

Inspection of Footsteps Nursery & Forest school

Sandy Hill Farm, Fradley Junction, Alrewas, Staffordshire DE13 7DW

Inspection date:

6 March 2025

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Requires improvement

Personal development

Requires improvement

Leadership and management

Requires improvement

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Good

What is it like to attend this early years setting?

The provision requires improvement

Currently there are a lot of staffing changes happening within the setting, which has led to a variable and inconsistent quality of teaching. Because of the changes, the key-person system is not as effective as it could be. Staff do not always know their key children well enough to provide a tailored care package unique to their individual learning needs. That said, the curriculum is designed to equip children with the knowledge and skills they need to be ready to go to school, and staff understand the rationale and aims behind this.

Children are safe at the setting. Staff fully comprehend the role they play in protecting children. They understand the settings policies and procedures to report any concerns so that prompt and swift action is taken. Children play in a lovely and enabling environment. Babies enjoy messy play. They explore dipping the feet of small toy animals into paints to develop their mark-making skills. All children enjoy lots of fresh air outdoors in the setting's vast and large outdoor space. They have access to forest school sessions where they practise their developing large-muscle skills as they navigate tree stumps and climb trees. Staff support children to learn about the world around them. For example, they help to ignite children's curiosity for finding worms like 'Superworm' from books they have read.

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

- Due to staffing issues, there is a heavy reliance on staff from other settings owned by the provider and agency staff. This means the key-person system is not effective enough because staff change rooms and are not there long enough for children to build strong attachments. That said, staff are kind and caring, and children do receive reassurance and cuddles to help them become more settled.
- In some rooms, the lack of consistent staff has led to decline in the quality of teaching. Information is not always shared between staff about the key children they are taking responsibility for. Consequently, staff do not always know children's precise next steps for learning and therefore do not always provide activities in line with their planned learning. However, despite this, children do make progress and acquire skills needed for their next stage of learning.
- The quality of teaching is variable. There is some strong practice in some areas, especially forest school sessions. Some staff support young children to learn how to use scooters. Staff teach children about different fruits as they explore the textures and smell of pineapples, pomegranates and passion fruit. Children recall past knowledge learned through stories they have read. However, not all staff teach children well enough. They do not provide sufficiently challenging activities or engage them in purposeful or meaningful play. This leads to some younger children wandering around not engaged in play or learning.
- Parents say that their children enjoy coming to the setting. They really like the

opportunities children have to explore the outdoors. Parents' evenings provide them with an opportunity to receive information about their child's progress. However, some parents say they do not know their children's next steps for learning and consequently do not know how to support them at home. In addition, sometimes, the information given verbally differs to what is provided on the online application.

- Leaders are aware of the impact staffing is having currently on the setting. They are working hard to implement their action plan to address the areas of weakness, which they too have identified. This will take some time to embed and ensure all staff practice is at good standard. Staff say they are supported, and they strive to deliver good-quality care for children.
- There is a strong focus on communication and language throughout the setting. Staff read lots of stories to children and ask them to share their thoughts and ideas. Mathematics is threaded throughout activities. Children love counting and will do this without prompting. Staff provide some opportunities for children to learn about what happens when different colours are mixed. Paint is squirted onto guttering and children roll toy cars down. They watch as the colour paint mixes and forms new colour. They express delight as the wheels of the cars leave painted tracks on the paper at the bottom.
- Younger children enjoy playing in coloured water using pipettes to squirt and squeeze the water. This helps strengthen the muscles in their fingers in readiness for later pencil control. Older children enjoy making their own artwork and confidently and independently write letters and their own names.
- Children learn about healthy lifestyles. They benefit from lots of outdoor play and freshly prepared healthy meals and snacks. Staff support children to understand how they can take care of themselves. They talk about teeth cleaning, and independent toileting is promoted throughout.
- There is support in place for children who may have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Staff hold regular meetings with parents and external agencies are consulted when necessary. This helps children make progress in their learning. Children who may speak English as an additional language are helped by staff to be able to communicate their needs effectively by using flash cards or other visual aids.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

There is an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts children's interests first.

What does the setting need to do to improve?

To meet the requirements of the early years foundation stage, the provider must:

	Due date
embed the key-person system to ensure that every child's care is tailored to meet their individual needs	04/04/2025
support staff to provide activities in line with individual children's needs and abilities to constantly and consistently engage them in purposeful and meaningful play and learning	04/04/2025
ensure that information about children's next steps for learning is shared with staff who will be taking on the role of key person.	04/04/2025

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

- continue to build and strengthen communication with parents to keep them fully updated and informed to help them support their child's learning at home
- continue to implement the action plan to raise the quality of teaching to at least good throughout the setting.

Setting details

Unique reference number	2588109
Local authority	Staffordshire
Inspection number	10388089
Type of provision	Childcare on non-domestic premises
Registers	Early Years Register, Compulsory Childcare Register
Day care type	Full day care
Age range of children at time of inspection	0 to 4
Total number of places	114
Number of children on roll	204
Name of registered person	Footsteps Day Nurseries Limited
Registered person unique reference number	RP520741
Telephone number	01283 791030
Date of previous inspection	2 May 2024

Information about this early years setting

Footsteps Nursery & Forest school registered in 2020. The nursery employs 34 members of childcare staff. Of these, 19 hold appropriate early years qualifications at levels 2, 3, 5 or 6. The nursery opens from Monday to Friday, all year round, except for bank holidays. Sessions are from 7.30am to 6pm. The nursery provides funded early education for all children who are eligible.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors

Johanna Holt
Sue Bradford

Inspection activities

- The inspection started on 27 February 2025. It was paused in line with 'Ofsted inspections and visits: Deferring, pausing and gathering additional evidence policy'. Inspectors returned on 6 March 2025 to complete the inspection.
- The inspectors viewed the provision and discussed the safety and suitability of the premises.
- The managers and inspectors completed a learning walk together of all areas of the nursery and discussed the early years curriculum.
- Children spoke with the inspectors during the inspection.
- Parents and carers shared their views of the setting with the inspectors.
- The inspectors observed the quality of education being provided, indoors and outdoors, and assessed the impact that this was having on children's learning.
- Staff spoke to the inspectors during the inspection.
- Managers and the inspectors carried out joint observations throughout the inspection.
- Relevant documentation was requested and reviewed by inspectors.

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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