

Little Steps Day Nursery

1 Lancaster Road, ST. ALBANS, Hertfordshire, AL1 4EP

Inspection date	02/10/2014
Previous inspection date	05/05/2010

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

- Staff use the interests of children to plan and teach enjoyable and challenging activities, which cover all areas of children's learning. As a result, children progress very well including those with specific educational needs.
- Children enjoy nutritious snacks and meals, including items they have grown themselves and the staff plan regular access to the outdoor area. This supports children's awareness of living a healthy lifestyle.
- The manager fosters a culture of continuous improvement and uses self-evaluation and links with other professionals effectively, to improve the childcare provision that she provides. There are also robust safeguarding measures in place to protect children.
- Partnerships with parents are well established due to the regular sharing of information about each child's individual progress and care needs. This promotes a strong continuity between home and the nursery.

It is not yet outstanding because

- On occasions, children are not consistently encouraged to do things for themselves, such as putting on their own shoes, to further promote their growing independence.
- There is occasional inconsistency in some personal hygiene care routines, particularly regarding staff attending to children's runny noses.

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 children's activities in all the rooms used and outside.
- The inspector carried out a joint observation with the teacher and held discussions with the manager and some other members of staff.
- The inspector sampled the nursery documentation including a self-evaluation, policies, children's learning journals and registers.
- The inspector took account of the views of parents through discussions on the day and recently completed written feedback.
- The inspector saw evidence of the qualifications and suitability of all persons working on the premises and other documentation in relation to the safeguarding and welfare requirements.

Inspector

Rachel Pepper

Full report

Information about the setting

Little Steps Day Nursery was registered in 1999 and is on the Early Years Register and the compulsory and voluntary parts of the Childcare Register. It is privately owned and operates from a house in a residential area of St Albans near to the town centre. The nursery serves the local area. The nursery is accessible to all children and there is an area available for outdoor play. The nursery opens Monday to Friday all year round except for a week at Christmas. Sessions are from 7.45am until 6.15pm. Children attend for a variety of sessions. There are currently 46 children attending, all of whom are in the early years age range. The nursery provides funded early education for three- and four-year-olds and supports children with special educational needs. The nursery employs 15 members of childcare staff. Of these, 10 hold early years qualification at level 3 or above. This includes one member of staff who holds Qualified Teacher Status. The nursery receives support from the local authority.

What the setting needs to do to improve further

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

- maximise opportunities for children to develop their independence skills through everyday activities and tasks

- strengthen the staff's safe personal hygiene practices further by, for example, consistently washing hands after attending to children's runny noses.

Inspection judgements

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

Staff at the nursery display a secure understanding of the Early Years Foundation Stage. They plan stimulating activities to cover all areas of learning. As a result, children enjoy a broad range of play experiences and make very good progress in their development. The quality of teaching is good and staff show awareness of timely intervention to join in and extend children's play. Furthermore, there is a good balance of both adult-led and child-chosen activities. This means that children experience a varied curriculum that supports them to reach their full learning potential. Staff carry out spontaneous and planned observations of children. They note any displayed interests and identify the next steps for each child. Therefore, the weekly planning is exciting and challenging for the children, who are fully engaged in what they do. For example, children express their creativity as they complete pictures of a scene from a popular children's film. Staff offer a vast array of resources and allow children to freely explore and manipulate the objects, using them how they choose.

Children enjoy story time and focus attentively as staff encourage them to sit and listen. Staff use open-ended questions, encouraging children to think, and give them adequate time to respond. Children share experiences from home, and staff engage them in purposeful dialogue, to support their speaking and listening skills. They extend children's vocabulary by introducing new words and support their communication and language development well. Staff respond to children's eagerness to share ideas and comments, such as the designs for their creative artwork. Staff use a calm manner and make sure that each child is given attention and time to speak. This demonstrates how all children's contributions are valued. Outside, children negotiate space and have time to assess their own risks using the various levels of ground. Children use the home made pulley system to speculate and test ideas, through trial and error, as they fill and empty the various containers with mud. They continue to use their smaller muscles as they dig in the mud kitchen and explore the natural resources in the mature environment. This supports children's developing physical skills. Independence is further promoted as staff ask children to collect the ripe tomatoes they have grown from the allotment. However, staff do not fully promote children's independence as, occasionally, they put children's shoes and clothing on for them without firstly encouraging them to try the task for themselves.

Staff promote school readiness effectively as there is a specific focus on literacy and mathematics within the pre-school room. They plan additional adult-led activities and support children to form the recognisable letters of their name. Children concentrate using whiteboards, pens and an interactive computer programme. Staff praise children regularly for their achievements, raising their self-esteem and prompting them to continue. Furthermore, children repeat number rhymes and are asked to solve problems using simple subtraction. This helps them to secure their early mathematical development. Staff contact the schools that children will move on to and provide information on their current working levels. Children take part in a graduation ceremony before leaving and gain confidence as they speak in front of attending parents. As a result, children are well prepared for the next stage in their learning. Staff maintain learning journals for each child, detailing their levels of development, which they send home each term. As a result, parents remain fully informed of the activities children take part in and can extend learning at home. Staff use national guidance to complete regular assessments on children. They use these to establish children's skills, knowledge and abilities accurately and identify areas children may not be progressing as expected. In addition, parents help to establish starting points when children join and share information about activities carried out at home. Therefore, all children, including those with special educational needs, benefit from the tailored activities that staff organise. For example, staff focus on activities to support muscle development for children with physical mobility delay. Consequently, this collaborative way of working means that any gaps in learning close quickly and almost all children are working at or above typical levels of development.

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

Children enjoy their time at this welcoming nursery and new children settle well. Staff respond immediately to children needing comfort and use a soft tone as they offer constant reassurance. They explain the routines of the day and regularly talk about what comes next. As a result, children have developed secure attachments to staff and know

what is expected of them. Children access their individual pegs and trays to collect their belongings. This helps them to develop a sense of belonging in the nursery. An assigned key person takes responsibility for each child and staff display this information in the entrance hallway. Therefore, all parents are aware of who specifically cares for their child. Staff obtain information about children's routines, favourite comforters and their different behaviours, which is actively used throughout the day. This ensures children have a smooth move into nursery from home. Staff use daily discussions and communication books to share any further information or concerns that they may have. In addition, staff encourage parents to phone or email if they require further reassurance. As a result, there is a strong continuity, between home and the nursery, in the care that each child receives. Staff use a flexible process to settle each child into the nursery and when preparing to move between the rooms when they are ready. This is unique to each child and agreed with parents to fully support their children's well-being.

Children are encouraged to behave well. Staff regularly remind children to be kind and affectionate to each other. They use frequent praise and encouragement, and reward positive behaviour to reinforce expectations. For example, children who help to tidy up before snack, are able to choose their favourite colour sticker reward at circle time. Children enjoy spending time in the different age rooms. This helps them to develop peer relationships and offers a chance for siblings to interact. Some older children take on the role of mentor to younger children, who are new to the nursery, and thrive on this responsibility. As a result, children's social and emotional development is supported well. Staff encourage children to celebrate the similarities and difference of others through a variety of festivals. Parents are invited to share their expertise and cultural traditions. Successful activities include children making lanterns for a German festival, sweets for Diwali and gaining knowledge about Thanksgiving. As a result, children gain confidence as they share their own traditions with friends and develop their understanding of the diversity of people and communities.

Children are offered a healthy, nutritious and balanced diet. For example, they typically enjoy lunches, such as chicken casserole, couscous and vegetables. Snacks include a selection of fruit, bread, cheese and ham. Children serve themselves and staff regularly remind them to use their manners, promoting socially acceptable behaviour. The resident cook freshly prepares all the daily meals, using a carefully devised menu. The nursery has received a five star rating as a food premises. The staff help children to learn about healthy food options as they involve them in the growing of seasonal fruit and vegetables in the nursery allotment and describe the fruit that they eat. Staff display the menus to keep parents fully informed of the food and drink that they provide. Children wash their hands before eating and after using the toilet and so are made aware of safe hygiene practice. This reduces the risk of contamination and the spread of germs. However, occasionally, some staff do not consider strengthening this practice further, as they do not always wash their own hands after attending to children's runny noses. Staff plan opportunities for children to play outside each day to enjoy regular exercise and fresh air. Children use their muscles energetically to pedal bikes, and climb and balance on the wooden frame and bridge, using their larger bodily movements. The nursery equipment and resources are well maintained and suitable for the ages of all the children who attend. They are easily available and rotated to meet individual needs.

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

The manager and her well-qualified team meet the safeguarding and welfare requirements well. The nursery is secure to ensure children are safe. For example, a CCTV system is used by staff to monitor all visitors to the nursery. Therefore, no person can gain unauthorised access to the nursery and children cannot leave unsupervised. Recruitment procedures are robust. For example, a secure induction and probationary system are in place. As a result, staff are fully aware of their roles and responsibilities. All staff, who have access to the children or work closely with them, have undergone full suitability checks. This helps to protect children's welfare. Staff have all received safeguarding training and know who the lead person is to contact if they have a concern for a child in their care. They are also aware of the procedures to follow if an allegation is made against them or another staff member. Staff carry out regular risk assessments on the areas children use and remove any hazards or risks immediately. Fire exits are clearly marked and the detection and control equipment is regularly checked. In addition, staff organise regular evacuation practice so that children know what to do in an emergency. A majority of the staff have received first-aid training and are deployed well throughout the nursery, to further promote children's welfare. Staff keep all mobile phones within the office area when working with children. Furthermore, staff are prohibited from commenting on, or referring to, the nursery on any social networking sites, emails or text messages. This further protects children's personal safety and privacy.

The manager views the morale of staff as a high priority and carries out regular supervisions. These are used to identify performance strengths and weaknesses and discuss what can be improved. The manager also welcomes feedback on her own performance, demonstrating this reflective ethos. Staff are supported to attend further training to develop their skills in areas that interest them. This effective development programme is continually improving the quality of teaching and childcare provision. For example, staff demonstrate their recent training through successfully allowing children more time to respond to questions, using more open ended techniques and modelling correct language sensitively. The current action plan includes obtaining further information on the forest schools approach and introducing more natural resources into children's play. The manager completes a regular self-evaluation document and refers to previous recommendations from inspections to drive continuous improvement. Areas of focus are now clearly strengths at this nursery. This shows that the manager is committed to developing the nursery to benefit children's learning and development.

Partnerships with parents are effective and they show motivation and interest in the nursery they refer to as homely. Parents of current children run a forum to ensure that the views of all parents are considered. Requests are taken into account and changes made in response. For instance, staff now send learning journals home each term to share with family members. This means that parents are involved in their children's learning. This highlights how their views are also valued. Parents access all the policies and further information through a secure login to the nursery website. This ensures that they remain fully informed. The management have established good links with relevant agencies and professionals. They use these contacts to monitor the learning and development of

children as and when required. Staff visit other nurseries to share ideas and liaise with an early years coordinator to reflect further. The nursery employs a special educational needs coordinator to support individual children. Staff have access to additional specialised support where this may be deemed necessary for any child in their care.

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. We re-inspect nurseries and pre-schools judged as requires improvement within 12 months of the date of 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		There were no children present at the time of the inspection. The inspection judgement is that the provider continues to meet the requirements for registration.
Not met		There were no children present at the time of the inspection. 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	123558
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	874757
Type of provision	
Registration category	Childcare - Non-Domestic
Age range of children	0 - 17
Total number of places	40
Number of children on roll	46
Name of provider	Little Steps Limited
Date of previous inspection	05/05/2010
Telephone number	01 727 856651

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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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