

First Steps Pre-School

Inspection report for early years provision

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| Unique Reference Number | 117187 |
| Inspection date | 19 March 2008 |
| Inspector | Carole Argles |
| Setting Address | Methodist Central Hall, Eastlake Street, Plymouth, Devon, PL1 1BA |
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| Registered person | The Plymouth Central Methodist Church Council |
| 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 good.

WHAT SORT OF SETTING IS IT?

First Steps Pre-school opened in 1992 and operates from Plymouth Central Methodist Hall, which is close to the city centre. The pre-school is run by members of the church. The children have access to two first floor rooms, with associated facilities, and a hall on the ground floor. There is no area for outside play. Children attend from all areas of the city and some of the surrounding villages.

The pre-school is open Monday to Friday during term times, from 09.45 to 12.30. In addition, a lunch club operates from 12.30 to 13.30 one or two days per week. The pre-school is registered for 26 children, aged from two to under five years. There are currently 26 children on roll, of whom 21 receive funding for nursery education. The pre-school supports children who have learning difficulties or disabilities and children who speak English as an additional language.

Six members of staff work with the children, all of whom either hold a relevant childcare qualification or are undertaking training.

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PROVISION

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

Children's health is well supported by the staff. There are effective measures in place to minimise the risk of infection spreading, and staff keep the premises and equipment clean. There are clear procedures in place to deal with emergencies, such as a child falling ill or having an accident. All staff hold a suitable first aid certificate. Appropriate parental consents are in place and suitable accident and medication records are maintained. Nutritious mid-session snacks, such as fruit, raisins and cheese, are provided for the children. Staff are careful to ensure that any special dietary requirements are met. They liaise closely with parents to check that all food provided is suitable for their child. Children have a drink of milk or water with their snack. Although the staff provide additional drinks on request, children cannot access drinking water independently if they are thirsty. Some children attend the weekly lunch club and this is an enjoyable and convivial time. Staff sit and talk with the children and help them learn good social skills.

Although there is no outside area, the children have daily opportunities for vigorous exercise, either in a large hall or in their playroom. Staff provide a wide variety of equipment and activities which help the children develop good control and coordination of their movements, for example, learning ball skills and how to balance. The children enjoy crawling through tunnels, playing football and building with large soft blocks. At times when the hall is unavailable, the playroom is cleared and the staff and children take part in an energetic music and movement session, stretching, bending and balancing with great enthusiasm.

There are many activities which encourage the children to adopt a healthy lifestyle. They learn good hand hygiene routines and always clean their hands before eating or cooking. They know that this is important to stop them becoming ill. Topics such as 'Our Bodies' help them find out how to look after their own health, for example, by good dental care. Staff help children to understand which foods are good for them. A staff member tells a child during snack time that the milk, cheese and fruit will help him grow big and strong. Children are encouraged to eat a varied diet and sometimes cook nutritious recipes, such as vegetable soup. Staff have developed links with a local supermarket, which provides a range of exotic and interesting foods for tasting sessions.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

The premises are well maintained, bright and attractively decorated with posters and displays of the children's artwork. Each child has a named coat peg and place for their belongings. Staff greet every family as they arrive in the morning. This helps children to feel welcome and secure. Staff use the rooms effectively to provide a range of activities. They make use of one room to provide more messy activities, including painting, sand and water, and use the large hall for exercise when it is available. There is a wide range of good quality furniture, toys and equipment to support all areas of the children's development. Staff are careful to make sure that children have the correct size chair so that they are comfortable when sitting at the tables. All toys and equipment are cleaned regularly and checked before use to ensure that they are safe and suitable for the children. Some toys, including a variety of puzzles and games, are stored where they are easily accessible to children, enabling children to make choices about what they do.

There are effective measures in place to promote the children's safety and reduce the risk of accidents. The pre-school premises are kept secure against unauthorised entry and there are clear procedures to ensure that the children are only collected by people nominated by their parents. Staff carry out regular risk assessments, drawing up action plans and ensuring that any hazards identified are addressed. The children are well supervised at all times and great care is taken when they are using the stairs. They are kept safe on outings because high adult to child ratios are maintained and age-appropriate restraints are used when they are transported in the church minibus. Regular fire practices are carried out so that all children and staff know how to act in an emergency. The children begin to learn how to keep themselves safe in many situations. They are reminded that they may fall if they run in the playroom. Staff explain what they should do if they become separated from their parents in the nearby shopping centre, and they talk about sun and water safety on the beach.

There is a satisfactory safeguarding children procedure in place, but few written details are made readily available to parents. Staff have a clear understanding of their responsibilities for protecting children from harm. They know the signs that may indicate that a child is being abused or neglected and what they must do if they have concerns about the welfare of a child in their care. Staff make sure that the children have no unsupervised contact with people who have not been vetted. This helps keep children safe.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

The children come happily into the pre-school, separating confidently from their parents and settling quickly at the activities. They play harmoniously together, sharing and taking turns. They form warm and friendly relationships with the staff and there are high levels of interaction and conversation between them. The children are praised for their achievements and their pictures and artwork are displayed on the walls. Staff are interested in the children and know them well, frequently talking with them about their interests and lives. This makes children feel valued and helps them to develop good self-esteem. The children learn to be independent, helping to tidy away toys and managing their personal care, such as washing their hands or putting on their shoes after exercise.

The children enjoy their time at the pre-school because staff make their learning fun, for example, by using puppets during circle times to engage their attention. There is an interesting programme of activities which support all areas of children's development well. Staff frequently observe the children so that they know what they can do and are beginning to use this information when planning their future development. The children understand the routines of the day and are eager to take part in the activities. There is a balance of adult-led and group times and periods when the children choose from a varied range of resources on offer. Staff adapt activities to make sure that the developmental needs of all children are catered for, for example, by providing separate story times for the younger children with books matched to ability and understanding.

Nursery education

The quality of the teaching and learning is good and this helps the children make good progress towards the early learning goals. Staff are enthusiastic about what they do and their enthusiasm is transmitted to the children, who are eager to take part. Staff work effectively with children, giving them plenty of support and attention. They help children to achieve, for instance, by using strategies to help children count correctly when they make a mistake. They are skilled at

asking children open questions that encourage them to think and solve problems. For example, they ask how they can make a chocolate bar and breakfast cereal mix together to make Easter nests. Through gentle questioning, the children decide correctly that this can be accomplished by using the microwave.

There are sound systems in place to monitor children's development. Staff carry out regular observations to evaluate what children can do, recording information so that they can easily assess their progress. They plan and provide a wide and interesting curriculum, which supports all areas of the children's learning. At present, staff do not make full use of assessment records when planning the next steps in children's development, but they are generally effective at providing suitable levels of challenge for the children.

The children are motivated to learn and show sustained concentration during both self-selected and adult-led activities. They are developing good speaking and listening skills. They speak readily with others, taking turns in conversations and talking about real and imaginary ideas. They enjoy songs and music and join in enthusiastically with the words and actions. They listen attentively to group stories and take books home to share with their parents. The children know that marks can have meaning and are starting to link sounds to letters. Many can recognise their names and some know other familiar words, such as the days of the week. Children are developing thinking and reasoning skills. They listen attentively as a member of staff describes an object and quickly suggest what it is.

The children develop good hand-to-eye coordination through handling small objects, for example, when joining puzzle pieces or placing small pegs in boards to make a pattern. They use one-handed tools to cut dough and many use scissors to cut out pre-drawn shapes. They have ready access to crayons and paper and use them in their pretend play, for example, when taking orders for food from their café. Some children are beginning to form recognisable letters and to write their names. Children have many opportunities to practise arts and crafts. They paint pictures and make models of their own design using recycled materials, tapes and glue. However, some of the activities planned and prepared by staff provide limited scope for more able children to try out their own ideas or use their imaginations.

Many types of activity, including dice, matching and card games, are used to promote children's understanding of numbers and counting. The children are beginning to count well, correctly linking objects to numbers and numerals. They sing songs involving simple calculations and are starting to solve simple problems, comparing and adding the number of boys and girls present. Many children can recognise and name simple geometric figures and identify these shapes in everyday objects; for example, a child compares a rugby ball to the oval shape they are talking about. Age-appropriate computer programmes are used to promote children's learning and many children are adept at using the mouse. The children examine objects and find out how things work and change. They grow flowers on the balcony, watch how ice melts and talk about the weather and seasons. They have made kites and boats, which they launched on ponds in the city centre. The children are beginning to find out about their community. Visitors, including police officers and health workers, talk with the children about what they do. When possible, staff use a minibus to take the children out on trips further afield to broaden their experiences.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

The children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is fostered. The pre-school has a Christian ethos and children begin to learn about important festivals, including Easter and Christmas. However, they are also introduced to the beliefs and traditions of other people in society. They find out about Chinese New Year and Diwali and have talked about Inuit culture during a recent topic. The children use a suitable range of resources that show positive images of diversity, including books, puzzles and pretend play toys. Children who speak English as an additional language are well supported by the staff, who ensure that they know some basic vocabulary and have resources, such as books, that reflect the child's first language. The vocabulary is used with all the children, for example, when they are talking about colours or the days of the week. This helps children develop an accepting attitude towards others and to value diversity both within the group and the wider community.

The children behave well. They play cooperatively together, readily taking turns with toys and during games. The staff have high but realistic expectations for the children and provide good role models, always treating children with courtesy and respect. Age-appropriate and positive strategies are used to help children understand what is expected of them. Children receive praise so they know when they have done well. Staff sometimes reward individual children with stickers or the whole group with an activity they enjoy. Children are helped to think about the consequences of their actions, for example, why they may hurt themselves or others if they run. A 'rule of the week' is displayed and discussed with the children so that they know why, for example, it is important that they should share and take turns with others.

Staff work closely with parents to ensure that there is a consistent approach to the children's care and that their individual needs are met. Parents are provided with information about the pre-school through a prospectus, notice boards and regular newsletters. There is an effective process to help new children settle quickly. Preliminary visits allow them to become familiar with the staff and the routines. Staff request detailed information about the children's development and interests from parents, so they can make sure that children are comfortable and secure. Each child has a named key person, who liaises with parents and discusses the child's achievements. There are clear procedures in place to support children who have any specific needs, learning difficulties or disabilities. Staff work closely with their parents and other agencies to plan their care and learning and ensure that they are fully including in the life of the setting.

The partnership with parents and carers is good and this supports the children's learning well. Information about the Foundation Stage curriculum and the six areas of learning is readily available to parents. They receive some information about the activities being provided through regular newsletters which give brief details of the topic and list the letter, colour and shape of the week. Pre-arranged meetings are held for parents of those children who are moving on to school. Other parents can ask to meet with their child's key person to discuss their progress and see their records. However, few take up this opportunity. Parents are encouraged to become involved with their child's learning at home, for example, by sharing library books with them and helping them to complete activity sheets.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

The pre-school meets the needs of the range of children for whom it provides. The children benefit from the good organisational skills of the staff, who work well together and have a clear understanding of their responsibilities. A high adult to child ratio is maintained at all times and this ensures that children receive plenty of attention and support. Staff are suitably qualified and undertake training to increase their knowledge and keep up-to-date with new developments in childcare. They make good use of the premises to support the children's learning and care. They plan and provide a wide range of activities for the children.

Staff maintain all the required records, which are kept confidential and up-to-date. The policies and procedures required to promote children's safety and welfare are implemented effectively. There are sound systems in place to ensure that staff are suitable to work with the children. However, some written policy and procedure documents, for example, the complaints procedure, do not contain all the required detail or reflect the current legislation or the practice of the pre-school.

Leadership and management are good and support the children's progress well. Regular staff appraisals and evaluations of the effectiveness of the pre-school are carried out to identify areas for further development. Action plans are put in place to ensure that these issues are addressed. The staff are well managed. They meet briefly before each session to make sure that everyone has a clear understanding of his or her responsibilities and duties so that everything runs smoothly for the children. Staff are allocated time to observe the children and update their development records. They evaluate the activities daily to see how well they have supported the children's learning and meet half-termly to plan the curriculum. Although these measures are generally effective in supporting the children's learning, staff do not make full use of up-to-date information about the children's progress to inform their short term planning.

Improvements since the last inspection

At the previous inspection, the provider agreed to draw up an action plan showing how the deputy would obtain a suitable qualification, to amend the format of the daily register, and to review all policies and procedures to ensure that they reflect current legislation. The provider also agreed to ensure that the planning gives equal emphasis to all areas of the curriculum, including calculation, and to devise a more formal means of communicating children's progress to their parents.

Since that time, new staff have been appointed and the current deputy holds a suitable qualification for her position. The register clearly and accurately shows the times that children and staff are present at the pre-school. These actions promote the children's safety and welfare. The provider and staff understand their roles and responsibilities and implement suitable policies and procedures. However, some of the written documents, including the safeguarding children and complaints procedures, still do not contain all the required details or reflect current legislation.

The staff plan a wide range of activities and experiences for the children. Although less emphasis is given to planning some areas of the children's mathematical development, staff provide activities during the everyday routines, such as the registration time, which support the children's learning in these areas. Staff remind parents that they can arrange to meet with their child's key person to discuss their progress. They provide a more formal meeting for parents whose

children are transferring to school. However, the same opportunity to keep up-to-date with, and share their own knowledge of, their child's development is not available to other parents.

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 and revise the policy and procedure documents to ensure that they contain all the required information and reflect current legislation and practice
- provide opportunities for children to access drinking water independently

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):

- continue to extend the partnership with parents by providing more information about what their child will be doing and their progress towards the early learning goals
- continue to develop the systems for linking assessment of children's progress to planning of activities to help staff when deciding the next steps in their 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