

Alphabets Nursery

2 Hillary Road, Penenden Heath, Maidstone, Kent, ME14 2JP

Inspection date

12/08/2014

Previous inspection date

24/02/2009

The quality and standards of the early years provision

This inspection:

3

Previous inspection:

1

How well the early years provision meets the needs of the range of children who attend	3
The contribution of the early years provision to the well-being of children	3
The effectiveness of the leadership and management of the early years provision	3

The quality and standards of the early years provision

This provision requires improvement

- Children play in a bright, colourful and welcoming environment where the resources are easily accessible.
- Staff teach children about the importance of a healthy lifestyle through providing a balanced diet and daily outdoor play.
- Staff work in partnership with parents to support children's learning at home and in the setting.

It is not yet good because

- Staff do not effectively observe or assess children's learning. Consequently, planning is not always successful in providing challenging activities during children's everyday play.
- Staff do not consistently use open-ended, interesting questions to develop children's language skills, or to give them time to consider their answers and respond.
- The key-person system is not fully effective in sharing information about the children and tailoring activities to children's needs. Staff do not always provide children with enough opportunities to complete self-chosen activities to their own satisfaction.

Information about this inspection

Inspections of registered early years provision are:

- scheduled at least once in every inspection cycle – the current cycle ends on 31 July 2016
- scheduled more frequently where Ofsted identifies a need to do so, for example where provision was previously judged inadequate
- brought forward in the inspection cycle where Ofsted has received information that suggests the provision may not be meeting the legal requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage or where assessment of the provision identifies a need for early inspection
- prioritised where we have received information that the provision is not meeting the requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage and which suggests children may not be safe
- scheduled at the completion of an investigation into failure to comply with the requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage.

Inspection activities

- The inspector observed children taking part in a variety of activities.
- The inspector reviewed documentation, including policies, procedures for complaints and safeguarding, and children's records.
- Discussions were held with parents on the day of the inspection to obtain their views.
- A joint observation was carried out with the manager.

Inspector

Maxine Ansell

Full report

Information about the setting

Alphabets Nursery opened under new management in April 2003 and is registered on the Early Years Register. It is situated in the residential area of Penenden Heath, in the north of Maidstone, Kent. It operates from three main rooms in a converted shop, with a private, secure and enclosed outdoor play area. The nursery serves the local and surrounding areas.

The group opens five days a week all year round. Sessions are from 8am until 6pm. There are currently 65 children on roll. The nursery is in receipt of funding for early education for two-, three- and four-year-olds. Children attend for a variety of sessions. Staff support children with learning difficulties and disabilities, and those who learn English as a second language. The nursery employs 12 members of staff and a cook. All staff who work directly with the children hold relevant early years qualifications.

What the setting needs to do to improve further

To meet the requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage the provider must:

- ensure each child's key person uses the information about their children's interests to tailor and support their learning to enable them to make good progress in all areas of learning, and shares information to help children settle as they move through the nursery
- use the observations and assessments of children to plan more challenging activities during their everyday and self-chosen play.

To further improve the quality of the early years provision the provider should:

- improve staff's use of open-ended questions to further develop children's language skills and give them time to think about their answers
- provide children with more opportunities to complete activities to their satisfaction, to enable them to think things through for themselves and solve problems independently.

Inspection judgements

How well the early years provision meets the needs of the range of children who attend

Children enjoy their time at the nursery. Staff greet each child as they arrive, which helps children to separate from their parents confidently. The environment is bright, colourful and welcoming. Staff make sure that toys and resources are easily accessible, helping children to make choices about their play and develop their independence. Children have access to a wide range of equipment both indoors and in a secure outdoor area. However, staff do not use their knowledge of the children's developmental needs to plan challenging activities during their everyday self-chosen play, based on their interests. For example, staff did not follow up on children's enthusiastic interest in kings. They did not provide any relevant resources or discussion to extend this interest, or use it to develop children's learning in other areas.

Staff promote children's developing knowledge of letters and sounds, and many children recognise their own names and those of their friends, from a selection of name cards. Staff support this knowledge with daily activities. However, on occasions these activities lack challenge and interest for the children, because staff do not extend familiar activities to provide new challenges. There are also times when adult-planned sessions take children away from their self-chosen play. For example, children were involved in independently finding the letters to spell 'elephant' on a magnetic board. One child told another, 'I know it ends with a 't'', and continued to look at the letters. A member of staff then called them for an adult-led, letters and sounds, session and the opportunity to enable the children to solve this problem was lost.

Children show good behaviour and listening skills when listening to stories and in group activities. Staff have improved children's knowledge and skills in the development of early language acquisition, through initiatives such as the 'Every child a talker' (ECAT) programme. However, staff trained in delivering the ECAT programme have now left. Current staff are not consistent in using useful questions to develop children's language skills further and encourage them to respond in more than single word replies. In addition, some staff do not give children time to consider their responses.

Staff have a comprehensive system to show their planning and assessment. They carry out home visits before children start to enable staff to see them in their home surroundings. They use the information they gather to assess children's starting points and help them to settle into the nursery. Parents regularly contribute to children's learning through verbally sharing information, adding photographs to their children's learning journey progress records and during monthly planning meetings. Staff regularly exchange ideas at these meetings to assist parents in develop their children's skills at home. The quality of teaching in promoting children's personal and social development, as well as children's physical development is generally good.

The majority of staff understand how to promote the learning and development of young children. However, the quality of teaching is variable. Some staff did not extend children's learning effectively or help them to solve problems. For example, staff showed the children zoo animals, and provided their names and distinguishing features in quick succession. Children did not have time to respond, and staff did not check to see if children had understood what they were saying. The children then lined up four animals and counted them with ease. Staff did not challenge them further, for example, by adding more animals to count, or by asking questions to help them think about simple addition

and subtraction. In addition, staff do not always consider the needs of less able children in group activities to ensure they understand what they are saying.

Staff enable children to have regular opportunities for outdoor play where they can learn about the natural world. Staff encourage children to care for the plants and investigate natural materials, such as sand and soil. Children independently develop their imaginations in the role-play areas, happily making tea and discussing their homes.

The contribution of the early years provision to the well-being of children

Children share close bonds as a group with the staff. They show staff and each other respect as they play together in the calm and welcoming environment. Staff enable children to gain a sense of belonging because they display their work around the rooms. Children are confident in the setting, independently selecting the easily accessible resources. However, due to changes in staffing, and individual roles and responsibilities, the key-person system is not fully effective. For example, key persons do not always take account of their children's interests and abilities in order to plan effectively, or provide support when they need it. On occasions, less able children do not engage with group activities, or in individual play, and children are not always supported well by staff as they move through the nursery.

Staff provide a calm and settled learning environment. They encourage children to take turns with toys and share, so they develop good life skills. Staff offer praise and encouragement, and consequently, children are happy. They behave well and play cooperatively. Staff are good role models and encourage respect and behaviour that is acceptable. For example, during adult-directed activities, children are encouraged to listen to one another. This means staff help children to learn to take turns, share resources, and be kind. The manager has attended training on behaviour management. Consequently, staff implement positive strategies to ensure consistency across the nursery.

Parents speak highly of the warm, welcoming atmosphere of the nursery. Parents are pleased with the way the children behave and interact. A parent commented, 'My children are happy coming here and run off as soon as they are through the door'. This reassures parents that their children are settled and happy.

Staff find out about children's dietary or allergy needs to ensure they are appropriately met and children are kept safe. The staff ensure that the children receive a balanced diet through breakfast, snack and a lunchtime meal, freshly prepare on the premises. Children independently wash their hands and the older children select their own food from bowls on the table. Staff have provided not only opportunities for physical activities in the outdoor area, but also opportunities for children to explore, grow and tend to their own vegetables. This means that children are developing a good understanding of a healthy diet and know where food comes from. Staff help children to learn about keep safe. For example, children can see photographs of themselves practising the fire evacuation procedure.

The nursery has links with the local schools and passes information about individual children to assist with a smooth transfer to school. However, information about the children's needs are not always communicated effectively to the next key person. Therefore, a smooth transition from room to room is not always possible.

The effectiveness of the leadership and management of the early years provision

The inspection found that the provider had failed to notify Ofsted of changes to the registered individual and the manager. It is a requirement to do so. However, the impact on the children is minimal and, therefore, Ofsted does not intend to take further action on this occasion. The nominated person took immediate action by contacting Ofsted so that information can be updated and all necessary checks can be completed. The manager has been employed for several years, previously as a staff member, and has a sound knowledge of the safeguarding and welfare requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage. However, systems to monitor the learning and development requirements are not fully effective.

Staff have a good knowledge of how to safeguard children. They have a secure and well-developed understanding of the procedure to follow in the event of a concern about a child or member of staff. This means that there is a culture where children are kept safe and secure, and any concerns from parents, staff or children are heard and acted upon.

Management has robust recruitment systems. These ensure all staff working directly with children hold appropriate qualifications, are suitable to fulfil the requirements of their roles and have had appropriate checks carried out. Where checks have not been completed, the manager has effective strategies in place to ensure that the member of staff only completes supervised duties. Therefore, the manager has a strong priority for safeguarding.

Staff receive regular supervision meetings throughout the year to promote their continuous professional development and have opportunities to discuss any concerns about the children. As a result, all staff, including new members of staff, feel supported in their work.

The manager has an appropriate understanding of her role in monitoring the educational programmes. She collates and evaluates children's records three times a year to ensure children are making the expected progress. However, systems to scrutinise the children's records to ensure they make good progress through effective and challenging activities is less rigorous between these evaluations. Therefore, staff do not always provide children with challenging activities during their everyday and self-chosen play.

The nursery staff work well with outside agencies and professionals to benefit individual children. For example, they value advice from speech and language therapists.

Management and staff have strong partnerships with parents. These are developed when

information is first exchanged about the child's starting points, and continues to be exchanged through contact sheets, daily discussion and monthly planning meetings. Parents speak positively about the nursery and feel that they are well informed about their children's progress.

What inspection judgements mean

Registered early years provision

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	Outstanding provision is highly effective in meeting the needs of all children exceptionally well. This ensures that children are very well prepared for the next stage of their learning.
Grade 2	Good	Good provision is effective in delivering provision that meets the needs of all children well. This ensures children are ready for the next stage of their learning.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	The provision is not giving children a good standard of early years education and/or there are minor breaches of the safeguarding and welfare requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage. We re-inspect nurseries and pre-schools judged as requires improvement within 12 months of the date of inspection
Grade 4	Inadequate	Provision that is inadequate requires significant improvement and/or enforcement action. The provision is failing to give children an acceptable standard of early years education and/or is not meeting the safeguarding and welfare requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage. It will be monitored and inspected again within six months of the date of this inspection.
Met		There were no children present at the time of the inspection. The inspection judgement is that the provider continues to meet the requirements for registration.
Not met		There were no children present at the time of the inspection. The inspection judgement is that the provider does not meet the requirements for registration.

Inspection

This inspection was carried out by Ofsted under sections 49 and 50 of the Childcare Act 2006 on the quality and standards of provision that is registered on the Early Years Register. The registered person must ensure that this provision complies with the statutory framework for children's learning, development and care, known as the Early Years Foundation Stage.

Setting details

Unique reference number	EY263151
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	826606
Type of provision	Full-time provision
Registration category	Childcare - Non-Domestic
Age range of children	0 - 5
Total number of places	36
Number of children on roll	65
Name of provider	Alphabets Nursery Ltd
Date of previous inspection	24/02/2009
Telephone number	01622 762045

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Type of provision

For the purposes of this inspection the following definitions apply:

Full-time provision is that which operates for more than three hours. These are usually known as nurseries, nursery schools and pre-schools and must deliver the Early Years Foundation Stage. They are registered on the Early Years Register and pay the higher fee for registration.

Sessional provision operates for more than two hours but does not exceed three hours in any one day. These are usually known as pre-schools, kindergartens or nursery schools

and must deliver the Early Years Foundation Stage. They are registered on the Early Years Register and pay the lower fee for registration.

Childminders care for one or more children where individual children attend for a period of more than two hours in any one day. They operate from domestic premises, which are usually the childminder's own home. They are registered on the Early Years Register and must deliver the Early Years Foundation Stage.

Out of school provision may be sessional or full-time provision and is delivered before or after school and/or in the summer holidays. They are registered on the Early Years Register and must deliver the Early Years Foundation Stage. Where children receive their Early Years Foundation Stage in school these providers do not have to deliver the learning and development requirements in full but should complement the experiences children receive in school.

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