

First Steps Children's Centre, Cauldon Campus

Inspection report for early years provision

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Inspector Maxine Williams

Setting Address Stoke Road, Shelton, Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire, ST4 2DG

Telephone number 01782 603507

E-mail mtayl3sc@stokecoll.ac.uk

Registered person Stoke On Trent College

Type of inspection Integrated

Type of care Full day care

ABOUT THIS INSPECTION

The purpose of this inspection is to assure government, parents and the public of the quality of childcare and, if applicable, of nursery education. The inspection was carried out under Part XA Children Act 1989 as introduced by the Care Standards Act 2000 and, where nursery education is provided, under Schedule 26 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998.

This report details the main strengths and any areas for improvement identified during the inspection. The judgements included in the report are made in relation to the outcomes for children set out in the Children Act 2004; the National Standards for under 8s day care and childminding; and, where nursery education is provided, the *Curriculum guidance for the foundation stage*.

The report includes information on any complaints about the childcare provision which Ofsted has received since the last inspection or registration or 1 April 2004 whichever is the later.

The key inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding: this aspect of the provision is of exceptionally high quality

Good: this aspect of the provision is strong

Satisfactory: this aspect of the provision is sound

Inadequate: this aspect of the provision is not good enough

For more information about early years inspections, please see the booklet *Are you ready for your inspection?* which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

THE QUALITY AND STANDARDS OF THE CARE AND NURSERY EDUCATION

On the basis of the evidence collected on this inspection:

The quality and standards of the care are good. The registered person meets the National Standards for under 8s day care and childminding.

The quality and standards of the nursery education are good.

WHAT SORT OF SETTING IS IT?

First Steps Children's Centre is run by Stoke-on-Trent College. It opened in 1988 and operates from seven rooms in two single storey purpose built buildings. It is situated within the grounds of the Cauldon Campus of Stoke-on-Trent College. A maximum of 83 children may attend the nursery at any one time. The nursery is open each term time weekday from 08.15 to 17.00 and from 08.00 to 17.00 during school holidays, all year round. All children share access to a secure enclosed outdoor play area.

There are currently 107 children aged from three months to five years on roll. Of these, 11 children receive funding for early education. Children attend for a variety of sessions. Places are mainly provided for students of the college and when places are available, the staff and local community. The nursery currently supports a number of children with learning difficulties and also a number of children who speak English as an additional language.

The nursery employs 24 members of staff, all of whom hold appropriate early years qualifications. Six staff are currently working towards further qualifications. The setting has an Investors in People award and is accredited with the National Day Nurseries Association.

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PROVISION

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

Children are cared for in a warm, clean environment where they learn the importance of good personal hygiene through well-planned routines. They know they need to wash their hands before snack and lunch times, after outside play and after using the toilet. Children's health is well protected by the successful implementation of policies and procedures. Nappy changing procedures are good because staff wear aprons and gloves, all surfaces are wiped with anti-bacterial spray and children's individual records are completed to ensure that staff and parents are aware of when children have been changed. Each child has their own bedding, nappies and cream, which prevents the risk of cross-contamination. Consequently, this helps children remain healthy. Accident and medication systems are fully understood and all records are accurate and up to date. When children arrive at the nursery with existing injuries parents are asked to complete the appropriate forms detailing how the injury occurred. This ensures that children's well-being is protected. Children's understanding of how to keep themselves healthy is promoted through topics, conversations and activities. When children are playing doctors, staff clearly explain what the blood pressure monitor is and how it works, discussing the importance of a nutritious diet and regular exercise to ensure they remain healthy. As a result, children are beginning to recognise ways to keep themselves healthy and to take responsibility for their own well-being.

The nursery has achieved a healthy eating award and supplies a wide range of nourishing meals and snacks that appeal to the children and meet their nutritional needs. Meal times are sociable occasions, children sit down together to share a nutritious meal, such as chicken, potatoes, vegetables and gravy, followed by fruit. All but the very youngest children are able to feed themselves and use appropriate cutlery and staff sit with children and offer assistance when required. Children's individual dietary requirements are recorded and vegetarian options are always available. All staff work together with parents to ensure that children begin to understand the benefits of a healthy diet and making healthy choices. Staff educate them about the benefits of eating fresh fruit and vegetables, and snacks are usually fruit and vegetables or other healthy choices. Fresh drinking water is available at all times and children are able to access a drink when they want one. Consequently, children are learning how to meet their own dietary needs. Babies are held by a preferred carer whilst being bottle fed, therefore they are comfortable and secure as they feed.

Children enjoy a wide range of activities, which contributes to their good health. Regular outdoor play sessions help children make progress in their physical abilities. For example, they manoeuvre around each other well, displaying competence while balancing on the stepping stones and using the climbing frames and slide in the enclosed play area. Children enjoy regular walks to the local park, which enables them to enjoy lots of fresh air and to run around, enjoying the open space, with suitable supervision. They join in the activities with enthusiasm and this helps them develop knowledge of the way activities have an effect on their bodies. All are able to rest and be active according to their needs.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

The nursery is split into seven rooms in two purpose built buildings. Children are allocated to the rooms in the nursery according to their age and stage of development. Each of the rooms

is of a good size, with an integral quiet area for children to rest and relax. There is a wide range of high quality and developmentally appropriate resources available, which meet safety standards. These are organised effectively in storage containers at heights which are accessible to children. Consequently, children are able to independently access resources and make decisions about their own play and learning. Children share access to a fully enclosed outdoor play area; there is a good sized play area which has safety flooring fitted to protect toddlers and babies from harm when they are developing their physical skills. Children are able to ride bikes and other ride-on toys and use the climbing equipment, while in a safe and secure environment. The nursery provides an attractive environment in which children are able to develop confidence, self-esteem and a very good sense of belonging.

Hazards to children are reduced because the staff are very attentive and use daily detailed risk assessments to reduce possible dangers. This means that children are able to move around safely, freely and independently. Staff monitor access to the premises at all times and additional security procedures are in place to ensure that admittance to the premises is controlled. For example, there are security cameras in place that monitor access to the building and activity in each of the individual rooms. This ensures that the safety and well-being of children is protected. Children are further protected because of robust procedures for their arrival and departure. Staff have a good awareness of the procedures that they should follow if a child becomes lost or is not collected at the end of the day.

Fire evacuation procedures are good, they are fully understood by both staff and children; appropriate fire-fighting equipment is in place and fire drills are practised and recorded on a regular basis. Staff help children to learn about keeping themselves safe through conversations and topics. For example, they remind children to use their 'walking feet' when in the nursery and talk to them about why they have to be attentive when using scissors. Knowledge and understanding of child protection procedures is excellent. Staff have a thorough awareness of the signs and symptoms of abuse and are confident to report concerns. All staff have undergone training in child protection. There is a detailed and robust child protection procedure in place, which is displayed in each of the rooms along with the pictures and contact numbers of the three designated child protection officers; each of whom is available to give support to staff, parents and children, should any concerns arise. As a result, children's safety is extremely well-safeguarded.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

Children are at ease and enjoy their time in the setting's welcoming and comfortable environment. They develop their independence as they choose between a large assortment of toys, books and activities, which are interesting and appealing. Staff continually talk to children and react to their language and actions. Children use a variety of ways to respond and express themselves, which contributes to their budding communication skills. For example, two-year-olds enjoy singing along to songs such as 'Baa, baa, black sheep' and 'The wheels on the bus'; most know the words and are eager to join in, performing actions when appropriate. There is a good range of equipment and toys to promote imaginative play and children play well together, with resources such as the home corner, kitchen and dressing up clothes. Staff promote the development of children's imaginative skills well, as they encourage children to access the role play area and choose clothes to dress up in. A good selection of role play resources further enhances children's enjoyment of their time in the setting. Two-year-olds concentrate well as they sit at the table playing with the hairdressing resources, pretending to wash and then brush the doll's hair, before adorning it with bands and slides.

One-year-old children are confident in their abilities, carefully placing a coloured ball at the top of the activity centre and dropping it through the hole, they watch patiently, as the ball rolls down the ramp and appears through the door flap. Once they have successfully manoeuvred the ball around the maze and completed the task they reward themselves with a clap, demonstrating very high levels of self-esteem and pride in their achievements. Staff are very attentive to children and spend considerable time enhancing their enjoyment and promoting their learning in everyday activities. For example, when two-year-olds are playing in the water tray, filling and emptying containers with water, staff join them and prompt children to examine the holes in the containers and to think about which will let the water through quicker. When children's hands start to wrinkle they are encouraged to think about why water makes their skin crease in this way. As a result, children's understanding of science and their communication skills are fully extended.

The nursery makes good use of the 'Birth to three matters' framework to promote children's learning and enjoyment in the setting. Staff have a secure knowledge of appropriate methods to promote children's development. Observations of children's progress are made by the key-worker of each group of children and the next steps to help children progress in their development are identified. However, no formal planning is in place for activities for children under the age of three and although children are progressing well, not all areas are fully covered through entirely free-play activities. All children attending the nursery produce many artistic creations, both during child-directed play and when learning about different festivals and celebrations. Babies have made Valentine's Day cards using finger painting and two-year-olds have produced a large wall display, depicting all of their favourite television and literary characters. These opportunities to produce artistic designs help to develop children's creative skills. Babies are encouraged to progress in their physical skills through the use of push and pull-along toys, shape sorters and activity centres. Babies are animated and gleeful as they play with the activity centre, delighting as they manage to move the objects with their hands and reaching for toys that staff members place just out of reach, in order to encourage babies to develop their physical skills further by crawling towards the objects. Children are relaxed and receive comfort when they are tired or upset. Staff sit with children, help them with their dinner and give cuddles. Consequently, children are confident and have good levels of self-esteem.

Nursery education

The quality of teaching and learning is good. The manager and staff delivering the Foundation Stage demonstrate a firm knowledge and a secure understanding of how young children learn and progress. Planning covers most areas of learning well and links clearly to the stepping stones, although there is no written differentiation of activities in the planning, in order that it is clear how activities should be adapted for the diverse capabilities of children. However, the good key-worker system and the knowledge of staff enables them to adapt activities to suit the educational needs of individual children. Current observation records for children receiving nursery education are completed on a regular basis, they detail what children have achieved and learned through activities and show some planning for the next steps in each child's learning. The information from observations is not efficiently used to assess how children are progressing along the stepping stones. However, the successful key-worker system ensures that children work in small groups, with a key-worker who knows them well and who is aware of their individual learning styles. Subsequently, the lack of appropriate written assessments does not significantly impact on meeting children's learning needs or extending their progress.

Children are involved and enthusiastic and they enjoy taking part in the available activities. They are secure with the staff and have good levels of self-esteem. They are confident in initiating their own learning and are generally well occupied by the interesting activities. Children demonstrate consideration and are polite to each other as they wait patiently in line to go outside for physical play and to visit the toilet. Their self-help skills are promoted well during everyday hygiene routines as they are all encouraged to use the toilet and wash their hands independently. Children's verbal communication skills are good. Most children speak clearly and assertively, talking about their personal experiences. They are able to put their thoughts into words, saying that they recognise the author's name when they are read a book about bears and talking about their own bath time routine, when the topic is covered in the story. They speak clearly and are confident, happy to talk to both adults and children, and eager to discuss why they have to water the plants and they know that if they do not the plants will wilt and die. Children are able to recognise their own names as they find their name on their placemats and they are encouraged to use the letter tiles to reproduce the words that are written on labels in various areas of the room, supporting them in linking meaning to written words. As a result, children's language and literacy skills are developing well.

Children often self-select and look at books independently. The good range and organisation of books encourages children to access them and to develop their reading skills and there is a comfortable area available for children to relax, enjoy quiet time and read books. Children often approach staff to read them stories and staff are always willing to sit down and read to children. The nursery is committed to promoting the communication, language and literacy of children attending. Themes are often organised around stories such as the current space theme, which is centred on a book about a bear and owl going to the moon. Each theme is promoted through a range of activities to help children extend their knowledge and awareness of the subject. For example, the themed book is read on a daily basis and rhymes and songs are adapted to suit each of the topics, as well as a wide variety of creative activities being planned to promote children's enjoyment. When taking part in the topic on space, children are encouraged to develop their understanding through a themed role play area, which is decorated with pictures of space and model rockets. They produce a variety of artistic creations such as picnic baskets to take on their trip to the moon and at snack time they make sandwiches to take for their picnics. These additional measures promote children's interest in the subject they are learning about and enables them to develop a deeper understanding of each theme. Staff actively encourage children's understanding and imagination during story times. Books are held so children can see the writing and pictures and staff ask children about the story as it is read and encourage them to predict what will happen next. When children ask questions or offer comments on the story staff are eager to engage children and promote their understanding of the narrative.

Children's behaviour is usually managed quite well and they enjoy being in the calm and caring surroundings. They are gently reminded to use their 'walking feet' in the nursery and to treat each other and the resources with respect. When books are damaged staff explain to children that the nursery's books are very special and that children have to be gentle with them or they will not have any nice books to read. This promotes children awareness of appropriate methods of behaviour and increases children's understanding of suitable conduct. The rooms and the outside play areas are well organised and offer interesting and appealing environments, with a good range of developmentally appropriate resources. Children learn about shapes, size and colour through activities and games. Three-year-olds are prompted to look at the patterns and shapes they produce when making picnic baskets, they are able to say when they fold the paper that they create a diamond shape. Children's counting skills are promoted in everyday activities; they are encouraged to join in counting songs such as 'Five little men in a flying saucer'. Each

child has a flying saucer to hold and wave in time to the song and to put down in turn as the men in the flying saucer reduce until there are none. They are regularly asked to count items during routine activities and games. Consequently, children's mathematical skills are progressing well.

Staff use appropriate means to sustain children's attention, they sit with children, ask questions and help to expand their learning and enjoyment during activities. Children's awareness of the community and the wider world is increased through activities and the positive attitude of the staff. There are topics to help children learn about nature and the world around them. For example, they take part in growing a variety of plants in both the outdoor area and inside such as carrots, cress and herbs. They learn about design and develop making skills through the use of various construction kits. Children concentrate well as they connect the rainbow rings, freely using their imagination to construct a selection of objects. They are eager to demonstrate how they can make the wheels of their model go around and how their giant has legs and arms and can walk along the table, making a loud, thumping noise as he goes. Children have access to a computer to help them develop their awareness of information technology and they are able to operate a variety of apparatus with confidence and ease. For example, opening programmes and operating the mouse on the computer to choose options on the educational games available. Children are confident in using the mouse to choose colours and then clicking on different areas of the screen to colour the picture, laughing as they choose inappropriate colours such as blue for the sun.

Children enjoy physical play regularly with the good range of play equipment in the outside physical play area. There are regular opportunities to use ride-on toys and to play physical games, as well as dancing and moving to music. They enjoy taking part in fun physical activities such as bouncing balloons in the air, without letting them drop onto the floor. When children have been playing active games they use the cushions to make themselves comfortable for a rest. This helps them develop knowledge of the effect of exercise and a healthy life on their bodies. Fine manipulative skills are developing and children demonstrate good control as they use scissors to cut out the paper for their picnic basket. Three-year-olds concentrate well as they cut carefully around the shapes and then use the glue spreaders to apply them to the outside of the basket, in decoration. Children respond well to a wide range of creative activities. They produce a variety of pictures and artistic creations for each topic. For example, they have made rockets, picnic blankets, tables and space pictures with glitter and sequins for the space display. Children's imaginative skills are developing well. They enjoy playing in the role play area, in which the main area is a kitchen theme, although a small area is changed to suit each of the themes, for example, the current space theme. There are regular opportunities to play with musical instruments and explore musical sounds and rhythm. Children are encouraged to access the instruments and to develop their understanding of rhythm as they use musical instruments to represent a spaceship zooming into space and then crashing down to land. They enjoy listening to music and are eager to participate in dancing and singing sessions. All children enjoy their time in the setting and are developing their learning through well-organised stimulating play.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

Staff have a very good understanding of learning difficulties and disabilities and the nursery's policies and procedures promote inclusion for all children. The setting works in partnership with parents to ensure appropriate support is provided to all of the children attending. The nursery links with outside agencies to assist children in their progress and there is an identified

member of staff, who has attended training and who is able to provide support for children with additional needs. The staff member has undertaken supplementary training to enable her to improve the language development of children attending the nursery, as part of a multi-agency communication, language and literacy project being operated in the local area. A project to assess children's language skills throughout the nursery, from babies through to pre-school children, and to continually assess language development throughout each of the rooms, is in place. Also, the designated staff member has recently been made supernumerary, which enables her to provide assistance to children, at any time, wherever her support is required.

There are a number of children attending with English as an additional language. The setting takes extensive steps to ensure that staff are able to meet the needs of children for whom English is an additional language. Parents are invited into the setting and asked to provide written key words to assist both children in communicating, and staff in meeting, routine needs. Additional support is available to staff, parents and children from the language tutors within the college, who are able to assist in any translation requirements. Children are provided with a series of pictures on a looped key ring, to enable them to communicate any needs that they are unable to vocalise, due to language difficulties. Consequently, all children are able to fully participate in the setting's activities and are making exceptional progress in their communication skills.

Staff have a very good understanding of equal opportunities issues and use it successfully to help children learn about the world around them. There is a good range of play materials and activities to help children develop positive attitudes towards their own and other cultures and beliefs, and to disability and gender. Different festivals are celebrated such as Christmas and Chinese New Year, for which children produce a variety of artistic creations to display around the setting and to take home. For example, children have produced pictures and model rats for Chinese New Year, to symbolise the 'Year of the Rat'. There is also an assortment of displays depicting different languages and cultural practices. These positive steps promote children's understanding of culture, diversity and the wider world.

There is a strong emphasis on focusing on good behaviour and staff have high expectations of children's behaviour. Children's self-confidence and sense of worth is developed well, with the use of encouragement and praise during their play. There are boundaries in place to encourage children to behave in an appropriate manner and to respect their peers, staff and resources. Although, on occasion, these boundaries are not enforced consistently, resulting in children testing the limits imposed by staff. The reward system in place encourages children to think about the way that they behave and to be proud of their own achievements. Children proudly show off the stickers they receive for positive behaviour and achievements are displayed on the walls in each of the rooms, to encourage children to feel a sense of pride in their accomplishments. Children take turns and share well, they wait patiently for their turn to play in the sand and all join in to help put the toys away when it is tidy up time. Children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is fostered.

Partnerships with parents are very positive and friendly, children's individual needs are documented and staff are available to discuss any questions or concerns at the end of each session. The individual routines of babies and young children, such as sleeping and feeding, are discussed and recorded, to ensure that continuity of care is promoted. Parent information boards are displayed, along with the 'policy of the month' to assist parents in developing their familiarity with the setting's policies and procedures. Also, summarised policies are provided to parents in the welcome pack, this means that parents are well informed about the care their child receives. Parents are regularly asked their views on the nursery and newsletters are

produced to keep them informed of what activities are planned for each term, along with details of themes and topics and ideas for parents to promote children's learning at home. Parents' comments are positive when discussing the care and education that children receive.

The partnership with parents and carers of children who receive nursery education is good. Initial information is provided to parents when children begin to receive nursery education. Staff are available to provide additional information on the Foundation Stage to parents and details of planning and individual topics are displayed for parents to read. There is an 'open-door' policy in place in the nursery, which enables parents and carers to come in at any time to chat to staff about their children. Consequently, there is a very good level of communication between the setting and parents. This ensures that all parents know how their children are progressing and developing and that children are able to make consistent improvement in all areas of their development.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

Children are comfortable and feel secure in the well-ordered surroundings. Indoor and outdoor space is organised well to provide an extensive range of play opportunities for children. This enables them to initiate and extend their own play and learning. Children are cared for by an appropriately qualified, dedicated team of staff. There are comprehensive and effective procedures in place for the recruitment and selection of staff and this helps to make sure that those looking after children are suitable to do so. An effective key-worker system is in place that ensures a named person is allocated to each child to take responsibility for their day to day care and development. The key-worker is the main point of contact for parents and carers, and shares necessary information with them. Staff successfully use the policies and procedures to support the well-being, care and learning of children. All documentation which contributes to children's health, safety and well-being is in place and is regularly reviewed. There is a strong emphasis on improvement through training and all staff are encouraged to access and undertake appropriate training to enhance their knowledge and awareness of child development and education, to enable them to provide high quality childcare.

The leadership and management of the setting is good. Both the provider and the manager are proactive in assessing the strengths and weaknesses in the educational provision, and continue to seek improvements in the service they provide for parents and children. There are clear and effective induction procedures in place to ensure that children are cared for by appropriately qualified and experienced staff. Effective guidance is given by management to ensure that staff are clear in their roles and the appraisal system monitors staff performance and ensures continuing suitability of staff. Staff delivering the Foundation Stage have a secure knowledge of how children learn and develop and they organise the planning for the National Curriculum to meet the needs of both individual children and the group as a whole, to help children develop academically and enjoy their time in the setting. Overall, the provision meets the needs of the range of children for whom it provides.

Improvements since the last inspection

At the last care inspection the provider agreed to improve safety. The items of furniture that previously presented safety issues have been disposed of and the buggies are now stored in a mobile unit. As a result children are safe and secure in the setting and fire exits are not obstructed, which means that fire safety is no longer compromised.

At the last education inspection the provider was asked to develop staff knowledge and to improve children's opportunities to develop their literacy and mathematical skills. All staff delivering the Foundation Stage have undergone appropriate training and demonstrate a suitable understanding of how to promote children's learning and progress towards the early learning goals. Consequently, children are taught by dedicated, highly motivated staff, who promote their learning in all areas. Opportunities for children to practise writing skills and letter recognition, as well as to develop problem solving skills and an understanding of mathematics are included and promoted in daily routine activities. As a result, children are progressing well in all areas of their academic development.

Complaints since the last inspection

Since the last inspection there have been no complaints made to Ofsted that required the provider or Ofsted to take any action in order to meet the National Standards.

The provider is required to keep a record of complaints made by parents, which they can see on request. The complaints record may contain complaints other than those made to Ofsted.

THE QUALITY AND STANDARDS OF THE CARE AND NURSERY EDUCATION

On the basis of the evidence collected on this inspection:

The quality and standards of the care are good. The registered person meets the National Standards for under 8s day care and childminding.

The quality and standards of the nursery education are good.

WHAT MUST BE DONE TO SECURE FUTURE IMPROVEMENT?

The quality and standards of the care

To improve the quality and standards of care further the registered person should take account of the following recommendation(s):

- include some planning into the daily activities for children under the age of three, to ensure that all areas of children's development and progress are covered effectively.

The quality and standards of the nursery education

To improve the quality and standards of nursery education further the registered person should take account of the following recommendation(s):

- improve documentation, by including differentiation for children of varied abilities and ensure that all areas of children's learning are covered in planning and improve the assessment system to ensure that children's progress towards the early learning goals is clearly recorded.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the leaflet *Complaints about Ofsted Early Years: concerns or complaints about Ofsted's role in regulating and inspecting childcare and early education (HMI ref no 2599)* which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk