

Childrens House Montessori

Inspection report for early years provision

Unique Reference Number	127682
Inspection date	02 November 2007
Inspector	Claire, Alexandra Parnell
Setting Address	Birling Village Hall, Snodland Road, Birling, West Malling, Kent, ME19 5JG
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Registered person	Candida Rose Balfour
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?

The Children's House Montessori Nursery operates from the village hall in the village of Birling, close to West Malling, Kent. The nursery caters for children from the local area and the surrounding rural community.

It is open on Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Fridays from 09.30 to 12.30 during school term time. A Thursday morning session is introduced from the January.

It is registered to take 18 children from two and a half to five years at each session. There are currently 21 children on roll. Of these, 14 are in receipt of nursery education funding. There are currently no funded children who have been identified with special educational needs and none who speak English as an additional language.

The owner/principal works with three other members of staff, three staff have a level four Montessori qualification and the fourth member of staff is a qualified primary school teacher with experience in Early Years. The nursery receives support from an early years teacher through the Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership. The teaching in the nursery is strongly influenced by Montessori methods.

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PROVISION

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

Children's hygiene is promoted well within the setting. Children have access to resources such as soap, warm running water, paper towels and tissues to promote their independent hygiene practices. They take themselves to the toilet, where staff remind them to flush toilets and to wash their hands effectively. Most children automatically wash their hands before their chosen snack time and staff are vigilant to remind those who forget to wash them before eating.

Most documentation promotes children's ongoing health needs. Most accidents are recorded adequately, although some details such as the time of the accident is sometimes omitted from the records. Medication administration is practiced effectively with clear and precise documentation to protect children's wellbeing.

Children have access to plentiful drinks and varieties of freshly prepared healthy snacks such as carrot sticks, fruit and rice cakes. Children choose when to have their snack but can help themselves to more drinks if they feel thirsty within the session. Staff have access to comprehensive records regarding children's dietary requirements to ensure their dietary needs are met.

Children have many regular opportunities to use movement and skills appropriately in both indoors and outdoors. Children learn new skills such as climbing trees, balancing along the red circle and rolling down hills to extend their physical development. Children have access to fresh air at all times through either free flow play or open windows.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

Children play in a very safe and secure environment, therefore highly promoting their safety. Good security measures are in place to ensure children cannot leave the premises unsupervised. The rear fire door has a bell attached to alert staff if anyone has opened this. The main front door is locked with keys accessible to ensure that this can be used in emergencies. Children can access all areas of the hall safely. There are no potential hazards seen within the environment or within the resources accessible to children. Clear space is available to allow children to move around safely. Staff are vigilant to ensure children are supervised at all times.

Children access safe and very suitable equipment themselves from low level and secure shelving. Therefore, they are encouraged to make safe and independent choices. Children use low level chairs and tables as well as floor space to allow freedom in their play.

Children learn to keep themselves safe. Staff give clear and understandable explanations to children about their safety such as only climbing the tree if they can reach it, holding the long poles close to their body so that they don't hit anyone and to tuck chairs in so others don't trip. Good and effective risk assessments are carried out to ensure the environment and resources that children use are always safe and appropriate for their use. Children are taken off the premises on a regular basis for nature walks and to use the grassed area to the side of the church. Staff are very vigilant to ensure all children are in their supervision. However, staff have not gained written permission to take children off site.

Children's welfare is promoted well due to the staff's good understanding of safeguarding procedures. The setting has an up to date safeguarding statement including what to do if allegations are made against staff. Staff have attended recent training to ensure they follow procedures correctly and have good levels of knowledge regarding types of abuse and who to contact for support. Visitors are asked to sign in a visitors book to demonstrate who has access to children whilst they are in the settings care.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

Children have free access to a wealth of activities, resources and equipment mainly based on Montessori learning techniques. They are encouraged to make independent choices throughout the session and all children are seen to be actively involved, engaged and engrossed in these activities. Staff are deployed well to encourage children's participation and learning. They enthusiastically engaged children in small groups and one to one discussions to help children think about their learning processes. All children are provided for, through a flexible routine, to ensure stability and continuity. Staff have some knowledge of the 'Birth to three matters' framework but use their specific knowledge of children from birth to six years of age to ensure children develop by stage and that their progress is recorded and provided for.

Nursery education

The quality of teaching and learning is good.

Children are making good progress towards the Early Learning Goals within the Foundation Stage. Children receive good levels of positive and effective interaction from all staff who observe where children are playing and what they are achieving from this play. A well organised routine helps children to concentrate for long lengths of time without disturbances to their learning process. The staff ensure that children have a good balance between adult lead learning and child initiated play. Staff keep effective records of children's achievements, particularly their understanding of letter, sound and number recognition. They use these well to take children on to the next stage of development. Good systems are in place to record children's weekly and termly progress, linked to the areas of learning. Observations are made of children's achievements although some of these are not evaluative and do not inform other staff of how children have actually achieved certain stepping stones of development. Staff do plan effectively for some areas of learning such as letters and numbers, using previously recorded information to inform this planning. However, planning for other areas of learning are not given equal priority. Staff skilfully differentiate activities for children's differing abilities to ensure that questions and activities are simplified for less able children and more able children are given the challenges to help them progress further.

Children are very confident communicators, using staff's examples of complex language to describe their actions. Children confidently make marks in structured and free play situation. Some more able children are developing strong skills to enable independent labelling of work. Less confident children begin to develop skills using sand trays to draw marks and letters. Children learn to act out stories using traditional stories such as "The enormous turnip", using props and story lines.

Children have a very confident understanding of mathematical concepts. They sort and compare shapes, sizes and amounts linking these to pattern and objects of familiar shapes and sizes.

Children confidently use numbers and understand amounts due to the staff's gentle encouragement to problem solve.

Children continuously have a deep respect and understanding for the environment around them especially nature and natural objects. Children effectively explore and investigate with natural materials- water, sand, leaves, berries, nuts, flowers etc- demonstrating their sensory understanding of experiences. Children use technology occasionally, learning to make different effect from different tools such as changing the blades in scissors to cut paper differently. Children confidently construct using a good range of shapes to link together to make a solid object.

Children confidently create pictures themselves using their own representations, from a good range of paper and materials. They enthusiastically sing familiar songs and join in with well known action rhymes, demonstrating their understanding of rhythm. Children thoroughly enjoy participating in small world imaginative play, acting out roles using animals and familiar play equipment such as farms.

Children demonstrate their good levels of dexterity and fine motor skills by pouring, squeezing, gripping, drawing and cutting with precision and confidence.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

Children's individuality is reflected and respected by all staff throughout the session. Children therefore feel proud of their identity. Staff use information from children's registration forms as well as informal conversations with parents to reflect this individual service. Children have access to some resources that reflect positive images of today's society to help their understanding of people's differences.

Children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are given good levels of support due to the staff's experiences, the close liaison with parents and the use of other professional's suggestions and advice.

Children's behaviour is very good. Staff and older children within the group act as very good role models for the younger children, showing them how to negotiate in their play such as sharing and taking turns, how to overcome difficult situations and quarrels, how to respect each other and to listen to each other's opinions. Children receive plentiful praise from the staff, even when a child's achievements results in making a mistake, such as putting their shoes on for the first time but on the wrong feet. Children are made to feel proud about their achievements, however small.

Children are very confident, intrigued and interested in their learning. They willingly participate in all activities and discussions, learning to socialise with different children. Children demonstrate a very caring attitude towards others by showing compassion when others are hurt or upset, getting them a tissue when they are crying. Children have excellent levels of concentration when playing in solitary or with others. They show other children how to complete new activities, allowing younger children to learn from example and then experiment with these activities themselves. Children are very independent within their personal skills, developing new skills such as putting their coats and shoes on as well as making choices as to what to play with next. Children's social, moral, spiritual and cultural development is fostered.

The partnership with parents is good, resulting in a positive impact on children's learning. Parents are openly invited into the setting at the beginning and end of the setting, talking to staff about home life as well as what the children have been doing during the session. Staff encourage parents whose child is upset to stay and settle the child before leaving. The setting has a comprehensive folder of policies and procedures available, although these are not actively accessible to parents on a daily basis. However, parents do have access to information about who to contact if they have a concern about the care of their children. Parents are very happy with the partnerships and relationships with all the staff, finding them approachable and available to discuss their children's development at all times. Staff willingly talk about individual children's achievements from each session. Parents are given a termly report on children's progress, helping them to understand aspects of the Foundation Stage and how this link to the Montessori ethos and learning practices. Staff gain useful information from parents about their children's development when they first start at the setting to ensure their individual development can be provided for.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

Children are cared for by a team of highly qualified and experienced staff. All staff hold recent checks to prove their suitability to have unsupervised access to children. Robust recruitment procedures are in place to ensure suitable staff are employed to care for children. Staff ensure that ongoing training results in their continued suitability such as renewing first aid certificates and training.

Good levels of staffing are available on all days. On some days there are four staff to 11 children ensuring all children have opportunities for one to one activities and effective small group situations. Staff ensure excellent levels of interaction and attention is given to all children throughout the session. Children are very settled and happy within their surroundings due to the familiar staff and familiar routine. Staff are very aware of their responsibilities and are quick to act when they see an opportunity for offering one to one time to individual children. Children's attendance is recorded appropriately, showing exactly who is present at any one time. All relevant policies and procedures are kept in a suitable folder and kept up to date. Staff attend good levels of ongoing training and are all interested in developing their professional skills in both nursery education and care.

All relevant documentation is recorded adequately. However, not all the children's information is kept safe secure and confidential when the setting is used by other users outside operational hours. Therefore children's welfare is occasionally compromised.

The leadership and management is good. Good observations are made by the proprietor to ensure all staff's practices are effective for all children, such as ensuring all remaining children are well interacted with to allow further staff to carry out one to one sessions with children. The staff recognise strengths and weaknesses within the nursery education programme and are quick to gain suggestions and advice to further improve their practices. Staff liaise well with local schools where most children move on to and introduce their systems for letter and sound recognition to aid children's progress within this area of learning. Children's development and staff's practices are discussed on a weekly basis to analyse what is working and what isn't.

The setting meets the needs of the range of children for whom it provides.

Improvements since the last inspection

At the last inspection, the setting was given three recommendations to improve the nursery education and five recommendations to improve child care for children.

The setting did not have an effective system to inform parents about children's progress. Parents are now verbally informed on a daily basis about what their children has been participating in. Parents receive a termly report about their child's progress linked to the Foundation Stage. They also receive the record of transfer when their child leaves the setting to go to school.

The setting did not make information about the Foundation Stage, stepping stones or the early learning goals available to parents. Parents now have a good knowledge of the Montessori system as well as an adequate understanding of the Foundation Stage and how the two systems fit together to aid children's progress and development.

The setting had limited resources to promote children's understanding of information technology. This type of resources is not part of the Montessori ethos but is part of the Foundation Stage curriculum. Children do gain experiences of technology through problem solving such as fixing different blades to scissors for different effects and the use of books, posters and maps for gaining information through different formats.

The setting had limited amounts of staff with relevant qualifications to meet the national standards, four staff now work with the children. There are three of the staff at level four status with an additional staff member who is a qualified primary school teacher with Early Years experience.

The medication records held limited information to promote children's ongoing health needs. Full consent is now sought and individual children's information is recorded in separate books. Parents are informed at the end of the session when the agreed medication was administered.

Children's existing injuries were not recorded. This is now recorded separately as part of the accident book, making it clear that the accident occurred in the parent's care and not within the setting. Staff use these records to monitor children's ongoing wellbeing.

The setting had limited resources to support children with English as an additional language. The setting now has some resources available to promote children's home languages and has a handful of children attending with English as a dual or additional language. A welcome poster has also been displayed that reflects many different languages.

The setting did not reflect confidentiality within their accident records. Accidents are still recorded allowing other parents to view other children's recorded details. Accident records are not held in a secure or confidential storage when the setting is not operating.

Complaints since the last inspection

Since the last inspection there have been no complaints made to Ofsted that requires 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):

- request written consent to take children off the premises
- ensure all children's details and information are always stored in a safe, secure and confidential system

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):

- further develop the planning and observation system to ensure children's individual development needs and their progress are reflected through all areas of learning within the Foundation Stage

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