

Queens Road Playgroup

Inspection report for early years provision

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Inspector Martyn Richards

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Type of setting Childcare on non-domestic premises

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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by Ofsted under Sections 49 and 50 of the Childcare Act 2006 on the quality and standards of the registered early years provision. 'Early years provision' refers to provision regulated by Ofsted for children from birth to 31 August following their fifth birthday (the early years age group). The registered person must ensure that this provision complies with the statutory framework for children's learning, development and welfare, known as the *Early Years Foundation Stage*.

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The setting also makes provision for children older than the early years age group which is registered on the voluntary and/or compulsory part(s) of the Childcare Register. This report does not include an evaluation of that provision, but a comment about compliance with the requirements of the Childcare Register is included in Annex B.

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Description of the setting

Queens Road Playgroup opened in its original premises in 1962. It was registered at its current address, in a classroom in Tannery Drift First School, in Royston, Hertfordshire, in 2006. It also has access to a secure outdoor area, with grassed and hard play surfaces. The playgroup serves the local area and has strong links with all local schools. It also liaises with a local Children's Centre, providing support to children and families in the area. It is open each weekday during the school term, from 8.45am until 11.45am. Extra afternoon sessions are sometimes organised to accommodate parental demand and run from 12.30pm until 2.45pm.

There are currently 44 children aged from two to three years on roll. The playgroup receives funding for early education places. The setting is able to support children with special educational needs and/or disabilities and children who speak English as an additional language.

There are six staff members who work with the children. Two members of staff, including the manager, have National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ) at level 3, while a third is a qualified teacher who has Early Years Professional Status. Three other members of staff are appropriately qualified at level 2. The playgroup is supported by the local authority, and is a member of the Pre-School Learning Alliance. It is registered by Ofsted on the Early Years Register and the compulsory and voluntary parts of the Childcare Register.

The overall effectiveness of the early years provision

Overall the quality of the provision is good.

Queens Road Playgroup is a welcoming and well managed playgroup. Skilled staff ensure children's individual needs are identified and met well. Warm and accepting relationships mean the children grow in self-confidence, enjoy learning and achieve well as they pass through the playgroup. Policies and procedures to ensure the safety of the children are mostly thorough and effectively keep children safe. Staff plan a largely good range of activities that all children can take part in and offer support when necessary. Staff have the management skills to evaluate the playgroup objectively, and they identify its strengths and weaknesses very effectively. They have brought about many significant improvements since the last inspection and their capacity to sustain improvement in the future is good.

What steps need to be taken to improve provision further?

To further improve the early years provision the registered person should:

- adjust the programme of fire drills to ensure all children who attend experience them regularly
- plan and provide a greater range of activities which link indoor and outdoor learning, and extend children's imaginations.

The effectiveness of leadership and management of the early years provision

The playgroup manager and her staff safeguard children effectively. The suitability of all adults working with the children is carefully checked. The classroom and the outdoor play areas are secure from intrusion and from children slipping out unnoticed. All staff have undergone recent and regular training in child protection, so they are alert to indications of possible mistreatment and know what action to take if they are concerned. Registers are kept carefully and all visitors must sign in and out. Staff are meticulous in guarding the children from hazards. Risk assessments of the site, equipment, and planned activities are very thorough and regularly reviewed. Checks are also made before trips are undertaken and at the start and end of each day. The playgroup shares its host school's fire alarm system and has access to the record of fire drills. The record gives a good picture of the frequency of evacuation practices, but does not fully meet the needs of a playgroup. This is because the sessional nature of the children's attendance means some of them might not be present at the appropriate times and are therefore not very familiar with the routine.

Staff work effectively as a team in leading the playgroup. The manager has skilfully allocated responsibilities among her team to ensure the children benefit from their expertise. For example, three staff coordinate special educational needs responsibilities. This system ensures children benefit from one-to-one help, from careful monitoring of their progress and advice from specialist support agencies. This provision for all children's needs is a strength of the playgroup, and the partnerships it has established amongst other early years settings and providers to support the children are excellent. The playgroup has a well organised key person scheme, which is valued by the parents. This ensures there is a single adult with a particular oversight for the development and welfare of each child, and for communicating with the child's parents.

Staff are committed to the continued improvement of the playgroup and have implemented the recommendations from the last inspection very thoroughly. They have developed and refined a good process for evaluating their own effectiveness. This has resulted in a detailed document which records the rich range of provision they make for the children. Staff are now extending the process to add a sharper focus on the impact of the playgroup's provision on children's learning, development and welfare. Their self-evaluation results in a clear-sighted and relevant action plan, detailing the improvements to be made, the responsible person and the date for implementation.

Staff enjoy an excellent programme of additional training, both externally-provided and in-house, to keep themselves up-to-date with new initiatives and good practice. Training is systematically evaluated and the insights gained are shared with the other staff. Improvements have included the very thorough implementation of the Early Years Foundation Stage framework, new weekly planning processes and individual assessment books for the children. Parents value these books highly, and comment on the encouraging picture they provide of their

children's progress. Parents also express that they are happy with the playgroup and feel well informed about events. Thoughtful planning has also brought about improvements to the outdoor area, although at present there are too few activities which link indoor and outdoor learning in an imaginative and engaging way for the children, which impacts on their choices and independence.

The quality and standards of the early years provision and outcomes for children

Children arrive happily to this light, colourful and interesting playgroup setting. There is a vibrantly coloured 'welcome' banner on prominent view as they enter. Once inside, they are quick to join in with their favourite activities before their parent or carer has left the room. Most children head for the outdoor area. Some ride wheeled toys and start role playing. They imagine stopping their vehicles to refuel at a miniature petrol pump while on their way to the shops. When asked what they are shopping for, the children discuss this question before deciding on bananas. Other children stay indoors and draw at a mark making table or try to write their names on a large, wall-mounted blackboard. Other children are captivated by the metal objects hanging from a percussion frame. With a small toy mallet they explore the sounds each object makes when struck. Adults are always on hand to help the children, but do so in a sensitive way, without taking the initiative away from them. Indoors, some children want an adult to share a book with them. They know which way up a book is held and can describe what the illustrations represent. The quiet corner of the room provides children with a calm, reflective space after exercise. Painting is also very popular and extends their creativity and motor skills. Children experiment with tones of yellow and brown, noticing how they can darken or lighten the colours, and the different marks they can make with the brush or their fingertips.

Throughout periods of self-chosen play adults promote children's language and thinking through simple questions and observations. After a very nutritious snack of fresh fruit, cheese and a drink of milk, the children join in group activities with adults. They recognise many letters and the associated sounds, and have learned simple songs to prompt their memories. A group of children make pencil and felt-tip drawings, some using a stencil. They are learning the correct way to hold a writing tool and are improving their hand and eye coordination. Staff ensure children have a good awareness of staying safe, by providing them with practical opportunities that reinforce their understanding, such as cutting pieces of paper with scissors.

Staff keep careful notes of each child's achievements and these are periodically entered into personal books. The books show the good progress children make while in the playgroup, although their skills on entry are not always as fully described as they could be. Children become more articulate throughout their time at the playgroup. They soon recognise their names and enjoy stories and books. They can count numbers in sequence and understand comparative terms, such as 'more' and 'less', 'quicker' and 'slower'. They look for insects and match them to the charts on the mini beasts table, invent fantasy stories while they ride on the rocking horse and know how to control images on a computer screen by using the

mouse. Themed activities, like making collages of homes across the world and celebrations of different festivals, give children a good appreciate of how people in other places live. They understand the importance of washing their hands before eating and have access to an excellent range of fresh foods. Children's appreciation of healthy living and nutrition is outstanding, and is supported by their constant access to outdoor physical activities and staff's explanations of the benefits of health and fitness. Their fine motor skills are developed well through the use of simple tools on the well-equipped miniature workbench and their sense of balance is extended through vigorous outdoor play. Children grow in confidence and they are excellently behaved. They make an outstanding contribution to the play group, as their behaviour is exemplary. They show responsibility for their actions by offering to help staff when tidying up after play. The skills, knowledge and personal attributes they acquire in this lively playgroup will stand them in good stead in their future education.

Annex A: record of inspection judgements

The key inspection judgements and what they mean

Grade 1 is Outstanding: this aspect of the provision is of exceptionally high quality

Grade 2 is Good: this aspect of the provision is strong

Grade 3 is Satisfactory: this aspect of the provision is sound

Grade 4 is Inadequate: this aspect of the provision is not good enough

The overall effectiveness of the early years provision

How well does the setting meet the needs of the children in the Early Years Foundation Stage?	2
The capacity of the provision to maintain continuous improvement	2

The effectiveness of leadership and management of the early years provision

The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
The effectiveness with which the setting deploys resources	2
The effectiveness with which the setting promotes equality and diversity	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding	2
The effectiveness of the setting's self-evaluation, including the steps taken to promote improvement	2
The effectiveness of partnerships	1
The effectiveness of the setting's engagement with parents and carers	2

The quality of the provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage

The quality of the provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
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Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage

Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The extent to which children achieve and enjoy their learning	2
The extent to which children feel safe	2
The extent to which children adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which children make a positive contribution	1
The extent to which children develop skills for the future	2

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Annex B: the Childcare Register

The provider confirms that the requirements of the compulsory part of the Childcare Register are: Met

The provider confirms that the requirements of the voluntary part of the Childcare Register are: Met