunities. The good levels of support ensure that all children are included and receive a great deal of individual attention so that their needs are effectively met. Staff and children use an appropriate range of Makaton sign language, ensuring that children are offered a range of different forms of communication.

Children are developing an understanding of the values and needs of others as they participate in a wide range of opportunities which promote their understanding of society and increase their awareness of other cultures and ways of life. These include celebrations connected with

Easter, Diwali, Christmas and Chinese New Year. Children's understanding and knowledge of their community is promoted through activities such as visits to the local library and school.

Children's behaviour is good and they are kind and considerate to each other and to staff. Their understanding of behaviour and its consequences is enhanced because they are always given clear explanations by staff, enabling them to understand this and make decisions. They are learning about sharing and turn-taking and show care and concern for each other. For example, a child notices that a new child is upset and stops playing to pat her gently on the shoulder. Children respond well to staff, and the positive approach and good staff role modelling ensures that children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is fostered.

The partnership with parents and carers is good. There is a strong commitment to involving parents in the setting and in their children's learning. Parents are welcomed and staff ensure that they are always available to discuss any issues or concerns. Parents are kept well informed of their children's progress through topical displays, newsletters, regular discussions with staff, consultation sessions and annual reports. There are informative notice boards containing information about a number of issues including current themes, child development, health and safety. Parents views are positively sought through the use of a suggestion box and evaluation sheets, with staff taking appropriate action regarding any suggestions. This positive attitude ensures that parents' views are valued, standards are maintained and appropriate care can be provided for each child.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

Overall the provision meets the needs of the range of children for whom it provides. Children benefit from the care provided by experienced, well-organised staff. There are stringent procedures in place for checking that all staff are suitable to work with children. A clear staff induction process and ongoing monitoring and staff appraisals ensure that the setting's policies and procedures are understood by all and are consistently applied. This area is further supported by a clear procedure for the induction and supervision of students to the setting, ensuring that they are aware of all expectations and are able to work appropriately with the children.

Children's varying needs are consistently met and they are offered a wide variety of activities and play opportunities due to the good organisation of space. The room is well laid out and is changed during the session, enabling children to move safely and freely between activities and to feel confident to initiate their own play and learning. Good organisation of staff time means that children's play is uninterrupted and their play opportunities are enhanced. For example, whilst children are eating their snack, another member of staff sets up the area and resources for songs and action rhymes. The clear organisation of all paperwork means that all appropriate records are kept and are stored confidentially, ensuring that children's safety and welfare are promoted. However, some policies do not contain sufficient detail which would result in a delay in acting in an emergency situation. The policies are also not easily accessible to parents, meaning that there may be misunderstandings with parents if they are not fully informed.

Leadership and management is good. Children's overall welfare is promoted by the thorough understanding that the manager has of her role and responsibilities, ensuring that she is aware

of all regulations and that these are consistently met. She acts as a good role model, attending additional training, demonstrating her enthusiasm for her work and supporting staff to attend further training. The manager and staff have a very positive attitude to reviewing their practice, forming an evaluation group which meets regularly to review all areas of work and set appropriate action plans. There is a positive atmosphere within the setting, creating an appropriate and stimulating environment in which children can learn and develop. All sessions are well planned, with a balanced range of activities throughout the week. Children are always given sufficient time and resources to enable them to complete their activities. Their progress is tracked through ongoing assessments and monitoring. Staff pay close attention to the planning of future work and themes, ensuring that the needs of individuals are met and the development of all children is promoted.

Improvements since the last inspection

At their last inspection, the group was asked to ensure that children do not have access to food they are allergic to. There are now clear procedures in place to record all allergies on a checklist and staff refer to this before offering children any food or drink, thus promoting children's health. They were asked to ensure children's confidentiality is maintained and to devise a system to record children's arrival and departure times. The record of allergies is kept inside the cupboard door and any concerns are recorded confidentially and kept in a locked filing cabinet. Parents now sign their children in and out, recording the times appropriately, with staff monitoring this system at each session. These measures improve children's security and maintain their confidentiality. The group was also asked to ensure good hygiene practices are in place regarding hand washing. Children wash their hands before snacks and cooking activities and after using the toilet, using paper towels to dry their hands. Staff supervise these procedures as necessary to ensure that they are completed and children's health is consistently promoted.

With regard to the provision of funded nursery education, the group was asked to extend opportunities for children to link sounds to letters, using rhyme to reinforce different sounds and syllables, and to provide more opportunities for children to use counting in everyday situations. There are now opportunities throughout the session for children to link sounds to letters, for example, recognising their name cards and comparing initial letters of their names. There are also daily opportunities for children to participate in rhymes and songs, and to use basic problem-solving skills, for example, counting the number of children in the line. These extended opportunities further reinforce children's understanding of this area. Staff were asked to increase the range of role play experiences available to children. These have now been incorporated in the planning to ensure that children are offered a wide range of opportunities to develop their imagination.

Staff were also asked to develop planning to include time for children to use the computer and programmable toys, explore their local environment and experiment with musical instruments. These elements have now been incorporated into weekly planning to ensure that children are offered regular opportunities. Displays of musical instruments and music sessions ensure that children have opportunities to explore music and changing sounds, parent-helpers are used to enable children to have more frequent access to the computer. Additional programmable toys have also been introduced, further extending children's learning and understanding in this area. Finally, the group was asked to ensure that parents have access to the activity plans and

extend the opportunities for parents to gain information about their children's progress. The group has now introduced consultation sessions and also make sure that there is always a member of staff available to talk before or after the session so that parents are kept informed of their children's progress. Activity plans and the timetable are now displayed on the parents' notice board, keeping them up to date and enabling them to extend their children's learning at home.

Complaints since the last inspection

Since the last inspection there have been no complaints made to Ofsted that required the provider or Ofsted to take any action in order to meet the National Standards. 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.

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 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):

- improve children's safety by ensuring that there is a written procedure to follow in the event of a lost or uncollected child
- continue to develop policies and procedures so that these contain sufficient information, and ensure that these are available to parents.

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):

- increase children's understanding of the concept that numbers carry meaning and can be used as labels by developing further opportunities for them to view written numerals.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the leaflet *Building better childcare: Compliments and concerns about inspectors' judgements* which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk