

Inspection of First Steps Nursery and Play Scheme

Royal Devon and Exeter Hospital, Barrack Road, Exeter EX2 5DW

Inspection date: 7 August 2025

Overall effectiveness

Outstanding

The quality of education

Outstanding

Behaviour and attitudes

Outstanding

Personal development

Outstanding

Leadership and management

Outstanding

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Outstanding

What is it like to attend this early years setting?

The provision is outstanding

Children thoroughly enjoy their time at this exceptional nursery. They arrive eagerly and keen to take part in the stimulating experiences that the staff provide for them. Children develop close friendships and have great fun playing together in the exciting outdoor areas. They delight as they make up games and demonstrate excellent collaborative work. For instance, they use equipment to create see-saws, taking turns to push each other and making up songs as they play. Children spontaneously exclaim, 'This is the best day of my life.'

Staff have established an enabling environment that helps to ensure children are actively engaged in learning. Babies practise balancing and climbing with the support of staff. They demonstrate warm, trusting bonds with staff, who skilfully extend their understanding, such as by helping them to count their steps as they hold their hands. Children sustain high levels of concentration. For instance, they delight in exploring different textures as part of messy play activities. They focus deeply for extended periods as they make 'dinner' by carefully mixing shaving foam and oats. Children listen attentively to staff as they play together and quickly incorporate new words into their talk, such as 'watermelon', 'smoothie' and 'scoop'.

Leaders ensure staff work incredibly well together and have very high expectations of what children can do for themselves, even from a very young age. They support children to demonstrate excellent problem-solving skills. For example, children confidently estimate the length of card needed to make a pirate hat. Children select the materials they need and show accurate skills using scissors to independently construct it. Staff regularly praise children to build their self-esteem and are mindful of their feelings. Children demonstrate exemplary behaviour and attitudes to learning.

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

- Leaders are passionate about providing children with the best possible outcomes as part of a highly ambitious curriculum. They ensure children's experiences over time build to provide them with firm foundations for future learning. For example, children take part in a very successful communication and language programme devised by leaders in the nursery. Targeted daily group activities for all children develop their knowledge of early phonics skills and extend their vocabulary.
- Staff's interactions with children are consistently of a high quality. Leaders provide a highly successful programme of monitoring staff's practice to ensure they are extending children's knowledge and understanding across the curriculum. They strive for excellence through a rigorous cycle of reflection that enables staff to adjust the curriculum to meet the needs of each child. Leaders

cascade training to staff through highly effective measures to improve their practice. For example, staff benefit from weekly newsletters containing the key messages, such as 'top tips' for creating and maintaining secure attachments with children.

- Staff provide children with an exceptional level of personalised support and care. They spend an extensive amount of time getting to know children's needs well and supporting them to access early education. Children with complex medical and learning needs are incredibly well supported by staff. For example, they provide individualised learning packs for children who are absent from the nursery for extended periods due to medical needs. Staff work in partnership with a vast number of other professionals to ensure children get the right care for them at the right time. As a result, children make the best possible progress from their starting points.
- Staff provide a highly inclusive environment. Children have consistently high levels of respect for others. Staff celebrate the diversity of those within the nursery and take part in an extensive range of cultural learning experiences. They support children to take part in age-appropriate activities to help them learn about people and communities beyond their own, including through learning about 'countries of the month'.
- Staff support children highly effectively in managing their emotions. They take swift action and provide bespoke support for children when they struggle to regulate their behaviour. For example, staff have created colourful murals on the walls of the nursery to help children use breathing exercises to regulate their emotions. Children respond very well to strategies that support them to let others know when they need space, such as 'available' and 'not available' signs.
- Children demonstrate an excellent level of independent skills for their age. For example, children wash their plates after eating their lunch, carefully removing the dirt in soapy water using a sponge. Staff supervise the children closely, offering useful tips and praise them for their efforts. Children demonstrate great pride in their achievements.
- Parents speak very highly of nursery staff. They report how staff 'embrace' their child's needs and allow them to come on in 'leaps and bounds'. Staff work very closely and effectively in partnership with parents to support transitions incredibly well. For instance, they have developed detailed booklets as part of an enhanced transition process for when children move to a different room in the nursery, providing key information on staff, routines and learning.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

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

Setting details

Unique reference number	EY407433
Local authority	Devon
Inspection number	10414849
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 4
Total number of places	129
Number of children on roll	195
Name of registered person	Royal Devon and Exeter N.H.S Foundation Trust
Registered person unique reference number	RP529622
Telephone number	01392 405858
Date of previous inspection	1 November 2022

Information about this early years setting

First Steps Nursery and Play Scheme registered in 2010. It is situated on the site of the Royal Devon and Exeter Hospital, in Exeter, Devon. The nursery opens from 7am to 6pm, Monday to Friday, all year round. There are 40 members of staff. Of these, one holds qualified teacher status, 27 hold a relevant level 3 qualification, four hold a level 2 qualification and eight are apprentices. The nursery offers government-funded childcare places.

Information about this inspection

Inspector
Leanne Edge

Inspection activities

- The inspector viewed the provision and discussed the safety and suitability of the premises.
- The nominated individual joined the inspector on a learning walk and talked to the inspector about their curriculum and what they want the children to learn.
- Children spoke with the inspector during the inspection.
- The inspector talked to staff at appropriate times during the inspection and took account of their views.
- The inspector spoke with members of the leadership team about the leadership and management of the setting.
- Staff spoke to the inspector about how they support children with special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- The inspector observed the quality of education being provided, indoors and outdoors, and assessed the impact that this was having on children's learning.
- The nominated individual and the inspector carried out a joint observation of a group activity.
- The inspector spoke to several parents during the inspection and took account of their views.
- The leadership team provided the inspector with a sample of key documentation on request, including evidence to demonstrate the suitability of staff in the nursery.

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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