First Steps Nursery
Day Care of Children

Heathhall
Dumfries
DG1 3NT

Telephone: 01387 255 345

Type of inspection:
Unannounced

Completed on:
27 June 2024

Service provided by:
Chloe Cullen trading as First Steps Nursery

Service provider number:
SP2009010275

Service no:
CS2010248991

About the service

First Steps Nursery is registered to provide a day care of children service to a maximum of 68 children at any one time. Of those 68 children, no more than 17 are under the age of two, no more than 15 are aged from two years to under three and no more than 36 are aged from three years to under 12. A maximum of 10 children may be attending primary school.

The service is provided in partnership with Dumfries and Galloway Council. It is situated in the Heathhall area of Dumfries and is close to shops, local amenities and public transport routes. There is an entrance foyer with a secure entry system. Children are cared for in three playrooms. Each playroom has access to designated fully enclosed outdoor play areas.

About the inspection

This was an unannounced inspection which took place on 26 and 27 June 2024 between 09:30 and 16:30. 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 since the last inspection. In making our evaluations of the service we:

- spoke with and observed children using the service
- received electronic questionnaires from 42 of their families
- spoke with staff and management
- received electronic questionnaires from nine staff
- observed practice and daily life
- reviewed documents.

Key messages

- Children experienced kind and compassionate care. They were happy, settled and approached staff for comfort and cuddles.
- Children had regular opportunities to play and learn in the community.
- The service should continue to develop their indoor and outdoor environment to ensure resources and invitations to play are exciting and stimulating for all children.
- The management team engaged well with the inspection and demonstrated a positive outlook on change and improvement.
- The service was appropriately staffed to meet the needs of children. Staff were kind and respectful, offering help to each other when required.
- Children and families were at the heart of the service.

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?	4 - 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/people and clearly outweighed areas for improvement.

Quality indicator 1.1: Nurturing care and support

Children experienced kind and compassionate care. Staff interactions respected children's rights and promoted their dignity. We observed children who were happy, settled and approached staff for comfort and cuddles. As a result, children felt valued, safe and secure.

Children benefitted from an unhurried lunchtime where their independence was promoted. Children were supported to self-serve, pour their own drinks and clear their plates when they were finished. Children were called over one at a time to a separate table to serve their lunch and clear their plate. This meant that some children had finished eating before staff were able to sit with them, and some children sat at the table waiting for long periods of time. When staff sat with children, they chatted meaningfully about their day and role modelled positive eating habits. We asked the service to consider ways to develop their lunchtime experience to ensure all that all children benefit from a positive and sociable mealtime. The service began to implement changes on day two of our inspection.

Children's wellbeing was supported by staff who knew them well and had formed positive relationships with families. One parent told us, "They are caring and understanding. Always take our views and perspectives on board and it's very clear they just want what is best for our child." All children had a personal plan in place that contained information to support staff to meet children's needs. We discussed the importance of ensuring consistent quality in the reviews, next steps and strategies within children's personal plans. This would ensure that all children are supported to reach their full potential.

Staff were responsive to children's individual sleep and rest cues. We observed staff recognising when children were tired and providing comfort, quiet time and opportunities to sleep. We advised the service to consider children's privacy when they slept in prams in the foyer. The management team told us they planned to provide beds in all playrooms. We agreed that this would ensure children had a cosy and private area to sleep.

Quality indicator 1.3: Play and learning

Children were confident and moved around the playroom independently, leading their own play and learning. Most children were having fun and self-selecting resources to enrich their own play during our visit. The service used a planning in the moment, and curiosity approach to support children's learning and development. This involves observing children's interests and what sparks their curiosity, extending play and learning experiences in response. Some staff were more skilled than others in recognising children's play cues and enriching their experiences. As a result, some children were not engaged in play for parts of their day and appeared bored. There had been frequent changes in the staff team, management had recognised that some staff would benefit from more support to embed these approaches effectively. This would ensure all children were engaged in meaningful play and learning experiences throughout their day.

Children's next steps and progress were recorded in learning journals that were shared regularly with children and their families. Almost all parents felt fully involved in their children's care, play and learning.

One parent told us, "This is spoken about every time we pick our child up. Their leaning journey folder is always accessible. There are also regular reviews and opportunities for parents to have stay & play sessions." This meant that families felt valued and included in their children's learning and development. We found some inconsistencies in the quality of observations and how they linked with children's next steps. We advised the service to develop their observation, planning and review cycle to ensure that individual children's interests were used to extend their play and learning. This would support all children to reach their full potential.

Children had fun whilst engaging in opportunities to develop their literacy and numeracy skills. We observed children choosing and listening to stories, singing songs and using menus and recipe cards in the mud kitchen. This supported them to acquire new knowledge and skills through play. Some playrooms were better resourced for literacy and numeracy opportunities than others. The service had already identified this as an area for improvement. They were in the process of developing rich numeracy and literacy experiences indoors and outdoors across the whole service. This would have a positive impact on children's play and learning.

Children had regular opportunities to go out in the local community. During our visit most children chose to go on nature walks throughout the day. Children also regularly visited local parks, the library and had visited a local farm. This supported children to develop meaningful connections with their own and the wider community.

How good is our setting? 4 - Good

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

Quality indicator 2.2: Children experience high quality facilities

Children experienced a homely and welcoming environment. The playrooms were bright and well furnished with plenty of natural light and comfortable areas for children to rest and relax. There was a warm and friendly ethos in the service. As a result, children were happy and relaxed.

Indoor play spaces had been carefully designed with a vast array of real, natural resources and loose parts. These are materials that do not have a specific purpose. This meant that most children experienced an environment that fostered creativity, imagination and discovery. Whilst resources were easily accessible, we observed a few children who were not engaged in play throughout their day. There were also some areas of the playrooms that very few children chose to access. We advised the service to ensure that the play spaces, provocations and invitations to play reflected individual children's interests. This would help to ensure that all children experience an environment that is exciting and stimulating.

Children's health and wellbeing was supported through daily outdoor play. Due to the layout of the building, free flow access from all playrooms was not possible. However, staff were responsive to children's preferences when they chose to play outdoors. They valued the positive impact of outdoor play and promoted it in all weathers. We observed staff supporting children to decide if they needed sun hats or rain suits in preparation to go outside. This helped children to make choices, learn about the weather and sun safety. The service had identified a recent increase in the number of accidents, mainly in the garden. As a result, they were temporarily limiting the number of children who could play in this area at the same time. The service informed us that this was a short-term plan while they were in the process of developing their outdoor environment. We asked the service to consider adjusting their staff deployment rather than limiting

children's access to the garden. This would prevent interruptions to children's play and ensure that their choices were not restricted.

There were clear processes in place to keep children safe. Risk assessments were regularly reviewed and updated to ensure that any potential harm was minimised. Staff supervised children closely and responsively assessed risky play. We asked the management team to be mindful that some staff appeared to be risk averse which could impact on the quality of children's experiences. The Management team recognised this and were supporting staff to help children assess and manage their own limits safely. The environment was clean and well-maintained and staff had a good knowledge of infection prevention and control procedures. This minimised the risk of infection and ensured that children experienced a clean and safe environment.

How good is our leadership? 4 - Good

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

Quality indicator 3.1: Quality assurance and improvement are led well

The management team were relatively new to the role. They engaged well with the inspection and demonstrated a positive attitude towards change and improvement. It was clear to us that children and families were at the heart of the service. They demonstrated a strong commitment to service development.

An overall service improvement plan was in place, as well as individual improvement plans completed by the staff team for each playroom. This meant all staff felt included in the service improvement journey. A large number of priorities had been identified across these plans that would have a positive impact on the service. The management team told us they had been focusing primarily on relationships and staff wellbeing, as well as developing the outdoor environment. We could see recent improvements in these areas reflected in practice during our inspection. One staff member told us, "I love working at First Steps. I have had great support during the years I have been here from all members of the team. We all work well together and strive to provide the best care and education for our children. We have a lot of plans for the future to enhance our setting for the children and its always exciting to see all the plans come together." This promoted a collaborative ethos and ensured staff felt valued and listened to. We advised the manager to consider prioritising improvement actions and devising clear timescales. This would support the service to ensure all of their development plans are manageable and achievable.

The service was in the early stages of developing their self-evaluation processes. Staff used team meetings to have reflective discussions and we could see where these had led to change and improvement. We suggested using an evaluative framework such as the Care Inspectorate document, 'A quality framework for daycare of children, childminding and school-aged childcare' along with best practice guidance. This would help focus their self-evaluation and add depth to their reflections.

Families' views had recently been sought in relation to the development of the outdoor area and suggestions were in the process of being implemented. Some parents told us felt included in the development of the service, whilst others did not. The service had recognised that different methods of consultation would be beneficial and had recently developed an electronic method of gathering feedback. This would ensure that all families feel included and able to influence change.

Robust auditing and monitoring systems around accidents, incidents and medication were in place and

effective. This helped to keep children safe. We suggested developing a more focussed approach to monitoring and observations in playrooms, particularly in relation to interactions and engagement. This would further support the management team in their quality assurance of all children's experiences. It was clear the service was enthusiastic about their improvement journey and were committed to promoting positive outcomes for children and families.

How good is our staff team? 4 - Good

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

Quality indicator 4.3: Staff deployment

The service had experienced recent changes in staff team. The management team had recognised the importance of focussing on staff wellbeing and developing positive relationships. One staff member told us, "I feel team wellbeing is a high priority, ensuring the setting is a positive place to work and staff feel happy, supported and valued as individuals." During our visit, staff were kind and respectful, offering help to each other when required. As a result, staff had formed strong, supportive relationships and there was a positive ethos in the service.

Parents spoke highly of the staff team. One parent commented, "Staff are all friendly, approachable, helpful and genuinely care about our children. They both love their time at nursery and the staff have made each transition so easy and stress-free. The communication is excellent and I have never felt nervous about leaving my kids in their care. We really appreciate the care received at First Steps." Some parents told us that frequent new staff can make it difficult to get to know everyone caring for their children. The service had introduced mini staff profiles on an electronic app. This helped to introduce new staff to families and develop trusting relationships.

The service was appropriately staffed during our inspection. The management team provided support in playrooms when required and covered in periods of staff absence. It was clear to us that children had formed positive relationships with the management team. We observed children confidently coming into the office for a chat or to say goodbye on their way home. As a result, children felt secure and were always cared for by familiar staff. The staff team worked well together sharing tasks throughout the day and communicating children's whereabouts effectively. As a result, children were safely supervised.

At times, the deployment of staff impacted on the quality of children's experiences, particularly during lunchtime and opportunities for outdoor play. The service had recognised that these were areas for development and were considering ways to ensure consistent quality of children's experiences. We also asked the service to consider the impact of key staff taking their breaks when new children were attending for short settling in visits.

Staff benefitted from regular opportunities to meet individually with management and as a whole staff team. This supported good communication across the team and ensured that all staff felt valued and included. There was a mixture of staff experience, knowledge and skills in the team. Staff were keen to support each other's professional development and spoke positively of their colleagues strengths. This helped staff to work collaboratively, learning from each other to promote positive outcomes for children and families.

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?	4 - Good
2.2 Children experience high quality facilities	4 - 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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