Health and Human Services

Iowa Department of Health And Human Services

CHILD CARE CENTER ANNUAL EVALUATION

Name of Center: St Matthew Early Childhood Center

Provider No.: 24466

Address: 2244 1st Ave NE, Cedar Rapids, IA, 52402

County: Linn

Director's Name: Sonya Benda

On-Site Supervisor: Heather Waddell, Co-Director

Phone Number: 3193639309

E-Mail: heather.waddell@crxcs.org
sonya.benda@crxcs.org
connie.schulte@crxcs.org

HHS Visit Date: 01/05/2026

Licensing Period: 02/01/2025 to 02/01/2027

Fire Inspection:

Date Inspected: 08/11/2025

Comments: Fire Captain Ben Kurka indicated on 11/3/2025 only item noted as not compliant was emergency responder radio coverage. There were portions of the building where emergency radios may not function adequately. This was determined to not have any negative effect on any other fire/life safety systems present throughout the building. The sprinkler and fire alarm systems remain fully functional and there are no egress concerns within the building. Additional fire/life safety components are also in place and fully functional, including but not limited to fire extinguishers, exit signage, emergency lighting, fire doors, and kitchen hood suppression systems. The process of evaluating emergency radio coverage typically occurs toward the end of a construction project, with amplifier system design and installation occurring after that. The contractor has provided updates that this is currently being completed. Once installed, fire marshal will complete a brief inspection to ensure that our radios function appropriately. Occupancy of the building was noted as being able to continue without restriction.

Report Visit Type:

- [ ] PTO
- [X] Licensing Visit
- [ ] Drop In
- [ ] Administrative Change

License Type:

- [X] Full
- [ ] Provisional

Quality initiative:

- [ ] Accrediation

Program Duration:

- [X] Year-Round
- [ ] School Year
- [ ] Summer Only

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HOURS:	*Year-round*	*School-Year*	*Summer Only*
Sunday			
Monday	6:00 AM to 6:00 PM		
Tuesday	6:00 AM to 6:00 PM		
Wednesday	6:00 AM to 6:00 PM		
Thursday	6:00 AM to 6:00 PM		
Friday	6:00 AM to 6:00 PM		
Saturday			

Program Population Served:

- [X] Infant(0-<24 Months)
- [X] Toddler
- [X] PreSchool
- [X] School Age
- [X] All Ages

LICENSE CAPACITY	Infants	2 Years	Preschool	School-Aged	Capacity
General	32	24	116	148	320
Summer					0

1. Basic Overview

Xavier Catholic Schools owns and operates several learning centers throughout the community. Specifically, this license pertains to St. Matthew Early Childhood Center which is located inside St. Matthew Catholic Elementary School. St. Matthew Early Childhood Center is part of the Xavier Catholic School System which is accredited by the Iowa Department of Education, and which is also part of the Archdiocese of Dubuque. St. Matthew Early Childhood Center is a non-profit program that has been in operations for many years. Current attending enrollment reported on 1/5/2026 was 229.

Xavier Catholic Schools executive director of all early learning and childcare is Connie Schulte. Ms. Schulte has been in this role since July 2024, has much licensed childcare center director experience and continues to participate in professional development. Co-Directors of St. Matthew Early Childhood Center are Sonya Benda and Heather Waddell. Ms. Benda and Ms. Waddell have each been St. Matthew employees for several years before becoming co-directors in July 2022. Ms. Benda and Ms. Waddell both have much experience working with children and continue to participate in professional development.

On 1/5/2026, program space was observed. Primary programming occurs in age defined classrooms. The building has sufficient restrooms including diapering areas and handwashing sinks to accommodate enrolled children. All foods for the St. Matthew Early Childhood Center are prepared on-site in the school kitchen which is annually inspected by the local health department. The program has access to both an indoor large gross motor room and outdoor school play areas. On the day of this monitoring visit, staff were observed warmly greeting families and children as they arrived for the day. Evidence of previous days' curriculum included nicely displayed child artwork (e.g. milestone handprint and footprint work, room #211 "Green Frog, Green Frog What Do You See?" clever art). Child themed music could be heard playing in some program rooms. Areas of study throughout the classrooms included winter, snow and dinosaurs. Curriculum on the day of

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this monitoring visit was observed to allow for a variety of play experiences that piqued child interest as well as encouraged social emotional growth, innovation and child choice. On 1/5/2026, staff were observed to be in ratio and actively engaged with the children in all activities including infant cares, center play events, large gross motor games, snack rituals and routine transitions. Staff were overheard engaging children in good discussion, providing positive redirection when needed and encouraging the use of social graces. It was noted that a staff in room #203 was observed providing minor first-aid to a child in the form of a band-aid and comfort. Children responded well to staff and appeared to be truly enjoying their day.

2. Identify Observed Strengths of the program

The mission of St. Matthew Early Childhood Center is to "...provide a Christian environment in which each child can grow spiritually, emotionally, physically, and intellectually through age-appropriate activities. We are committed, in collaboration with families, to enhance each child's character development and nurture the individual strengths and talents that allow each child to reach their potential..."

St. Matthew Early Childhood Center has the following website for families and the community to access information about the program: https://www.school.stmatthewcr.org/.

As of 1/5/2026, Xavier Catholic School early learning locations continue to be overseen by a board of directors. St. Matthew Early Childhood Center's management team (e.g. Ms. Schulte, Ms. Waddell, Ms. Benda) is invested in the community, having connected families with resources as well as at times being mentors for other childcare programs. The management team continues to improve their system of organization to help ensure administrative items are completed and maintained in a secure manner. The management team remains knowledgeable of licensing guidelines as well as their own program's policies and procedures.

On 1/5/2026, St. Matthew Early Childhood Center was found to be maintaining required postings, maintaining parent-staff-program information centers, utilizing technological communication resources, and offering family programming activities. St. Matthew Early Childhood Center continues to have an active PTO (parent teacher organization) which holds regular meetings, sponsors fundraising events, holds annual back to school events and assists with many other family activities each year. Curriculum continues to occur in a Christian environment, is play based and includes a combination of strategies (e.g. religious education, physical activity, social-emotional components, literacy, STEM offerings, teacher-inspired ideas). Curriculum also incorporates additional enrichments including off-site excursions, guest speakers, themed days, and seasonal-holiday parties.

St. Mathew Early Childhood Center continues to have and update policies and procedures that include those for safety, daily health checks, hand washing, cleaning, sanitizing and disinfecting. On 1/5/2026, management acknowledged how their team of staff help ensure the children's space is sanitary and hazard free each day by following the policies and procedures. Management also talked about having support from their board and school personnel (e.g. school administration, school maintenance, school custodial team, school kitchen staff) as to daily building and grounds conditions and repairs.

Xavier Catholic School learning centers have emergency plans, policies, and procedures that are regularly reviewed and updated as needed. Specifically, St. Matthew PS has successfully navigated through historic Linn County flooding events, 2019 winter Polar Vortex, 2019 health (covid-19) pandemic, 8/10/20 Derecho Storm, 2021 food supply issues, 2022 infant formula shortages, air quality alerts (2023, 2025), and repeated technology outages (7/19/24 global technology outage, 10/10/2025 AWS outage, 10/29/2025 Microsoft outage).

3. Identify the aspects that fall below the standard

4. Any corrective action plans, provisional license, and safety plans-steps to get into compliance

Not applicable.

5. Special Notes/Recommendations

Continue to collaborate with the Xavier Catholic School System including St. Matthew Elementary School regarding

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maintenance of the outdoor playground (e.g. adequate cushion surface depth, chipping/rusting equipment, power washing of outdoor equipment). If areas of the outdoor playground become unsatisfactory, the childcare shall refrain from accessing those areas until remedies are made. Noted on 1/5/2026 - Repair the cracked grey heavy plastic climbing wall steps attached to the outdoor climber. At the top of the school-age sidewalk, the distance between the fence panel and swinging gate latch fence panel has increased whereas the gate latch is close to not latching properly. Remedy. There is signage attached to the outdoor play area fence with long bolts protruding into the area the children play. Please remedy to prevent a puncture hazard.

Repair areas of chipping paint (e.g. classrooms, indoor large motor room, hallways).

Ensure all posted lesson plans are updated.

Please ensure documentation of NR's scheduled first-aid and CPR training is placed into respective file and uploaded into ipower upon receipt.

At the end of food service, please ensure that once any cup containing a liquid other than water has been offered and drank from, that cup is fully emptied and then cleaned and sanitized prior to using again. To do otherwise, can result in bacteria growth, food illness, and/or diminished integrity of food nutrients.

Increase school-age materials (e.g. games, books, puzzles, building materials, crafts) in both the young and older school-age areas. Please also consider obtaining mobile (wheeled) shelving for your school-age children. All supplies can then be easily stored and transported/moved from the storage area to the school-age shared programming areas as needed.

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The program's license remains in full status. Thank you for the visit.

Date: 01/23/2026

HHS Licensing Consultant: Amy Lyons

Non-compliance with any of the mandated regulatory requirements listed above may lead to the cancellation or revocation of your Child Care License. Please take steps necessary to completely address each of the violations noted above.

Child Care Resource and Referral is an excellent resource for providers to access training options and support in your area. You can reach Child Care Resource and Referral at **https://iowaccrr.org**.