

Small Steps Day Nursery and Pre-School

Inspection report for early years provision

Unique Reference Number	EY346027
Inspection date	11 June 2007
Inspector	Elizabeth Margaret Grocott
Setting Address	9 Lang Lane, West Kirby, Wirral, CH48 5HE
Telephone number	0151 625 6127
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Registered person	Small Steps Day Nursery (Wirral) Ltd
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 outstanding. 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?

Small Steps Day Nursery and Pre-school was registered in January 2007. It operates from a converted house in the residential area of West Kirby on the Wirral peninsular. A maximum of 45 children from birth to five years, of whom no more than 16 children may be under two years, may attend at any one time. There are currently 50 children on roll of whom six are receiving funding for nursery education. The provision is open on weekdays from 08.00 until 18.00 for 51 weeks of the year. All children share access to a large secure outdoor area. The nursery and pre-school support children with learning difficulties and disabilities and children who speak English as an additional language. Eight staff are employed, all of whom have appropriate early years qualifications or who are working towards one. The setting receives support from an early years advisory teacher.

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PROVISION

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

Children thrive because of the nursery's proactive approach to keeping them healthy. Children enjoy many healthy items at snack time, including apple, orange, bread sticks and raisins, and at these times children are encouraged to talk about their food and its nutritious value. Children with special dietary requirements, such as a vegetarian diet, are offered good quality alternatives. Children are quickly learning how to manage their own personal care, washing their hands after toileting and before snack with little prompting. Children's health needs are further supported through the use of clear documentation systems that keep parents fully informed of accidents and the administration of medicines. The standard of cleanliness throughout the building is maintained to an excellent standard by the staff, for example, tables are cleaned promptly after messy play and meals, and floors are swept or dried after activities.

Children's good health is effectively promoted because they are learning about growing foodstuffs organically, composting, recycling and planting healthy fresh fruit and vegetables. Each child takes responsibility for watering and nurturing the plants in the organic garden. Children's growth and development is superbly promoted by healthy exercise on a daily basis where children have regular opportunities to climb, run, swing, slide and enjoy fresh air. They use tricycles and go on walks to local areas of interest, such as a nature reserve, the beach, and local parks. There is exceptional focus on the outdoor provision in the form of an ice cream shop role play, beach huts, small tables and chairs with umbrellas for shade and swing seats with canopies for shade.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is outstanding.

All areas are maintained to an extremely high standard. Examples of children's work and photographs are displayed around the walls presenting a welcoming environment for families and showing that staff value children's contributions. A selection of different types of music plays quietly in the entrance area, giving an atmosphere of calm and tranquillity as parents and children arrive and leave. The extensive range of furniture and resources provided, promote effective learning because they are bright, interesting, inspiring and challenging. For example, babies play with musical instruments, explore with wet spaghetti and have low tables and chairs where they can sit together socially to enjoy their meals.

Well thought through safety procedures are in place to protect children from hazards. A rigorous risk assessment is used daily by the staff to check indoor and outdoor areas and resources. The premises have been designed with children's welfare in mind. Each area has specific safety features, such as non slip paint on the outdoor fire escape, nosing to the edges on the stair treads, highlighting the edges of the steps for the visually impaired and giving extra grip for young children and those with mobility difficulties. The accident records are checked regularly to see if any injuries recur, which could help to inform the risk assessment. Clear and comprehensive policies help maintain a safe environment for children. They learn about what is dangerous and how to keep themselves safe through topics, staff modelling good practice and practising such things as the evacuation procedure.

Staff ensure that their practice is underpinned by an up to date and thorough knowledge of child protection and the correct procedures to follow should they have any concerns. As a result, the welfare of children is fully safeguarded and promoted while in their care.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

Children enter the nursery enthusiastically, and settle very quickly to activities. They are familiar with the daily routines and on arrival, the older children find their name, put it on the flower on the door demonstrating they are present. Children who are distressed for any reason are given comfort by a familiar adult, and quickly become calm and interested in the activities. Extremely warm and caring, relaxed relationships are demonstrated between children and staff as they talk and laugh together whilst playing.

Staff have an excellent knowledge and understanding of the 'Birth to three matters' framework and use it to plan activities to inspire children's curiosity. Children are provided with a broad range of exciting activities and spontaneous events that help them to develop their language and mathematical thinking, to use their imagination and to build on their natural curiosity as learners. For example, toddlers learn to thread, sit on comfortable beanbags to look at books or go to the workshop to hammer and chisel. In the Tweenie group, children go out of the nursery to the local shops to choose a piece of fruit each to bring back and sample. The fruit is then used for printing. The pre-school children see how a hair dryer works, experiment with magnets and magnifying glasses and play in their own garden centre with plant pots, watering cans, trowels and forks. They also go out to a local nature reserve and collect straw and sticks to construct houses for the Three Little Pigs.

Nursery Education

The quality of teaching and learning is good. Staff demonstrate a very good understanding of the Foundation Stage and refer to the stepping stones in their planning. Effective systems are in place for identifying children's starting points, including using information obtained from parents. Excellent settling-in procedures ensure that children are secure, and confident in their environment and in their relationships with staff. Useful observations of children's learning and attainment are regularly made. These demonstrate children's very good progress and are consistently used to plan the next steps in children's learning. Staff create a stimulating environment and sit alongside children to ask questions and extend their learning, resulting in children being very focused, excited and motivated to learn. As yet, planning does not demonstrate support or challenge for more able and less able children. This means that it does not meet the needs of all children fully.

Children enthusiastically make choices about their activities and care, for example, as they choose what they would like to eat and drink from the snack table, or engage in filling and pouring with different utensils in the water tray. Children have a very positive attitude to their learning, concentrating on adult led and self-chosen tasks, such as making a three dimensional boat for the summer picture on the wall. They are confident and proud of their achievements discussing the features of their pictures in minute detail. Staff are skilled at conversing with children, giving them time to think before they answer. Children use good manners in their interactions with staff and each other, saying please, thank you and excuse me without prompting, and are very willing to complete group tasks, such as tidying up.

Children are making very good progress towards the early learning goals in all six areas of learning. They have strong communication skills, readily sharing their news at circle time and contributing to group discussions. They have large vocabularies, as they talk about a salamander in their story about a pet shop, David Attenborough's Life on Earth show, drawing pictures of lung fish and describing how the cistern fills after flushing the toilet.

They make good use of books in their free play, as well as learning about the use of books for information in staff led discussions. They access writing materials in many parts of the setting, making good use of them in the role play garden centre. Children show good listening skills during story time. This is as a result of animated story telling and effective staff questioning. For example, children are enthralled as one staff member asks the children if they think that the little boy in the story will choose to buy the rat over all the other animals. Children show confidence in their understanding of mathematical concepts. They show an interest in numbers and counting and have ample opportunities to count within the daily routine. For example, they count how many children are in pre-school each day, they link to this how many mats they will need at snack and how many plates and cups will be needed for lunch.

The setting provides an environment which reflects the wider community and the world we live in. Dressing up clothes, books and puzzles reflect different cultures and children celebrate Chinese New Year, Holi and St Patrick's Day. Children are involved in tending the organic garden, recycling materials and making compost. They are confident using the computer and enjoy many educational games. Children learn to use the nursery's digital camera and take photographs of their friends at play. Children enjoy music for dance and movement and sing along with favourite songs. Singing songs is a part of each session, and children make musical instruments, such as shakers, to accompany themselves. Role play areas are very well resourced providing an important backdrop to children's extensive imaginative play.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

The nursery staff apply first-rate effort to ensure that the individual needs of the children in their care are met. This is achieved through an effective key worker system that ensures every child is well known to all members of staff. Staff are particularly skilled in valuing children's contributions and display their work attractively on the walls around the nursery. Children have opportunities to learn about differences in cultures. This is done through looking at religious festivals and having access to a variety of resources which positively represent society, for example, the multicultural outfits for dressing up. They also learn about helping others, such as fundraising to support charities by taking part in the 'Big Toddle' at Chester Zoo.

Children with extra needs are exceptionally well cared for. Staff adapt the environment and ensure they have as much knowledge as possible, in order to accommodate their learning and development. Ongoing information is shared with parents of younger children in a variety of ways, including the notice board, newsletters and suggestions book, and through general, friendly daily conversations with the staff. Parent feedback is extremely positive about the setting and the care of the children, in particular how staff are fully aware of, and effectively meet, their children's individual needs. Children's behaviour is exemplary because they respond well to consistent boundaries. They benefit from lots of praise and encouragement in an effort to help them to learn right from wrong. They are kept busy and involved at all times so they do not become bored or frustrated. Children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is fostered.

The partnership with parents and carers is outstanding.

Parents of older children are provided with high quality information through a range of media, such as the nursery prospectus, to enable them to gain a full understanding of the Foundation Stage curriculum and how their children learn. Information about topics is displayed on the parents' notice board to keep them well informed about what their children are learning and how they can become involved, such as the St Patrick's Day celebrations. Regular newsletters keep parents fully up to date on any nursery issues and all staff make themselves available for regular exchanges of information. Comprehensive information is obtained from parents before placement to ensure that they are fully consulted about the care of their child, their individual requirements, and they are confident that their wishes are adhered to. Excellent arrangements are made to inform parents of children's ongoing progress and achievements. For example, regular meetings are held with key workers, parents can watch their children engage in an exciting range of activities through observation windows and comprehensive assessment files are available for parents to freely access.

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

The newly refurbished premises are bright, airy and clean and offer a warm and welcoming environment. The organisation and careful planning of the nursery, creates an atmosphere where children can learn and develop whilst having a lot of fun. Children benefit from staff who have a very clear sense of purpose and commitment to continually improving their practice within the nursery. They are enthusiastic about developing their commitment to effective practice and child development. They are actively supported and encouraged by their manager, to attend a variety of training, which ensures that they keep up to date with current practice and move forward with any future childcare initiatives. Space, time and resources are very well organised, and there is a high ratio of staff to children. Therefore, children receive extremely high levels of care and individual attention throughout the sessions.

Robust systems are in place for the vetting and recruitment of staff working directly with the children. This ensures that children are protected and cared for by staff with an expert knowledge and understanding of child development. A clear policy also relates to the supervision of staff who are not yet cleared, ensuring children are continually well protected. A comprehensive staff induction, regular meetings and six monthly appraisals, are combined to equip staff effectively. They work as a cohesive team to provide a range of resources and activities for the children to ensure they are well cared for and their learning is maximised.

Leadership and management is outstanding. The provider is also the manager of the setting and she clearly leads by example with her enthusiastic, thorough and positive approach. She spends time working alongside staff and directly with the children to motivate and act as a good role model. There is a very positive team ethos in evidence within the nursery. The manager ensures that each staff member has the opportunity to use their strengths and talents within the setting, giving children access to a variety of teaching styles. All are involved in regular monitoring and evaluation of curriculum delivery. This contributes to a high level of consistency and excellent organisation of the day to day running of the nursery. Overall, the provision meets the needs of the range of the children for whom it provides.

Improvements since the last inspection

Not applicable.

Complaints since the last inspection

Since registration 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.

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WHAT MUST BE DONE TO SECURE FUTURE IMPROVEMENT?

The quality and standards of the care

No recommendations for improvement are made because the quality and standards of care are outstanding.

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):

- ensure older, more able children are given sufficient challenge to meet their individual needs fully.

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