

First Steps Nursery

Inspection report for early years provision

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Inspector Lynne Milligan

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Type of setting Childcare - Non-Domestic

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Introduction

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Description of the setting

First Steps Nursery opened in 1988 and operates from four rooms within a single storey building in the grounds of Cauldon Campus of Stoke-on-Trent College. The setting is close to Staffordshire University and Hanley Park as well as other local amenities. The nursery opens five days a week during term time only, with sessions offered from Monday to Friday from 8.30am until 4.30pm. Some sessions operate later into the evening as the nursery stays open until 5.00pm on a Monday and 6.00pm on a Tuesday.

The nursery is registered on the Early Years Register. A maximum of 36 children may attend the nursery at any one time. There are currently 62 children aged from four months to under five years on roll, many in part-time places. Places are mainly provided for students of the college and when places are available, the staff and local community.

The nursery employs 15 members of staff, all of whom hold early years qualifications at level 3 or above. Six staff are currently working towards their Foundation Degree, with one member of staff holding a BA Degree in Early Childhood Studies.

The overall effectiveness of the early years provision

Overall the quality of the provision is outstanding.

Children at First Steps Day nursery receive an outstanding level of care and learning supported by a professional and highly motivated team who are wholly committed to their role as early years educators. The strong relationships between management, staff, parents and carers fully support their inclusive approach and provide an enabling environment where children thrive. Staff are expert at delivering the learning and development requirements with many children achieving above and beyond their expected level. Countless innovative policies and procedures such as those that deal with safeguarding extensively encourage a shared responsibility in keeping children safe. A forward thinking approach to assessing the capabilities of the provision is consistently adopted and ensures a high quality service.

What steps need to be taken to improve provision further?

To further improve the high quality early years provision the registered person should consider:

- increasing the number of outings in order to further improve children's experiences of their community and the wider world.

The effectiveness of leadership and management of the early years provision

The provision is exceptionally well organised and managed. All staff take a personal interest in the success of the nursery and share a future vision in order to achieve a sustainable and successful nursery. Staff know that the 'office door is always open' to discuss any issues that arise and are actively encouraged by management to develop their ever growing skills. Any training that is attended is then shared throughout the nursery as staff hold briefings in order to train each other, sharing new ideas and techniques. Consequently, they are a keen and knowledgeable work force, with their professionalism and enthusiasm being evident throughout the nursery. All policies and procedures are of a superior standard and are fully implemented in practice to have a positive impact on children's care. As a result, outcomes for all children are excellent.

Child protection procedures are fully understood. Staff consistently work alongside safeguarding officers both at the nursery and college as a shared responsibility is always adopted and staff demonstrate an excellent working knowledge of child protection. A comprehensive policy is in place and is displayed in each of the rooms to support both staff and parents in following the correct procedures should concerns arise. This contains an outstanding level of detail in clear and easy to understand language. Children's safety is expertly promoted within the setting. Every inch of the nursery is fully risk assessed and updated using on line systems along with regular checks to ensure that the environment, both indoor and outdoor, is suitable. All areas accessed by children are beautifully maintained and laid out to enable freedom of movement. Toys are in excellent condition and safety equipment such as stair gates and socket covers are used to minimise any risks to children. The building is extremely secure. With their safety and well-being consistently prioritised, children thrive.

Superb relationships are fostered with parents, professionals and other carers. The setting provides parents with daily diary sheets for younger children, translating these into home languages where necessary, so that all parents are fully informed as to the care children receive. Daily discussions also occur regarding children's progress and needs, ensuring any changes are promptly responded to. Staff also take time to inform parents about any special achievements. For example, retelling significant events when their children have shown special kindness to others. Staff are committed to working with parents as they recognise the value of effective partnerships. A parent's charter demonstrates this very effectively and clearly defines the nursery's aims and objectives in realising each child's unique contribution whilst having the full support of all its parents. Staff also work alongside other professionals to ensure that children with additional needs are fully supported. Going above and beyond the norm, staff ensure that children receive care that complements that received at other settings. This gives children the best possible chance of reaching their individual goals and targets.

The setting has developed a superior approach to self-assessment which successfully identifies strengths and weaknesses in the provision. All staff are encouraged to play an active part in evaluation and, consequently, everyone who

works at the nursery has a keen sense of ownership and pride in the way it is run. Previous recommendations for improvement have been fully addressed and ideas for bringing about future changes have been identified. These are focussed on improving children's experiences, indicating that their well-being and enjoyment are always top priority.

The quality and standards of the early years provision and outcomes for children

Children's health is successfully promoted as they are provided with nutritional meals and plenty of opportunities for active play. A range of freshly cooked dishes are provided at lunch time along with healthy snacks and drinks. Individually named beakers and cups are placed in each of the room and encourage children to identify their own needs as they quench their thirst whenever they need to. An inclusive approach enables staff to overcome some of the physical barriers such as the size of the outside areas to ensure there is regular access to physical play and fresh air which also promotes an active lifestyle. Children of all ages are encouraged to use the outside areas throughout the day and the fantastic range of equipment and toys outside, means that most children relish the chance to do so. Children engage in sand and water activities or enjoy balancing and climbing on the equipment. They have great fun water painting the shed with large brushes and making Halloween displays as they learn about traditional celebrations. Staff also encourage children to stay safe as they regularly practise the fire drill with them and remind them of the rules of the setting. This is further underpinned through meaningful interactive activities that involve local fire officers who make it fun whilst increasing children's awareness of the hazards. Consequently, children are developing an excellent sense of how to stay safe.

Staff expertly manage children's behaviour and ensures that children's self-esteem is protected. Unwanted behaviour is dealt with by getting down on the child's level and discussing how their actions effect others. Positive actions are rewarded with an abundance of praise and encouragement. Children beam with pleasure as they are rewarded for being kind and great pride is taken when children are given responsibilities such as helping to wipe tables after lunch. Children also take part in a range of fundraising events for popular charities or sponsored dressing-up for a popular children's charity. Consequently, children are actively involved in the community and are effectively developing their understanding of the wider world. They also learn about other cultures and backgrounds through themed events. Resources in the setting reflect the backgrounds of those who attend. Children for whom English is a second language are fully included as words in their home languages are displayed alongside English written words and images. This encourages them to develop a strong sense of self-identity and belonging.

Staff successfully plan experiences that link to children's individual learning and development needs. Children are allocated a key worker who skilfully observes and assesses their progress. Next steps are identified for each child and fed into weekly plans to ensure all children are stimulated. All six areas of learning are equally covered. Children are actively involved in determining the resources on offer as

even young babies are able to choose items for free play from the photographs on display. They eagerly search for their favourite things and throughout the session are fruitfully engaged, moving freely between activities, playing imaginatively in the home corner, building with construction blocks or completing jigsaws. A marvellous range of resources are available. Children choose from the array of clearly labelled toy boxes which include dressing-up clothes, telescopes, tape measures, jigsaws, books and dolls. The way the environment is set out is regularly reflected upon and evaluated. Action is then taken to ensure all children get as much as possible out of the activities. Consequently, staff are extremely knowledgeable about what engages and stimulates children and resources are carefully selected to maximise children's enjoyment. For instance, when learning about letters of the alphabet, staff incorporated see through pots which contained visual prompts of the letter with which they began, enabling staff to fully include all children.

All staff skilfully extend children's learning through the use of open questioning. They sit alongside the children as they play, showing genuine interest in their learning. As a result, children are confident communicators, answering questions with thought and offering their own ideas. Staff regularly sit and observe children, learning about their style of play, how they negotiate and communicate and understanding their needs. This effective practice allows little intervention from staff as they carefully adapt the environment and provide ample opportunities for children to take their learning in a direction that suits them. At times when staff do intervene, the challenges are extremely well received. Children clearly enjoy these engaging moments and clearly excel at every level.

All activities are expertly planned, enabling children to learn in fun and interactive ways. For example, after reassessing children's acceptance of reading and their appreciation of books, staff devised a book club. Tickets were made and children became aware of the processes involved as they took book homes to read with their families. Not only did their understanding of reading, basic comprehension and stories increase but so did the level of English used by the parents. Younger children learn about shapes at the newly introduced shape table, associating 3D images that include construction bricks, cassette tapes and rulers to laminated cards with pictures of rectangles, squares and oblongs. This encourages their reasoning skills and literacy skills as they use both written word and picture cues to solve the problem. All children are making rapid progress as they delight in the activities on offer. Babies are fully absorbed in play as they experience the feel of baked beans between their fingers or engage in creative play with music and singing. They enjoy snuggling up with staff as they wake up and are fully included in all nursery activities. As a result, all children flourish in this caring and professional environment where children's needs are always top priority.

Annex A: record of inspection judgements

The key inspection judgements and what they mean

Grade 1 is Outstanding: this aspect of the provision is of exceptionally high quality

Grade 2 is Good: this aspect of the provision is strong

Grade 3 is Satisfactory: this aspect of the provision is sound

Grade 4 is Inadequate: this aspect of the provision is not good enough

The overall effectiveness of the early years provision

How well does the setting meet the needs of the children in the Early Years Foundation Stage?	1
The capacity of the provision to maintain continuous improvement	1

The effectiveness of leadership and management of the early years provision

The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	1
The effectiveness with which the setting deploys resources	1
The effectiveness with which the setting promotes equality and diversity	1
The effectiveness of safeguarding	1
The effectiveness of the setting's self-evaluation, including the steps taken to promote improvement	1
The effectiveness of partnerships	1
The effectiveness of the setting's engagement with parents and carers	1

The quality of the provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage

The quality of the provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
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Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage

Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
The extent to which children achieve and enjoy their learning	1
The extent to which children feel safe	1
The extent to which children adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which children make a positive contribution	1
The extent to which children develop skills for the future	1

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