

St Mark's Playgroup

Inspection report for early years provision

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| Unique Reference Number | 103847 |
| Inspection date | 04 February 2008 |
| Inspector | Virginia Cooper |
| Setting Address | The Old Vicarage, Vicarage Road, Gillingham, Kent, ME7 5JA |
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| Registered person | St Mark's Playgroup |
| 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?

St Mark's Playgroup opened in 1983 and operates from two rooms in a church hall situated in Gillingham, Kent. Children have access to an adjacent garden area in the grounds owned by St Mark's church.

A maximum of 30 children may attend the playgroup at any one time. The playgroup is open each weekday from 09.30 to 12.15, term time only.

There are currently 39 children aged from two to under five years on roll. Of these, 27 children receive funding for early education. The playgroup currently supports a number of children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and also supports a high proportion of children who speak English as an additional language.

The playgroup employs seven members of staff. All staff hold appropriate early years qualifications and one staff member is working towards her Foundation Degree in Childhood Studies.

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PROVISION

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

Children benefit from a warm, caring environment helping them feel secure. A settling in procedure is in place helping children become confident about leaving their main carers.

Children's good health is promoted in an environment that is maintained to a good standard of hygiene and cleanliness. There are effective systems to prevent the spread of infection, for example, different coloured cloths are used for different cleaning tasks. Tables are wiped before and after snack time to ensure children sit to a clean table to eat.

Children take themselves to the toilet, encouraging their independence. They generally learn the importance of good hygiene through the daily routine, for example, washing their hands after using the toilet. Children use paper towels, helping to reduce the risk of cross infection. Before children eat their snack, staff encourage them to wash their hands, however, they also routinely use an anti-bacterial hand cleanser. Whilst this helps to eradicate germs and prevent cross infection it might give children a mixed message about being thorough when they wash their hands. Children are reminded to wipe their noses when needed and to dispose of their dirty tissues carefully.

The staff do not care for children who are contagious ensuring others are not at risk of cross-infection. Children who become poorly whilst at the playgroup are isolated as much as possible, comforted, and made comfortable, until their parents are able to collect them. Staff very rarely administer medication; when this is required, they ensure they obtain written parental permission and parents sign the record to make sure they know what has been given.

There is always one member of staff present who has a current first aid qualification; there is a first aid kit that a named member of staff checks and replenishes as necessary. They are able to administer first aid to children in the event of an accident or emergency. Any accidents and any first aid that is administered whilst the children attend the group are recorded, parents sign the entry and this results in them being well informed about what has happened to their child.

Children enjoy plenty of fresh air; they regularly play outside in the adjacent garden. Staff provide physical activities for the children when the weather is poor, for example, a mini trampoline, a climbing frame and balance beams. This ensures children develop their physical skills and get plenty of exercise.

The playgroup operate a snack bar enabling children to choose when to sit down for their snack. Staff provide a good choice of snacks at every session, for example, fruit, vegetables, bread sticks and crackers. The snack bar is next to a wall display that helps children understand which foods are most healthy. Children independently pour their own drinks. They can choose water, milk or weak sugar-free squash. Water are always available ensuring children remain hydrated. Children undertake projects that teach them about healthy eating.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

The premises are safe and secure; there is an alarm on the door alerting staff if it is opened. Only staff open the door to parents and visitors so they can check their identity. A staff member

greet children and parents warmly when they arrive and stands at the door at home time, ensuring children leave with a known responsible adult.

There is a small cosy room where children undertake quiet activities and small group activities that are adult led. The quiet area enables children to rest and relax. The playgroup has nursery size tables and chairs helping children manage tasks more easily. The toys and equipment are of suitable design and condition and easily accessible to children encouraging them to make choices and exercise independence. Staff prepare the room carefully enabling children to start play as soon as they arrive. The room is partitioned by chairs to make distinct learning areas that cover all areas of development. If a child requests a particular piece of equipment staff willingly go and get it for them. Children have opportunities to explore and examine natural materials using all their senses. They collect twigs to make a collage of a deep, dark wood and use sand for pretend cooking. Children feel confident to move resources about the room enhancing their play experiences. The higher than usual staff : child ratio enables them to supervise with vigilance. Staff notice and sweep up stray sand promptly to prevent the floors becoming slippery. A risk assessment is carried out regularly; staff identify potential hazards and risks and safety equipment is in place to prevent accidents. A daily visual check of the premises is undertaken each day to maintain the safety standards. Staff remind children how to behave to keep themselves safe, for instance, only one person on the trampoline at a time. This is beginning to help children take responsibility for their own safety.

Staff induction procedures ensure they understand their role in the protection of children. The staff understand the signs and symptoms of abuse; they feel confident that they would recognise if a child were being abused. The procedures to follow if any staff have concerns about a child in their care are documented clearly.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

Staff have embraced the document Birth to three matters. They consider the younger children's needs when they plan activities and ensure the youngest children have good support to undertake new activities. They encourage children to gain independence, for example, they wait patiently whilst children collaboratively put together some large construction equipment to make a balance beam. Staff offer help if children are stuck but mostly children manage to solve their own problems because staff get them to think and give lots of encouragement. Staff watch carefully what children are showing an interest in and provide activities that will capture their imagination. Natural materials, for example, sand, twigs, and branches provide the tactile play experience that children enjoy. The children can easily access the resources enabling them to make choices about what they want to do. There is a very homely atmosphere where children are happy and secure. They have a good relationship with the staff and chat easily with them, improving their communication skills.

Nursery Education

The quality of teaching and learning is good. The playgroup employs well qualified and experienced practitioners who are all familiar with the Curriculum guidance for the Foundation Stage. All staff feed into the plans ensuring that the areas they wish to work upon with individuals are included, enabling children to progress at a pace that suits their individual learning needs. The activities cover all six areas of learning and follow children's interests. Staff maintain the assessment records very well. The records provide good evidence of how children are progressing towards the early learning goals. The children's learning is very experiential;

Staff encourage children to experiment and explore their environment. Children with learning difficulties take a full and active role. They have an individual education plan that sets them realistic and achievable targets encouraging their development.

Children are keen to try new activities; they are comfortable exploring their environment and experimenting with the resources to see what they can achieve. They are interested and involved in their play. Children are curious about visitors to the group and approach them confidently, introduce themselves and ask about why they are at playgroup today. They love to share their news and talk about their families. Children understand the concept of sharing and taking turns, however, some still find this difficult. Staff deal with minor squabbles appropriately helping children appreciate that their actions have consequences and understand what is right and wrong and why. Children's level of concentration is variable, however, staff work hard at keeping their attention, and always try to include them to keep their interest.

Children communicate effectively. Staff extend children's vocabulary in a natural way as they chat whilst they play. They are able to imagine situations and verbalise them, for example, a member of staff wonders aloud what would happen if a plane didn't have wheels. Children think and suggest that a plane without wheels wouldn't be able to take off, or land and the body would get scratched, one child suggests it would crash. There is a good range of books to read, children know how to handle and take good care of them. The staff use information books to support the children's learning. Children learn that books are to gain knowledge as well as to be used for pleasure. Staff have recently started making talking and thinking books. The first is about the Deep, Dark Woods and was inspired by a child who brought a photo to school and regularly talks about the woods and the wildlife within it. Children have the opportunity to recognise their name every day and staff encourage them to 'write' their own name on their work; they can often write recognisable letters. Writing materials are always available in role play areas, for instance, appointment diaries in their pretend office. This encourages children to understand that writing can have a specific purpose. Staff encourage children to link sounds and letters through playing rhyming games, singing and story telling.

Children spontaneously and confidently count as they play. The number line in the room is split and displayed on opposite walls which doesn't help children see the whole sequence of numbers up to ten. Staff encourage children to make simple calculations and to solve problems as they play, for example, discussing how many wheels they need on the aeroplane they are making. There are puzzles of varying difficulty that promote children's spatial awareness. They love to play with sand, giving them the opportunity to measure and explore volume. Children learn their colours because staff naturally refer to them throughout the session.

Children love to design and make projects of their own choice. They have lots of opportunities to experiment using different construction toys. Staff are very supportive and help them achieve what they want to do. They teach them the difference between a nail and a screw, enabling children to begin to make decisions about the best tools and materials to use. Children are fascinated as they realise the beam of light from a torch can be directed and focused upon different objects. They learn to make patterns on the ceiling by waving the torches about. Staff teach them about festivals from all over the world helping them to appreciate their own and other people's cultures and beliefs. The opportunity for children to use everyday technology is limited because the computer is situated in the quiet room, and therefore, can only be used when a member of staff is present. The staff are looking to change it's position to enable children to use it more often. Children do however, play with calculators and use old computer keyboards and phones as they role play. Children love to collect objects when they go out to

play to make collages. Staff use the outdoor area to good effect to help children appreciate the different seasons.

Children develop good coordination and learn how to use tools with increasing control. They mould dough and are able to make recognisable models. Staff provide some interesting play equipment shaped like a tortoise shell that children sit in and spin developing their sense of balance. This equipment also stimulates their imagination, children pretend they are a ladybird and wear them as helmets. Children travel about the hall on sit and ride toys with confidence, negotiating different spaces appropriately. Staff undertake topics that teach children about staying healthy, for example, they discuss which foods are best for them.

Children use their imaginations when they play and enjoy acting out various situations. They delight in dressing up and admiring themselves in the mirror. Staff join in their games and encourage their creativity and self esteem. Children make music with a variety of instruments that help them explore tone, rhythm and pitch. They join in enthusiastically when they sing rhymes and songs. Children are confident to make pictures in their own way, their art work is individually styled and children express themselves freely when they paint and stick.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

The playgroup welcomes all children. They operate a waiting list and give priority to funded children. They consider children's spiritual values and make it clear to parents in their policies that the group is Christian based and Christian values provide the key to the group ethos. Their spiritual values make it clear to parents that each child is valued as a unique individual whatever their ethnic or religious background. Children are taken out into the local community, for example, the post box, the shops and the local school.

The mix of children attending the group is diverse; children celebrate other festivals and their knowledge of other cultures is being extended. Resources and posters about the playgroup reflect diversity positively, which supports children as they learn to embrace differences and become accepting of others. Children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is fostered.

Children with special needs are welcome and integrated into the playgroup. They have an individual education plan that sets realistic targets to help them develop. The staff work with other professionals to ensure children with special needs receive an appropriate service after full consultation with parents.

Staff manage children's behaviour positively, their age, stage of development and level of understanding are all taken into account. The boundaries are consistently applied, for example, children understand that they take turns nicely to use the trampoline. Staff periodically remind children of the rules and children demonstrate that they know what is expected of them and clearly understand the difference between right and wrong. Children respond positively to the praise and encouragement they are given.

The partnership with parents is good. The playgroup have an open door policy and parents are able to visit at any time; parents stay to help their children settle. Parents speak highly of the staff and the service they deliver. There is lots of information available for them about the provision, a notice board and regular face to face contact. Photos are used to good effect in the children's assessment records to demonstrate to parents how the six areas of learning are

addressed. Staff encourage parents to look at and contribute to their children's assessment records regularly; they detail each child's progress toward the early learning goals. Staff ask for photos of the children's extended family and are working hard on children and parents taking ownership of the records. Staff encourage parents to become involved in their children's learning; there is lots of information about the framework Birth to three matters and the Foundation Stage. Parents are kept well informed about current topics and there are opportunities to take an active role, for example, they help their children bring in articles of interest from home and staff have planned topics around these. There is a comprehensive complaints procedure; the playgroup keep a complaints log.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

Procedures are in place to ensure all staff hold a current criminal records check and are suitable to look after children. Staff understand their roles and responsibilities and all hold a relevant qualification. They are encouraged to attend courses and update their training.

The pace and routine of the day is good; children are busy and interested in what they are doing. The children have access to a wide range of resources to keep them amused and aid their development in all areas. The setting meets the needs of the range children for whom it provides.

All required documents are in place for the safe and effective management of the setting, and stored confidentially. However, although the policies and procedures have recently been updated they were not amended for sometime before this. The playgroup usually operates with a higher than recommended staff : child ratio ensuring there is always enough staff working directly with children to give good support.

The leadership and management are good. The group are committee run; there are two parent representatives on the committee and parents know to speak with them if they want any issues raised at committee meetings.

The supervisor takes responsibility for the day to day management of the playgroup. The supervisor and her deputy meet very regularly and there are monthly staff meetings enabling them all to contribute to the planning. They collectively review and evaluate how they are delivering the five outcomes for children. They are reflective practitioners and can identify what works well and what requires development. The staff are dedicated and work well as a team. The setting meets the needs of the range of children for whom it provides.

Improvements since the last inspection

At the last care inspection three recommendations were made that relate to Standard 6 - Safety and Standard 14 - Documentation. The play group staff were asked to obtain written permission from staff to keep a copy of their CRB checks; to remove staff's personal information from the operational plan and ensure the daily diary goes out with the register in the event of a fire. All these issues are addressed improving the quality of care for children.

At the last education inspection there were no significant weaknesses to report, but the playgroup staff were asked to give consideration to continuing to develop the daily plans to ensure there is enough space to fully record the differentiation and the evaluation of activities.

The staff record some differentiation on the adult led activities, however, they know the children well and naturally make adjustments when necessary. They have changed how they plan activities completely to follow children's interests more closely. These changes are improving the children's care and education.

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 provider has not recorded all complaints made to Ofsted by parents.

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):

- update policies and procedures more regularly

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 regular opportunities for children to use the computer, everyday technology and other programmable toys

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