

Parents and Carers Voice

In response to the recent Ofsted inspection on March 31st, 2016, we received many, and some very comprehensive responses from current and past parents, shocked at the Ofsted rating that St John's received. The full version of the letters are available at the setting, but here is a snapshot of what the parents had to say. To protect privacy, parents and children's names have been initialised.

Mrs K. (IK)

(Referral)

"I have been a parent at St John's Nursery Playgroup for two years and I have been happy with the level of support both my child and I have received. My daughter started just before she turned three years old with Mrs Mash as her key worker. From the beginning she was swiftly settled into the nursery and I felt comfortable leaving Isabella in their care as she quickly warmed to Mrs Mash. When my daughter spent 6 weeks off nursery for a health injury I was happy with the support we received and I worked closely with the nursery to ease her back in.

Mrs Mash has played an important role in assisting my daughter with her speech disorder. Under her advice I sought professional help from a speech and language therapist which enabled her to be diagnosed with this disorder. Following this, Mrs Mash has been working with the speech and language therapist, attending meetings and assisting with the specially designed activities to help her progress. Furthermore Mrs Mash has undergone specialist training to further develop techniques to support my daughter....."

Mrs H. (CH)

"My son started with you last January 2015. I will never forget how welcoming you and the staff were of the little chap that kept wanting to visit. I knew then that he would settle in just fine - which he did.

In response to the points raised:

- 1. Anyone visiting St Johns can see how actively involved the manager is with the day to day running of the nursery. The Manager's desk is slap bang in the middle of the room, it is very hard for supervision and assessing not to occur!*
- 2. Regular newsletters and meetings with my son's key worker mean I am always aware of what he is learning each term and I believe the flow of information is very good. In addition to any written communication there is constant feedback and reporting when collecting children from the nursery and I have always found the staff to be very helpful with any questions either face to face, phone or email.*
- 3. As a parent I feel I have access to my son's learning journal whenever I want and his progress and next steps for learning are very clearly defined. This is also discussed in meetings with his key worker. With regards children not being challenged I can only comment on how impressed we are with the counting and writing that my son has developed. I have always felt that my son's key worker understood his needs and interests very well. Everyone knows he is an active little lad who is interested in animals, nature and is encouraged to follow his interests with his reading.*

I have never heard a negative word against St Johns and have always found its reputation to speak for itself. On Facebook parent groups it is highly recommended to any mums looking into local nurseries with positive testimonials from past and present parents."

Mrs S. (LS)

".....My daughter has attended the nursery since January 2015 and my experience of the nursery has only ever been good. My daughter was quite nervous to start nursery as she was only 2 years 10 months at the time, and I was concerned that she would find it difficult to settle in. However, she settled brilliantly after only a couple of days and I feel this was largely due to the staff at St Johns.

My daughter has had 2 key workers over the time she has been at the nursery and both these members of staff have communicated with me extremely well about my daughter and her developments. Mrs Mills always has time to speak to parents as do all the staff. I feel the staff at St Johns are extremely approachable and as a parent I have always felt confident that if I had any concerns I could speak to either Mrs Mash, my daughter's key worker or Mrs Mills directly and the matter would be dealt with efficiently.

I have been kept up to date with my daughter's development throughout her time at St Johns and feel very satisfied with her progress....."

Mrs H. (MH)

".....My daughter has been attending this nursery since the beginning of this year. We researched many nurseries in the area and visited many of them and I have to say that St. John's Nursery came top of our list for numerous reasons.

The staff there work extremely hard and always put the needs of the children at the top most list of their priorities (something I witnessed first-hand when we first visited the nursery and could see just how well they managed any emotional outbreaks from any child). The children there welcomed us with open arms and my daughter straight away felt she was part of this wonderful group.

The combined knowledge and years of experience of all the staff who work there make a huge difference to how the children interact with one another, something which cannot be taught on a course. This is reflected via my daughter who often tells me she loves the staff and feels at ease once I leave her in their capable, professional and loving care.

My childminder, who herself has over 20 years' experience in childcare, even sends her grandchildren there and has no qualms about recommending other children attend this nursery.

..... My daughter has settled in beautifully and I have no worries about sending her to St. John's Nursery. I fear that too much emphasis is placed on too strict an academic based approach by Ofsted, something I strongly question the merit of in children so young. At this age their emotional wellbeing should far outweigh any academic achievement.

I have no problems in my communication with the nursery who keep me fully updated on all the activities my daughter has experienced on each visit....."

Ms G (EG)

“.....I appreciate that OFSTED are there to protect parents and children from non performing educational facilities and overall we (as parents) rely on your inspections to inform and advise our decisions. However, my experience of this playgroup is completely different to yours and I just wanted to relay this.

When my daughter first joined the playgroup, the introduction process and information was upfront and allowed me time to plan for my working arrangements. Things were very organised. I have been invited to both AGMs whilst my daughter has been in attendance at the playgroup (attending one) and I am invited to view her journal at the end of each term, to sit with the keyworker and discuss my child's interaction, social skills, development and next steps, as well as anything I want to raise or discuss. Although I have always been told I can just ask to meet at any time (just let them know in advance to make sure that the keyworker is there).

In my most recent visit the keyworker asked what school we were going to, whether they used jolly phonics or read, write, ink and to let them know which, so that they could try and introduce my daughter to those methods to help her get ahead. Her journal is always up to date and the playgroup / keyworker have always allowed me to pick a time to visit that fits in with my work (even if that has meant staying late).

The termly newsletters keep us informed of upcoming events and activities and lets us know some of the things that the children will be doing that term, i.e. they were having visits from lots of people doing different jobs, from hairdressers to police. They invited parents to come and talk to the children about our own jobs or to read to the children. They organised the big toddle and all parents were invited to attend, as I couldn't attend the whole session, my daughter's keyworker offered to care for her whilst I wasn't there (within her allowed number of children). We are invited to many events including the St Johns Carnival float (which has a theme each year), harvest festival, Christmas plays, Easter shows and most recently the 50th Celebration of the playgroup. All of these events generally have coffee time attached, where parents can get together to talk, but where keyworkers are also on hand to talk to you if you want to.

In terms of liaising with the playgroup, my daughter has experienced a couple of incidents with other children where she has become upset – not physical incidents. The staff notified the person collecting my daughter (grandparent) and then I was invited to telephone the next morning (if I wanted to), which I did. The issues were discussed, I took advice from the keyworker in terms of next steps, as well as providing my own opinion (which was listened to). We agreed the way forward, the situation was monitored and nothing else occurred. However, over the following weeks, I was kept informed via the person collecting her and telephone calls. I was encouraged to call if I needed to, which I did. I also collected my daughter and was welcomed in by the keyworker, who stopped to talk to me for as long as I wanted.

As my daughter's keyworker's day had changed this year (for one of her three days), St Johns have made sure that she has a backup keyworker for that day. My daughter knows that she can go to any staff member at the setting and often talks about others, but when she feels shy / vulnerable / particularly tired on occasion, she wants that “known” person who she can go to and someone who completely understands what she needs, without her necessarily having to say anything. I am confident that if you asked any of the staff at St Johns about my daughter (even though she is probably one of the quieter children), they would all know about her.....”

Mrs G. (MM)

(CLA – Virtual School)

“In my experience the staff at St Johns have excellent partnerships with parents, the Manager, Celia is available at the beginning and end of the school day as are the other staff members. As parents of an adopted child we have to spend a significant amount of time preparing our child for new activities and experiences. St Johns were so accommodating with our child's settling in period and since then both the Key worker and the Manager have been available to discuss our child's individual needs whenever we have asked. As a personalised setting, parents are spoken to on an individualised basis about their child's needs. In our experience, the staff worked hard to ensure that our child was settled and communicated this back to us. Although, this was not communicated in a formal, written way, the staff nevertheless ensured that our child's needs were met and reported back to us regularly.

St John's are taking part in the pilot 'virtual school' for Looked After children. We had a meeting with the Virtual School leader, the Manager and Key Worker about our child which required the nursery staff to complete forms about our child's development. The staff were made available for the meeting and the detailed report demonstrated our child's progress and achievements.

The staff are knowledgeable about the children, we have only had excellent parent-teacher conferences, where the feedback was detailed and accurate and the next steps in our child's development were shared and help at home was discussed. The progress that has been made is very well documented in outstanding learning journals which are shared with parents during the year. I have never experienced a time when a member of the team was unavailable to talk.

We are very happy with our child's progress and his achievement. Upon starting nursery at two and a half as a child who had suffered trauma and found it difficult to relax in new situations. Just over a year later, our child is settled, and he has developed friendships and is excited every morning to go to nursery.

In our opinion St John's provides a good variety of resources, engaging opportunities and valuable, age appropriate activities and, importantly for us as parents, the staff spend quality time interacting with the children.”

Mrs C. (JC)

“.....Can I firstly say that having read the report I do not recognise the nursery that the inspector visited and would never in a million years have guessed she was talking about St John's. I do not agree with a single negative comment that has been written and feel very angry that the inspector has labelled every section inadequate, especially the personal, behaviour and welfare of children at St Johns. I would not trust my son in any nursery that I wasn't completely happy with on every level.

Everyone at St Johns is very welcoming and friendly, and all staff are always available to talk to at either drop off or pickup, regardless whether they are my son's keyworker or not. Mrs Mills is always available to take to as well. You very rarely see a child crying at drop off so the comment "staff struggle to help children settle" is complete tosh.

Regarding quality of teaching, learning and assessment. I thoroughly enjoy taking my son's journal home and reading what he's been up to, and since he joined St John's Easter 2014 the progress he has made is outstanding. He adores his keyworker, Mrs Stone, and she is always available to talk about any worries I have or any assistance I'd like in a particular area, such as when he was first potty trained.

I could not believe the comment "the manager's policy to not challenge children's skills to their full potential and children are not prepared for school". My son is starting school this September, and he will be more than ready due to his time at St John's. He could have started in the school nursery

in 2015 but I chose to leave him at St Johns for another year due to the care, attention and guidance he receives at St John's.

In summary, this new OFSTED report is not a true reflection of St John's, I do not believe it bares any resemblance to the nursery at all and even taking into consideration that any OFSTED visit adds pressure in my opinion as a parent the inspector does not know what she was talking about.

My eldest son was at the nursery when St John's was awarded outstanding and I have not noticed any difference in the care and attention received then and now.”

Mrs E (A & GE)

Sen

“.....My son A joined the nursery in January 2013. Within a relatively short period of time one of their keyworkers very delicately approached me about some of A's behaviours and physical 'mannerisms'. I acknowledged them and explained A had always behaved this way since he was very small. Upon returning from a family holiday and discussing some concerns that we had with the same keyworker, I was advised to contact my GP to discuss both our concerns.

A was diagnosed with ASD in March 2014. If it had not been for St. Johns bringing this to my attention A would not be where he is today. Not only did they alert me so very early on they continued to support both Arthur (and I) until he left in July 2014.

I had regular consultations with his keyworker, weekly reviews using IEP's, I was alerted to support groups and the EYAS. There was never a period of time where I was not communicated with or supported so much so that I regularly recommend St Johns playgroup and this is also why my daughter G has attended since 2015 despite a nursery place being available for her at my choice of School.

To say that St. Johns do not have strong partnerships with parents is ludicrous, it is thanks to St. Johns he received very early intervention and now at the age of 5 has an EHCP. I could not have got through this process without them. Mrs Mills is exceptionally knowledgeable, approachable and has helped me on many, many occasions.

I honestly cannot fathom how the nursery could have received a less than outstanding result as they all, as a team have given my son (and now my daughter) the confidence, independence and the skills to prepare them for School.

St Johns nursey playgroup have made a huge difference to my life all they did with A and continue to do with G. They nurture and help each child grow and they will always be my first and only recommendation for a nursery.”

Mrs P. (IP)

EAL

“By way of introduction, my name is A.P. and I am the mother of a child who has been attending St John's Playgroup on Bakes Street for the past 13 months.

I found the observations in the OFSTED report very unfair particularly in respect of the assistance (or lack of assistance as the report highlighted) provided to children who have English as an Additional Language (EAL) and the communication between the staff and parents.

First of all, by way of background, my daughter did not speak a single word of English when she joined the playgroup and most important, she is a highly emotional child. However, here we are, 13 months later and she is fluent, English native speakers cannot tell she is an EAL child. What does that mean? Well, it means that the playgroup staff have done an amazing job, helped her to settle in, put in place a process by means of which they were showing her pictures & signs and practiced English words with her. Also, based on what my

daughter tells us when she gets home, the staff always try to get everyone involved in the activities that take place during a normal day, giving extra support to EAL children.

.....Bottom line, I find the comments in the report extremely unfair, untrue and unfounded.

In terms of the communication between parents, childminders and playgroup staff, I find this is effective. Everyone is approachable, we get formal consultations once a term but each morning, Ms Mills is there, answering questions, providing feedback again to those parents that are interested in how their child is doing. They constantly send letters at home describing future activities of the playgroup, they keep accurate journals for each child to record his/her development, etc. When you look at those journals, you can see how much work, care and support your child gets there which is A LOT."

Mrs D (MD)

"I was shocked to hear that St John's Nursery was rated as inadequate during its very recent Ofsted inspection. This in no way reflects the nursery that I know nor the care and education my children have received. There are always a wide range of activities going on, both child and adult led, plenty of positive interaction and lots of happy, settled children. The staff are very approachable and key workers always make time to discuss children's positive achievements as well as concerns they may have and also offer advice on how to consolidate and enhance what the child has learned. Thanks largely to the bond with his key worker, my son has flourished from a quiet, shy child with a stammer to confident, expressive, excited and happy learner. The nursery staff are a committed, caring, supportive, professional team and I look forward to my youngest child starting her nursery education there next year."

Mr S (YS)

"I am writing having just seen the Ofsted report which appears to be rating St John's Nursery as inadequate. Both myself and my wife Z feel this is completely inconsistent with our own experiences of St Johns Nursery. We have found that our son has received lots of care and attention and his key worker, Mrs Hearne and the other careworkers have always given us regular and comprehensive feedback on his development and learning. We have really appreciated the efforts of everyone at St John's and have been really impressed with the professionalism shown. We have seen our son's confidence grow and are so thankful that we chose your nursery for him. We absolutely do not agree with the outcome of this report and just wanted to give you our utmost support and do hope that the Ofsted report can be challenged."

Mrs S (IS)

"..... I am very concerned about the Ofsted rating of Inadequate received by them ... as not a true depiction of valued service it offers to the children attending and to the families it supports.

My son has been attending St John's since he was 2 years old. He has been recently diagnosed with Autism as a result of many checks and concern the staff had with regards to his progress. I who had found it difficult to settle down in his previous setting. He has absolutely thrived and really enjoys his time since starting at St John's. His language and fine motor

skills have really shown great progress over his time there.

The staff have been attentive and quick to take on board the advice given to them by my son's speech and language therapist and have always supported him well. ... I have been well supported by the tea, who always have made time for me, to give me advice or to listen to any concerns if I had any with regards my son. They have supported my son and my family during a very emotional time after his diagnosis. I have been updated on a daily basis on I's activities and strategies I could use to support him at home..."

Mrs K (F & MD)

"Further to the above inspection, I was really shocked to hear of the outcome. As a parent, I would just like to say I am extremely happy with St John's Nursery. My son attended in 2013, I have recommended friends and now my daughter is at this nursery. My daughter had some settling in issues, the staff were fantastic with us both. I was made to feel comfortable and welcome to stay until my daughter needed me too, after a few times she managed to settle in at her own pace, for which I was grateful.

I feel I am able to communicate well with all the staff and am able to voice any concerns or queries I may have."

Mrs J (LJ)

"I am mother of L, she is attending to St. John's Nursery Playgroups from October 2015. When she start nursery, she couldn't speak English so was very difficult for her to settle but with main help from her key worker Mrs Cooke and other staff, she started to enjoy time in the setting. ... When she gets home she is talking what they have been doing at nursery during the day. Also she is mentioning the teacher's names and talking warmly about them. ... I feel that L gets good care and support from her key worker Mrs Cooke and other staff as if something is wrong they always talk with me about it."

Mrs L (EL)

"I have read the Ofsted Inspection of 31st March 2016 and I completely disagree with the rating that has been given to this nursery.

Firstly this nursery has excellent communication with parents; there is always a member of staff available to listen to us. We can phone, email, or talk face to face. They have excellent relationships with the children and have extended knowledge of their needs and interests.

They have a very good and up to date website to find out any information we may need.

This is my second child to attend this nursery and she settled extremely well, largely down to the staff being extremely well experienced and having genuine kind and caring natures. They have in place very good methods of settling in children.

Their assessment is incredibly thorough, we receive regular updates on our children's progress and we can ask to see our children's learning journals at any time...

To call this nursery inadequate is not only ridiculous but also completely ruins their reputation in the community which is not fair and they do not deserve it... "

Mrs P-T (SP-T)

“... I did not take the decision to send my first child to nursery lightly... Initially I was far more drawn to the local Montessori nurseries... A neighbour suggested that I visited St John’s .. within minutes of my first visit it became obvious what had been missing from the other nurseries: warmth and a genuine affection for the children.

The staff at St John’s do not just ‘show up’ they have a large amount of pride in the important work that they do caring for and nurturing our children. Upon speaking to Celia Mills for nearly half an hour on that first visit, I was completely convinced St John’s was the right place for my child. Her passion for not only the education of the kids but also their social skills and emotional growth was completely infectious. I left the nursery elated that I had been able to find such a wonderful place for my daughter practically on my doorstep. ...

Even though I personally would place emotional wellbeing and development of social skills above formal learning in order of importance, there is also a certain level of the latter that is needed so as not to be at a disadvantage when starting school. Having myself spent a number of years studying (I have degrees in Psychology and in Veterinary Medicine) there is no doubt in my mind that this is important. At this very early stage though, I believe that a gentle and playful approach to teaching is essential in order not to stifle the inbuilt eagerness that kids have to acquire knowledge. When it is done in a fun and creative way, it is far more attractive to a child. I believe this is what occurs at St John’s.

I am constantly surprised by the amount of knowledge that my daughter is accumulating by being at St John’s. One lunchtime at home she was playing with cucumber slices on her plate which I had sliced both lengthways and crossways. She said “mummy look... mummy look... I am arranging my cucumber semicircles in a smile”. Not bad vocabulary for a not-yet-three-year-old child. ...

What I do care about is the staff and manager of St John’s and that all their passion, care and hard work could potentially go unrecognised. There is nothing more demoralising than not being credited for achievements that you deserve.”

Mrs C (E & NC)

“Thank you for your regular communication in light of the recent Ofsted Inspection. The inspection findings are not only shocking but deeply disappointing as I feel that St John’s provides high quality Early years Provision. I am deeply concerned that the ethos and values of the Nursery have not been reflected in this report as well as finding communication with parents as inadequate. Along with the majority of parents I would like to express my support for the provision that you provide by documenting my views as a parent.

I have entrusted two of my children into your care and both have made at least good progress in their development throughout their time with you. My eldest child was extremely shy and apprehensive about starting nursery. I communicated this with the staff and they were very supportive in creating a plan to aid my son’s transition from home to nursery. Within a few weeks my son was interacting freely with other children and making good progress in his

language and social emotional development. ... Without the support and communication with St John's I am confident that my son would not have had such a smooth transition from nursery to school. ...

The nursery also provides a newsletter for parents, informing us of the diverse range of activities and opportunities they are providing for the children. These range from activities within the setting, to off site visits and activities within the local community. The newsletter keeps us informed of diary dates, expectations of children as well as making parents aware of opportunities of how they can be involved. This is a valuable form of communication and a further opportunity for parents to be involved in their children's learning and development...."

Mrs D (C & ED)

"... My eldest daughter C attended St John's nursery from September 2013-2015. She previously attended Tilbury Hall nursery for two terms. ... When she started at St John's I was concerned at how she would settle having struggled at her previous setting but what a difference! It was fantastic, her key worker Mrs Hearne was warm and approachable and C took to her straight away. She settled in without a glitch and used to run into nursery eager to start the day. Mrs Hearne and Mrs Mills (who is regularly based at the nursery overseeing the staff) always took time to speak to me about any good work that Chloe had taken part in, or any concerns, and the regular parents meetings gave us the chance to have a detailed discussion about her progress. The nursery encouraged parent participation and indeed grandparent participation and both my mother and mother in law who regularly assisted me with childcare knew the staff very well, and enjoyed a day out together with the nursery to Hatfield Farm Park.

In January this year, my youngest daughter E started at St John's. Mrs Hearne was also allocated as E's key worker and I appreciated this continuity as she had already built up knowledge of our family, working patterns and childcare outside of nursery. .. E took part in the recent Easter show within the church and I was delighted to see her singing and dancing with the other children, her confidence evidently growing.

Having read the Ofsted report I am astounded that you could come to these conclusions about this wonderful nursery as it reads like you have visited a different setting! I am also surprised that a nursery can be judged to have changed to drastically from Outstanding (which it is) to Inadequate whilst having the same manager, the majority of the same staff, same procedures and location. ..."

Mrs L (E, A & TL)

"... We are writing to express our shock and disagreement with your recent Ofsted report of the setting. The report bears no resemblance to the setting our children attend. ... From day one we have had fantastic communication with both our children's key worker Mrs Turner, the setting manager Mrs Mills and all the other staff. WE have seen our children's confidence grow with the array of different activities and experiences that the setting offers. We have had consultations on our children's progress and have had the pleasure of reading through their very comprehensive learning journals. We are regularly updated via a newsletter with the subjects and activities that our children will be participating in on a termly basis. Each of our children have different specific needs and individual strengths' and weaknesses. We believe that the setting caters more than competently for each of them. Not only are the staff professional, and more than competent, they really care for our children,

their development and welfare. From the variety of quality of the activities to the promotion of healthy eating, this is an outstanding group..."

Ms L (LW)

"My daughter attended this wonderful setting between May 2014 and July 2015. Initially she was shy and unsure (she was never a confident toddler) but Mrs Mash (her keyworker), Miss Cornwell and all the amazing staff did everything possible to settle her into her new environment. I spent sessions helping to ease her in which was supported by the staff and we developed strategies which meant that my daughter soon settled and came on leaps and bounds in all aspects.

I always felt 'in the loop' with regards to my daughter's learning through almost daily verbal updates from Mrs Mash, another member of staff and regularly Mrs Mills who is a very visible and approachable manager. I was always approached if L had excelled in something and likewise if anything was concerning them. They supported my daughter through one particular issue fabulously which increased her confidence 10 fold. The learning journals were in depth and I still read them now and marvel at how far she progressed during her time there.

My daughter is now at Primary school and settled instantly. This, I'm sure is due to the confidence and skills she developed at St John's. She is hitting all targets for her age and the support she received at nursery laid the foundation for this...."

THE FULL VERSIONS OF THE LETTERS CAN BE READ AT THE PLAYGROUP