



# the little group



*“An irresistible invitation to learn”*

...the little group has been leading the field for many years in the provision of high quality multidisciplinary intervention with groups of children who have a complex communication disorder or an autistic spectrum disorder....

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# Welcome to 'the little group'

## A Note from the Head Teacher

Dear Parent

I hope that you find this prospectus interesting, informative - but most of all exciting and that it answers some of the questions you might ask in thinking about making the right choice of nursery for your child.

From reading this prospectus, you will begin to appreciate how 'the little group' believes that learning is not just about acquiring discrete skills, but rather that true learning affects the way a child thinks and understands the world in which they live.

Our most recent OFSTED report (highlights enclosed) reflects much in the way of our accomplishment and is an independent view on our high level of success and achievement with children who have an autistic spectrum disorder.

So, enjoy reading through our prospectus. I know it will serve to answer some of your questions though not all, so let me take this opportunity to invite you to contact us so that we can talk about the work that we do here at 'the little group'.

I look forward to hearing from you very soon!

With warmest regards



*Judy Gilham*

Head Teacher

## Contents

Mission statement	Page 4
'the little group' team	6
Curriculum & Therapy	8
The Child's Family and Carers	10
The School Year and the School Day	12
History of 'the little group'	14
Safeguarding and Child Protection	16
OFSTED Report - June 2007	18
OFSTED Report - October 2008	19



" 'the little group' - A very special nursery"

"We owe 'the little group' our eternal thanks for everything they have done for our family"

# Our Mission Statement

'the little group' aspires to lead the field in the specialist provision of early intervention for children with an autistic spectrum disorder, and their families and to inspire the practice of others. The dedicated team is passionate about inspiring and empowering people who live and work with autism in all its forms. We promote a sense of self-worth, security and trust in a fun-loving and motivating environment.

## **Governance**

The proprietors of the Eagle House Group are Messers Paul and Michael Conrathe. The Eagle House Group Strategic Board is responsible for the governance of all schools and provisions within the Group. The Chair of the Board is Linda Miller, Group Operations Director. Should you wish to contact either the Eagle House Group Proprietors or the Eagle House Board, your enquiries should be addressed to:

Eagle House Group, 8th Floor, Grosvenor House, 125 High Street, Croydon, Surrey, CR0 9XP  
or via the 'Contact Us' page on the Group website: [www.eaglehousegroup.co.uk](http://www.eaglehousegroup.co.uk)



## **What is 'the little group' Nursery?**

'the little group' is a specialist registered nursery for pre-school children who have complex communication disorders and associated problems. Most of the children have an autistic spectrum disorder. 'the little group' was established over 18 years ago and is on the site of a mainstream school in Epsom, Surrey. Children can be admitted to 'the little group' from the age of 2 and places are also available for children up to the age of 6.

## The 'Triad' of Difficulties

We admit children whose difficulties tend to fall into three areas:

- Social interaction
- Social communication/communication
- Imaginative play and flexibility

Our children may also have secondary problems such as poor attention control, challenging behaviour, sensory integration issues, resistance to change and high anxiety levels.

*'the little group' Approach* is designed to actively engage the children in building strategies for learning.

This is done through:

- specialist early intervention provided directly by professional and experienced staff
- access to a nursery setting which has been designed to promote the development of learning strategies
- access to a communication-based curriculum that uses the child's strengths to encourage development in areas that are causing difficulty
- full involvement of the parents through workshops, training, regular contact with the professional team, and advice and practical support



“leading  
the field  
of  
autism  
for  
many  
years”

# 'the little group' team

## **Judy Gilham** - BA, PGCE, NPQH Head teacher

A teacher for 25 years, Judy is now a specialist in autism since joining 'the little group' in 1997. She has been Head teacher of the nursery for some years managing, leading and supporting a very experienced and highly trained staff team. Judy believes that autism is a 'whole family' issue - not just about the child with autism – and strongly believes in placing the child and family first.

Judy has long been involved in the development and advancement of 'the little group' approach, whose reputation has grown immeasurably over the years. As a result of pressure from other professionals working in autism, Judy has created a successful series of training workshops which she regularly delivers to both parents and professionals at 'the little group' Early Years Centre. Judy says she is particularly keen to impart the approach to practitioners involved with children at 'the little group' nursery.



## **Nicky Hardwick** – BSc (Hons.), MRCSLT Senior Speech and Language Therapist and Deputy Head

Nicky qualified as a speech and language therapist at Newcastle University and subsequently worked in paediatric sSpecial nNeeds for the National Health Service in London. Nicky joined 'the little group' in 1999 specialising in early intervention for children with autism.

Nicky became Deputy Head of the nursery in 2006 and is the lead speech and language therapist working directly with the children. With her vast wealth of experience and expertise, Nicky is a trainer of 'the little group' approach to both professionals and parents.



At 'the little group', a team of professionals is assigned to each class. Each class-based team consists of a special needs teacher and one or two classroom assistants. A speech & language therapist works in the classroom as part of the core team for at least 70% of the week. The children attend the nursery in class-based groups of 10 with a child to staff ratio of 3:1.

In addition to the core teams for each class group, 'the little group' has a specialist assistant who works on a one to one basis with those children who have particular problems with anxiety or hypersensitivities.

There are further specialist assistants who support the children during the *Afternoon Outings* class into the community to ensure that each child has access to successful learning opportunities outside the classroom base, for example trips to the library, cafe, park or local shops.

"Sometimes you see something and you know it is 'right' and that's how I feel when I see 'the little group' in action".

## Enrolment

At 'the little group' we have an open referral system and therefore anyone can refer a child to us. In most cases initial contact is made by parents.

Referrals may also be made by health professionals, to include:

- GPs
- health visitors
- speech and language therapists

or by professionals working in education such as:

- educational psychologists
- teachers
- special needs case officers
- portage teachers

It is not necessary to have a formal referral letter or a statement of special educational needs. Regardless of who refers your child to the nursery you, the parents, are always involved in decisions relating to your child's placement at 'the little group'. The referral and subsequent admissions process is designed to ensure you are fully involved and that direct intervention is easily accessed.

Following the initial referral, we usually arrange a home visit so that parents can ask about 'the little group' and we can evaluate the needs of your child in an informal session. If, after this visit, parents wish to proceed and 'the little group' believes that we can offer the service most appropriate to your child's needs\*, then the parents will be invited to come to the nursery and spend some time observing the way in which we work.

A firm offer of a place is confirmed at this stage and a start date agreed with the parents. Waiting lists are kept to a minimum and 'the little group' admits children throughout the year.

Children may be admitted to either the 'parent and child' group or into one of the nursery classes. The decision about the *best route in* for the child is made by 'the little group' in partnership with the parents.

\* 'the little group' believes in a policy of fairness and honesty. If it feels that it cannot help the child or that the nursery is the wrong placement for the child, the child will not be offered a place.



"magnificent outcomes for children and their families - OFSTED 2008"

# Curriculum & Therapy

At 'the little group', specialist speech and language therapy and special needs teaching are combined to form a communication-based curriculum that is sensitive to the needs of each child.

'the little group' adopts specialist autism-specific teaching strategies such as:

- TEACCH
- Intensive Interaction Therapy
- Social Stories
- PECS
- structured teaching techniques
- high levels of speech and language therapy
- Sensory Integration Therapy

It is the responsibility of the professional staff to keep abreast of emerging research in the field of autism and communication difficulties and to evaluate techniques and programmes. 'the little group' has been leading the field for many years in the provision of high quality multidisciplinary intervention with these children. We believe that learning is not just the acquisition of discrete skills but rather that true functional learning affects the way a child thinks of and understands the world. 'the little group' provides a communication-based, visually supported curriculum with structured learning opportunities that focus on teaching strategies for developing attention, communication, social interaction and play skills. Challenging behaviours are addressed through consistent management but are rarely a problem once the child learns more appropriate and satisfying interaction with the curriculum.

The emphasis is on positive learning, child-orientated play materials, fun, safety and pleasure. In this way the children engage readily and meaningfully in the Early Years Foundation Stage Curriculum, as described in the *Department for Children Schools and Families* documentation. The children are able to relax and enjoy learning.



At 'the little group', we are fortunate to have the addition of regular input from the Eagle House Group multidisciplinary team. This includes psychologists and occupational therapists lead by Linda Miller, Operations Director. Otherwise, every child who has been through *Pre-School Notification* is usually assigned an educational psychologist from the local authority.

We ensure good communication with all of our children's local authorities' educational psychologists, who visit us to observe their child(ren), liaise with the team and attend the annual reviews.



“Creating  
a positive  
founda-  
tion for  
life”

# The Child's Family & Carers

At 'the little group' we recognise that parents and carers play the most significant role in a child's development. 'the little group' team work in partnership with the home and any other involved agency such as Portage or occupational therapy services. When your child is first diagnosed as having an autistic spectrum disorder or complex communication problems, feelings within the family can range from shock to fear, anger and sadness. Many parents are afraid that they will not cope, will not know what to do or know how best to handle and help their child.

One of the key aims of 'the little group' is to provide parents with both support and advice as we know that the involvement of the parents is a vital factor in your child's success. During the period of your child's placement at the nursery, parents and carers will have access to the specialist knowledge of the staff each time your child attends a session. In addition to the initial home visit, further visits are available as required.

Parents are kept up to date by face to face contact, telephone calls or 'home books', newsletters, reports and regular updates of the Individual Education Plan (IEP - which not only provides an overview of objectives and achievements, but which also sets attainable goals).

At 'the little group', we run workshops for parents every term and organise sessions on a Saturday for the extended family. The workshops, covering subjects such as play, communication and behaviour, are a fundamental part of 'the little group' approach.



## Our School Accommodation

There are three main large and airy classrooms, which have controlled levels of environmental stimulation to help focus and sustain attention. These are used for class-based work every morning and every afternoon.

Other rooms are used for lunchtime, small group and 1:1 therapy and consultation. They are also the gathering places for the start and end of the Afternoon Outing group sessions when children leave the site to generalise their learning into the community.

The nursery also has a large secure garden area for the children to enjoy, and a covered area for outdoor work.



“Trusted  
by  
families  
for over  
15 years”

## Lunchtimes at 'the little group'

Lunchtime is just as important for teaching and social time as time spent within the classroom setting. Our children are therefore provided with and encouraged to have, a hot school dinner. They are taught mealtime behaviour and food-related issues can be addressed consistently by the team. Special diets may be catered for in consultation with the Head Teacher.

A choice of milk, or water is offered with our children's meal.

# The School Year & The School Day

The school currently operates a three-term year. Term dates are circulated to parents, carers and to each child's local authority and can also be found on our website: [www.thelittlegroup.co.uk](http://www.thelittlegroup.co.uk)

The sessions of the school day are as follows:

- 9.30 am to 12 noon - There are class-based sessions Monday to Friday (Green and Blue Class)
- 12 noon to 1 pm - Lunch time and a structured play time is provided for children who stay all day. Lunch is delivered and facilitated by the team.
- 12.30 pm to 3 pm - There are class based sessions with the Purple Class running on Wednesdays and Thursdays and the Parent and Child Group on one afternoon per week. Friday afternoons are for parent's workshops with a crèche for 6 weeks per term. The remaining Fridays each term are for staff training, planning and preparation. Additional parent workshops are scheduled at other times during the week. Details can be found on the website.
- 12.30 to 3 pm - Class-based sessions take place from Monday to Thursday for Yellow Class at set times of the year.

Official staff hours are from 9.00am to 16.00 during week days.

We ask parents and carers to avoid taking children out of school for family holidays whenever possible. This must be requested in advance by letter to the Head Teacher.

We ask parents to report their child's absence as soon as possible for illness or medical and dental appointments by a letter to the class teacher or a message in the child's home-school book. The regulations in force regarding attendance of school age children require schools to record all 'unauthorised' absences. These are any absences which have not been explained by parents or carers.



## School Uniform

School uniform consists of green or blue sweatshirts and polo shirts. This is only compulsory in the Blue Class as the curriculum is designed to prepare them for their next school placement where a uniform will be compulsory.

We try to encourage our children to wear nursery uniform or nursery colours. Both our pupils and parents find our uniform helps reduce problems in dressing and choosing clothes each morning as well as promoting the feel of a whole nursery community.

*All items can be purchased from the nursery.*

The children in Blue Class change into a simple PE kit (provided by the family) as part of their preparation for the next school setting.

This consists of:

- any plain T-shirt
- any Plain shorts
- black plimsolls/gym shoes



“At ‘the little group’, our strength is our experience”

# History of 'the little group'



**Gina Davies** (Specialist Speech and Language Therapist) and **Jan Chamberlain** (Special Needs Teacher), each experienced practitioners in their respective fields, devised the method of combining speech and language therapy with teaching while they were working at a school for children with autistic spectrum disorders (ASD) within the state education system. Although the then-current system was able to accommodate the disciplines of both teaching and speech and language therapy, the two ran alongside each other rather than being interwoven.

Working together at Linden Bridge School over 20 years ago, Gina and Jan sowed the seed of an idea and that seed went on to become 'the little group' nursery and the 'the little group' approach to autism that we know today. Their belief that the two disciplines must be fully integrated in order to provide an effective approach underlies all aspects of the work of 'the little group'. Gina and a colleague designed a speech and language programme around the topics that were being covered by Jan in the classroom, setting targets for the use of certain words. Jan then incorporated those words into her classroom curriculum and the results were more than encouraging – learning to communicate had become fun, and the children were learning!

Jan and Gina decided to move out of the secure but somewhat limiting world of the state system and go it alone. They never doubted that a structured programme of early intervention, which combined conventional teaching with speech and language therapy, was the key. 'the little group' was born and in May 1992 the first two children were enrolled.

There have been many changes and developments over the years but 'the little group' still adheres to Jan and Gina's original belief that teaching and speech and language therapy must operate as a single entity offering the children and irresistible opportunity to learn.

It is acknowledged, both locally and nationally, that 'the little group' makes a significant and positive contribution to the life of the children and their families – encompassing the areas of education, support and well-being.

## Health & Safety

All external doors are locked during lesson times though fire exits are easily opened from the inside. The main door is monitored by the nursery administrator who is also the first point of contact for all visitors to the school. All visitors are required to sign themselves in and out of the building.

The playground is kept secure when the nursery is in session and there are always at least three members of staff on duty during playtimes whenever pupils are outside. When the building is empty, the school is protected by fire and burglar alarms.

In terms of individual health and safety, some members of our class teams are trained first-aiders and can deal with minor cuts, bumps and grazes. If a child becomes ill or is injured, we need to be able to contact parents and carers quickly. To help us to do this, we keep the children's contact files as up to date as possible in the office and rely on parents and carers to tell us of changes to phone numbers or addresses as quickly as possible avoiding unnecessary anxiety for a child in distress.

We do not generally administer medicines to children during the school day. Parents and carers are asked to regulate the dosage to avoid school hours. The exception to this rule is a child who has a long-term illness or condition such as asthma when inhalers can be kept in school and administered as and when required. In all cases, written authority is needed from the parent or carer. Each classroom has a copy of a medical list of their children who may give cause for concern so that any adult in the room has an immediate reference guide if a child should become unwell.



“We firmly believe in working in partnership with parents”

# Safeguarding and Child Protection

We support the Children Act 1989 - <http://tinyurl.com/lko3tt>, the Children Act 2004 - <http://tinyurl.com/ktqfw4> and the responsibility of adults to protect the rights of children in their care. All staff are committed to these responsibilities supported by policies on behaviour, child protection and bullying. The nursery has a published Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy which you can request from the administrator and all staff have been cleared by the Criminal Records Bureau in accordance with DCSF (Dept for Children, Schools & Family) statutory guidance 'Safeguarding Children and Safer Recruitment in Education' - <http://tinyurl.com/nv3ff7>.

## Complaints Procedure

All staff at 'the little group' recognise the importance of working in partnership with parents and carers and we value positive relationships with you. However, we realise that on rare occasions, a parent or carer may feel unhappy with an aspect of their child's education. In line with legislation, we have a school complaints policy which ensures complaints are addressed and dealt with fairly and as quickly as possible.

Complaints are resolved informally where possible but if this is not successful then a more formal route can be considered which may ultimately involve a panel which includes someone who is independent of our nursery.

Copies of 'the little group' policies are available for reading on request from the nursery administrator.



# Eagle House Group



Delivering exceptional education and care to children and young people aged 2 - 25 years with autistic spectrum disorders and Asperger's Syndrome

NEED ADVICE? CALL OUR PARENT LIAISON HELP LINE ON

**0845 074 2972**

[carrie.haslett@eaglehousegroup.co.uk](mailto:carrie.haslett@eaglehousegroup.co.uk)

[www.eaglehousegroup.co.uk](http://www.eaglehousegroup.co.uk)



# Ofsted Reports

**'the little group' received a very encouraging report from OFSTED in June 2007 and again in October 2008. The nursery was judged as outstanding in every area on both occasions.**

## **OFSTED Report – June 2007**

- Children's individual needs are central in the planning of the curriculum and organisation of the daily routines to ensure full social and educational inclusion for all children. This fundamental ethos ensures their superb outcomes.
- The quality of teaching and learning is outstanding. Practitioners have worked exceptionally hard in developing a comprehensive curriculum programme and assessment system based on the Foundation Stage guidance, but which is skilfully adapted to link with the developmental points that children with Autistic Spectrum Disorders often pass through, and to accommodate the children's individual learning needs.
- Communication and language development is central to planning and the high level of practitioner expertise in this area is key to children's development in all other areas of learning.
- Practitioners are secure in their knowledge and understanding of the “Birth to Three Matters” framework which they have adapted and use in conjunction with the Foundation Stage curriculum guidance for activity planning. The outcomes for children are highly effective.
- Exceedingly good use is made of the local and wider community resources to enable children's social inclusion and to promote their learning through practical experiences.
- Outstanding teaching methods, most significantly the use of visual demonstrations, laminated pictures of key words and strips of paper detailing the sequence of the outing and the rules to follow, mean that children are secure in their knowledge of safety rules, where they are going, when and why.
- There are superb and really inspirational opportunities to encourage experimental sensory development. The thematic planning helps children to make connections with real life.
- Relationships between children and the practitioners are very affectionate and children demonstrate high levels of security and a strong sense of belonging.
- Children enjoy regular massage and reflexology sessions which qualified practitioners perform. This helps to relax their muscles and the physical contact that this requires is exceptionally well-suited to encourage children's acceptance of affection and to further extend adult-child relationships.
- Partnership with parents and carers is outstanding. Parents report that the teaching methods and provision of parent-education workshops has significantly changed their lives.
- Children are cared for by a carefully vetted staff team who have exceptionally high levels of expertise in the field of complex communication and Autistic Spectrum disorders. 'the little group' provide a national lead for the provision of early intervention for these groups of children.

## OFSTED Report - October 2008

- The quality and effectiveness of the provision are outstanding.
- It is highly successful in fulfilling its aim: “to lead the field in the provision of early intervention for children...and their families and to inspire the practice of others.”
- The setting is highly effective in ensuring the children's progress in all areas of learning and their personal development. All aspects of the setting's work are excellent.
- Children's learning and development are impressive in relation to their capabilities and provision for their physical and emotional well-being is excellent.
- Systems for assessing and recording children's progress are outstanding.
- Exceptional partnership between the provider and parents, together with links with other agencies, ensure that children's needs are met.
- The leadership and management of the nursery are outstanding.
- The vision of the head teacher is inspirational to staff and parents. She rigorously evaluates and monitors her own performance and that of her staff to ensure that children receive the best possible care...(she) involves careful analysis of the setting's strengths and where improvements can be made.
- The dedicated staff strive constantly to ensure that all are aware of the changing demands of provision for these children and to implement innovative programmes. The proactive action plan and constant review ensure that the provision meets the needs of every child.
- Assessment is outstanding: individual files are carefully monitored...and daily informal meetings ensure that children's welfare is paramount.
- Parents are unanimous in their praise of the consistent support they are given at all times.
- Links with the mainstream and special schools to which children may transfer are exemplary.
- All procedures to ensure children's safety and welfare are exemplary. Staff are highly qualified...child protection procedures are highly secure.
- The Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum has been very well adapted to provide an excellent curriculum for children with Autistic Spectrum Disorders, emphasising the importance of positive learning and communication.
- Sensory development and behaviour are carefully monitored.
- Sessions are carefully planned and underwritten by a strongly language-based curriculum.
- Children are effectively taught to keep themselves safe and healthy. As a consequence, children make excellent progress according to their abilities. Their social and linguistic development is particularly strong, which is reflected in their excellent enjoyment of lessons and outstanding rate of progress towards the learning goals for their age and ability.

“...over-whelmed with the progress our child has made...”



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Eagle House Group

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