

Inspection of St. Joseph's Playgroup

North Road, HERTFORD SG14 2BU

Inspection date: 13 June 2025

Overall effectiveness	Good
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The quality of education	Good
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Behaviour and attitudes	Good
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Personal development	Good
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Leadership and management	Good
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Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good
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What is it like to attend this early years setting?

The provision is good

Children are confident and demonstrate a love for learning at this inviting playgroup. Staff warmly welcome children as they arrive, helping them to transition well and start their day calmly and settled. Staff provide a learning environment that is inclusive, engaging and tailored to the needs of the children. They thoroughly enjoy a range of engaging learning opportunities. Children participate enthusiastically in warm-up sessions set to music. They listen well to instructions and move their bodies in different ways, marching, galloping and stretching. Staff are highly responsive, and interactions with children are purposeful and rooted in strong knowledge of child development.

Staff promote positive attitudes to learning, encouraging children to use their 'looking eyes', 'thinking caps' and 'indoor voices' to make the most of their experiences. Staff act as positive role models and reinforce respectful, empathetic behaviour. Children are kind and caring towards each other. When their peers are upset, others show genuine concern and offer comfort, promoting positive relationships. Staff help children to have a sense of belonging within the setting. Birthdays are celebrated collectively, with songs and shared cake. Family picture boards enable children to talk about their families with pride and reinforce children's sense of identity and uniqueness.

What does the early years setting do well and what does it need to do better?

- Settling-in procedures are robust and support children's well-being from the outset. Families are invited to open days, and staff gather information about children's starting points with parental input. Home visits are carried out before the child starts, helping to build secure relationships with their key person. Photos of the staff and the environment are shared to help children feel familiar and confident before attending, which supports children's smooth transition to the playgroup.
- Communication and language are a key focus within the curriculum. Staff provide ongoing narration of children's play to introduce new vocabulary and encourage meaningful conversations. Stories are read with animation, and children are encouraged to engage by copying sounds made by the characters. Group times are used to introduce new language through songs and discussions about the weather. However, sometimes, the length of group times occasionally causes younger children to lose focus.
- The outdoor area is a key strength of the provision, offering rich and varied learning opportunities. Areas include a growing area, sandpit, climbing equipment such as monkey bars and a space for a 'daily mile' around the school field. These features actively support children to make good progress with their physical development.

- Teaching is carefully differentiated to meet the developmental needs of both older and younger children. For example, during a water play activity, younger children use larger scoops to explore, while older children use pipettes to develop strength in their fingers. Children enjoy focused activities that involve carrying out individual tasks, such as searching for items in the environment that are 'red', helping them to learn colours. However, some tasks are too advanced for younger children's abilities, which they do not fully benefit from.
- The playgroup supports children with special educational needs and/or disabilities well. Staff work with a range of external professionals to ensure that children receive tailored support. Regular communication with parents helps to ensure that they feel informed and involved in their child's development, helping children to make good progress from their starting points.
- Partnerships with parents are well established. Parents are kept informed through an online platform and regular parents' evenings. The playgroup offers support to parents to continue their child's learning at home, including resources and behaviour strategies. Parents are actively involved in the life of the playgroup through fundraising events and by sharing their own skills and professions, such as doctors visiting to speak with the children and playing musical instruments.
- Leaders foster a positive and supportive culture at the playgroup. Staff practice is monitored through observations and supervisions, and staff have access to a wide range of training opportunities to build on their skills even further. The committee plays an active role in the running of the playgroup, supporting areas such as finances, staff well-being and fundraising. Leaders and staff show a commitment to continuous evaluation to ensure that children have the very best outcomes.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

There is an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts children's interests first.

What does the setting need to do to improve?

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

- ensure that focused activities are developmentally appropriate and align with children's age and stage of understanding, to maximise learning
- review the duration and structure of group sessions to maintain engagement across all age ranges of children.

Setting details

Unique reference number	401997
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10394830
Type of provision	Childcare on non-domestic premises
Registers	Early Years Register
Day care type	Full day care
Age range of children at time of inspection	2 to 4
Total number of places	20
Number of children on roll	38
Name of registered person	St. Joseph's Playgroup, Hertford Committee
Registered person unique reference number	RP523980
Telephone number	07814849274
Date of previous inspection	27 September 2019

Information about this early years setting

St. Joseph's Playgroup registered in 2002. The playgroup employs eight members of childcare staff. Of these, four hold appropriate early years qualifications at level 3 or above. The nursery opens from Monday to Friday, during term time. Sessions are from 9am to midday, and from midday to 3pm. There is a daily lunchtime club from midday to 1pm. The playgroup provides funded early education for eligible children.

Information about this inspection

Inspector

Emily Woodhead

Inspection activities

- The manager and inspector completed a learning walk together of all areas of the playgroup and discussed the early years curriculum.
- The inspector observed the quality of education being provided, indoors and outdoors, and assessed the impact that this was having on children's learning.
- The inspector carried out a joint observation with the manager.
- The inspector talked to staff at appropriate times during the inspection and took account of their views.
- The children communicated with the inspector during the inspection. The inspector spoke with parents and carers during the inspection and took account of their written views.
- The inspector looked at relevant documentation, such as evidence of the suitability of the staff working in the nursery and a selection of other records.

We carried out this inspection 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.

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