

First Steps Nursery Day Care of Children

216 Bank Street
Irvine
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Telephone: 01294 212 632

Type of inspection:
Unannounced

Completed on:
13 February 2024

Service provided by:
First Steps (Nursery Schools) Limited

Service provider number:
SP2003000870

Service no:
CS2003004265

About the service

First Steps Nursery is a day care service for children located within a quiet residential area close to the town of Irvine, North Ayrshire.

The service is registered to care for a maximum of 72 children from 6 weeks to those not yet attending primary school.

12 children 0 - 2 years

20 children 2 - 3 years

40 children 3 - primary school age

First Steps nursery is in partnership with North Ayrshire Council to provide early learning and childcare.

The nursery is a purpose built service with three playrooms, separate outdoor play areas and is surrounded by green space.

The service is close to Irvine town centre, local transport links, shops and community services. The service operates between 07:30 and 18:00 Monday to Friday.

About the inspection

This was an unannounced inspection which took place on 12 February 2024 between 09:30 and 18:00. The inspection was carried out by three inspectors from the Care Inspectorate. To prepare for the inspection we reviewed information about this service. This included previous inspection findings, registration information, information submitted by the service and intelligence gathered since the last inspection.

In making our evaluations of the service we:

- spoke with 23 people using the service and eight of their families
- spoke with 10 staff and management
- observed practice and daily life
- reviewed documents

Key messages

- Children were happy and confident and well supported by staff who knew them well
- Staff had a kind, caring and nurturing approach
- Children had access to quality experiences and resources indoors and outdoors
- Children had fun and led their own learning
- The team worked well to ensure children's needs were met
- The management team should secure further training for staff
- The owners and manager were committed to the quality of the service
- The manager led the service well

From this inspection we evaluated this service as:

In evaluating quality, we use a six point scale where 1 is unsatisfactory and 6 is excellent

How good is our care, play and learning?	4 - Good
How good is our setting?	5 - Very Good
How good is our leadership?	4 - Good
How good is our staff team?	4 - Good

Further details on the particular areas inspected are provided at the end of this report.

How good is our care, play and learning?

4 - Good

We evaluated this key question as good, where several strengths impacted positively on outcomes for children and outweighed areas for improvement.

Quality indicator 1.1 Nurturing care and support

Children were cared for in a warm and nurturing environment by staff who knew them very well. Staff had formed positive relationships with all children and were responsive to their emotional and wellbeing needs. When children needed reassurance, staff were warm and nurturing, ensuring their needs were met. Children were happy, confident and familiar with the daily routine and having fun with their friends. This meant that children were safe and secure.

All children had an up-to-date personal plan which were stored on the online family app. The plans incorporated the Safe, Healthy, Achieving, Nurtured, Active, Respected, Included (SHANARRI) wellbeing indicators from the Getting it right for every child (GIRFEC) approach. This meant that children's health and wellbeing needs were well supported. The plans outlined children's needs and targets. We asked the manager to ensure that children's needs and targets were clearly documented and clear strategies were identified to support children's next steps. Staff provided regular updates with families and they were able to comment and share information with staff on their children's progress. This meant that families were involved in their children's care and development.

Children had access to healthy snacks throughout the day and water was available ensuring children were kept hydrated. This meant that children could choose their snacks and drinks independently. Children's meals were cooked and prepared on site. The tables were set up for the children in the conservatory and after handwashing they sat at the tables and were encouraged to self-serve and pour their own water or milk. Staff sat with the children and ate with them as they talked about the children's morning. Lunchtime was a relaxed and social experience for the children. We observed towards the end of lunchtime, staff became task oriented which created some disruption. We asked the management team to continue reviewing the lunchtime routine and allow more time before staff cleared the tables to enhance the quality of children's experiences.

During the lunchtime routine for the younger children, staff were warm, kind and nurturing towards the children as they sat with them and enjoyed an unhurried social lunchtime experience. The children were well supported during lunch and staff praised the children and encouraged them to eat independently. This meant that children enjoyed a positive lunchtime experience.

After lunch some children were being picked up and dropped off for their afternoon placement. We spoke with the management team about perhaps delaying staff breaks until the children were settled and more staff would be available during the lunchtime experience.

Children's emotional security and wellbeing was well supported during sleep routines. Staff were sensitive to children's individual care needs and they understood the importance of sleep for children's overall development. The sleeping areas were warm, comfortable and cosy with new cots and staff ensured safe sleeping practice to keep children safe. This meant that children's health, safety and wellbeing needs were supported.

We spoke with families throughout the inspection and they told us that staff were nurturing and caring towards their children.

All staff were trained in child protection and knew how to safe guard children and to report any concerns to the manager. This meant that children were safe from harm.

Quality indicator 1.3 Play and learning

The service provided a broad range of play and learning experience for children to develop their skills and learn through play. Children led their own play and moved freely between the indoor and outdoor areas with the support of staff. Each play room was well designed and set up with defined areas for children to access a range of play experiences. This included story areas, imaginative and role play and arts and crafts. Children were actively engaged in their learning and staff were supporting their play by encouraging them to choose their own art and craft materials to create their own pictures and paintings.

There was a strong focus on language and literacy skills. Children were enjoying music and rhyme experiences led by staff which were fun and exciting for the children to participate in. They were singing and using puppets and props to play games to develop their use of language in different ways. There were opportunities for mark making and children used notepads and pencils to write and draw. The reading area was cosy and comfortable and children used the space well to enjoy a range of books and sit with staff as they read stories together. This meant that children were developing their skills in language and literacy.

Each playroom had access to an outdoor area and children were encouraged to play outdoors on a regular basis. The service had purchased wellington boots and water proof suits ensuring children could play outdoors in all weathers. The large outdoor area had some risky play apparatus which enabled children to develop their physical skills and enjoy the benefits of risk taking such as balancing blocks and climbing trees.

The younger children played outdoors and staff responded to children's ages and stages of development by providing appropriate play opportunities and experiences. Staff were playing games with the children and interacting with them in a fun and playful manner making their experiences enjoyable. Staff understood the importance of children's wellbeing and the benefit of outdoor play which contributed to their physical skills and developmental milestones. This meant that children's play was meaningful and they enjoyed the benefits of outdoor play, including fresh air and exercise.

Staff planned for children's learning. They used an annual overview which outlined children's skills in health and wellbeing, language and English, numeracy and mathematics. The planning process also took in to account seasonal, festival and cultural events. This meant that children had access to a range of learning experiences including aspects of the Chinese new year festival.

Children's progress was tracked throughout each term and reflected a balance of planned learning experiences and responsive planning. Staff were responsive to children's interests and focussed on children's individual targets. This ensured that children's learning and development was documented and they were progressing well.

We spoke with the management team about securing further training for staff to use observation and assessment information as an ongoing process to monitor children's progress over time. This could support staff to record children's learning and development more effectively and improve outcomes for children.

How good is our setting?

5 - Very Good

We found significant strengths in aspects of the care provided and how these supported positive outcomes for children, therefore we evaluated this quality key question as very good.

Quality indicator 2.2 Children experience high quality facilities

The service had a warm and welcoming atmosphere. The three playrooms were comfortable, homely with plenty of natural light and good ventilation. Children were safe and secure and internal gates provided additional security as children freely accessed other areas of the service such as the cloak room and toilets. The outdoor areas were secured with appropriate and well maintained gates and fencing. This meant that children were safe and secure.

The service owners had invested a significant amount of funds to improve the internal and external spaces within the service. This included an upgrade of the younger children's changing areas and sleeping areas to ensure children's emotional health and wellbeing needs were met. In addition a new fully fitted kitchen had been installed in the baby room to minimise disruption to cleaning and feeding routines. This ensured continuity of care throughout the day.

New furniture and resources had also been purchased such as sleeping cots, low level feeding chairs, strollers and developmentally appropriate play equipment for the younger children. This meant that children benefitted from play rooms that were well furnished and resourced giving children a strong message that they matter.

All children had access to an outdoor play area which meant that they could enjoy the benefits of outdoor play, including fresh air and exercise. The large outdoor area was an open space with high trees lining the fence line, a gazebo and wood chips ground cover for safety. The service had introduced some risky play equipment for children to develop their physical skills including, balancing and co-ordination skills. We spoke with the management team about further developing the space to include more risky play equipment and loose parts to allow children to use their creative and imaginative skills.

How good is our leadership?

4 - Good

We evaluated this key question as good, where several strengths impacted positively on outcomes for children and outweighed areas for improvement

Quality indicator 3.1 Quality assurance and improvement are led well

The service was in partnership with North Ayrshire Council. The manager attended regular management meetings, accessed training and joined a local support network. The owners also provided opportunities for the manager to share practice with their associated services.

The manager had made significant progress in the development of the service with the support of the owners. This included digitising paper copies of children's records and converting all other paper based documents to electronic files. The service was also using the family app to streamline communication with families and keep them up-to-date on a regular basis.

The service had developed a vision, values and aims as part of the rebranding of the service. Families were involved in the process and a family participation strategy had been developed to seek the views of families.

This meant that families were meaningfully involved in the service and their views were sought to influence change.

An improvement plan was in place which contributed to the ongoing development of the service. It highlighted priorities to secure children's progress in literacy, numeracy and wellbeing. The service had also identified other priorities. For example, they wanted to improve the transition arrangements for younger children who were developmentally ready to move to other play rooms. During the inspection we spoke with several families who told us that they were happy with the arrangements that were in place to support their child's room move and that this was carried out sensitively and at their child's pace. As a result, children experienced positive outcomes.

The service was in the early stages of implementing self-evaluation processes. The manager had a clear starting point and had begun to consult with the staff team and families. We asked the service to involve children in the process. This means that children's views could be included in the self-evaluation process.

We spoke with the manager about developing a monitoring calendar to help continuously review and evaluate the quality of the service and to undertake regular audits to ensure the ongoing improvement of the service and improve outcomes for children.

How good is our staff team?

4 - Good

Quality indicator 4.3 Staff deployment

We evaluated this key question as good, where several strengths impacted positively on outcomes for children and outweighed areas for improvement

Staff were kind, caring, and responsive to the children in their care and they had formed strong attachments with the children. As a result children benefitted from a team that ensured children's experiences were positive and that they were happy, safe and secure.

The service was well staff and the owners had employed additional staff to enhance the quality of the service. This also meant that planned and unplanned absences were well managed. Staff retention was high and the service owners had improved staff's conditions of employment. This meant that there was continuity of care for children.

Staff were deployed according to their skills, knowledge and experience to meet the needs of the differing age groups. They were also deployed in specific learning areas and this was agreed by the management team and staff in relation to their interests and strengths. For example, some staff preferred to work with specific age groups and others preferred to work outdoors. We spoke with the manager about deploying staff within specific learning areas for longer periods of time. This could allow staff the opportunity to extend and further develop the areas, facilitate children's interests, and improve outcomes for children.

The team worked well together and offered support when needed to ensure children's needs were prioritised. They used walkie talkies to communicate from indoors to outdoors which worked well. This ensured that staff knew where children were as they moved freely between the indoor and outdoor play areas. There was also good communication within the play rooms. Staff informed each other of when they needed to leave the room and they shared information about children's needs.

Families overall were happy with the service and felt there was good communication with staff and the use

of the family app was valuable. On the day of inspection we spoke with families and they told us that staff knew their children well and that their children's needs were well supported. Families also told us that they were happy with the changes to the service including the support of the manager and deputies.

The manager and deputies worked well together to ensure the ongoing development and improvement of the service. Their roles and responsibilities were defined and they ensured that staff were well supported throughout the day and during staff breaks.

The management team had identified training and development opportunities for staff across the service and had demonstrated a commitment to ensuring staff were well trained. This meant that children benefitted from a team that was continuing to develop their skills and knowledge in early childhood practice.

What the service has done to meet any areas for improvement we made at or since the last inspection

Areas for improvement

Previous area for improvement 1

The manager should ensure that all staff are familiar with the service's medication policy and procedure. Regular monitoring of processes should be developed to support effective and safe practice and appropriate record keeping.

This area for improvement was made on 9 March 2020.

Action taken since then

The new manager and staff were familiar with the medication policy and procedure and this was discussed during the inspection as part of the core assurances. The manager was auditing the process as part of their role to ensure effective record keeping was in place. This area for improvement has been met.

Complaints

There have been no complaints upheld since the last inspection. Details of any older upheld complaints are published at www.careinspectorate.com.

Detailed evaluations

How good is our care, play and learning?	4 - Good
1.1 Nurturing care and support	4 - Good
1.3 Play and learning	4 - Good

How good is our setting?	5 - Very Good
2.2 Children experience high quality facilities	5 - Very Good

How good is our leadership?	4 - Good
3.1 Quality assurance and improvement are led well	4 - Good

How good is our staff team?	4 - Good
4.3 Staff deployment	4 - Good

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