

Little Fingers Playgroup

Inspection report for early years provision

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| Unique Reference Number | 110092 |
| Inspection date | 24 May 2007 |
| Inspector | Penny Wood |
| Setting Address | The Gospel Hall, Vernham Dean, Andover, Hampshire, SP11 0LD |
| Telephone number | 01264 737735 |
| E-mail | |
| Registered person | Little Fingers Pre-School |
| 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 satisfactory.

WHAT SORT OF SETTING IS IT?

Little Fingers Playgroup opened 1991 and operates from the Gospel Hall in the village of Vernham Dean. The playgroup occupies the main room and has the use of a kitchen and an enclosed tarmac area for outside play.

The group operates five mornings a week between the hours of 09:00 and 13:00, term time only. A maximum of 16 children aged between two and five years old may attend the group at any one time. There are currently 27 children on roll, of which 17 are funded to receive nursery education. Children come from a wide catchment area. The group supports children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

The playgroup employs three members of staff, of which the manager holds an appropriate childcare qualification and another member of staff is currently undergoing training.

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PROVISION

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

Children are developing a good understanding of appropriate hygiene routines, which reduce the spread of germs and infections. They regularly wash their hands, particularly after going to the toilet and before eating, with staff gently reminding them to 'wash away the germs'. Staff practice good hygiene routines, such as wearing gloves and aprons to change nappies, and ensuring the toys and equipment are regularly cleaned.

Children benefit from the importance staff place on ensuring all members are trained in first aid. Good procedures in place to record accidents ensure parents receive their own copy of entries, which inform them of events and the care children receive. In the event of a major accident or illness, parental consent to seek further professional care ensures children receive appropriate medical attention.

Children enjoy physical activities in the outside play area, promoting a healthy approach to exercise. During inclement weather, staff enable children to access equipment within the room, thus promoting healthy exercise all year round. Opportunities for children to access equipment such as bats, balls, tricycles and climbing frames, encourage children to develop good co-ordination skills and to build muscle strength. During hot weather, children are developing their understanding of how to protect themselves from the harmful effects of the sun, with staff reminding children of the importance of wearing sun cream and hats when playing outside.

Children enjoy regular drinks, particularly after exercise in warm weather, reducing the risk of dehydration. They enjoy a social snack time where they all eat together. A nutritious range of snacks encourages children to develop an awareness of healthy eating, with children enjoying a treat of a biscuit once the healthy options have been eaten. During snack time, children are gaining independence and particularly enjoy handing out plates and snacks to each other, with older children beginning to learn how to pour their own drinks.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

Children enter a welcoming environment which is prepared prior to children's arrival to enable them to enter with ease and to quickly commence playing. Colourful posters and displays of children's work promote a happy atmosphere and encourage children to take pride in their achievements.

Risk assessment of the premises carried out on a daily basis ensures the quick identification of hazards, with action taken to ensure the hall remains safe. Within the areas used by the children, good measures are in place to ensure children's safety. For example, the heating system is enclosed and the premises remain secure during operating hours.

Within the hall, good use of space allows children room to move safely between one activity and another. Regular safety checks on the good range of toys ensure children only access those resources that are safe, with damaged toys being quickly disposed of. Children benefit from the staff's clear knowledge and understanding of safeguarding children's welfare, particularly regarding child protection issues.

Children are gaining a good understanding of how to evacuate in an emergency because of their participation in monthly fire drills. Exits are clearly marked and kept clear to enable a rapid evacuation to take place. Prior to outings, staff visit proposed venues to carry out their own risk assessment in order to identify risks and to assess the suitability of the venue for the children.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

Children enjoy a good range of age appropriate activities which ensures that all children remain occupied and have fun. They are developing good relationships with each other and enjoy the staff's input into their play. New systems are in place to initiate the incorporation of the Birth to three matters framework, ensuring that all children within the group experience appropriate opportunities to allow them to make progress within their development.

In addition to the planned activities, children enjoy initiating their own activities, which staff are happy to accommodate. For example, when playing outside, children confidently asked staff if they may have the chinks to allow them to draw on the tarmac. Children benefit from the support they receive from the staff, which at times enables them to achieve new skills. For example, when playing on stilts, a member of staff was close by to aid a child, gradually releasing the child and moving away once the child had gained their confidence.

Nursery Education

The quality of teaching and learning is good, with a high emphasis on children learning through play. The planning of activities covers all areas of learning, encouraging children to experience a wide range of opportunities which include a balance of free choice and adult-led activities.

Children engage well during their time within the group because of the provision of interesting topics and the enthusiastic delivery of activities by the staff. Staff instinctively assess children's involvement in their play, re-focussing them when appropriate. For example, when children playing with aeroplanes became a little noisy, staff proposed they may like to build a runway with some track, extending the learning opportunity and introducing new ideas for them to enjoy.

Children benefit from the knowledgeable staff who know them and their capabilities well. For example, during activities, staff adapt the level of challenge according to the individual children taking part, ensuring all experience appropriate levels of challenge to encourage their progress. During adult-led activities, particularly those based around mathematical development, skilled management and questioning techniques encourage children to make good progress. For example, when putting numbers into sequence, staff encourage children to predict the next number, at times offering the incorrect answer to establish if children are able to recognise and correct mistakes. For those children who are confident in counting to high numbers, further challenge is provided by developing children's skills in counting backwards.

Staff ensure areas of play are well-resourced enabling children to fully develop their ideas. For example, when playing in the 'hospital area' children are able to access an assortment of dressing up clothes, bandages and further equipment such as stethoscopes and thermometers. Within their role play, children enjoy becoming the nurse or patient, developing good use of their imaginations. They play well together, co-operating with each other's play schemas, such as helping each other to take their patient's blood pressure or to apply bandages to a cuddly toy.

Within their play, children are confident to explore for themselves and to approach staff when they require assistance. They are keen participants in group activities, such as naming the letter of the week, where they enthusiastically sound the letter and perform the relevant action. Children are acquiring good knowledge of the letters of the alphabet and confidently name letters when randomly picked. Children are gaining in independence when writing their names, using a wide range of equipment to improve and develop their small muscle and pencil control.

Throughout, children receive consistent praise and encouragement from staff, building on their high levels of confidence and self-esteem. They enjoy sharing their ideas and experiences with both their peer group and the staff, for example, recent games of tennis they have enjoyed. Many of the activities are made fun by the staff and children clearly enjoy being involved, for example, when trying to beat 'Timmy' the egg timer at tidy up time.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

Children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is fostered. They take an active part in the routines of the group, for example, they help to handout the plates and cups at snack time. They enjoy a strong sense of belonging which is nurtured by staff, such as encouraging children to tidy up as a team and when singing the group's goodbye song.

Staff deploy themselves well to ensure that all children's needs are met, particularly the younger members of the group. For example, those children unable to sit for periods of time during large group activities are appropriately occupied, with staff enabling them to dip in and out of the group activity as they wish. This reduces the disruption on the group as a whole. Good strategies to manage children's behaviour ensures children develop an understanding of right and wrong, in addition to learning to share and take turns.

Children benefit from the appropriate strategies in place to assist children with additional needs. They enjoy access to a good range of resources that depict positive images of race, culture and disability. These resources combined with topics based on different cultures from around the world, enable children to develop an understanding of diversity naturally through play and activities.

Working in partnership with parents and carers is satisfactory. Parents are welcomed into the group to settle their children. They receive general information about the group in the form of a newsletter, which offers brief information on the provision of nursery education and general events. Parents receive information about how they are able to contribute to the topics, and children clearly enjoy discussing items brought from home during group activities. On request from parents, staff provide children with worksheets to complete at home in order to further prepare them for school. However, this is not consistently provided for all children. When requested, staff make themselves available to discuss children's progress. However, there is little opportunity for parents to look through and make contributions to their child's records of achievement, limiting their ability to observe how children are making progress within their learning journey. Home liaison books for each child offer parents a glimpse of how children participate at playgroup, although not all of these are completed on a regular basis. Staff value parental feedback in the form of an annual questionnaire, taking action to improve their provision based on suggestions made.

Organisation

The organisation is satisfactory.

The setting meets the needs of the range of children for whom it provides. The group benefits from an active committee and a group of staff who are committed to providing good quality care for children. Committee members take part in fund raising and offer emergency cover in case of staff absences. During the session, staff deploy themselves well to support the safety, welfare and development of the children present.

Management have appropriate recruitment procedures in place to ensure those working with children are suitable to do so. Staff are able to attend short training courses. However, the group do not currently maintain the requirement of at least half the staff holding the minimum of a level two qualification. At present, staff do not undergo a formal appraisal procedure in order to recognise their strengths and weaknesses and to enable the management to plan for the further development of the staff team. All regulatory documentation is in place, contains the required information and is stored securely.

The leadership and management of the provision of nursery education is satisfactory. Staff work well as a team in the practical delivery of nursery education. All are able to make contributions to the planning of activities. However, since the last inspection there has been limited progress in the recording and evaluation of activities and children's records of achievement. This limits staff's ability to effectively plan for children's next steps and to aid the recognition of learning difficulties. Furthermore, despite children benefiting from the staff's knowledge of individual abilities, there are limited records to guide additional staff should the permanent staff be absent from the group. Staff have taken positive steps in the instigation of target sheets for children, although some children are yet to have this in place. Management receive support from a development worker, through meetings with other local providers and from an advisory teacher, and display a keen interest in moving the group forward in future.

Improvements since the last inspection

The group have made some improvements based on the recommendations raised at their last inspections for care and education.

At the last care inspection, the group were asked to update their documentation to include certain procedures. As a result, the lost child policy, accident and medication policies, the procedures for protecting staff from allegations of abuse and for providing information about the regulatory body to parents have been improved. In addition to this, daily risk assessments are now carried out on the premises. As a result, staff have clear guidance to refer to and procedures to follow to ensure the safety and welfare of the children, their parents and staff.

At the last inspection for nursery education, the group were asked to improve aspects of the planning to identify children's learning intentions and how staff are able to offer challenge to children with different abilities. These areas have been improved with planning identifying the proposed learning for children and staff adapting their delivery of activities to ensure children experience appropriate challenge. However, the group were also requested to develop the records of children's achievements and to ensure the progress reports contribute well to children's overall progress. This area has received limited improvement and remains an area for the group to further develop.

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.

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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):

- maintain an action plan to ensure that at least half of all staff hold a level 2 qualification appropriate for the care and development of children
- initiate staff appraisals in order to promote staff development

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):

- continue to monitor and develop the system for the evaluation of activities and the observation and recording of children's achievements to ensure the progress reports contribute well to the future planning of activities and children's overall progress
- improve the ways in which parents are able to take an active role in the provision of nursery education

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