Step by Step Private Nursery
Day Care of Children

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Type of inspection:
Unannounced

Completed on:
12 July 2022

Service provided by:
Step By Step Private Nursery Limited

Service provider number:
SP2003001250

Service no:
CS2003044454

About the service

Step by Step Private Nursery is an independently run nursery located within a suburb of Cumbernauld in North Lanarkshire. The nursery provides a registered day care of children service to a maximum of 71 children not yet attending primary school. Of those 71 children no more than 12 are aged under two and no more than 59 are aged two to those not yet attending primary school.

The service is provided from a semi detached building, which is on one level. Children have the use of two bright playrooms and a large secure outdoor play space. There is a sensory room, staff room, kitchens, office and toilet facilities. The service also regularly access community amenities including parks and forest spaces to enrich children's play and learning experiences.

About the inspection

This was an unannounced inspection which took place on Monday 11 July 2022 between 08:40 and 15:45. The inspection was carried out by two 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 throughout the inspection year.

In making our evaluations of the service we:

- spoke with several children using the service and reviewed survey responses from eight parents whose children attend the service.
- spoke with the service provider, management team and six staff
- observed practice and staff interactions with children
- reviewed documents.

Key messages

Children were happily engaged in activities indoors and outside. Staff intuitively stepped in to support children's play ideas when needed or offer challenge to extend their learning.

Children enjoyed exceptional lunchtime arrangements, they chose when to eat so that their play was not interrupted.

The nursery gardens were organised to promote children's independence, risky play and sense of wonder.

Exemplary staff retention and staff support ensured a staff team who worked well together in delivering high quality experiences for children.

The management team and staff should continue to consolidate quality assurance processes underpinned by best practice guidance.

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?	6 - Excellent
How good is our setting?	6 - Excellent
How good is our leadership?	5 - Very Good
How good is our staff team?	6 - Excellent

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

How good is our care, play and learning? 6 - Excellent

We made an evaluation of excellent for this key question as we found the service performance to be sector leading and innovative for both quality indicators. Child centred practice and play based approaches were embedded in the service ethos. Children consistently received outstanding care and support from compassionate staff who knew them extremely well. Staff intuitively stepped in to support children's play ideas when needed or offered challenge to extend their learning. As a result children experienced care that was nurturing and responsive to their individual needs.

1.1 Nurturing care and support

Children of all ages and abilities were happy and settled within the setting. Paying attention to everyone's emotional wellbeing was embedded in the service ethos and staff practice. There were organised activities such as yoga where children determined their level of participation but children were also supported through intuitive staff responses that supported their emotional wellbeing. For example baby room staff stayed at child level, interacting with gentle tones, welcoming body language and lots of cuddles. This helped children build attachments with their keyworkers as well as strong, trusting relationships with the wider staff team. Staff practice during children's personal care reflected their family's preferences and promoted children's independence, privacy and dignity. The comfortable staff room had a weekly treat box from the manager and meant staff felt valued. When staff feel respected and cared for this is likely to be reflected in their relationships with children.

Children's emotional security and wellbeing were supported through sensitive arrangements for daily routines such as nap and meal times. For example, staff were aware of children's comforters but did not insist on rigidly following nap time: they were respectful of children's choices if they would rather play than sleep so that children were learning to recognise their own body's cues. We observed the exceptional organisation of children's meal times. The 'rolling lunch' meant children benefitted from uninterrupted play and could independently decide when to sit down with their peers and enjoy an inviting, sociable experience. Food provided by the service was nutritious and reflected current guidance, such as 'Food Matters', for children's well balanced diet. There were alternatives offered to meet any dietary needs of children and made sure everyone felt included. The day of our inspection visit was very hot and we noted that fresh water was easily accessible by children both indoors and outdoors to ensure they remained hydrated.

Staff were respectful of parents' roles as key partners in their children's care and learning. Parents confirmed that staff regularly shared and exchanged information using online learning journals, closed Facebook pages, emails, telephone calls and chats during children's handover times. They appreciated that contact with the setting was gradually being increased as pandemic restrictions lifted. One parent commented:

"The staff are so nurturing towards my daughter. My daughter missed out on loads due to Covid-19 and I feel she has came on leaps and bounds since starting nursery. We are regularly updated on what she is achieving in nursery and what they are focusing on."

It was clear that staff had high aspirations to enable children to be successful. Meaningful partnership working with families enabled staff to get a clear understanding of strategies to support the holistic needs of each child and help them reach their full potential. Staff had established strong links with a range of external agencies but could also give examples of occasions where they had advocated for children to

receive additional support or equipment out with term time. This was so that children had the opportunity and encouragement to access all areas of the curriculum.

Reviewing personal plans was a priority within the service improvement plan and we agreed with this focus. In keeping with legal guidance, plans were in place for each child within 28 days of them joining the nursery then reviewed with families at least six monthly. Staff used all about me and care plan information to enhance children's individualised care and respect parents' requests for children's routines. We assessed that the electronic learning journals element of the personal plans were not representative of staff practice nor the richness of children's experiences. For example, children's voice was not always evident in their individual plan yet we observed how much children were involved in deciding about their own learning and how staff offered variety and challenge throughout the day. This was reflected in a parent comment: "The information reported back at the end of the day tends to be the same for groups of children. Whilst I appreciate they work in groups, the feedback isn't tailored to the individual child". We talked to staff about the capacity of the software to promote the involvement of families when recording children's learning journey. We have given this as an example of how monitoring could be improved under the leadership key question in section 3.1.

1.3 Play and learning

Children were meaningfully and actively involved in leading their play and learning through a balance of spontaneous and planned high quality experiences that promoted children's choice and independence. We observed lots of child centred, responsive play and child led learning scaffolded by staff. Staff were playful in their interactions with children and there was lots of chatter and laughter. Staff took time to listen to children, using careful questioning to support children's higher order thinking skills (HOTS). This meant children were empowered to express their ideas and to develop problem-solving skills, thus awarding them a sense of achievement. It demonstrated that staff were valuing children's interests and supporting their play, learning and development through following children's line of enquiry at their own pace.

In the playrooms and outdoors there were plenty of well considered open ended materials and creative approaches that successfully engaged children's imagination and enriched their play and learning. We observed children negotiating space and risk taking as they learned to use their body in different ways in the garden. For example, one group of children were building an obstacle course and HOTS questioning from staff helped children work out the risks involved in walking across their chosen path. Children's perspectives were listened to by staff and taken account of in staff observations and planning. Children's right to play was threaded through staff planning and the provision of children's play experiences. We suggested that more explicit reference to the United Nations Rights of the Child (UNCRC) would celebrate staff practice and could be utilized when recording the positive outcomes for children. 'A quality framework for day care of children, childminding and school aged childcare' could inform this task.

Play experiences offered, such as calculating how the number of children sitting in or pushing a shopping trolley impacted on speed, naturally provided opportunities for children to develop skills in language, science and numeracy. However we felt there were some missed opportunities to showcase how these wonderful experiences supported children's achievements across the early level of Curriculum for Excellence. 'Realising the Ambition: Being me' could assist staff in affirming their own practice as well as the documentation of children's play based learning.

How good is our setting? 6 - Excellent

We evaluated this key question as excellent, where performance was innovative and sector leading. Children's perspectives had been considered in the design of exciting and stimulating play spaces where the quality of open ended resources was exceptional.

2.2 Children experience high quality facilities

Playrooms and outdoor play areas were safe and secure, welcoming and stimulating. Children were able to decide how they wished to spend their day. We observed a very positive learning environment with purposeful areas rich in opportunities for children's curiosity and investigation. Throughout the setting there were plenty of spaces where children could rest, feel safe, content and cosy, affording them a sense of security and wellbeing. We observed older children making use of quieter spaces to stop, think and relax. For example in the garden there were book nooks and hammocks. Indoors there was a sensory room that staff had found particularly beneficial for children with additional support needs to calm down. We were impressed with a discrete nurture corner with open ended resources that children could use to express their feelings and learn about self regulation.

Babies also enjoyed an exceptional range of heuristic and sensory play experiences, which supported how they communicated their thoughts and ideas to staff. For example in their sectioned off area of the garden there was a table at toddler height arranged as a mud kitchen where babies could participate in messy play that supported the development of fine motor skills.

Staff understood the value of outdoor play for children's learning. Staff were playful supporting children's ideas including for games such as hide and seek and 'what's the time Mr Wolf?', encouraging turn taking, children's respect for others as well as mathematical thinking. Children were supported by staff to problem solve and think imaginatively when using a range of loose parts. This benefitted children in terms of their fine and gross motor development and language. We observed children spending long periods of time on specific activities, for example, persevering with how to use a large piece of piping to transport stones into a basin. Children's imaginative play, exploration, and creativity were stimulated by the availability of real life items. For example, children were learning about the food cycle because the nursery kept a chicken and children could collect then cook eggs on the fire pit.

The service was also making use of community amenities, such as the forest for woodland play and staff told us about how they planned to reintroduce other experiences for children including planting in a local allotment. Opportunities to play and be active outdoors in different weathers and natural environments developed children's understanding of their wider world and benefitted their overall health and wellbeing.

Children's safety was promoted through detailed risk assessments for all environments and activities accessed by them. These were regularly reviewed and staff were aware of their responsibility to identify and remove any new hazards in the way of children's safety and wellbeing. Children were also kept safe and healthy because of the robust infection control practices that were in place within the setting.

How good is our leadership? 5 - Very Good

We evaluated this key question as very good, where significant strengths supported positive outcomes for children. The service's improvement plan reflected their key priorities and demonstrated their commitment to partnership with the local authority. The child centred and play based ethos was evident throughout the setting and staff practice.

3.1 Quality assurance and improvement are led well

Positive working relationships between the management team and staff promoted a collegiate approach to providing high quality play experiences for children. The management team had created conditions where everyone felt confident to initiate well-informed change and share responsibility for the process. For example staff shared initiatives they had introduced and felt passionate about, including wiggle giggle: a parenting programme that promotes attachments between babies, young children and their caregivers.

Staff felt very supported by management both formally and informally through their open door approach. This had been particularly important during the height of the Covid-19 pandemic where people faced both personal and professional challenges. Regular staff meetings provided opportunities for staff to reflect together and use these reflections to bring about positive change for children. The management team regularly undertook observations of staff to support practice. We encouraged them to use the challenge questions from 'Realising the Ambition: Being me' to frame these observations. This would model for staff how best practice guidance can be used when recording observations and identifying where improvements can be made.

Providing staff with high-quality learning underpinned improvement planning. Staff told us about the core training, such as child protection, that they had participated in but also that they could request training they felt would have a positive impact on children. The manager agreed that they could be clearer with staff about the source of training. For example the service was in partnership with North Lanarkshire Council and therefore had access to their training catalogue. Strong leadership supported staff to have high aspirations and confidence in their capacity to support children and families to reach their full potential.

There were some examples of leadership such as room supervisors and themes including overseeing children's medication, fire wardens and forest schools. Through speaking with staff, it was evident that they felt involved in evaluating key areas for improvement. However, we found there could be more explicit links with the policy and guidance that underpinned practice so that everyone could see how positive outcomes for children were planned for and evaluated. For example, learning through play was central to staff planning but we discussed how child led approaches could be better represented within children's learning journals. As reviewing children's personal plans is an improvement priority, it will be important for the management team to monitor the content of all elements for consistency in practice and to identify where additional support for staff may be needed. We signposted the management team to our 'Guide for providers on personal planning: Early learning and childcare' that could inform this task.

Communication with families' was transparent, for example using closed Facebook, messaging, newsletters, and daily face to face contact. The nursery successes and achievements were shared with children, families and partners and used as a starting point for future improvements. This was confirmed by parent responses to our survey, where people strongly agreed that the service was well led and their views were listened to. For example one parent commented: "The nursery manager is very well organised and appears to provide staff with good leadership and guidance from what I have seen when at the nursery. All staff appear well supported and happy at their work which is generally a sign of good leadership...As parents we are asked to provide any feedback we have on a regular basis".

The management team and staff should continue to consolidate quality assurance processes underpinned by best practice guidance. This will assist them in monitoring and maintaining their already very high standards of service delivery to children and families.

How good is our staff team? 6 - Excellent

We evaluated this key question as excellent, where performance was innovative and sector leading. Exemplary staff retention and staff support ensured a staff team who worked well together in delivering high quality experiences for children.

4.3 Staff deployment

The service had high staff to child ratios: there was a high proportion of fully qualified staff and those who were still in training told us that they were fully supported. Training was planned to reflect staff interests, support service improvement planning and ensure high quality outcomes for children. Effective use was made of the differing experience, knowledge and skills of the staff team around the nursery. For example, sometimes staff moved with children from babies to the 2-5 playroom, so that the presence of a familiar adult supported smooth transitions for children and they felt secure.

Staff were deployed in a way that reflected the needs of children attending each day. Staff positioned themselves in the learning spaces both outdoors and inside to ensure they were aware of children's engagement and wellbeing. Staff breaks were planned to minimise impact on the children whilst enabling staff to rest and be refreshed. Staff also had protected time away from the playroom when they could focus on planning for children, including writing up their observations. This helped ensure children's experience of quality engagement with staff across the whole day was positive and that they were safe.

Staff believed that relationships were a strength of the service and perceived themselves as a strong team. Throughout the day they were flexible and supported each other to work as a team to benefit children. For example, staff naturally called each other for assistance when needed but also made use of walkie talkies to support everyone's safety when out of sight. Most parents who responded to our survey strongly agreed that there are always enough staff in the nursery. One commented: "The staff are fantastic, they are very nurturing and kind. There seems to be lots of staff always around".

Individual staff had taken on the mentoring role for new staff. Trainees spoke positively of their experience of having a 'buddy' who could support them in learning about their role and responsibilities for providing quality experiences for children. Being a mentor was a staff development opportunity for more experienced staff, which they could choose to engage in when they felt they had the right experience. We particularly liked that new mentors could also have a 'buddy' to shadow as they learnt about the mentoring role, thus building on the skills and knowledge of the collective staff team. To assist with their task, we signposted staff to Scottish Government's 'Early Learning and Childcare - National Induction Resource' on the HUB section of our website and mentoring tools on the Scottish Social Service Council (SSSC) website.

We observed and spoke with staff who were passionate, skilled, and experienced practitioners. Staff were committed to their professional development and reflected together on how this could impact positively on outcomes for children. They engaged extremely well with the inspection process taking on advice offered. Staff provided lots of warm, caring interactions and were respectful towards children's ideas. They were proactive in sharing information with each other and with families to ensure continuity in children's care. This had helped create an inclusive staff ethos where children and families' contributions were valued and encouraged.

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?	6 - Excellent
1.1 Nurturing care and support	6 - Excellent
1.3 Play and learning	6 - Excellent

How good is our setting?	6 - Excellent
2.2 Children experience high quality facilities	6 - Excellent

How good is our leadership?	5 - Very Good
3.1 Quality assurance and improvement are led well	5 - Very Good

How good is our staff team?	6 - Excellent
4.3 Staff deployment	6 - Excellent

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