

First Steps Playgroup

Carters Mead, Harlow, ESSEX, CM17 9EU

Inspection date	04/02/2014
Previous inspection date	02/07/2010

The quality and standards of the early years provision	This inspection:	2
	Previous inspection:	2
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

- The quality of teaching is good and children relate well to what is planned because staff understand children's individual learning needs.
- The successful partnerships developed with parents help children to feel secure and ensure parents share information about learning at home, which increases children's rate of progress.
- Staff have a very secure understanding of safeguarding practice. They ensure children's welfare is prioritised and take appropriate action where there are concerns about children's well-being.
- Staff promote children's care and learning effectively because they are committed to improving their practice through continuous professional development.

It is not yet outstanding because

- There is scope to make optimum use of the outdoor areas to support children who prefer outdoor learning across the curriculum.
- There is scope to improve the monitoring of the systems used to track children's progress to ensure consistency across the team and that information is readily available to those who need it.

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.

Inspection activities

- The inspector observed activities in the classroom, quiet room, hall and outdoor areas and conducted a joint observation with the manager.
- The inspector, staff and children had wide ranging discussions at appropriate times during the inspection.
- The inspector looked at documentation related to the management of the playgroup, children's progress and self-evaluation.
- The inspector took account of the views of parents through short discussions.
- The inspector checked evidence of suitability and qualifications of staff working with children.

Inspector

Alison Reeves

Full report

Information about the setting

First Steps Playgroup was registered in 1999 and is on the Early Years Register. It is situated in Potter Street Academy in Harlow, Essex. The playgroup serves the local area and is accessible to all children. It operates from a classroom, a small quiet room and there is an enclosed area available for outdoor play.

The playgroup employs seven members of childcare staff. Of these, six hold appropriate early years qualifications at level 2 and 3. The playgroup opens Monday to Friday during term time. Sessions are from 8.45am until 11.45am and from 12.30pm until 3pm. Children attend a variety of sessions. There are currently 48 children attending who are in the early years age group. The playgroup provides funded early education for two-, three- and four-year-old children. It supports a small number of children who speak English as an additional language and children with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

What the setting needs to do to improve further

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

- use outdoor spaces more creatively to support all areas of the curriculum so that children who prefer outdoor learning consistently engage in rich experiences
- enhance the monitoring of the key person assessments of children's progress to ensure consistency across the team and that information is readily available to those who need it.

Inspection judgements

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

Children enjoy their time in the playgroup because staff are skilled in planning and delivering a programme of interesting and engaging activities. As a result, children are acquiring skills and a positive attitude to learning. Staff use appropriate and effective methods of teaching and this supports children well, ensuring they succeed even when challenged. Children are confident and chatty. During activities, they talk to each other and to staff about what they are doing. Children use their knowledge in their play recalling past experiences. When playing with dough and raisins children pretend to make cakes and cookies deciding on favourite and unusual flavours. Staff support learning well by asking questions that help the children to explain their flavour choices. Using skilful questioning helps children to develop their problem solving abilities and to share what they know. Where children are quieter and shy, staff provide more commentary on the play. Their explanations of what is happening provide children with the language they

need for thinking and communication. Staff make use of signing to support children's early and non-verbal communication. Consequently, all children, including those who speak English as an additional language, are developing and using their speaking and listening skills effectively.

Children have embraced the current topic on shape, colour and number. The inclusion of songs that involve counting and simple subtraction mean children quickly develop confidence with numbers. Children apply their knowledge to other situations. One child, during a conversation about sharing a cake cut into six, works out that four pieces have been eaten when two pieces were left. Parents report children showing great interest in numbers in the environment. Two girls are each painting a picture of a baker's shops. They use brushes and sponges to make and decorate their cakes. Each child explains that the colour of the cakes they are a particular flavour. There are yellow banana cakes and yellow lemon cakes, the pink are strawberry and cherry blossom and the brown one is chocolate. Children are encouraged to use writing for a purpose and they often write their names on their pictures. They demonstrate good pen control and carefully form recognisable letters. Staff praise the children for their effort and success. This supports children's early writing and contributes significantly to their readiness for school ensuring children feel confident and proud of their achievements. Staff use phonics and children are good at linking letters and sounds. Parents have noticed children are showing and increasing interest in identifying letters and sounding out simple words when at home. This demonstrates the effective links between home and playgroup that support children's home learning. Children have the opportunity to play and learn outdoors as a small area is accessible throughout the session. However, when they use the larger playground space the focus is mainly on physical play. There are opportunities to extend this to include other areas of learning and better support children who enjoy outdoor experiences.

Staff use effective strategies to ensure activities support and challenge appropriately to their individual needs. As a result, all children, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities are making good progress from their individual starting points. Parents are involved from the outset at the playgroup. Staff gather information from parents to establish a baseline level of development and they use this as the basis for early planning. Ongoing assessments using observation enable staff to track children's progress and identify appropriate next steps to ensure children continue to make good progress towards the early learning goals.

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

Children settle into playgroup because the strong and effective key person system works well so that children, their families and the staff develop relationships that help children to feel emotionally secure. Where children receive additional funding this is directed to provide more general support within the playgroup enabling the key person to work one-to-one with a child. This means children work closely with someone they trust and have a strong bond with, which enables them to learn effectively.

Children develop their understanding of good hygiene because staff use both the regular

routine and direct teaching. Children always wash their hands before they have snack and they put their used tissues into covered bins. Staff help the youngest children to develop good habits by reinforcing routines and then build on this with more discussion and questioning as their understanding grows. This results in children who understand why healthy habits are important to their health and well-being. Snack times contribute to the children eating a healthy diet. They enjoy choosing their fruit and most are happy to try all that is offered. Staff talk to the children about their preferences for milk, squash or water and why it is important to have a drink. The children pour their drinks and use knives with care to spread topping on their bread. Children lead a very active life in playgroup. They have time outdoors each day using the decked area and the larger area shared with the school. Children use the ride-on toys with tremendous enthusiasm. Staff help the children to share and take turns by using sand timers. This means children understand that turns are fair and they each have the chance to ride on their favourite bike. The playgroup uses the large school hall for some energetic play. One of the staff leads an active music session. Children move the different parts of their body, stretching bending and jumping. They stop for a rest and feel their hearts pumping and they take deep breaths. This helps them to see the effect of exercise on their bodies. Children listen carefully to instruction and all join in when asked what they need to do to keep themselves safe in the hall.

Staff support children's independence effectively. They encourage children to make decisions, such as whether to play indoors or outdoors. This means children take charge of their learning and understand that adults value their choices. Children generally behave very well. Staff give children clear guidance on how to behave. They remain calm and talk children through difficult situations. They develop and agree specific strategies with parents to support children who need extra help. For example, one child is upset because someone has sat in his space and some of the resources he wants to use are gone. The key person calmly asks the child to explain what has happened. The child becomes calm because they are helped to express their frustration and this prevents the situation from escalating. This supports children in developing increasing self-control, leading to improved behaviour. They listen and sit well when working in small and large groups learning to put their hands up before speaking. Consequently, children build their personal skills to become confident, articulate, sociable and independent, which prepare them well for the next stage in their learning.

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

Staff provide a safe and secure environment for children in the playgroup. They understand their roles and responsibilities in meeting all of the legal requirements of the Statutory framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage. Robust recruitment procedures and ongoing suitability checks ensure staff are suitable to work with young children. The established team is qualified and experienced and this enables them to provide well for the needs of all the children. The staff have very good safeguarding knowledge and this enables them to prioritise children's well-being and take swift action in the event of any concerns. Regular checks on the play areas and equipment means potential hazards are minimised or removed. The very close supervision of children at all times promotes their

safety.

The staff team regularly reflect on their practice. This helps them to identify their particular strengths and to look at how the provision for children can be improved. The views of parents and children form part of this reflection and future planning. Children's responses to activities help staff to know what is successful in supporting learning. Feedback from parents through questionnaires, discussions at open days and day-to-day chats is highly valued and contributes significantly to the development of the playgroup. The monitoring of individual staff ensures each one develops their skills and that they keep up to date with current practice. Staff use what they learn on training courses effectively to improve the quality of teaching and learning for all children. When staff have a particular interest in an aspect of the curriculum, this is nurtured and their enthusiasm inspires others on the team. The continued monitoring of children's progress ensures they all make good progress from their individual starting points and there is generally good quality information available to share with parents and others who need it. The central tracker used by the team enables them to see at a glance the gaps in children's learning and this identifies the reasons for any delayed progress.

There are effective partnerships with a number of organisations that work with children and their families. This means there is continuity for children and the families are supported. The partnership with the school is successful and helps children and their families to make the move from playgroup to the Reception class. Where children go to other local school the staff provide details of children's progress and invite staff to visit children in the playgroup. Partnerships with parents are successful. They say it is a 'brilliant playgroup'. 'Staff are very approachable'. 'On the first day the key person said to my child if you ever need a cuddle come to me. I felt so reassured that he would be cared for in this way'.

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	402222
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	951331
Type of provision	
Registration category	Childcare - Non-Domestic
Age range of children	0 - 5
Total number of places	25
Number of children on roll	48
Name of provider	First Steps Playgroup Partnership
Date of previous inspection	02/07/2010
Telephone number	07930214283

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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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