

First Steps Pre-School

Victory Hall, Long Marston, TRING, Hertfordshire, HP23 4QS

Inspection date	12/12/2013
Previous inspection date	29/03/2011

The quality and standards of the early years provision	This inspection:	
	Previous inspection:	
How well the early years provision meets the needs of the range of children who attend		2
The contribution of the early years provision to the well-being of children		2
The effectiveness of the leadership and management of the early years provision		2

The quality and standards of the early years provision

This provision is good

- Children are well prepared for the next stage in their learning because the pre-school works closely with the local school in order to plan focused activities to develop children's early reading and writing skills and good levels of independence.
- Staff use a consistent approach to encourage positive behaviour and when setting expectations for behaviour. This means children learn to behave very well and show a mature respect for others and for their environment.
- The setting makes very good use of its Early Years Professional in order to develop the skills and knowledge of the whole staff team. This leads to continuous improvements to the quality of the teaching and learning.

It is not yet outstanding because

- There is scope to give children a wider range of resources from which to choose in order to extend their play ideas and independence. Currently, they have to ask for or rely on staff to provide additional resources in some areas of the environment.
- The less flexible timetable for outdoor play and outings means that children do not have immediate opportunities to take their interests and learning outdoors. This limits the capacity for those children who prefer to learn actively in an outdoor environment.

Information about this inspection

Inspections of registered early years provision are:

- scheduled at least once in every inspection cycle – the current cycle ends on 31 July 2016
- scheduled more frequently where Ofsted identifies a need to do so, for example where provision was previously judged inadequate
- brought forward in the inspection cycle where Ofsted has received information that suggests the provision may not be meeting the legal requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage or where assessment of the provision identifies a need for early inspection
- prioritised where we have received information that the provision is not meeting the requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage and which suggests children may not be safe
- scheduled at the completion of an investigation into failure to comply with the requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage.

The provision is also registered on the voluntary and compulsory parts of the Childcare Register. This report includes a judgment about compliance with the requirements of that register.

Inspection activities

- The inspector observed activities in the main hall.
- The inspector looked at a selection of policies, procedures, records and photographs of children joining in with different activities.
- The inspector spoke with the chair of the committee, the manager, staff and children at appropriate times throughout the inspection.
- The inspector checked evidence of the suitability, training and qualifications of those connected with the setting.
- The inspector viewed some planning documentation and evidence of children's learning.
- The inspector spoke to a number of parents and carers during the inspection, and took account of the views of the head teacher from the local school.

Inspector

Hilary Preece

Full report

Information about the setting

First Steps Pre-School was registered in 1997 and is on the Early Years Register and the compulsory and voluntary parts of the Childcare Register. It is located in Long Marston, near Tring in Hertfordshire. It is managed by a voluntary committee of parents. The pre-school serves the local area and is accessible to all children. The pre-school operates from the village hall. There is no enclosed outdoor area available but children use the neighbouring school playground and the local environment for outdoor play each day.

The pre-school opens on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday during school term times. Sessions are from 9am until 12pm, with extended lunch clubs on Tuesday, Thursday and Friday until 1.30pm and an extended day on Tuesday to 3.00pm. Children attend for a variety of sessions. There are currently 26 children attending who are in the early years age group. The pre-school provides funded early education for three- and four-year-old children. The pre-school supports a number of children who speak English as an additional language and children with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

The pre-school employs six members of childcare staff. Of these, three hold appropriate early years qualifications at level 2 or 3, including one with Early Years Professional and Qualified Teacher Status.

What the setting needs to do to improve further

To further improve the quality of the early years provision the provider should:

- review the organisation of resources to provide greater opportunity for children to self-select from a wider range of toys and materials during their play, particularly in the areas of mathematics and expressive arts
- explore opportunities to give children the choice of extending their interests and learning in the outdoor environment each day by considering changes to the routine and structure of the session.

Inspection judgements

How well the early years provision meets the needs of the range of children who attend

There are good opportunities for children to develop their communication and language. Children see and use written text throughout the day. They are encouraged to recognise their name cards and the staff use an appealing 'Sounding Sam' puppet to introduce children to the sounds that letters make during songs, stories and discussions. Children are invited to participate in these sessions every morning if they so choose. Children have

further opportunities to discover letter shapes and number symbols which are hidden in the sand or water tray. This encourages children to discover letters and numbers through play activities that interest them. Staff use children's interests to engage them in activities that they may be reluctant to use. For example, following some training on how boys learn, the staff have encouraged boys to explore making marks by taking the toy cars and tractors to the paint tray so that they can make wheel tracks in the paint. The staff provide interesting resources to help develop children's listening and conversation. For example, children listen to stories using CDs and headphones and they gain confidence to use recording devices to record a two-way conversation between the child and adult.

Staff use effective strategies to scaffold children's learning. These include plenty of well-structured open questions to stimulate children's thinking, curiosity and desire to find out for themselves. Staff plan physical activities specifically aimed at developing shoulder muscles, which is necessary before children develop fine motor control needed for writing. For example, children paint marks using large brushes and water on the playground to develop shoulder movements. They particularly enjoy shaking and waving a large, fabric 'parachute.' Staff skilfully introduce learning opportunities into this game, such as encouraging children to count, to solve simple subtraction problems and to introduce positional language as they talk about 'up', 'down' and 'side to side'. Children do not have the benefit of their own secure outdoor area and rely on using the local school playgrounds at set times within the week and outings within the local environment. Children, therefore, cannot always extend their interests and learning outdoors whenever they wish and this somewhat restricts the learning potential of those who prefer to be active outdoors.

The staff have reviewed their planning to ensure that is more flexible and focused on children's interests. There is a reliable system for observing, assessing and planning for children's good progress. The staff work closely with parents and carers to share information and this effectively supports continuity in learning between the home and pre-school. There is particularly good support for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Frequent communication and sharing of information between all parties provides staff with individual and targeted strategies that contribute to the rapid progress that children make based on their starting points. In addition, the staff have developed their own tools, such as visual timetables and choice boards. These help any child with communication difficulties, including those that speak English as an additional language, to communicate and express their needs effectively. Overall, all children develop rapidly and are well prepared for the next stage of their learning as they move on to school.

The contribution of the early years provision to the well-being of children

Every child has a key person who supports a smooth settling-in process. Key persons gather useful information from parents on registration in order to get to know children's interests and individual care needs. Parents report that the 'nurturing' approach from the key person helps children to build secure attachments and adapt to the new environment. Staff recognise that some children may need additional support at times in order to feel comfortable and secure. For example, children who do not wish to engage in vigorous, large group activities are given the option of enjoying a quieter time in the story corner.

Overall, the pre-school is well resourced and activities are set up to encourage children to explore and discover. Children show high levels of motivation and they are keen to access the activities available. However, there is scope to make a greater variety of resources readily accessible to children during each session in order to further increase their independence and decision making, particularly when using creative art materials and maths resources.

The staff provide children with the opportunity to choose when they want to have a snack. This enables children to eat when they feel hungry or when they decide it is appropriate to stop their play. This is important for their independence but also means children have uninterrupted time to continue with their play and imagination. Children develop further independence by cutting or grating fruit and pouring drinks. The snack table is well managed by the staff to provide a calm atmosphere where social interaction and conversation is encouraged. There is a good variety of healthy foods provided for snack and this is complimented by a weekly cooking activity where children might make soup, sandwiches or fruit salad, for example. These activities not only help to broaden children's tastes but provide valuable opportunities to reinforce good health and hygiene messages to children.

Children learn about personal safety and taking risks when using equipment and on outings. When they use the climbing frame and balance beam the staff carefully explain the rules for safe and fair play. On outings, staff reinforce and remind children of the importance of holding hands, crossing the road safely and wearing high visibility waistcoats so road users can easily see them. Staff consistently reinforce behaviour expectations to children and praise and encourage them at every opportunity. The children are eager to be helpful at tidy up time. They diligently collect up the toys, sort them into the boxes and work together in small groups to carry the boxes to the side of the room. Children show in their behaviour that they recognise when things go wrong. They apologise immediately and any problem is quickly forgotten. When children need additional support to manage their behaviour the staff provide quiet times for discussion and reassurance. Staff effectively use resources, such as puppets and books, to help children explore their feelings. Children are, therefore, well supported to develop safe behaviours, good social skills and emotional security.

The staff have worked with the reception class teacher at the village school to help children prepare emotionally for their onward move to school. As the time draws near, the staff change the role play area into a reception class where children use items like book bags and school uniforms to dress in as part of their imaginary play. They also use a photographic book showing different areas of the school as a tool for discussion. These activities help to familiarise the children with a school classroom and allay any anxieties they may have. The head teacher reports that this works well in preparing children for the transition to school.

The effectiveness of the leadership and management of the early years provision

Safeguarding arrangements are securely understood by all levels of the staff and the committee, and procedures are implemented in accordance with requirements. This means children are protected. Record keeping and policies are regularly reviewed to ensure that systems are efficient. Staff demonstrate how risk assessments are carried out in order to keep the premises secure and minimise the risk to children when using equipment and when on outings. The committee understands its legal responsibilities in managing the pre-school and plays an active role in supporting and developing the practice further. The pre-school follows safe recruitment practices which include obtaining suitability checks for all staff and committee members and providing sufficient staff supervision and mentoring.

The pre-school committee actively supports the professional development of staff. Staff member's particular strengths or interests are used to good effect to enhance children's experiences. Those with a creative flair focus on developing interesting art or musical activities, while those who speak a second language introduce the children to songs or talk in French. Appraisals are used to identify training needs and appropriate training courses are sourced. Staff share the skills and knowledge they acquire with the whole team so that all staff benefit from fresh ideas and new ways of working. The pre-school has high expectations and has made good progress in recent years. The deputy has obtained Early Years Professional status and uses her expertise to guide staff and model good practice to the whole staff team. For example, she continues to strengthen the quality of the staff interactions with children by delivering training on the use of open-ended questions to promote sustained shared thinking. The manager frequently meets with the reception class and head teacher of the local school in order to obtain feedback on children's achievement levels when they enter school. This helps her to monitor both the educational programme and the progress made by individuals and groups of children, and to make any necessary adjustments.

The pre-school works well in partnership with other agencies and professionals. This means that children who have additional needs receive sharply focused support. The pre-school makes good use of information and guidance from the local children's centre, which they share with parents when appropriate. Staff also access training opportunities provided by the centre to develop their knowledge and professional development further and they attend network meetings with other early years settings to share good practice and develop new ideas. The pre-school listens to the views of parents and makes every effort to incorporate them into everyday practice. For example, parents suggested some activity ideas to extend the range of outdoor play sessions available. As a result, the pre-school provides more focused outdoor activities, such as fruit picking and weather or seasonal related activities, that contribute to children's learning and well-being. Additionally, in response to parents' requests the pre-school is developing a website as a means of providing parents with newsletters and electronic communication. This demonstrates a willingness to listen to the views of its users and suggests there is a strong capacity for continuous improvement.

The Childcare Register

The requirements for the compulsory part of the Childcare Register are

Met

The requirements for the voluntary part of the Childcare Register are **Met**

What inspection judgements mean

Registered early years provision

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	Outstanding provision is highly effective in meeting the needs of all children exceptionally well. This ensures that children are very well prepared for the next stage of their learning.
Grade 2	Good	Good provision is effective in delivering provision that meets the needs of all children well. This ensures children are ready for the next stage of their learning.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	The provision is not giving children a good standard of early years education and/or there are minor breaches of the safeguarding and welfare requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage. It will be monitored and inspected within twelve months of the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	Provision that is inadequate requires significant improvement and/or enforcement action. The provision is failing to give children an acceptable standard of early years education and/or is not meeting the safeguarding and welfare requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage. It will be monitored and inspected again within six months of the date of this inspection.
Met		The provision has no children on roll. The inspection judgement is that the provider continues to meet the requirements for registration.
Not met		The provision has no children on roll. The inspection judgement is that the provider does not meet the requirements for registration.

Inspection

This inspection was carried out by Ofsted under sections 49 and 50 of the Childcare Act 2006 on the quality and standards of provision that is registered on the Early Years Register. The registered person must ensure that this provision complies with the statutory framework for children's learning, development and care, known as the Early Years Foundation Stage.

Setting details

Unique reference number	129340
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	870984
Type of provision	
Registration category	Childcare - Non-Domestic
Age range of children	0 - 17
Total number of places	24
Number of children on roll	26
Name of provider	First Steps Pre-School (Long Marston) Committee
Date of previous inspection	29/03/2011
Telephone number	07925 185311

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Type of provision

For the purposes of this inspection the following definitions apply:

Full-time provision is that which operates for more than three hours. These are usually known as nurseries, nursery schools and pre-schools and must deliver the Early Years Foundation Stage. They are registered on the Early Years Register and pay the higher fee for registration.

Sessional provision operates for more than two hours but does not exceed three hours in any one day. These are usually known as pre-schools, kindergartens or nursery schools

and must deliver the Early Years Foundation Stage. They are registered on the Early Years Register and pay the lower fee for registration.

Childminders care for one or more children where individual children attend for a period of more than two hours in any one day. They operate from domestic premises, which are usually the childminder's own home. They are registered on the Early Years Register and must deliver the Early Years Foundation Stage.

Out of school provision may be sessional or full-time provision and is delivered before or after school and/or in the summer holidays. They are registered on the Early Years Register and must deliver the Early Years Foundation Stage. Where children receive their Early Years Foundation Stage in school these providers do not have to deliver the learning and development requirements in full but should complement the experiences children receive in school.

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