

First Steps Playgroup

Inspection report for early years provision

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| Unique Reference Number | 226397 |
| Inspection date | 03 October 2007 |
| Inspector | Susan Andrews |

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| Setting Address | The Old School Hall, Church Road, Barlestone, Nuneaton, Warwickshire, CV13 0EE |
| Telephone number | 07903 132279 |
| E-mail | |
| Registered person | First Steps Playgroup |
| Type of inspection | Integrated |
| Type of care | Sessional 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 satisfactory.

WHAT SORT OF SETTING IS IT?

First Steps Playgroup opened over 30 years ago and operates from the Old School Hall with access to a small enclosed outdoor play area. The playgroup is situated in the village of Barlestone, near Hinckley, in Leicestershire.

A maximum of 24 children may attend the playgroup at any one time. The playgroup is open each weekday morning from 09:15 to 11:45 during term time. There are currently 22 children aged from two to four years on roll. Of these 19 receive funding for nursery education. Children come from the local community and nearby villages.

The playgroup has experience of supporting children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and also children who speak English as an additional language. The setting employs six staff. Including the manager, three staff hold appropriate early years qualifications and three staff are working towards a qualification.

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PROVISION

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

Children are cared for in a warm, clean and child-orientated environment. General standards of hygiene at the setting are well maintained and staff minimise the risk of cross-infection as disposable towels and wipes are used and tables are cleansed using antibacterial spray after activities and before snack time.

Children's personal hygiene is well promoted as staff remind children to wash their hands before eating, after playing outside, using the toilet, wiping their noses and after messy play, therefore, children are beginning to develop an understanding of their own health and self-care needs.

Children experience a range of activities which contributes to their good health, such as frequent exercise and fresh air in the outdoor play area and using a range of toys and equipment that develops their physical skills. Children hop, jump, run and balance using a good range of age-appropriate equipment. They are learning to ride tricycles, climb on the climbing frame and balance on wooden forms with purpose and precision. Children have a good sense of movement as they negotiate space. They move freely between activities and equipment with ease, changing directions and starting and stopping as required. Good use is made of small equipment, such as sand tools, rolling pins, play dough cutters, paintbrushes, puzzles, fishing nets, sensory and threading toys. Consequently, this promotes children's development of fine muscle skills and co-ordination.

Children's medical welfare is safeguarded as an appropriately equipped first aid kit is available. Staff hold relevant first aid qualifications and follow clear procedures when dealing with accidents and the administration of medication. Therefore, they are able to positively respond should a child in their care have an accident or become unwell. Accident records are maintained, however, occasionally these lack sufficient detail regarding the injury sustained and any follow-up observations that are made.

Healthy eating is generally promoted. Snacks, such as cheese spread on toast, fruit and raw vegetables are provided at set times during the session and a weekly menu is displayed for parents to see. Children have a choice of milk, water or juice to drink. Staff ensure children take extra fluids when the weather is hot or after physical exercise, therefore, children remain well hydrated. However, children and staff do not always sit together at snack time and therefore a positive and relaxed social environment is not always created for children to develop their language, social skills and independence, for example, by pouring their own drinks.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

Children play in a well-organised environment, with clearly defined play areas. They benefit from the use of the outdoor play area which is safely enclosed when used by the children. There is sufficient space between each of the activities, both indoors and outside, so that children are able to move around comfortably, engaging in quiet and physical activities. As a result, their decision-making skills, choice of activities and independence are promoted. Children have easy access to a varied range of safe and suitable child-sized furniture and equipment which is in good condition. Toys and resources are plentiful, varied and reflect diversity. They are

age-appropriate and provide suitable challenge, therefore, children develop their skills, are stimulated and interested in what is available.

Children are well protected from the risks of accidental injury, as staff are highly safety conscious. They take positive steps to plan for emergencies and to effectively prevent and manage accidents. This is because they implement a range of risk assessments, regular fire drills and daily health and safety checks, to identify any potential hazards. Effective practices are in place, which actively contribute to keeping children safe and free from harm. For example, staff are extremely vigilant in the supervision of children regarding the security arrangements. The arrival and departure arrangements of children and their parents, are extremely well managed. Children are never left alone with people who have not been vetted or released to unauthorised adults, therefore, they remain safe and secure within the setting.

A written child protection policy is in place, which is in line with Local Safeguarding Children Board guidance and a copy of the 'What to do if you are worried a child is being abused' government leaflet, is displayed for parents to see. Staff have attended further training to update their knowledge and they have a sound understanding of child protection issues and reporting procedures. They are aware of the signs and symptoms of abuse and fully recognise their duty to protect the children in their care, therefore, children's welfare is safeguarded

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is satisfactory.

Children settle well and are happy in the setting and they are confident, independent and relaxed. New starters receive lots of sensitive care, support and encouragement from staff which helps to reassure them. They are cared for by enthusiastic and motivated staff, who give children lots of individual attention, therefore, they feel secure, welcomed and valued. Children are able to approach adults with ease and form close, trusting relationships with their key staff members. Staff are enthusiastic and are interested in what children do and say, they listen to them attentively and are skilled in knowing when and how to guide children to take the initiative in their play.

Children's overall development is supported as staff have an understanding of how children learn. Staff provide a range of planned indoor, outdoor and spontaneous activities and experiences that children, across the age range, enjoy. They explore their feelings through books, art activities and happily engage in role play, dressing-up and re-enacting familiar events, such as 'working in a hat shop', 'cooking breakfast' and 'going shopping'.

Nursery Education.

The quality of teaching and learning for the funded nursery education programme is satisfactory. Staff are sufficiently familiar with the Curriculum guidance for the foundation stage to enable them to plan a topic-based programme of activities giving generally broad and balanced coverage across the areas of learning. They are aware of how children learn and progress through the stepping stones, what the areas of learning include and they provide a suitable range of activities. However, some children, are unable to fully extend their learning. This is because curriculum planning and activities are not sufficiently influenced by staff's observations of what individual children can do, or need to do next. Staff are enthusiastic, they ask questions and invite children to think and predict for themselves during activities and general conversations. Children have opportunities to self-select play experiences and most activities are child-initiated with staff providing support and encouragement to develop their learning.

Children listen when staff are speaking and willingly answer their questions. They are beginning to be confident speakers as they increase their skills and vocabulary during group activities, happily singing songs and listening attentively to stories. Staff engage all children in lively conversation, however, some of the younger children, due to their limited focus and attention span, find it difficult to maintain an interest in the group activities.

Children are interested in their chosen play activities and generally enjoy their time and have fun at the setting. They form good relationships with their peers and play well together. For example,

'going to the shops' in the role play area or 'working in a hat shop'. Through appropriate organisation of resources and time, children have access to all activities and can make choices and decisions about their play, including playing out of doors or inside. Staff generally manage children's behaviour well, giving explanations about why some behaviour is unacceptable. Children are beginning to understand how their behaviour affects others. Children are kind to each other, they work co-operatively, take turns, share their toys and help to tidy away the equipment, which gives them a sense of responsibility. However, some opportunities are lost for children to develop their skills and independence further, for example, to access tissues to blow their own nose, pour their own drinks at mealtimes and to put on their own coats at home time.

Children's mark-making skills are fostered with the use of a variety of materials made available on a daily basis. For example, children use paintbrushes and chalks, they draw and write with pencils and crayons as part of art activities. However, spontaneous opportunities are not always available, such as making a shopping list or taking a phone message in the role play areas. They enjoy looking at books and respond well to questions as they confidently predict what might happen next in their stories. Children are learning that the printed word has meaning and have opportunities to recognise their name, for example, as displayed on their art work. They follow words on the page at story time and some use of labels and displays around the room are helping children to become familiar with letters and numbers, linking them to objects and places.

Children's mathematical development is routinely encouraged. Older children are able to count confidently up to 10 and sometimes count in sequence as part of adult-led activities, such as singing rhymes, reading stories or when using a range of number puzzles. Younger children are beginning to use numbers in everyday conversations, for example, 'I caught two fishes in my net'. Children are learning to compare, sort and calculate as they use jigsaw puzzles and see numbers in their environment, for example, in their role play as they 'pay for their pretend shopping'. Children enjoy exploring and investigating their environment and they are making progress in using positional language, such as 'in front of', 'underneath' and 'above'. Through the sand and play dough activities they are making comparisons, for example, judging which container is full, heavier or smaller and which play dough shape is bigger. Children explore the world around them and have opportunities to develop their information, communication and technology skills as they use scales for weighing, magnifying glasses, magnets and when playing with the digital camera, cash till, calculator and telephone in their role play.

Children are beginning to make some sense of the world around them by investigating and exploring through first hand experiences in the play environment. Children observe, explore, question and are encouraged to be curious through some planned activities. For example, children have regular opportunities to explore textures, how things feel, such as pine cones, water and play dough. They are beginning to learn the value of different cultures and beliefs,

through a limited range of multicultural celebrations. Some resources are available that promote positive images regarding diversity. For example, books, puzzles, dolls and dressing-up clothes. This helps children to respect their own and other cultures and to value people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Children develop their physical skills and their creativity through the use of a range of art materials and tools as they paint, crayon, create collage pictures and model with play dough. Children use their imagination to express their ideas and feelings through stories and in play situations that reflect their home and the wider community. They dress up as 'police officers' and 'shopkeepers'. Children remember and sing familiar songs. They use musical instruments with great enjoyment to explore, identify and learn about differing tones, pitch and rhythms. Children's appreciation of different kinds of music is enhanced as the range includes classical, ethnic and contemporary music as well as children's familiar songs and nursery rhymes.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

Staff ensure children feel a sense of belonging as new children are sensitively supported, so that they settle and become more confident. Staff liaise closely with parents of new children to ensure that they are kept informed of their individual needs. They work closely with parents and with their permission seek advice, guidance and engage regular support from other professionals for those children who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Consequently children's needs are met and they feel included, valued and respected. Children have access to a range of resources, play opportunities and activities which reflect diversity and that helps children begin to positively acknowledge cultural differences. For example, through the celebration of some multicultural festivals and the use of puzzles, dolls, dressing-up clothes and books.

Children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is fostered. Children behave well in the setting. Staff manage children's behaviour in a positive way, by diverting children's attention, listening to them and praising their achievements. Staff assist children in their negotiations, in a calm consistent and encouraging manner. Clear explanations are given by staff about why some behaviour is unacceptable. They remind children that they must take turns and share their toys. Children's self-esteem is enhanced by praise from staff, for example, staff positively acknowledge children when they are kind to each other. Children are aware of the rules as they tidy away their toys and when they are asked to sit on the carpet at the end of the session to hear their name called, before going to greet their parents. This encourages them to work co-operatively with each other and adds to their sense of responsibility. Staff are polite to each other and to the children, always using 'please' and 'thank you' and encouraging children to do the same. Consequently, children behave well and harmony and co-operation is promoted.

The partnership with parents and carers is satisfactory. They speak favourably of the welcoming environment which helps them feel confident in the care offered to their children. A range of the setting's policy documentation is available for parents upon request, however, a comprehensive prospectus has not been devised. Parents have access to information about the six areas of learning and information is given informally by staff through ongoing dialogue, newsletters and the parents' notice board. Developmental files are kept for individual children showing children's progression through the Foundation Stage. These are made available to parents upon request. Appropriate information is gathered at the time a child is placed at the setting, to help them settle. However, this consultation process is not ongoing or sufficiently

robust and consequently, does not fully develop the partnership with parents to encourage them to contribute more efficiently to their children's care and learning.

Organisation

The organisation is satisfactory.

Children receive a satisfactory level of care from staff who have been selected as part of an appropriate application procedure. This ensures that they are looked after safely by qualified, experienced and committed staff, who embrace training opportunities and have been vetted. They receive appropriate induction, however, staff appraisal systems are not in place to evaluate their ongoing suitability and competency.

The operation plan has been devised, works in practice and the documentation which contributes to the children's health, safety and well-being is generally in place and under revision. Staff are familiar with the setting's policies and procedures and are aware of their duty to comply with the National Standards and Regulations. Appropriate staffing ratios are in place and staff deployment is generally effective, therefore, the supervision of the children is suitably maintained.

The leadership and management of the funded nursery education programme is satisfactory. However, the members of the newly formed trustee/committee are not fully familiar with their roles and responsibilities or the National Standards and Regulations. The line management system, provides childcare staff with a system to communicate appropriately through informal discussion, regular planning and team meetings. The person in charge is an effective leader with good vision about how to provide an appropriate service to children and parents. Overall children's needs are met.

Improvements since the last inspection

At the last inspection, the setting agreed to ensure the operational plan was revised, policy statements brought up to date and to ensure parents know how to contact Ofsted. The setting also agreed to ensure the management of snack time provided children with nutritional food options. In addition the setting was asked to provide positive images for the playgroup children, regarding race and disability.

The setting has taken positive steps to address all three issues. The operational plan has been revised and policy statements are regularly under review to take into account new changes in procedures and practice. Information is displayed about the setting's complaints procedure and this includes Ofsted's address and telephone number. Suitable progress has been made regarding diversity and positive images of culture, gender and disability are displayed and incorporated within planned activities.

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

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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 satisfactory.

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):

- continue to develop a partnership with parents and carers that encourages them to participate and contribute more effectively to their child's care and learning
- develop strategies for ensuring that the trustees/committee members are familiar with their roles and responsibilities and that fair and effective systems are implemented to assess staff's ongoing suitability and competency.

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):

- revise the management of mealtimes to more effectively promote a positive social environment and provide more opportunities for children to develop their language, social skills and independence, for example, to pour their own drinks, access tissues to wipe their own nose, and put on their own coats
- develop effective use of observations, assessments, records and planning for what children need to do next, so that activities and experiences are better matched to children's individual stages of development and provide appropriate challenge and progression to encourage their sustained and independent learning.

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