

The Big Top After School Club

Inspection report for early years provision

Unique Reference Number	130544
Inspection date	13 September 2007
Inspector	Siobhan O'Callaghan
Setting Address	Meryfield School, Theobald Street, Borehamwood, Herts, WD6 4TJ
Telephone number	020 8953 2106 or 07930 338141
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Registered person	The Big Top
Type of inspection	Childcare
Type of care	Out of School 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

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.

WHAT SORT OF SETTING IS IT?

The Big Top After School Club has been registered since 1999 and operates from a large school hall within Meryfield Primary School in Hertfordshire. The group have direct access to seven toilets. There is a large secure outdoor play area. A maximum of 40 children may attend the group at any one time. The group is open Monday to Friday from 15:15 until 18:00 term-time only.

There are currently 45 children from four years to 12 years on roll. The children who attend come from the local area. The after school club collects children from three different local schools and some children come independently from a fourth senior school. The group supports children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and also supports a number of children who speak English as a second language.

The group employs seven staff. Of these, six staff hold early years qualifications and one member of staff is working towards a further qualification. The number of staff on duty depends on the number of children booked into the group. The group achieved the Hertfordshire Quality Standards Award as a provider of quality early years childcare and education in 2006.

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PROVISION

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

Children stay healthy as the staff team effectively follow appropriate environmental health and hygiene guidelines. The environment is clean and maintained to a high standard to ensure that children's general health is safeguarded. Children learn about the importance of good hygiene practices when they are cooking. Every child washes their hands and is reminded that they must not put sticky fingers in their mouths and then continue to mix ingredients. However, this good practice is not consistently followed through at snack time when the children do not wash their hands and are not reminded to do so by staff. Therefore this does not reinforce to children the importance of protecting themselves against germs and possible infection.

Children are learning positive attitudes towards healthy living. They enjoy a well-balanced tea where they are offered brown bread rolls with a variety of fillings which include ham, chicken, cheese, salad and fruits. Children are happy and secure at tea-time which is a social occasion where children chat comfortably with each other and to the staff team. They have excellent opportunities to take part in physical activities both inside and out in the large garden area. Children are very enthusiastic to participate in football, dancing and playing life-size snakes and ladders which involves them jumping into the squares and throwing a large inflatable dice. They enjoy the challenges of walking on pot-stilts and do manage this difficult activity with extremely good coordination. After physical activities children help themselves to drinks which ensure they remain hydrated.

Children have good provision to rest when they are tired, a comfortable book corner with a caring adult on standby allows children to sit out of activities and enjoy a quiet story. Children are sensitively cared for if they are unwell as there is a positive policy in place to ensure that their individual needs are maintained and that all the children in the club are considered when excluding children who are unwell. Staff maintain thorough accident and medication records, these are shared with parents when necessary. Children are further protected as all staff have first aid experience.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

Children are cared for in a warm and welcoming environment. They are secure and safe due to effective risk assessments that highlight any issues giving cause for concern, which in turn are dealt with immediately. Children have access to a broad and stimulating range of resources which are safe and suitable for their differing stages of development. Children's safety is of paramount importance to the staff team, they ensure effective supervision in the large outside play area. Children learn about their boundaries outside and do not cross these. The secure site ensures that un-vetted visitors cannot access the premises unsupervised. Children know that they must not open the main door to anyone including their own parents unless staff are present.

Children are protected from harm as staff have a sound understanding of child protection and how to make referrals should the need arise. All staff attend child protection training within their induction and this is updated regularly. The setting has comprehensive policies to safeguard children including a lost and uncollected child policy and an effective emergency evacuation

procedure, which is practised on a regular basis. However, the evacuation procedure is not adequately displayed which may compromise the safety of visitors or new children to the group.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

Children thrive at this setting where they are presented with a varied and interesting range of stimulating activities and experiences. Children are extremely confident to access their environment. Upon arrival to the setting they hang up their coats and bags and eagerly sit down for tea. Children delight in making up their own bread rolls which they butter and then fill with a choice of their own, such as chicken, ham or cheese. They pour their own drinks and confidently request cucumber and tomato to complete their meal. This is a very happy and social occasion, children chat amongst themselves and to staff members. There is no pressure for children to finish their food quickly, so they take their time. It is evident that children feel secure and safe here. They approach staff comfortably with some children giving staff a welcome cuddle as they arrive.

Children are fully engrossed in their play. They are involved in a wide variety of challenging activities both inside and out in the garden. A group of children play a football match, whilst another group of children enjoy walking on stilt pots. Children are thrilled to help a staff member set up a new resource in the garden. They help to fix the water-way system which has boats and locks, there is great excitement when the water is added. Inside children energetically practise their dance moves and are keen to show their skills to friends and staff.

Children are highly motivated throughout the setting. They enthusiastically participate in cooking activities and playing a life-size game of snakes and ladders where they need to physically jump into the squares. Children's individual interests are met as their requests for resources that are not out are honoured. Children are absorbed in their play as they build large rail tracks on the floor, these are further developed as they circle beneath a table to create a loop. Staff are on hand to support, challenge and praise children for their excellent efforts. Children who are tired are followed sensitively into the book area where an offer of a story is given. Staff are clearly highly in-tune with children's individual needs which are met in a caring and sensitive manner.

Children's positive comments about the club include: '(the staff) are the best and well under control for running an after school club'; 'The helpful thing is they feed you so you're not hungry whilst you're here and they help you with your homework' and 'The adults play and bond with the children'.

Children's behaviour is exemplary. They cooperate effectively with each other and have a great sense of fairness. Children are able to demonstrate that they make a list of names that they have recorded to ensure that everyone gets a turn to show off their dancing skills and that no one is left out. Children display caring relationships towards each other as they share dressing-up clothes and help each other with garments. Staff have developed warm and caring relationships with children, this is evident through the positive interaction observed and how fondly children talk of their carers.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

All children are made very welcome into the setting and their individual needs are extremely well met. Children are cared for in a positive environment which is supported by exceptionally motivated staff. The staff team are dedicated to ensuring that children have a good time, which is evident throughout the setting as staff take the lead from the children in following their self-chosen activities. Children's sense of belonging is reinforced through the emphasis that this is their club. Children are involved in choosing new resources for the club when funds allow. They have a say in the activities that they would like to see happening thus the emphasis is on following children's interests. The impact is that all children are busy, happy and content within their environment.

Children from four to twelve years of age are able to play harmoniously together and in some cases alongside each other. They share resources, ideas and compliments as they admire each others dance moves and the good choice of garments when they are dressing-up. Children have excellent opportunities to make choices and take decisions as they access the rich and resourceful environment. Children attending come from a range of diverse backgrounds which is fully acknowledged and valued within the setting. Children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are valued and sensitively supported to be fully included within all aspects of the club.

Children benefit from the excellent partnerships with parents which supports them to feel secure and safe within the setting. The setting held a 'family day' during the summer which involved parents and staff in providing stalls and refreshments for everyone involved with the setting. Parents are extremely complimentary about the setting and all that it has to offer. Parents feel content and secure in that their children are happy and stimulated. Both children and parents express a deep satisfaction with the care children receive. Children thrive as staff and parents share information and work together as an equal partnership, this is evident as parents take a lead role in the committee.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

Children are cared for by a well-qualified team of staff who have a wealth of experience and knowledge within early years and childcare. They ensure children are protected within the setting as there are secure recruitment and vetting procedures in place. All staff have a full induction which includes training in first aid and child protection, this enhances the overall safeguarding of children. Children are respected and listened to which supports their growing self-esteem. High staff ratios in the setting support children's ability to enjoy and achieve. Children have access to a well-organised environment and to the provision of an excellent range of resources and activities. The accommodation is thoughtfully set up to cater for the different age range of children attending. Younger children gravitate to the role play and adult-led activities such as cookery.

There are comprehensive policies and procedures in place to promote children's good health, safety, enjoyment, achievement and ability to make a positive contribution. However, some aspects require consistency to ensure effective hygiene practices are implemented.

Improvements since the last inspection

At the last inspection the provider was asked to develop a written statement about special needs that is consistent with current legislation. The provider has developed a positive policy to support children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. This is effectively implemented in the setting to support children and liaise with parents as necessary.

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

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.

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 staff are aware and informed of good hygiene practice with reference to consistent hand-washing practices
- ensure fire procedure is made available in line with any recommendations made by the Fire Safety Officer.

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