

The Little Group

Inspection report for early years provision

Unique Reference Number	EY346483
Inspection date	06 June 2007
Inspector	Amanda Jane Tyson
Setting Address	Rear of St Josephs Primary School, Rose Bank, Epsom, Surrey, KT18 7RS
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Registered person	Eagle House School
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 outstanding. The registered person meets the National Standards for under 8s day care and childminding.

The quality and standards of the nursery education are outstanding.

WHAT SORT OF SETTING IS IT?

The Little Group opened in 1992 and changed ownership in 2006. It operates from a single storey building in the grounds of St. Joseph's Roman Catholic Primary School in Epsom in Surrey. The Little Group offers specialist day care for children aged two to six years who have a complex communication disorder or Autistic Spectrum disorder. Specialist teaching and speech therapy are built into the curriculum on a full time basis. A maximum of 35 children may attend the nursery at any one time. The nursery is open Monday to Thursday from 09:30 to 15:00 and on Fridays from 09:30 to 12:00, term time only. Children have access to a secure outdoor play area. There are currently 41 children aged from two to six years on roll. Of these 18 children receive funding for nursery education. Children come from a wide catchment area. The nursery currently supports a number of children who speak English as an additional language. The nursery employs 15 members of staff. All of the staff, including the head teacher hold highly accredited qualifications. The setting receives support from the Early Years Childcare Service.

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PROVISION

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

High levels of attention are given to meeting children's complex health and medical needs. All practitioner's are trained to administer first aid and have completed additional training to enable them to administer specific and more invasive medication when required. All required documentation relating to health, such as details of children's medical history and necessary parental consents, accidents and administered medication are well maintained. A well structured gazebo provides good sun protection outdoors and the recent topic on sunshine resulted in children being able to tolerate sun hats and accept the need for sun protection cream.

Many children have food allergies and intolerances and many more have anxieties about trying different foods. The individual staged approach used for the children, for example this begins with looking, touching and licking a piece of fruit is having a remarkable effect; many children are now happily consuming a range of different fruits at snack time. Furthermore, the setting have developed a close relationship with the school cook whose commitment to adapting the presentation of the meals to meet specific needs is ensuring the children eat a well balanced and nutritious meal.

The extensive programme for physical development keeps children healthy and active and promotes understanding of how the body works. They enjoy a programme of aerobic exercise and take part in structured physical challenges early on in the session which increases their concentration during other activities later on. They run, jump and balance with developing skill when they take part in group games and during free play in the garden. Children play ball and parachute games, take part in country dancing and negotiate trim-trails because practitioners skilfully perform a visible demonstration beforehand. Children benefit greatly from the daily walking trips within the community, and they thoroughly enjoy the challenging climbing apparatus in the local parks and indoor soft play centres. Children enjoy regular massage and reflexology sessions which qualified practitioners perform. This helps to relax their muscles and the physical contact that this requires is exceptionally well suited to encourage children's acceptance of affection and to further extend adult-child relationships.

Children are exceptionally well prepared for their first full session; they happily say goodbye to parents and become immediately absorbed in play. Relationships between children and the practitioners are very affectionate and children demonstrate high levels of security and a strong sense of belonging.

The setting make sure that good hygiene is well promoted. Children know the routine of rubbing sanitising hand gel into their hands before snacks and meals, and are reminded by pictorial rules to wash their hands after using the toilet. The nursery environment is kept hygienically clean by the practitioners who regularly wash tables with antibacterial spray. The outdoor sand pit is fitted with a secure cover to prevent animal visitors and the garden is checked for animal mess daily before the children go outside. Practitioners are vigilant in noticing when children's noses need wiping, good nappy changing procedures are practised and parents are very aware of the policy for keeping children at home if they are infectious. As a result, the risk of cross infection of germs is well minimised.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is outstanding.

Exceptional attention is given to ensuring that children are cared for in a safe environment, both within the setting and during the daily outings. For example, every cupboard is securely locked to minimise the effects of children's obsessive fascination with opening and shutting doors, radiators and electrical sockets are all appropriately covered and the outdoor play area is secured with good quality perimeter fencing. The excellent range of play and learning resources and all areas used by the children are assessed daily with the use of a comprehensive check list. The garden shrubs are carefully maintained to protect children, whilst still teaching them to recognise hazards. For example, stinging nettles are all removed but some prickly shrubs are purposefully and strategically retained. High levels of adult to child ratios ensure that every child is allocated to a key adult on outings and park gates are secured with safety straps to further minimise risks of children becoming misplaced. Outstanding teaching methods, most significantly the use of visual demonstrations, laminated pictures of key words and strips of paper detailing the sequence of the outing and the rules to follow mean that children are secure in their knowledge of safety rules, where they are going, when and why. As a result, they behave well which ensures that trips are possible. Children carry a picture of their named adult and another showing hand holding which provides them with a constant reminder. The strict routine of crossing roads using a pelican is laying the foundations for future safe independence. All the required inspections relating to portable appliances and fire safety are conducted at the appropriate times, and although fire evacuation is not actually practised with the children, due to anxiety levels related to Autistic Spectrum disorders, it is practised by the team when children are not present.

Children are well safeguarded by the expertise of practitioners who have attended specific child protection training to recognise possible abuse in children with language and communication delay. Good recording and monitoring systems are in place and parents are clear about their responsibility to inform the setting of any injuries sustained to children outside of the setting.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

Children's individual care needs are exceptionally well understood by their key practitioners. Activities, and routines are planned with precision, but practitioner expertise leaves plenty of room for flexibility. The highly structured organisation of the morning and afternoon sessions, and the arrangements for the children that attend for a full day is particularly well organised to meet children's individual needs and to foster a sense of belonging. Children arrive happily and are keen to absorb themselves in play. Practitioners are secure in their knowledge and understanding of the 'Birth to three matters' framework which they have adapted and use in conjunction with the Foundation Stage curriculum guidance for activity planning. The outcomes for children are highly effective.

The quality of teaching and learning is outstanding. Practitioners have worked exceptionally hard in developing a comprehensive curriculum programme and assessment system based on the Foundation Stage guidance, but which is skilfully adapted to link with the developmental points that children with Autistic Spectrum disorders often pass through, and to accommodate the children's individual learning needs. For example, children's need to progress beyond the use of echolalic words or phrases and the need for them to understand the concept of 'pretend' and jokes, to link language with expression, and to recognise deliberate errors. Communication and language development is central to planning and the high levels of practitioner expertise

in this area is key to children's development in all other areas of learning. Every activity begins with a visual and practical demonstration which captures children's interest and means that they understand what they will be doing. Their attention and listening skills are obtained through innovative techniques, such as the introduction of electronic and programmable toys which fascinates the children. Practitioners have developed the skill of drawing and writing upside down and from right to left, so that children can view the sequence of what they will be doing vice-versa. This helps them to feel secure and confident. Much of the day is specifically structured to encourage children to engage in a variety of activities and to follow adult instruction. This is preparing them well for a school environment and minimises the tendency for children to resort to obsessive play. Nevertheless, a time for free play, usually in the well equipped outdoor play area, provides opportunities for free play.

The programme for the development of musical skills features significantly in curriculum planning. Singing introduces new key words which children learn to use in meaningful context and is always linked to other learning areas. Children explore the cause and effect properties of percussion instruments, participate in making music both with and without the use of instruments, learn to keep in time to beat and rhythm and to applaud others for their participation. Most games include singing and simple messages are successfully delivered through song, for example to remind them that it is 'tidy-up time'.

Children make patterns and marks using a wide range of interesting resources and media, for example salt pots, chalks, paint, pencils and with their fingers in cornflour. They listen and participate in storytelling because they are inspired by vocally animated practitioners and colourful props. Children are learning to link letters to sounds of key words which relate to the day's theme.

Mathematical challenges are well embedded within all activities. For example, during music children count the beats they create, sing number songs, identify shapes such as a circle of ribbon whilst balancing along it, and the different shapes of sun glass lenses during fun singing games. They count their jumps and each time they throw quoits whilst participating in physical education team games. Many children can count to high numbers and are able to calculate increasing and decreasing numbers, and recognise numeric print. Weight, volume and capacity are enthusiastically explored during water play and children are introduced to the value of coins during the regular trips to the supermarket.

Children build, mould and sieve the sand, investigate nature and experiment with hanging objects such as chimes and other interesting stimuli during outdoor free-play. There are superb and really inspirational opportunities to encourage experimental sensory development. The thematic approach to planning helps children make connections with real life. For example, children were mesmerised when a practitioner created an Olive tree with glue, glitter and real Olives. After watching paint being splattered onto piles of spaghetti which produced patterns on large sheets of paper, they were inspired to experiment on their own. They watched carefully when they were shown how to paint and thread pasta onto string to create a sequence of colour and then carefully proceeded to make their own necklaces, counting each pasta shell accurately. Children learned the association of these with Italy, the theme for the day. All themes are supported with highly worthwhile and intriguing activities such as watching different coloured water mix together as it travels through a water wheel, observing a coffee fountain, experimenting with coffee beans, and posting chickpeas down a tube whilst listening carefully to the noises they created and watched them come out the other end.

Exceedingly good use is made of the local and wider community resources to enable children's social inclusion and to promote their learning through practical experiences. Children regularly go to the supermarket to buy specific items which they identify from their pictorial lists and reinforces the process of queuing patiently to pay for their purchase. Children benefit greatly from the phenomenal amount of trips, for instance to the miniature railway, fire and police station, taxi rank, local cycle shop, golf club, launderette and Royal Mail sorting office. Some outings, such as weekly swimming lessons are routine. Excellent use is made of electronic and programmable equipment to promote knowledge and understanding of technology and how things work; children use torches, video, cameras and tape recorders regularly. Too many children have an obsessive fascination with computers, therefore these are purposefully not provided.

Children who have been attending for a while are now demonstrating very good levels of independence. They manage their personal care, can dress and undress themselves and carry out simple tasks for adults when requested. Most activities involve turn-taking, learning to wait patiently and listen carefully. Children are making excellent progress towards the six early learning goals.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

Children's individual needs are central in the planning of the curriculum and organisation of the daily routines to ensure full social and educational inclusion for all children. This fundamental ethos ensures their superb outcomes. Extensive steps are taken by practitioners to get to know the children and their families prior to the commencement of a placement. Each has an Individual Educational Plan (IEP) and care plan which details their very specific practical and emotional needs, and developmental targets. This requires significant adaptations, such as the staged approach to trying new foods because the children are all at different points on the Autistic Spectrum. The setting have worked extremely hard to develop community relationships and local providers now embrace the opportunity to welcome the children, for example they are monthly guests at the local library café and are taken behind the scenes to find out about how a supermarket operates. Excellent curriculum planning broadens the children's awareness and understanding of diversity and the wider world.

The expertise of the practitioners in the field of Autistic Spectrum disorders, and the strong and proactive approach to working in partnership with parents and carers helps children to understand rules and behave well. This enables children to access play and learning and socialise and interact with others. Changing routines that would otherwise cause the children high levels of anxiety are overcome through the use of pictorial sequence strips and media resources such as photographs, tape recorders and video. These techniques are shared with, and adopted by parents which means that children manage change extremely well, for example visiting new places, going into hospital and starting full time school. Consistent praise for 'good listening and waiting' is encouraging high levels of cooperation. Children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is well fostered.

Partnership with parents and carers is outstanding. Following home visits, all parents attend a highly supportive six week introduction programme with their child which helps them to understand their own child's behaviour and the benefits of the very specific teaching methods used at the setting. Parents, carers and extended family members further benefit from the workshops which run for six weeks, three times per year and include Saturdays to enable the attendance of those that work. Parents are fully involved in planning children's individual

learning and care programmes; they receive a detailed mid year report which they contribute to, attend their child's IEP reviews, and exchange daily information with practitioners both verbally and via the use of a detailed communication book. The curriculum plans are displayed and a weekly newsletter provides them with clear information about the group learning themes so that they can extend and support this at home. Parents report that the teaching methods and provision of parent-education workshops has significantly changed their lives; routine practical activities and family outings are now achievable.

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

Children are cared for by a carefully vetted staff team who have exceptionally high levels of expertise in the field of complex communication, and Autistic Spectrum disorders. The Little Group provide a national lead for the provision of early intervention for these groups of children.

Leadership and management is outstanding. The team are inspired by proactive and highly dedicated leadership and this unique and delightful setting is producing magnificent outcomes for children and their families. The comprehensive induction programme makes certain that new staff are secure in their knowledge and understanding of the operational procedures, and in particular how to combine the Foundation Stage of learning with the specialist teaching methods. A well implemented appraisal system demonstrates management's commitment towards personal and professional development and the regular opportunities for the team to meet together provide a forum for sharing knowledge, skills and research findings. Management ensure that the team work very closely with all the specialist and mainstream schools that children transfer to. The roles and responsibilities of practitioners are very clearly defined according to their specific area of expertise, for example, a speech and language therapist is based in each classroom and the programmes for music, physical education and sensory development are the responsibility of named practitioners. Management's profound vision for continual development is well demonstrated by their short and long term action plan. Daily briefing and de-briefing, and weekly meetings where they evaluate the effectiveness of teaching, keep the curriculum on track to meet the needs of each and every child.

Children's welfare, care and development is exceptionally well supported and underpinned by comprehensive written policies and procedures which are well shared with parents. Practitioner to child ratio's are very high and determined during the introduction period for each child. Children are cared for in one of two key groups based upon their stage of development, rather than age. Records and documentation are maintained to a very high standard and there are strict procedures in place to ensure confidentiality. The setting meets the needs of the range of children for whom it provides.

Improvements since the last inspection

Not applicable.

Complaints since the last inspection

Since registration 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.

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The quality and standards of the nursery education are outstanding.

WHAT MUST BE DONE TO SECURE FUTURE IMPROVEMENT?

The quality and standards of the care

No recommendations for improvement are made because the quality and standards of care are outstanding.

The quality and standards of the nursery education

No recommendations for improvement are made because the quality and standards of nursery education are outstanding.

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