



Office for Standards
in Education

COMBINED INSPECTION REPORT

URN 402222

DfES Number: 542252

INSPECTION DETAILS

Inspection Date 13/05/2004
Inspector Name Lynn Clements

SETTING DETAILS

Day Care Type Sessional Day Care
Setting Name First Steps Playgroup
Setting Address Carters Mead
Harlow
Essex
CM17 9EU

REGISTERED PROVIDER DETAILS

Name The partnership of First Steps Playgroup

ORGANISATION DETAILS

Name First Steps Playgroup
Address Carters Mead
Harlow
Essex
CM17 9EU

ABOUT THE INSPECTION

The purpose of this inspection is to assure government, parents and the public of the quality and standard of day care in accordance with the National Standards for Under Eights Day Care and Childminding; and that the nursery education for funded three and four year old children is of an acceptable quality. Inspection of nursery education also identifies strengths and weaknesses so that providers can improve the quality of educational provision and help children to achieve the early learning goals (elgs) by the end of the Foundation Stage. This inspection report must be made available to all parents.

If the setting has been inspected previously, an action plan will have been drawn up to tackle issues identified. This inspection, therefore, must also assess what progress has been made in the implementation of this plan.

Information about the setting

First Steps playgroup opened in 1999. It operates from a classroom within Potter Street Primary School, Harlow. The group also has the use of a small adjoining quiet area, toilets and kitchen. There is an enclosed outdoor area adjacent to the classroom, and the group also share usage of the main school playground, hall and library. The playgroup serves the local and wider area.

There are currently 57 children from three to four years on roll. This includes 20 funded three year olds and 15 funded four year old children. Children attend a variety of sessions. The setting supports a small number of children who have special needs. There are also a few children attending who have English as an additional language.

The playgroup opens five days a week during school term time. Sessions run from 09:00 until 11:45 and 12:30 to 15:00.

Four full time and two part time staff work with the children. Over half the staff have early years qualifications to NVQ level 2 or 3. One members of staff is currently working towards a recognised early years qualification.

The setting receives support from the Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership (EYDCP) and the Pre-School Learning Alliance (PSLA)

How good is the Day Care?

First Steps Playgroup provides good quality care for children.

The playgroup employs experienced, motivated staff who work well as a team and are keen to continue their professional development. The group is organised well and staff understand their roles and responsibilities. The premises are warm, welcoming and suitable for young children. Documents are kept safe and are consistent with the National Standards, however the behaviour management policy requires updating to include information regarding bullying.

Staff have a good awareness of safety issues and are currently formalising a daily risk assessment procedure to ensure the environment remains safe for children and staff. Good hygiene practices are in place and appropriate action is taken when children are ill to avoid cross infection. Healthy snacks and drinks are available daily at the snack stop. Children are given opportunities to learn about similarities and differences through activities, resources and positive staff attitudes. There are good procedures in place to ensure any concerns regarding children are dealt with appropriately.

Staff have secure knowledge of the Foundation Stage curriculum which enables them to plan a balanced range of activities. All children attending are provided with meaningful play opportunities which promote progress in all six areas of learning. The special needs co-ordinator works closely with parents and other professionals to ensure children with special needs make good progress towards the early learning goals. Staffs' high expectations and consistent approach supports children's understanding of boundaries and as a consequence behaviour is good.

Parents are kept well informed about their children and have plenty of opportunities to share information and discuss progress and development with their child's key-worker. Parents are also encouraged to share their skills.

What has improved since the last inspection?

No actions were raised at the last inspection.

What is being done well?

- Special educational needs practice within the setting and staff working alongside other agencies ensures children are fully supported and their individual needs are met.
- An effective key-worker system supports children to become independent, active learners which builds on their individual knowledge, ideas and thinking skills.
- Behaviour is good. Staff act as positive role models, listening to children and helping them to co-operate, take turns, share fairly and respect each other.
- Partnership with parents is successful and enables children to move confidently between their home and the playgroup.

What needs to be improved?

- the staff appraisal system, to support and ensure continued professional development for the direct benefit of both the staff and the children attending the playgroup
- the behaviour management policy, to include information about bullying
- documentation, by obtaining a copy of the Government booklet 'What To Do If You're Worried A Child Is Being Abused'

- the daily risk assessment procedures, to ensure shared areas remain safe for children attending the playgroup.

Outcome of the inspection

Good

CONDITIONS OF REGISTRATION

All registered persons must comply with all conditions of registration included on his/her certificate of registration.

As a result of this inspection conditions of registration have been imposed / varied / removed and a new certificate of registration will be issued.

WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE NEXT?

The Registered Person should have regard to the following recommendations by the time of the next inspection

Std	Recommendation
2	Formalise the current appraisal system to ensure all staff are fully supported in their professional development.
6	Review and formalise daily risk assessment procedures to ensure shared areas such as the school hall and playground are safe to use and children cannot leave unescorted.
11	Update current behaviour management policy to include information about bullying.
13	Obtain a copy of the Government booklet 'What To Do If You're Worried A Child Is Being Abused'.

INSPECTION OF THE NURSERY EDUCATION PROVISION FOR FUNDED THREE AND FOUR YEAR OLDS.

How effective is the nursery education?

The provision for nursery education at First Steps Playgroup is very good. It enables children to make very good progress towards the early learning goals in all six areas of learning.

The quality of teaching is excellent. Key staff hold relevant qualifications. The providers monitor and evaluate teaching practice to ensure all staff are working appropriately with children. Staff provide a stimulating and rich learning environment where children can use their imagination and learn at a pace to suit their individual needs. Staff have strong relationships with the children, asking them questions to help them develop their ideas and thinking skills. Staff are caring and sensitive to children's needs. They provide motivating activities particularly in the creative and knowledge and understanding of the world areas. Behaviour is very good. Children share fairly, take turns and respect each other.

Staff observe children and record their progress. They are currently developing assessment records to clearly reflect children's next steps through the stepping stones. They are also formalising their strategies for supporting children with English as an additional language. Provision for children with special needs is very good.

Leadership and management is thorough. Staff meet regularly to discuss planning and the daily running of the group. Both providers are proactive in promoting and supporting staffs continuing professional development.

Partnership with parents is strong. Staff are friendly and offer plenty of opportunities to share information about children's progress and development. Parents are confident with the support of the group and feel included in their children's playgroup experiences.

What is being done well?

- The programme for knowledge and understanding of the world is excellent. Children learn to care for living things such as tadpoles, tortoises and puppies. They enjoy watching caterpillars grow and change into beautiful butterflies. They discover similarities and differences of their own and other cultures through topic work and daily discussions. Regular visitors help children to gain a sense of community and learn about people who help them such as the local community police officer and nurse.
- Clear emphasis on child centred learning through play ensures children make good progress and extend their investigative skills and ideas. Staff support and challenge children appropriately and encourage them to become confident, active, independent learners, and as a direct result, children's self esteem is high.

- Very good communication skills are being developed. Children extend their vocabulary, discussing their ideas and topics with staff and each other. Children link sounds to letters and are beginning to use simple phonics to write leaflets and lists in role play.
- Partnership with parents is excellent and enables children to move confidently between home and the playgroup. Clear information regarding the learning areas helps parents to support their children appropriately and enables them to make valuable contributions to their developmental records.
- Strong leadership provides a sound ethos for good early years practice. Dedication by all staff to develop professionally, ensures that children benefit from high quality care and effective child centred teaching.

What needs to be improved?

- assessment records to identify children's next steps in all six areas of learning, based on observations of what they can do
- strategies for children with English as an additional language, to ensure they can learn in context, through practical, meaningful experiences and interaction with others.

What has improved since the last inspection?

N/A

SUMMARY OF JUDGEMENTS

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Judgement: Very Good

Children's confidence and self esteem are high and they are supported by staff who know them well. They are encouraged to become active independent learners, selecting activities and resources for themselves, preparing their own snack, pouring their drinks and taking care of their personal hygiene. Children's behaviour is very good, they learn to take turns, share and respect each other. Children work well together. learning to cooperate and organise their play and ideas.

COMMUNICATION, LANGUAGE AND LITERACY

Judgement: Very Good

Children are keen communicators. They listen to stories and join in repeated refrains such as in 'Little Red Riding Hood and the Three Little Pigs.' Children understand that print carries meaning, they read labels around the setting and create their own posters and leaflets. They follow text in story and information books and can make up their own stories to match the pictures. Children are beginning to link sounds to letters, establishing basic phonic knowledge and skills for later learning.

MATHEMATICAL DEVELOPMENT

Judgement: Very Good

Staff use everyday opportunities to promote calculating skills, such as counting the number of children at registration and cups at snack time. They also join in activities which promotes the use of subtraction. Children use giant snakes and ladder games to learn about taking away and use compare bears to discover one less than. Children develop their understanding of quantity and capacity when playing in the soil and water trays and when weighing ingredients to make cakes.

KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING OF THE WORLD

Judgement: Very Good

Staff support children in looking at similarities and differences between cultures and religions. They learn about customs and try different foods from around the world, such as prawn crackers and nann breads. Staff provide opportunities for children to investigate through first hand experiences, such as investigating birds nests and re-creating 3D models of them. Regular visitors include the local police officer and nurse who develop children's understanding about people that help us.

PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT

Judgement: Very Good

Children explore large and small tools and equipment such as the climbing frame, balance beam, slide, wheeled toys, rolling pins and scissors. Children move around the setting safely and with good co-ordination and control. They manipulate malleable material by squeezing, pulling and stretching it. They discover how to keep their bodies healthy through diets and what they eat at snack and food tech activities. They discover the changes which occur to their bodies when they exercise.

CREATIVE DEVELOPMENT

Judgement:	Very Good
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Children have opportunities to use their imagination, during dance and music activities. Children pretend to be baby animals growing slowly then hopping like bunnies and slithering like snakes. They join in role play, selling plants and pets in their garden farm shop. Children explore the sounds made by different instruments including ones they have made themselves. They sing songs and rhymes from memory. Children discover textures playing in gloop, soil and water.

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

OUTCOME OF THE INSPECTION

The provision is acceptable and is of high quality. Children are making very good progress towards the early learning goals. The next inspection will take place in three to four years time.

WHAT THE SETTING NEEDS TO DO NEXT

There are no significant weaknesses to report, but considerations should be given to improving the following:

- There are no significant weaknesses to report, but consideration should be given to improving the following:
- formalise strategies for children with English as an additional language, to ensure they can learn in context, through practical, meaningful experiences and interaction with others
- develop the assessment records to show clearly children's individual next steps in all six areas of learning based on observations of what they can do.

The provider must draw up an action plan within 40 working days of receipt of this report showing how the key issues detailed above will be addressed. The action plan must be made available to all parents and to the Local Authority if required. An evaluation of the action taken will form part of the next inspection of funded nursery education.

SUMMARY OF NATIONAL STANDARDS

STANDARD 1 - SUITABLE PERSON

Adults providing day care, looking after children or having unsupervised access to them are suitable to do so.

STANDARD 2 - ORGANISATION

The registered person meets required adult: child ratios, ensures that training and qualifications requirements are met and organises space and resources to meet the children's needs effectively.

STANDARD 3 - CARE, LEARNING AND PLAY

The registered person meets children's individual needs and promotes their welfare. They plan and provide activities and play opportunities to develop children's emotional, physical, social and intellectual capabilities.

STANDARD 4 - PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

The premises are safe, secure and suitable for their purpose. They provide adequate space in an appropriate location, are welcoming to children and offer access to the necessary facilities for a range of activities which promote their development.

STANDARD 5 - EQUIPMENT

Furniture, equipment and toys are provided which are appropriate for their purpose and help to create an accessible and stimulating environment. They are of suitable design and condition, well maintained and conform to safety standards.

STANDARD 6 - SAFETY

The registered person takes positive steps to promote safety within the setting and on outings and ensures proper precautions are taken to prevent accidents.

STANDARD 7 - HEALTH

The registered person promotes the good health of children and takes positive steps to prevent the spread of infection and appropriate measures when they are ill.

STANDARD 8 - FOOD AND DRINK

Children are provided with regular drinks and food in adequate quantities for their needs. Food and drink is properly prepared, nutritious and complies with dietary and religious requirements.

STANDARD 9 - EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

The registered person and staff actively promote equality of opportunity and anti-discriminatory practice for all children.

STANDARD 10 - SPECIAL NEEDS (INCLUDING SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS AND DISABILITIES)

The registered person is aware that some children may have special needs and is

proactive in ensuring that appropriate action can be taken when such a child is identified or admitted to the provision. Steps are taken to promote the welfare and development of the child within the setting in partnership with the parents and other relevant parties.

STANDARD 11 - BEHAVIOUR

Adults caring for children in the provision are able to manage a wide range of children's behaviour in a way which promotes their welfare and development.

STANDARD 12 - WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS AND CARERS

The registered person and staff work in partnership with parents and to meet the needs of the children, both individually and as a group. Information is shared.

STANDARD 13 - CHILD PROTECTION

The registered person complies with local child protection procedures approved by the Area Child Protection Committee and ensures that all adults working and looking after children in the provision are able to put the procedures into practice.

STANDARD 14 - DOCUMENTATION

Records, policies and procedures which are required for the efficient and safe management of the provision, or to promote the welfare, care and learning of children are maintained. Records about individual children are shared with the child's parent.