

St Albans Playscheme

Inspection report for early years provision

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Inspector Martyn Richards

Setting address Wheatfields Junior & Infant School, Downes Road, ST.
ALBANS, Hertfordshire, AL4 9NT
Telephone number 07979 612363
Email info@snaphearts.org.uk
Type of setting Childcare on non-domestic premises

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Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester
M2 7LA

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

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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*.

The provider must provide a copy of this report to all parents with children at the setting where reasonably practicable. The provider must provide a copy of the report to any other person who asks for one, but may charge a fee for this service (The Childcare (Inspection) Regulations 2008 regulations 9 and 10).

Children only attend this setting before and/or after the school day and/or during the school holidays. The judgements in this report reflect the quality of early years provision offered to children during those periods.

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

St Albans Playscheme is one of six Special Needs Activities and Play (SNAP) Hertfordshire Ltd playschemes, a registered charity managed by a board of trustees. It registered in 2007 and is organised into distinct groups for children aged from four to 10, and for those over 10. The provision for the younger children operates from two rooms plus a dining hall in Wheatfields Infants School in St Albans, Hertfordshire. The children also have access to an enclosed outdoor play area. A maximum of 16 children aged from four to eight may attend the playscheme at any one time, although it is open to children and adults up to age of 19 years. At the time of the inspection there were seven children in the Early Years Foundation Stage age group on roll, three of whom were present. The playscheme is open each weekday for four weeks in the school summer holidays from 10.00am to 3.00pm. It also opens during the Christmas and Easter holidays, and on some Saturdays during the year.

The setting is established to support children with special educational needs and/or disabilities and has the necessary access, facilities and equipment to meet their needs. It also welcomes children who speak English as an additional language, although there are none on roll at present. It has links with other providers and specialists who support the children, along with the schools they attend, and with their parents.

St Albans Playscheme employs six members of staff. Of these, two are qualified teachers, whilst another is completing a course for a childcare qualification. Staff are assisted by several trained volunteers.

The playscheme is registered 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.

St. Albans playscheme provides a welcoming and secure environment for its children. Each child is seen as unique, and the play activities provided are tailored well to meet their individual needs. The playscheme is inclusive, and all the children have access to the activities offered, with whatever adjustments are needed to meet their individual circumstances. Consequently the children settle well, and behave excellently. They have confidence in staff, and make clear headway in confidence and skill from their varied starting points. The setting is well managed, and staff are keen to see it improve even further. They have implemented the recommendations of its previous inspection well, and have been very successful in putting in place the key requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage. They have good links with the schools and other agencies which support the children, helping to ensure consistency in provision. The setting has a good capacity to continue improving in the future.

What steps need to be taken to improve provision further?

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

- develop a more systematic approach to evaluate the playscheme's strengths and weaknesses, and pinpoint priorities for development
- refine recording profiles of children's daily activities to give more attention to their learning and progress.

The effectiveness of leadership and management of the early years provision

Staff give the highest priority to ensuring that the children are safe in the playscheme. The suitability of all adults working with them is carefully checked. A very thorough staff induction programme ensures they are all aware of the possibility of mistreatment, and appreciate their responsibilities in this regard. The managers conduct a full annual check on the site, accommodation and equipment to ensure they are safe for the children. They also carry out detailed pre-visit checks for off-site trips, and a short daily health, safety and cleanliness audit of the facilities the children use. There are regular fire drills and evacuation plans are clear, and emergency exits well marked and uncluttered. Visitors must be identified before entering the setting, and systems of locks and fences ensure children cannot slip out unnoticed. Parents know the procedures to be used if they are late collecting their children, or if a child goes missing, or is met by an unauthorised adult. The care shown in safeguarding the children means they can play and learn in a calm and ordered environment.

The playscheme has very good arrangements for gathering important entry details from parents. Most parents allow staff sight of children's care plans, or individual education plans, and wherever possible staff also link with specialists working with the children, and with the schools they attend. These good links mean staff can make whatever adjustments in the planned programme are necessary to ensure each child's needs are being met. The care taken over this planning, enabling the very diverse needs of the children to be so well met, is an outstanding feature of the setting. Each child is allocated a key person, who is responsible for overseeing the welfare of the allocated child, noting the progress the child makes and liaising with parents. Parents are kept well informed of the playscheme's activities through a weekly newsletter, and can speak with staff whenever they feel the need.

The playscheme is excellently equipped, and the resources are used thoughtfully and effectively. The imaginative outdoor area provides a range of challenges for the children, while indoors there are good facilities for practical activities, for listening to stories and for resting quietly on the floor cushions. An excellent ratio of adults to children means that all children receive close support and attention from adults who know exactly when to encourage their individual choice of activity, and when to intervene to open new possibilities for experience or learning. Staff are well trained, especially in paediatric first aid, and this gives them a thorough

insight into how best to work with the children.

The playscheme has built on its past success, improving further the good quality of in-house training, and using the requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage to enrich the provision for the children. Staff work very well together as a team, and share a commitment to improving the playscheme in the future. They are led by a manager who is well informed, self-critical, dedicated and very effective. While staff have sensible aspirations for future developments, arrangements for implementing a more systematic process of self-evaluation in order to provide a sharper picture of the setting's strengths and developmental needs, are still at a relatively early stage.

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

Children settle quickly and calmly in the playscheme when they arrive. Staff are well prepared for them, and there is a good range of indoor play activities for them to choose. Some settle quickly to construction play, while others want to explore the possibilities of face painting. Some like to curl up with an adult for a chat, or to look at a book together, to play with soft toys, or just to rest for a few minutes in the inviting cushioned quiet area. There is an adult on hand for any child who wants help or company. When the weather brightens, most go outdoors. Some love to exercise their sense of adventure on the climbing apparatus, while others make musical sounds on the hanging tubular bells. Some children practice gripping and throwing skills from their wheelchairs, and two decide to work together to lift a heavy log into the sand pit.

Alongside self-chosen activities are the new starting points introduced by staff. Children are in the process of building a pirate boat from large sheets of corrugated board, and some have recently worked out how to get a rolled-up paper into a bottle as a ship-wreck message. One child made a painting depicting his favourite joke, and wrote out the joke alongside it, helped by an adult. A storyteller has visited, and arrangements are in hand for a dance group to entertain the children. Children enjoy a very good range of trips out, to a local farm for example, to Butterfly World, for a guided walk in nearby woods, and go swimming in Hatfield.

The children enjoy stories, singing, painting and dancing. They count how many are present each morning, and recognise the regular shapes of some of the floor mats they sit on. Trips and visitors contribute to their understanding of the wider world about them. They eat their healthy fruit snacks eagerly, and can have a cold drink whenever they want one. The children have a good understanding of hygiene and they know their hands need washing during the day. The children's behaviour is excellent and makes a major contribution to the calm and happy ethos of the playscheme. They play independently, and occasionally together, with no quarrels. They choose activities confidently, await turns when necessary, and are polite and helpful. They enjoy the chance to chat with adults and visitors, confident they will be understood. Because they are so well looked after, and frequently engrossed in engaging activities, they build well on their existing skills. Staff keep daily notes of

each child's activity, and these are used to help adjust play activities for the different children. At present the notes give a picture of what the children have done each day, but little insight into how the activities have promoted their learning and progress. Children's warm and friendly manner, their enthusiasm, and growing self-confidence and skills, will help them as they move through their 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	1
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	2
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	2
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