

Smalltalk Playgroup

Inspection report for early years provision

Unique Reference Number	127549
Inspection date	31 October 2007
Inspector	Karen Scott
Setting Address	Christchurch Church Hall, Westgate Bay Avenue, Westgate-on-Sea, Kent, CT8 8NY
Telephone number	01843 834406 or 07787 378422
E-mail	
Registered person	Bronwen Wood
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 satisfactory. 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?

Smalltalk Playgroup opened in 1991. It operates from a church hall in Westgate-on-Sea, Kent. A maximum of 35 children may attend the playgroup at any one time. Opening times vary with sessions running on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday mornings and Monday and Thursday afternoons, term time only. There are two rooms used by the playgroup. All children share access to a secure enclosed outdoor play area.

There are currently 36 children from two to under eight years on roll. Of these 19 children receive funding for nursery education. Children come from the local area. The playgroup currently supports a number of children with learning difficulties. Children attend a variety of sessions.

The playgroup employs eight staff. Of these, five of the staff, including the manager, hold appropriate early years qualifications.

The playgroup receives support from the Local Authority.

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PROVISION

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is satisfactory.

Children know that they need to wash their hands after visiting the toilet, before lunch and after messy play. However, they are not reminded to wash their hands before snack time when they help to prepare the food and a shared bowl is still used for hand washing after messy play. Therefore children are not always protected from cross contamination. Children have daily physical exercise either in the garden or indoors on ride on toys or by joining in with music and movement sessions. This helps them to understand the need for exercise as part of a healthy lifestyle. Children who are infectious do not attend, helping to prevent the spread of infection. The majority of staff hold first aid qualifications so are able to administer first aid in the event of an accident. The group would seek emergency medical advice or treatment if children required it and has written parental permission to do so. The accident and medication books have been updated to ensure confidentiality and that all necessary details are included, helping to protect children from harm.

The setting encourages children to develop healthy eating habits. They receive snacks that are healthy such as fruit and crackers and parents are encouraged to send healthy lunches with the setting giving examples of what constitutes a healthy packed lunch. Parents are also asked to ensure that ice packs are included in lunches in order to keep perishables fresh. Snack time is a social occasion as children sit together in small groups. They show independence, pouring their own drinks and helping to prepare the snacks. Children can help themselves to a drink whenever they wish, receiving gentle reminders if they have not had a drink during the session, in order that they do not become dehydrated.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is satisfactory.

Children benefit from playing in a spacious environment, allowing them the room to move around freely. They have easy access to toys and resources appropriate for their ages. Daily risk assessments are undertaken and steps taken to minimise the risks to children in order that they play in a safe and secure environment. There is a clearly defined procedure for the evacuation of the building. However, staff are unclear when the last practice evacuation took place meaning that the group cannot be sure that all children are familiar with the process, compromising their safety. There are clear procedures in place should a child become lost or is not collected, helping towards keeping children from harm, and written parental permission is sought to take children on outings and walks to local areas of interest. The group ensures that a written record is kept when somebody different to the norm is collecting a child. The majority of staff have a reasonable understanding of the signs and symptoms of abuse and the procedures to follow should they have any concerns about a child in their care. However not all staff have an adequate knowledge of child protection. The child protection policy is in the process of being rewritten in order that it reflects current guidelines for the protection of children.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is satisfactory.

Children are happy and relaxed, enjoying their time at the setting. They relate well to the staff and to each other, forming close relationships. They learn important social skills such as turn taking and sharing. Children gain independence, making choices about what they wish to play

with from the toys and resources that are arranged around the setting for them. Staff encourage children to do things for themselves although sometimes they are too keen to assist and children tell them that they can do the tasks themselves. However, staff give good support when children are learning new skills. Throughout the sessions, children are invited to come together as a group to participate in ring games for example. However if children do not wish to participate they may continue with what they are playing with, making choices about what they wish to join in with.

Staff are beginning to use the Birth to three matters framework to plan activities for younger children. However planning for this age does not reflect individual children's needs.

Nursery Education

Teaching and learning is satisfactory. Staff know their key children well and have just started to make observations of them. These are used to assess children's stages of development. The group is starting to use observations to inform planning but activity plans do not show specifically which children require extension or support in particular areas and therefore are reliant on the child's key person being present. Children are interested in the activities and resources that they have access to. They concentrate at activities of their choosing and ask the adults questions to gain knowledge. Most children start at the group when they are two years old and their portfolios are passed on to the staff caring for the older children, giving them some information about their starting points.

Children are happy to attend and pleased to see each other. They play alongside each other and together. Children stand up for their rights and happily share resources. They are polite, saying good morning to each other, for example, and willingly ask for help when it is required. During the sessions, children and staff talk happily to each other and use talk to enhance play. For example, children playing with dough explain to each other what they are doing. Children enjoy looking at books on a one to one basis and in small groups. They chose from a range of books and become fully engrossed in stories that are read to them. Opportunities for children to practise their pre-writing skills are limited to a 'mark-making table' and staff automatically write children's names on their drawings.

Children and staff count together, for example at registration and enjoy number rhymes and songs. Opportunities to see numbers around the environment are limited. Children learn about shapes through experiences such as preparing snack when they look at the different shapes of fruit and crackers, for example. There are limited opportunities for children to learn about information and technology. Children enjoy playing with a range of construction toys. They show an understanding of the routine of each session and when they show an interest in the time this is pursued, as there are many clocks around the room. Children enjoy exploring and investigating. They look inside a pumpkin, using their hands to feel the different textures.

Children develop their gross motor skills when playing outside and indoors on ride on toys. They avoid obstacles and use ride on toys with ease. Children particularly enjoy participating in an exercise routine. Fine motor skills are developed when children use scissors and glue sticks, for example, at the art and craft table and tools when playing with dough. Children use their imaginations, exploring media and materials. Children use paper, paint and glue to create individual pictures and explore the texture of paint with their hands. However, the painting table has only two pots of paint on, limiting children's choices. Children talk about their creations, describing what they have made. Children play with dressing up clothes but there here are limited role-play opportunities.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is satisfactory.

Children are treated with respect and made to feel good about themselves. They are keen to attend the group, arriving happily and greeting the staff and each other with pleasure. Children talk about things that are important to them such as family members and are able to talk about the activities they enjoy at playgroup. The setting has experience of caring for children with learning difficulties. Children's requirements are discussed with parents and support sought from outside agencies in order that their individual needs are met. This ensures consistency of care for children. A written behaviour management policy is shared with parents and staff. Ground rules are in place and are consistently maintained. Children are well behaved. Staff act as good role models to the children. They offer praise and reinforce good behaviour. Children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is fostered.

Partnership with parents and carers is satisfactory. Staff engage parents in conversations when they arrive and keep them informed about the setting through daily chats. The group also runs a parent and toddler group, which means that parents and children are familiar with the staff and setting when they start at the playgroup, providing a continuity of care. Parents are helped to settle their children at the group and are offered compassion and support at this time. The complaints procedure has been updated to reflect current legislation, ensuring parents are aware of how to complain and the process involved if they do. A book for parents to write comments in in order that staff can enhance the care given to children is not readily available meaning that this input is missed out on.

Information such as the Curriculum guidance is available for parents and carers to read. Activity plans are displayed on a notice board but it is not particularly inviting to look at and many parents do not read them. Once a term parents receive written information on how their children are progressing through the early learning goals. However, children's portfolios are not easily accessible and parents have to ask to see them.

Organisation

The organisation is satisfactory.

Children benefit from playing in ample space that is divided into different areas of learning. The group ensures that staff are deployed around the room and that children receive sufficient support to help them feel secure and confident. Staff try to keep themselves informed of current childcare practices by attending relevant courses and sharing what they have learnt with their colleagues. Thorough recruitment procedures, job descriptions and an appraisal system help the staff to care for the children they look after. Work experience students are given clear descriptions of their roles at the setting and are aware that they are not to be alone with children. Consequently, students are a valuable asset to the staff team, supporting children as they play. Most relevant and mandatory documentation is in place. Some policies and procedures are being updated in order that they reflect current guidelines. A record of visitors to the setting and their reason for attending helps to safeguard children. The provision meets the needs of the range of children for whom it provides.

Leadership and management is satisfactory. Staff work hard supporting children as they play. They meet together to discuss ways in which they can make improvements to the delivery of the Foundation Stage curriculum and are slowly implementing change. One member of staff coordinates the planning and supports her colleagues as they begin to understand their roles as early years practitioners.

Improvements since the last inspection

At the last inspection, seven actions were raised in order to make improvements to the care that children receive and five actions were raised in order to make improvements to the delivery of the Foundation Stage curriculum.

In order to make improvements to care the group were told to make sure that there is at least one member of staff with a current first aid training certificate on the premises or on outings at any one time and to ensure that the first aid qualification includes training in first aid for infants and young children which is consistent with any guidance issued to local authorities by the Secretary of State. They were told to keep a detailed record, signed by parents, of medicines given to children. They were also told to assess the risk to children in relation to the security of the building and the oven in the kitchen and take action to minimise the risks. The group were told to develop staff's knowledge and understanding of safeguarding children's welfare and ensure the playgroups written statement includes all details required by the National Standards. They were also told to develop and implement appropriate systems of planning and assessment for children under three years by use of the Birth to three matters framework and ensure all children are provided with a balanced range of activities that are appropriate to their ages and stages of development. The group were told to ensure practice is inclusive and children with learning difficulties or disabilities are fully integrated. They were also told to improve their knowledge and understanding of the requirements set out in regulations, ensure all policies and procedures reflect the National Standards and set in place a procedure to notify Ofsted of relevant matters.

In order to make improvements to the Foundation Stage the setting were told to provide parents with information about the educational programme and their children's progress towards the early learning goals. They were also told to develop a system of planning and assessment, to ensure information gained through observation is used effectively to inform the planning and identify children's next steps in learning. The group were told to review the effectiveness of the daily routine to ensure planned activities and routines help children make effective progress towards the early learning goals, especially within the programmes for communication, language and literacy and creative development. The setting were also told to develop effective systems in order to regularly monitor, review and evaluate the effectiveness of the care and the educational programme. The group were told to develop the leadership and management of the setting in order to support staff with the care and education they provide to children.

Six members of staff have attended appropriate first aid courses, enabling them to offer first aid to children in the event of an accident. The setting has prepared a medication form and book in order that they keep a detailed record of medication given to children. There is space for parents to sign their consent for the medication to be given and to acknowledge that it has been given. This helps to care for children when medication is given. Staff undertaken daily risk assessments of the setting in order to keep children safe from harm. The door to the setting has a lock on and a notice reminds visitors to make themselves known to staff before they enter the rooms. A record of visitors to the setting is also kept, helping to protect children. The supervisor has assessed the safety of the oven and procedures are in place to protect children when it is in use. With support from an advisory teacher, the group is rewriting the child protection procedure so that it reflects current guidelines. Staff have undertaken some training in child protection and have a basic understanding of the signs and symptoms of child abuse but are vague as to the procedures involved should they have any concerns. This does not completely safeguard children and therefore it is recommended that the setting continues to update their knowledge of child protection issues.

A member of staff has undertaken training on planning activities for two year olds and further training is being accessed in the new year. Knowledge gained is being used to help plan for two year olds using the Birth to three matters framework. When children first start at the group staff observe what their interests are and plan activities to reflect these. However it is unclear as to how observations are used to further plan for individual children's needs and therefore it is recommended that the setting continues to develop appropriate systems of planning and assessment in order to meet every child's developmental needs. Children with learning difficulties or disabilities are fully integrated into the setting, joining in with all the activities on offer.

The group has sought advice from early years advisory teachers and is in the process of updating policies and procedures in order that they reflect the requirements of regulations. A procedure is in place should the group need to notify Ofsted of any relevant matters.

Parents have access to information about the Foundation Stage, as the Curriculum Guidance is available to them to read on a daily basis. However staff are concerned that parents are not reading this and are thinking of other ways to provide them with information about the early learning goals. Parents and carers are informed of their children's progress verbally each day and through written progress reports which they receive once a term. The group has devised a system of planning. Although plans are based around individual children's needs, it is not clear on the plans which children need support or extension. Therefore, it is recommended that the setting continues to make improvements to the system of planning and assessment in order to meet individual children's needs. The setting holds staff meetings where they review the effectiveness of the daily routine. For example, they noticed that children become restless towards the end of the sessions so have changed what they offer at this time of day. There are limited opportunities for children to practise their pre-writing skills and it is recommended that the setting enables children to do this. Children freely create using a range of resources. Every six weeks staff evaluate what their key children have been learning. Staff meet together to review the care and educational programme in order that they can make improvements to what they offer to children. The role of Foundation Stage coordinator has been created and a member of staff has received training in order that she can undertake this role. She monitors the delivery of the Foundation Stage curriculum and supports the other staff in their delivery of it.

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 any 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 satisfactory. 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 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):

- ensure that good hygiene practices regarding hand washing are in place at all times in order to keep children healthy
- practice regular emergency evacuations of the setting, recording the actual times of the fire drills in order to ensure that everyone participates
- continue to update the Child Protection policy and ensure that procedures to be followed in the event of allegations of abuse and neglect comply with those of the Local Safeguarding Children Board. Develop staff's knowledge and understanding of safeguarding children
- continue to develop appropriate systems of planning and assessment for all children, ensuring that all children are provided with a balanced range of activities that are appropriate to their ages and stages of development (this applies to nursery education too).

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):

- provide more opportunities for children to practise their pre-writing skills in everyday situations and during free play
- continue to provide parents with information about the educational programme. Enable them to contribute towards their children's learning and continue to keep them informed about their children's progress and achievements.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the leaflet *Complaints about Ofsted Early Years: concerns or complaints about Ofsted's role in regulating and inspecting childcare and early education (HMI ref no 2599)* which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk