

Friends Junior School

Inspection report for early years provision

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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 provider must give a copy of this report to all parents with children at the setting where reasonably practicable. The provider must give a copy of the report to any other person who asks for one, but may charge a fee for this service (The Day Care and Childminding (inspection) (England) Regulations 2005 No 2300 Regulations 5 and 6).

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 NURSERY EDUCATION

On the basis of the evidence collected on this inspection:

The quality and standards of the nursery education are good.

WHAT SORT OF SETTING IS IT?

The Friends School is situated close to the centre of Saffron Walden, Essex and was founded over 300 years ago. The early years department has been in existence for

10 years. The school occupies a main building and several additional teaching blocks; the Early Years Unit is situated in its own set of classrooms with attached enclosed outdoor space. The school serves both the local area and surrounding towns and villages.

There are currently 42 children from three to five years on roll within the Early Years Unit. This includes 36 funded three and four year olds. The school opens five days a week during school term-times. Younger children may attend part-time. Nursery sessions run from 08:30 to 11:45; 11:45 to 13:10; 13:10 to 15:20. A breakfast club and after school club activities are also available.

Five members of staff work regularly with the nursery and reception children, together with the Head of Early Years and other specialist teachers within the school, who are also qualified teachers. All of the staff are appropriately qualified in Early Years.

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PROVISION

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

Nursery Education

The quality of teaching and children's learning is good. Children use their imagination in a wide range of play situations such as the garden centre in the role play area or playing with the cars in the outdoor play area. They explore their creativity in art and craft, sticking skeletons of imaginary animals or painting pictures of snowdrops or stormy skies. They explore a wide range of interesting medium such as ice, shaving foam and pasta with lentils to learn about texture and to explore their senses. They notice that the shaving foam feels 'soft and sticky' and that 'it smells like shampoo'.

Children use number names in their play and count 'how many' cups they need to set the table for snack time. They expertly use their knowledge of calculations when they talk about bikes they are 'fixing' in the role play area to conclude that 'two wheels on the back and one wheel on the front makes three wheels altogether'. Older children have good opportunities to write numbers at circle time discussions; they recognise large numbers and show a very good understanding of mathematical concepts such as counting on. Good teaching strategies, for example, the use of a number line, wipe board and instructions to 'hold the number in your head', enables them to successfully build on what they already know. Children learn about time, using the sand timer and counting in seconds to find out how long it takes to perform 'helper' tasks for their teacher.

Children in the Foundation Stage communicate very effectively and use a wide range of vocabulary to express their ideas and talk about what they know. They discuss where their parents go to work and know that 'London is a long way away. You have

to go on a train or you get stuck in lots of traffic'. They talk to adults about their thoughts and anticipate what might happen next: 'I'm going to play with the dinosaurs next, then I'm going to play with the computer'. Children discuss what they do at home and talk about their families with understanding. They talk about 'going to a wedding' and demonstrate with confidence how they danced at the disco. They learn about the natural world, monitoring the seasons through topics and artwork. For example, topics such as mini-beasts provide opportunities for children to observe snails. They talk about 'spiral shapes' on the snail's shell; they know that 'caterpillars eat lots and lots of food then they change into a cocoon and become a butterfly'. They talk with understanding about the life cycle of chickens and know that 'the chick bangs on the shell with it's beak to get out'.

Children look at books alone and with adults; they turn pages from front to back carefully and listen with keen interest to stories. Library sessions provide children with good opportunities to choose their own books and take them home to share with their parents and carers, further promoting early reading skills and fostering an enjoyment of books and stories. Children join in with group discussions and take turns to speak at circle time. They enjoy music and movement and sing their favourite songs to each other. Adults use music effectively to help children to express themselves creatively. For example, children listen to Beethoven's Pastoral Symphony to give them inspirations for artwork and songs about animals are chosen to encourage children to stomp like an elephant and roar like a lion. Children are beginning to learn about sounds and experiment with sounds in spoken words. They notice rhymes in words and finish rhyming phrases successfully. Children know that writing carries meaning and younger children can read familiar words such as their own name. Older children use their growing phonic knowledge to write words on their own and are confident to attempt more difficult words.

Children develop a wide range of physical skills and show very good co-ordination and control when they use scissors, paint brushes and ride bikes or balance on the beam in the outdoor play area. They demonstrate an awareness of how their bodies work, talking about being hot and thirsty after outdoor play. In addition, children understand how to keep themselves healthy in the future. They wash their hands before eating and know that 'germs make you sick'.

Nursery staff and teachers working with children have a very good knowledge and understanding of the Foundation Stage areas of learning. They follow the Foundation Stage curriculum well, presenting activities in an interesting way to encourage children to learn through their play. For example, children learn about writing by using the mark-making resources in the garden centre and doctor's surgery; they learn about numbers and letters by making giant collages or sorting socks on the 'washing line'. Teachers are able to form challenging questions for children and provide them with time to think in order that they can demonstrate what they know. Staff regularly observe children so that they can record their achievements. Curriculum plans are clear and linked to stepping stones and early learning goals; as a result a broad and balanced range of activities is provided over time. However, children's observation records are not yet used successfully to plan activities that build on what every child knows and enjoys. As a consequence, some activities lack

challenge for some children. For example, adults do not routinely ask children to write their name on their artwork; they miss opportunities to help children to extend their understanding of practical mathematics in daily activities such as snack time and the use of pre-cut shapes in sticking activities limits children's ability to develop new physical skills. This affects learning.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

Children demonstrate a very good sense of belonging and have high levels of self-esteem. They confidently greet their teachers and each other upon arrival and leave their parents and carers easily. They are self-assured and independent in most aspects. Their work is on display in all areas and they join in with various activities with the rest of the school to encourage them to feel part of the school community. However, the organisation of the sessions affects children's ability to pursue their own interests and affects their ability to make discoveries in an environment that suits their individual learning needs.

Children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is fostered. They confidently share experiences at circle time and talk with enthusiasm about what they do at home. Adults encourage children to work together co-operatively during group activities with clear explanations to help them to learn about taking turns and sharing. Staff in all areas of the Foundation Stage engage in discussions with children about expectations for behaviour and as a result children behave very well and show respect for one another. For example, children talk about each others' individual skills, saying another child is 'a very good thinker' and use conventions such as 'please' and 'thank you' in their conversations as a matter of course. Children have opportunities to learn about the world they live in through activities such as writing in Chinese characters to celebrate Chinese New Year. They play with Small World figures, look at books and take part in a wide range of cultural and religious celebrations. Circle time discussions enable children to learn about each other's family culture so that they develop positive attitudes towards diversity. Teachers work closely with the parents and carers of children with English as an additional language and those who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities so that all children make good progress.

The partnership with parents and carers is good. It contributes effectively to the progress of children who receive funded early education. Parents receive good information about Foundation Stage activities in regular newsletters and on the noticeboard in the entrance area. Staff share information informally with parents on a daily basis so that children's individual needs are well met. Parents receive good information about children's progress and about the activities children will take part in, so that they can support their child's learning at home. Parents are able to influence the day to day running of the school by taking up a place on the Parent and Teacher Committee.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

Leadership and management of nursery education are good. All areas of the physical environment are bright, attractive and very stimulating for young children. The Early Years Unit provides plenty of space for children to move around safely and independently. Resources are well organised and clearly labelled, to help children to find what they want easily and to promote early reading and writing skills. Children's work is on display in all areas, promoting a sense of belonging and enhancing children's self-esteem. The adjacent outdoor area is clearly zoned, with areas for learning about nature, developing new physical skills, learning about numbers and writing and for engaging in imaginative role play scenarios.

The school implements effective recruitment procedures, which ensure that each member of staff has suitable experience and qualifications; ongoing appraisal of staff's skills identifies areas for professional development and informs training. Staff have regular opportunities to meet with the rest of the school as a team and share good practice. In addition, the Early Years team attend a wide range of outside training sessions to further enhance the provision.

Nursery staff work closely with the reception teacher to help the children to make a smooth transition into school. This helps children to be confident and to settle into school more easily. Clear planning and assessment systems have been developed and implemented. A self-evaluation tool is in place and used to identify areas for further development to secure ongoing improvement in teaching and learning. As a result, all aspects of the curriculum are well promoted and children are making very good progress towards the early learning goals.

However, the organisation of the sessions affects children's ability to pursue their own interests continuously. For example, children are unable to explore the outdoor area except at specific times and staff call them away from self-chosen activities, even when they are interested and engaged, to take part in adult-led activities where there are limited opportunities for children to extend their learning beyond the planned learning intentions. This impacts upon the children's ability to engage in sustained thinking and affects their ability to make discoveries in an environment that suits their individual learning needs.

Overall, children's needs are met.

Improvements since the last inspection

At the last inspection of early education, there were no recommendations raised. However the nursery were advised to give consideration to improving the provision of resources to introduce children to everyday technology and to devise a system to enable parents to share information about their child before they enter the setting.

Since the last inspection the nursery has provided children with improved

opportunities to explore everyday technology in their play. For example, children use telephones, 'scanners' and cash registers in the role play garden centre; they use an electronic guitar and access 'V-Tech' computerised story books. In addition, children use the computer in the classrooms freely and as a result, they are competent in the use of both the mouse and the keyboard, enabling them to complete simple programmes effectively.

Staff collect good information about children when they start at the setting. Information about children's likes and dislikes are recorded, together with details about basic skills that children have acquired. This information is added to children's progress records and effectively used to build on what children already know and can do.

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WHAT MUST BE DONE TO SECURE FUTURE IMPROVEMENT?

The quality and standards of nursery education

To improve the quality and standards of nursery education further the registered person should take account of the following recommendation(s):

- develop the system for planning and assessment: use key worker and parents' observations of what children enjoy and do well to plan activities; make sure that all activities offer adequate challenge and provide opportunities for children to extend their learning beyond the planned learning intentions
- develop the organisation of the sessions to provide children with improved access to the outdoor play area and increased opportunities to make decisions about what activities they will take part in: encourage them to pursue their own interests, engage in extended periods of sustained thinking without interruption and explore their preferred learning environment independently.

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