

Footsteps Pre-School

Inspection report for early years provision

Unique Reference Number	EY242708
Inspection date	16 November 2007
Inspector	Jill Nugent

Setting Address	Great Dell Scout Hut, Great Dell, Welwyn Garden City, Hertfordshire, AL8 7HX
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Telephone number

E-mail

Registered person	Footsteps Pre-Nursery
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Type of inspection	Integrated
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Type of care	Sessional care
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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?

Footsteps Pre-School opened in 2002. It operates from the main room of the Great Dell Scout Hut in Welwyn Garden City. Children share access to a secure outdoor play area. The pre-school is open Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday from 09:15 to 11:45 during term-time. There is an optional lunch club on Tuesday, Thursday and Friday from 11.45 until 13.00.

A maximum of 20 children may attend the pre-school at any one time. Currently there are 22 children on roll and of these 14 children receive funding for nursery education. The pre-school supports children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those who speak English as an additional language.

The pre-school employs four staff, all of whom hold relevant childcare qualifications.

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PROVISION

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

Children's health is promoted well because the pre-school has good medical procedures in place. Children are well taken care of in the event of an accident as staff are well qualified in first aid and have good access to first aid equipment. Children are excluded if ill so as to protect others from infection. Staff are attentive to matters of hygiene. They clean toys regularly, according to a set rota, and follow guidelines for the hygienic use of the kitchen area. Children are becoming aware of good hygiene. They learn why they need to wash their hands before eating and to access tissues independently for wiping noses.

Children find out about healthy eating while having their snacks and packed lunches. Staff talk with them about the health aspects of different foods. Snack time is a social occasion when children get together in groups and this provides the opportunity for them to take part in conversation and develop personal independence. They very much enjoy a wide range of healthy snacks, such as fresh fruit, cheese, wraps and cucumber, and these are presented attractively on the tables. Children with special diets eat appropriately as all staff are aware of their dietary needs. Drinking water is made available to children throughout the session in order to reduce the risk of dehydration. Therefore, children are well nourished.

Children enjoy good opportunities for regular physical activity. Outdoors they have fun riding wheeled vehicles around a fenced-off area of the car park. They also enjoy walks in the woods and visits to the park. Indoors children develop their control and co-ordination as they balance along beams and play with large hoops. They develop new physical skills as they use a slide, tunnel, bats and balls. Children benefit from these opportunities for fresh air and exercise which help to keep them physically fit.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

Children are cared for in a welcoming environment. The hall is cosy and inviting with many interesting resources set out when they arrive. The many pictures and displays brighten up the environment and extra mats and cushions make the room more comfortable. Children are secure in the premises because the door is usually kept locked and a high bolt is fitted to the inner hall door. There is a bell entry system on the main door so that visitors to the setting can be monitored. Children are always accompanied to the toilets in the reception area. However, the main door is open and unmanned at the beginning and end of the sessions and this poses a security risk to children.

Children's safety is promoted effectively through the carrying out of regular risk assessments and detailed daily safety checks. This ensures that potential risks to children are minimised and children can use the premises safely. Children use a wide range of safe and suitable resources which are stored in low-level units for ease of access. All resources are checked for safety and kept clean. Children learn how to keep themselves safe when using large equipment. There are good fire precautions in place and children practise evacuating the building from different exits to make sure they know what to do in case of an emergency.

Staff have good procedures in place for ensuring children's safety on outings. They maintain high adult to child ratios on walks in the local area and seek parental permission and assistance

on trips further afield. Children learn about road safety so that they are aware of keeping safe outdoors. Staff have a good understanding of child protection issues. They have all attended relevant training and know where to seek advice if they have any concerns. Therefore, children are well protected in this area.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

Children are very settled and happy at pre-school. They come in confidently at the beginning of each session, showing much interest in the resources on offer. There is a calm, busy atmosphere in which children enjoy self-chosen activities, for example, playing imaginatively with doctor's equipment and toy vehicles or making pictures with paper shapes and glue. They are gaining independence as they make their own choices and often become absorbed in different play situations. For instance, they like playing with a set of felt figures, using their imagination to develop their own ideas. Staff enhance children's play by extending their thinking through conversation and offering praise, thereby boosting their self-esteem.

Children take part in a range of activities which support their development and learning. Staff make good use of the 'Birth to three matters' framework to provide a child-centred environment through which they can promote children's learning effectively. They encourage children to try new activities and suggest ideas for using resources in different ways. In conversation they introduce new vocabulary and ask questions. This helps children to learn to express themselves through language. There is a wide choice available to meet the needs of children of differing ages. Children respond positively to staff who show an interest in what they are doing. This stimulating learning environment encourages all children to move on in their learning.

Nursery Education.

The quality of teaching and learning is good. Staff demonstrate a thorough knowledge of the Foundation Stage of learning. Their written plans show a good balance of activities across the six learning areas. Group times are carefully planned to focus children's learning around a theme. Staff are aware of what they expect children to learn through the planned activities. They exude enthusiasm and motivate children, increasing their enjoyment and enabling learning to happen. They are quick to introduce extra resources to extend learning experiences and readily talk with children who show an interest in something new, such as a world globe. At group times, staff make the best of each opportunity to challenge and extend children, for instance, encouraging their use of senses in matching games. Children each have an attractive folder containing examples of work, photographs and comments which provide a useful visual record of their time at pre-school. Their progress towards the early learning goals is observed and recorded and then used effectively to guide future planning.

Children are self-confident and learning to concentrate when taking part in group activities. They enjoy opportunities to share chosen resources with staff during free play. For example, they like to sit in the comfortable reading corner sharing books. They are learning to enjoy books as they talk about the pictures and become aware of sound and rhythm as they listen to stories. Children find out about the shapes and sounds of letters as staff model writing and encourage mark-making. They are beginning to develop writing skills as they learn to make marks for a purpose, for example, creating shopping lists. In play activities they learn mathematical concepts and develop their use of language for comparing size and shape. They learn to count and to recognise numerals during activities and routinely throughout the session.

When having fun joining in number rhymes children become aware of simple calculation. In these ways they are developing a wide range of basic skills in the areas of literacy and numeracy.

Children learn about living things and their environment in discussion with staff, for example, they find out about the life cycle of butterflies and about wild animals around the world. They develop technological skills as they use various materials to make models, such as firefighter trucks. Children talk about their families and discuss how to develop good relationships with others. When making self-portraits they use different colours to represent faces and extend their awareness of colour in free painting and collage activities. They have good opportunities to develop new skills in art and music. For example, they use clay to create Diva pots and learn about Indian dancing. Children have fun playing musical instruments and joining in action songs. Consequently, they are developing good physical and creative skills.

Overall children are encouraged to learn through the provision of meaningful learning experiences which interest and stimulate within a happy environment and contribute to children making good progress in all learning areas.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

Staff are effective in promoting equal opportunities and ensure that all children feel included. They provide a variety of choice so that all children can access a range of play experiences. Staff move around the hall joining children in their play. In this way they are available to children and can offer support where necessary. Children do not feel left out during any activities as staff make sure they are always included, for example, providing an option for talking about pets that children either own or would like to own. Children learn about a wider society through using resources which reflect diversity and taking part in activities organised around special days or celebrations. For example, at Divali they tasted a variety of Indian foods.

Children develop a real sense of belonging and enjoy gathering together as a group at intervals during the session. They have good relationships with each other and with staff. At free choice times they play harmoniously sharing resources fairly. They learn to take turns in organised activities, for example, joining a queue to walk along the balancing beams. They are aware of their boundaries and respond positively to requests and instructions. If misbehaving, staff make sure children understand what they have done wrong and then offer the opportunity to move on, for instance, choosing another toy. As a result children are learning to behave responsibly within the group.

Children are encouraged to develop personal independence, for example, when putting on coats for outdoor play. Staff are very aware of children's individual needs and offer good support as they move around interacting with children. They offer much choice and this encourages children to learn to make decisions for themselves. For instance, when playing outdoors children can choose to ride on cars or bikes, or participate in a table-top activity. Children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are well supported as they are closely observed and, if necessary, individual learning plans are put in place in liaison with other professionals.

Children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is fostered.

The pre-school works closely with parents and carers. They receive clear information about the pre-school's policies and procedures in a welcome pack. Staff help parents settle new children in gradually. They send out questionnaires to gauge the satisfaction of parents with regard to

the care they offer. These help them to make improvements that benefit all children. Regular newsletters are sent out and these keep parents and carers up to date with events at pre-school.

The partnership with parents and carers of children who receive funding for nursery education is good. They receive information about the topics and related activities, showing what children will be learning. However, the information about the Foundation Stage and planned weekly activities is a little mixed and unclear for parents. As a result they are not easily able to extend their involvement in children's learning. Parents have good opportunities to exchange information about their children's progress and development at each Annual General Meeting. Children benefit from staff's close working partnership with parents and carers.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

The pre-school's policies and procedures work well in practice to promote the outcomes for children. All the necessary policies are in place. The written planning for the educational programme is readily available and up to date. Parents complete registration forms which request information about children's medical history and individual needs so that appropriate care can be offered. All documentation is easily accessible and provides a good framework for both care and education.

The leader ensures that good adult to child ratios are maintained and there are contingency arrangements in place for cover at short notice. There is a thorough induction procedure for new staff. All staff are committed to the ongoing improvement of the provision. Since the previous inspection they have attended training in various areas. These include the six areas of learning, 'Birth to three matters' framework, and Food Hygiene. Children benefit from their acquired knowledge and skills.

Staff make very good use of the available space and time. The hall is set up in such a way as to encourage children to take part in freely chosen or adult-led activities. Staff follow a daily routine that provides variety for children and maintains their interest throughout the session. The key worker system is particularly effective in providing opportunities for children to participate in extra activities suited to their learning needs. A good momentum is maintained so that children are occupied and enjoy themselves. Overall children's needs are met.

The leadership and management of the nursery education is good. The leader is a good role model for staff, being hands-on within the setting and thereby encouraging them to work well together as a team. She involves staff in the planning and evaluation of the educational programme and has initiated written action plans in order to monitor the ongoing nursery education. There is an appraisal system in place for staff to assist them in their own professional development. A collection of supporting information on childcare and education is available to help in the planning of activities and observation of children. The leader's active role is instrumental in the provision of a thriving pre-school environment.

Improvements since the last inspection

At the previous care inspection the pre-school was asked to ensure that at least half of all staff hold a relevant qualification. The pre-school also agreed to update the Behaviour Management and Complaints policies and maintain a fire log. All staff now hold a relevant early years qualification. The policies have been updated appropriately and a fire log is maintained. This response has contributed to an improvement in childcare.

At the previous nursery education inspection the pre-school was asked to review the written planning and enable children to access regular activities for promoting writing and mathematical skills. In addition they were asked to encourage children's awareness of personal safety in physical activities and their understanding of social skills. The planning has now been reviewed and includes relevant learning intentions for children. The small group times are more focused so as to promote the development of early writing and mathematics. Staff ensure that children are aware of personal safety at all times and encourage them to share and take turns during organised 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

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):

- review the safety procedures at the beginning and end of each session to ensure children are secure.

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):

- clarify the written information available to parents and carers on the Foundation Stage and weekly activities.

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