



Skylarks Day Care

Inspection report for early years provision

Unique Reference Number	EY301868
Inspection date	21 March 2006
Inspector	Maura Pigram
Setting Address	Holcroft Road, Harpenden, Hertfordshire, AL5 5BQ
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Registered person	Skylarks Day Care Limited
Type of inspection	Integrated
Type of care	Full day 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?

Skylarks Day Care operates on Batford Nursery premises and opened in 2005. It serves the local area of Harpenden. A maximum of 20 children may attend the setting at any one time. The setting is open each weekday from 08.00 to 18.00 for 50 weeks of the year and offers flexible bookings. During the sessions the children have use of a dedicated room. They can access the enclosed outdoor play area at all times and use the nursery facilities during an allocated time.

There are currently 88 children from 3 to 5 years on roll. The majority of children who attend Skylarks also attend Batford Nursery. There are currently no funded children attending. The group supports 3 children with special needs. Children who speak English as an additional language are also supported, none currently attend.

Skylarks employs ten staff and half of these, including the manager, hold appropriate early years qualifications. They recently received the Herts Quality Standards and the Investors in People awards.

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PROVISION

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is satisfactory.

Children are protected from infection and are well taken care of if they have an accident or become ill. The team are very caring and follow clear policies and procedures. Measures such as using tissues and wiping surfaces with anti-bacterial spray help to ensure the children's welfare is met. Children routinely wash their hands before meals and snacks, therefore, they learn simple hygiene practices.

They have their health and dietary needs met because the staff work closely with the parents who give details of their children's needs. Key staff, particularly in the breakfast and tea club, update their knowledge on helping children choose a healthy lifestyle. Fruit is attractively displayed for the children who enjoy eating a wide variety. Recent research on the fat and salt levels of various biscuits resulted in the staff making adjustments to the snacks offered. This means that as a result the children are well nourished. However, snacks and main meals are prepared by adults which potentially hinders the children's independence skills.

Children have ample opportunities to enjoy fresh air and physical play both outdoors and indoors. They relish the time spent in the well resourced and spacious garden. Here they enjoy riding bikes, cars and scooters, digging in the large sand pit and climbing on the apparatus. Children have some opportunity to rest and sleep on armchairs and cushions. This area is under development ensuring that children who attend for a long day are given the opportunity to rest when required.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is satisfactory.

Children are cared for in a bright and secure indoor and outdoor environment where risks are identified and minimised through the use of effective risk assessments. This means they are able to play safely and move around throughout the setting independently. A password system is in place for the safe collection of children. Emergency evacuation procedures are practised regularly and records of this are maintained, therefore, children are familiar with the procedure to follow in an emergency.

Staff give high priority to helping children understand how to keep themselves safe.

They are reminded how to play safely when outside, such as climbing on the apparatus and driving their cars. They learn about road safety during the walks undertaken within the local environment. Themes related to 'people who help us' help the children develop their understanding of the various professionals within the community who help them stay safe, such as police and fire officers.

Children's welfare and safety is further protected because the majority of the team have up-to-date knowledge of the possible signs and symptoms of abuse and neglect. They are aware of the procedures to follow if they had any concerns, although existing injuries are not recorded. Consequently, procedures to protect children's welfare are not fully comprehensive.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

Children are happy and settled in a child centred, calm and caring environment where strong relationships between children and staff are developed. They rapidly develop and extend their knowledge because experienced staff skilfully interact with them. The manager and her team naturally extend their play and encourage shy or reluctant children to take part in singing games such as 'farmers in his den'. This means that all children are included and are helped to enjoy group activities which promotes their social skills.

Children develop confidence and self-esteem because they initiate their own play. They respond excitedly to the broad range of learning and play opportunities available. They love imaginative play and have ample opportunities to develop this such as outside in the well resourced and spacious garden. They use the crates and apparatus to hide from the 'big bad wolf' and to build castles. The children relate well to each other throughout their play, they know how to take turns happily negotiating with each other.

Children's time spent at the setting, including the holiday play scheme, benefit from the wide range of structured activities such as cooking, arts and crafts, music and singing. Recently they enjoyed a theatre visit to see a puppet show and took part in a visit from 'the magic carpet'. This involved the children in listening and joining in with music and songs created by the visitors. This raised ample opportunities for asking questions and talking to the interested staff.

Children benefit from the experienced and caring staff who are aware of the 'Birth to three matters' framework. All staff have attended training and the manager is proactive in including this knowledge in developing the activities for the children.

Nursery Education

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. There are no funded children currently attending the setting. However, children make good progress because the staff know the children well. They use information gained from parents and initial assessments to find out how much the children know and can do. The children are supported by the competent manager and the well established team who are

committed to training and have an effective understanding of the Foundation Stage. The manager uses these assessments to inform planning and detailed evaluations of these are maintained. Plans cover all six areas of learning but do not show challenges for the children. Therefore, the activities planned do not indicate how these can be developed to extend the children's knowledge.

Children become very involved in outdoor and indoor play, particularly imaginative play where they take on family roles or those of familiar people in the community, such as doctors and nurses. Some of the children are capable readers but do not readily select books from the current storage unit as the presentation is not attractive to the children. They enjoy listening to stories and songs joining in with enthusiasm and gusto. Children are confident to initiate conversations and staff skilfully extend their language and understanding. They talk about wild rabbits and that they live underground in warrens. Older children are able to take turns in conversations and listen to what others are saying. Children are eager to write their names and numbers, holding pencils correctly. They have some opportunities to write for a purpose such as using a diary in the hospital area to record the babies names and weight.

Children develop their mathematical understanding as staff use related language throughout the children's play. When playing with bricks and construction they understand simple terms such as more or less. They learn about weights and measuring when cooking. They are also able to weigh their 'babies' in the hospital play area. However, there are missed opportunities for children to see numbers as labels.

Staff give the children the opportunity to explore technology through the use of interactive toys. They readily access the computer and enjoy playing appropriate games on here. Positive interaction from staff allows the children to become excited when they discover how to listen to their own heartbeat in the hospital play area. They are finding out about the wider world through their outings to local allotments and visits to a local theatre to see a puppet show. They also have regular visitors such as musicians and clowns, this helps the children acquire new knowledge and skills such as practising hand-eye co-ordination when plate spinning. Fine motor skills are developed by the children independently accessing painting and joining in with adult led art and craft activities. Some children produce high quality paintings and are able to express in clear detail features of animals such as sheep, rabbits and giraffes. All children's work is valued as they are encouraged to share their thoughts about their creativity.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

Children are highly valued and all children, regardless of their gender or capabilities, are included in the provision. All staff, including those who work in the breakfast and tea club, know the children well and there are strong relationships between them and the children. They develop a strong sense of belonging as the staff know the children's likes and dislikes well and are very active in ensuring their needs are met.

All children eagerly join in with adult led activities and have plenty of opportunities for free play, they are given choices throughout the sessions and following registration. This means that they develop self-esteem, are valued and can make decisions.

There is a sound system in place to support children with special needs and who speak English as an additional language. Staff work closely with the parents and other professionals to ensure all children can participate in the activities, some children have individual support. This means that children of all abilities are valued. Children learn about diversity and the world around them from the visitors to the setting such as the 'magic carpet'. Here the children were able to join in with songs from around the world and they made hand prints on a map of the world to demonstrate where the songs originated from. Therefore, children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is fostered. Children learn boundaries because the calm staff are always consistent and clear in delivering messages, such as reminders to take turns when playing with a favourite toy. Social skills, such as developing well mannered children are a high priority and the children are reminded to say please and thank-you. Praise is actively given to the children throughout all activities.

The partnership with parents and carers is good. There is a positive partnership with parents who speak highly of the friendly and approachable staff. The parents receive regular newsletters and there are posters and information sheets about the Foundation Stage Curriculum displayed on the windows and walls for parents to read as they collect their children. They also receive a welcome pack which provides clear information on policies and procedures. A parent notice board is under development with a view to creating a parent rota, relevant workshops and inviting parents in to share their skills with the children. Regular open sessions are held where staff informally share information about the children's progress. They can also talk to the staff at any time about the progression their children are making. They are given information about who to approach if they are unhappy about any aspects of the setting and staff are aware of the procedure to follow in the event of any concerns. Parents are encouraged to be involved in their children's learning by knowing the proposed themes and activities which are brought to their attention through the newsletters and notices.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

Children benefit from the staff who are committed to training and enhancing the provision. The adult: child ratio positively supports children's care, learning and play as there are ample experienced and caring staff on duty at all times. The team understand their roles and responsibilities well. As a result of this, the children can take an active part in the setting and their care and education is well supported. The manager works closely with the staff, including the administration support team, to ensure that policies and procedures allow the successful running of the setting and the children's welfare and safety are effectively met. All staff work very well together and the change over at breakfast, lunch and tea operate smoothly which means that the children are provided with high quality care throughout their day. There is a sound recruitment and vetting procedure in place and all staff have obtained Criminal

Record Bureau checks. Children's records are confidentiality maintained. Overall, the provision meets the needs of the range of children for whom it provides.

Leadership and management is good. There are no funded children attending, however, the manager has an extremely clear vision for nursery education and is proactive in evaluating practice. The manager evaluates and monitors her plans and assessments to suit the learning needs of the children including those with special needs. Strengths within the curriculum and areas for improvement are continually assessed and shared with the team. This means that children's learning is well supported, they are helped to make effective progress towards the early learning goals by all staff. She and her deputy are strong role models, they naturally motivate and interact with all of the children ensuring they develop and are active and independent learners. She has attended relevant training and actively shares any new knowledge with staff members. Suitable resources are easily available for staff to increase or reinforce their understanding of issues related to the children's education.

In addition, she has a sound vision for the future of the setting. This means that children's needs are a core of the provision, any ideas for the future are fully discussed with the team and with other relevant members of the school, including the head teacher. Management meetings are regularly held and a business plan for the immediate and long term future are in place. The majority of the team are long term and professional development is actively encouraged. Any new members are clearly inducted, as a result of this children's learning continues smoothly. Children benefit from the dedicated staff who know their responsibilities through clear job descriptions and appraisals. The team work very well together and are committed to the on-going improvement of the provision. They have developed positive working relationships and are committed to promoting an inclusive environment in which every child matters.

The manager has established close links with their network organisations and works in partnership with them to improve the provision. She continually reviews the day to day running of the setting to ensure the transition periods between breakfast, lunch and tea operate smoothly and without stress for the children. There are clear policies and procedures in place to allow the effective running of the setting and to keep children healthy and safeguard their welfare.

Improvements since the last inspection

Not applicable

Complaints since the last inspection

There have been no complaints made to Ofsted since registration.

The provider is required to keep a record of complaints made by the 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

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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):

- review snack time to promote independence and review rest and sleep provision
- record existing injuries.

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):

- include challenges for children on plans
- develop opportunities for mark making and for seeing numbers as labels.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the leaflet *Building better childcare: Compliments and concerns about inspectors' judgements* which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk