

Inspection of Our Lady's First Steps Pre-School

Clinton View, Widnes, Cheshire WA8 8JN

Inspection date: 11 October 2023

Overall effectiveness	Good
The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

What is it like to attend this early years setting?

The provision is good

Babies and children settle quickly and demonstrate strong bonds with staff. All children, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, make good progress from their starting points. Additional funding is used appropriately to meet children's individual learning needs. For example, the manager identifies and buys resources that match children's interests to engage them in learning. Overall, children behave well. Expectations, including the use of kind hands and indoor voices, are displayed, and children are reminded of them. Staff encourage children to talk about how they feel and to consider the needs of others. For example, children talk about different emotions on World Health Day.

Children exercise in the fresh air every day. While outdoors, they also learn about nature, such as when collecting sticks and leaves in woodland or talking about the animals they can see on the local farmland. Throughout the day, children enjoy many opportunities that help them to develop good speaking and early reading and writing skills. Staff encourage babies to copy animal sounds as they play imaginatively with the farm set and sing songs about animals. Children develop a range of skills through well-linked activities themed around stories. During the inspection, staff read a well-known book, 'We're Going on a Bear Hunt'. Following this, children excitedly recalled the story as they played imaginatively with props. They searched for bears in the garden using binoculars they had made.

What does the early years setting do well and what does it need to do better?

- Since the last inspection, the manager and staff have made the required improvements. The manager has begun to meet with each staff member to discuss their practice. She is beginning to allocate time when she is not covering staff-to-child ratios to observe and review practice in each room. Changes to involve committee members more in the evaluation of practice are also being made.
- There is a clear curriculum and, overall, staff organise activities well. However, at times, staff do not focus sufficiently on what they want two-year-old children to learn or how they will deploy themselves best to support children. Consequently, during whole-group activities, some two-year-old children lose interest, walk away and do not fully access the intended learning.
- Staff are making good use of what they learned during training in the care of babies and how babies' brains develop. Staff play with babies as they push buttons on toys to activate sound and light. Activities such as these help babies to develop their attention, hand-to-eye coordination and their understanding of technology.
- Following training on mathematics, staff increasingly provide opportunities for children to see, recognise and use numbers and shapes as they play. Children

look closely at the patterns on animals and recreate them using paint. They carefully match toy dinosaur bones to pictures of dinosaur skeletons. They count in order as they jump on each number on a number line.

- Due to concerns about children's speech development following the COVID-19 pandemic, many staff have received training on how to assess children's early language skills. This enables them to identify children whose speech and language may be delayed and seek timely support to help them catch up.
- Children develop a keen interest in literacy. They choose to look at books, and staff help children to understand new words and to use them as they play. Children freely draw with chunky chinks and crayons, and they make marks with sticks in sand and with brushes and water on chalkboards.
- Children's daily access to images, toys and books that reflect diversity is steadily improving. Children point to members of their family on displayed photographs of different family groups. Some activities introduce children to the traditions and celebrations of different countries, cultures and faiths. For example, children have recently explored the Jewish New Year, Rosh Hashanah, in a range of age-appropriate ways. They ate apples dipped in honey and printed with apples in paint.
- Staff exchange information with parents in a variety of ways. They talk to parents daily, and babies also take diary sheets home with information about their day. Parents of pre-school children comment that they find the monthly newsletters informative. They feel well informed about their child's progress through daily talks and regular written assessments. They enjoy attending stay-and-play sessions, where they speak to staff and join in activities with their children.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Staff check regularly for hazards to keep indoor and outdoor spaces safe and secure. They assess risks in the garden before using it and ensure that children are aware of the risk assessment. For example, they place cones on the wooden slide steps and balancing beam when they are wet. This reminds everyone that they are slippery and cannot be used until they are dry. Staff carefully sequence opportunities for physical development to build safely on each child's prior learning. For example, babies crawl in a soft-play area and progress to crawling over soft-play shapes before using low-level wooden climbing equipment. Staff regularly renew their safeguarding training and know how to report any concerns about children and families.

What does the setting need to do to improve?

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

- build on the supervision of staff arrangements and ensure they receive relevant support, coaching and training to make them fully effective in their role
- focus more carefully when planning what two-year-old children are to learn and the best group size to support their learning even more effectively.

Setting details

Unique reference number	EY244150
Local authority	Halton
Inspection number	10262220
Type of provision	Childcare on non-domestic premises
Registers	Early Years Register, Compulsory Childcare Register, Voluntary Childcare Register
Day care type	Full day care
Age range of children at time of inspection	0 to 10
Total number of places	105
Number of children on roll	188
Name of registered person	Our Lady's First Steps Pre-School Committee
Registered person unique reference number	RP907239
Telephone number	0151 424 5500
Date of previous inspection	18 October 2022

Information about this early years setting

Our Lady's First Steps Pre-School registered in 2004. The nursery employs 31 members of childcare staff. Of these, three hold appropriate early years qualifications at level 2, 22 at level 3, one at level 4 and one at level 5. The nursery opens Monday to Friday, from 8am to 6pm, all year. The nursery is in receipt of funding for early education for two-, three- and four-year-old children.

Information about this inspection

Inspector

Lynne Naylor

Inspection activities

- The inspector discussed any continued impact of the pandemic with the provider and has taken that into account in their evaluation of the provider.
- The manager and the inspector completed a learning walk together.
- A joint observation was carried out by the inspector and the nursery manager.
- The inspector held discussions with staff, children, parents and grandparents at appropriate times during the inspection and took account of their views.
- The inspector looked at a sample of documentation, including evidence about staff suitability and training.

We carried out this inspection 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.

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