Arolygiaeth Gofal Cymru
Care Inspectorate Wales

Inspection Report

Stepping Stones Day Nursery

18 Bush Row, St Thomas` Green, Haverfordwest, SA61 1RJ

07770 791 972

Date(s) of inspection visit(s): The inspection visit took place on 02/09/2025

Service Information:

Operated by:	Vivienne Hickey
Care Type:	Children's Day Care
Registered places:	42
Main language(s):	English
Flying Start service:	Yes
Receive funding to provide early years part time education:	Yes
Promotion of Welsh language and culture:	The service provider makes an effort to promote the use of the Welsh language and culture, or is working towards a bilingual service.

Ratings:

Well-being	Good
Care & Development	Good
Environment	Adequate
Leadership & Management	Good

Summary:

Children are happy and enjoy their time at the setting. They develop positive relationships with staff and other children, so they feel safe and secure. Children have opportunities to be independent and enhance their skills through a good range of play experiences.

Staff are patient, kind and caring towards the children, providing positive interactions to ensure children feel valued and happy. They support children's learning and development through a wide range of activities led by the children's interests and developmental needs. Staff understand and implement policies and procedures to keep children safe.

Leaders follow some appropriate health and safety procedures. However, some procedures including maintenance of the setting require improvement. The environment is bright and full of examples of children's work, celebrating their learning, development and achievements. Toys and resources are age-appropriate, and the outdoor play area is regularly used.

Leaders are organised and generally manage the setting well. They strive to develop the provision and are committed to ongoing improvements. They encourage an active partnership with parents and other stakeholders. They successfully embed their policies in the running of the setting.

Findings:

Well-being — Good

Children have a strong voice at this setting and confidently communicate with staff both verbally and non-verbally. Some children confidently approach us, Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) as visitors to the setting, keen to engage us in their play. Children make decisions about their play moving freely between activities which capture their interest. For example, children are asked if they would like to join in with a game of pet bingo and their choice was respected if they did not want to participate.

Children feel safe, happy and relaxed at the setting. Most cope well with separation from their parents as they form positive bonds of affection with staff. Children who are unsettled are quickly comforted by staff who display empathy and understanding towards them. We saw some children arrive keenly at the setting eager to join in with the activities and play with their friends. Children are familiar with the daily routines, which helps them feel settled and at ease in their surroundings. For example, children know they need to wash their hands before snack time.

Children are developing lovely friendships and interact well with staff. They are learning to take turns and share resources and toys. We saw children playing collaboratively, one child pretending to be a dog whilst the other child pretended to be the dog's owner. Children are clearly beginning to enjoy each other's company and play interactions with staff. For example, when children sit with a member of staff to listen to a story, they lean in affectionately, clearly enjoying the story and discussion. Children are developing an understanding of the rules of behaviour and are learning to cooperate successfully.

Children are enthusiastic and interested in their play and learning. They enjoy their play opportunities, engaging with toys, books and resources which are of interest to them both indoors and outdoors. For example, children enjoy role play in the home area, making 'food' for a member of staff and engage enthusiastically with outdoor craft activities, laughing as things stick to their hands. Children concentrate for an age-appropriate length of time. For example, one child is fascinated with a book about cars and listens intently as a member of staff discusses the different car names and look at the pictures together. Children have opportunities to follow their own instincts, ideas, and interests. They can also join in with adult led activities. For example, they are keen to join in with a matching game and offer very good answers and suggestions.

Children have good opportunities to develop their independence and are actively encouraged to do so. For example, during snack time, children choose where to sit, cut and prepare their own snack (with appropriate help and supervision) and pour their own drinks.

Care & Development — Good

Staff understand their roles and responsibilities to promote children's safety and well-being. Staff have a good knowledge of potential safeguarding issues, understand the safeguarding policy and their duty to report concerns. Staff supervise children well, paying close attention to ratios. They communicate exceptionally well as a team, ensuring cover remains intact during staff break times and school pickups. They keep accurate records of the children and staff attendance. They have attended paediatric first aid training enabling them to deal with minor accidents confidently. Staff keep appropriate records of accidents and incidents. Leaders have identified that an evaluative approach to the information collected would further drive improvement. Staff promote healthy eating habits and water is always available to ensure children stay hydrated. There are suitable procedures in place to manage children's allergies and dietary requirements. Staff implement good hygiene procedures and follow nappy changing practices appropriately. Staff encourage children to wash their hands before snack time, however, do not always monitor children's hand washing following independent visits to the toilet. Staff encourage frequent outdoor play to ensure children get fresh air and opportunities to further develop physical skills.

Staff know children well and have a warm, friendly, and caring approach. They speak to the children affectionately, developing a positive rapport. For example, staff were particularly aware some children would soon be starting school and provided emotional support and kindness to children who expressed some worry over this. Staff manage interactions and behaviour well. They are patient, calm and clear when supporting children to manage more challenging feelings and emotions. For example, during outside play a member of staff skilfully manages turn- taking of the rope swing, by using a sand timer and discussing being good friends and sharing. Staff praise children when they share with their friends. For example, one child is praised when they share their tractor, with the staff member saying, *"I am so proud of you for sharing." The* child looked very proud of their achievement. Staff consistently reinforce positive behaviour and enhance children's self-esteem. Staff encourage children to be kind and polite. They sit with children at lunchtime, when eating snacks and during circle time to promote their language and social skills.

Staff ensure children have good opportunities to direct their own play and learning as well as taking part in adult led activities if interested. They support children's learning and development effectively, engaging positively to help children learn naturally and in the moment. For example, during outside water play they support children in working collaboratively to get water to flow through pipes, suggesting additional equipment which would help the children in their task. Staff used some Welsh during morning welcome time but there were some missed opportunities to use more incidental Welsh during the session. Staff support and provide for children with additional needs very well and have a good awareness of the need to provide a flexible environment and routine for children with such requirements. Staff reflect on training opportunities and seek ways to implement strategies which will have a positive impact on all children in their care.

Environment — Adequate

The setting is safe and secure. External doors are managed satisfactorily, and leaders are reviewing the management of the main entrance as a priority to ensure security is as robust as possible. There are detailed risk assessments for most areas of the setting and for trips and outings, with systems in place to keep children safe. The outdoor area is appropriately fenced, and staff explain that they complete checks daily. Fire drills are undertaken regularly, and a clear procedure is in place. There are daily cleaning rotas at the setting to ensure responsibility for cleanliness is shared. However, these are not always completed by staff. Leaders are working hard to develop the environment and have created an improvement plan to redecorate and renovate rooms and toilets, whilst minimising impact on children and staff. However, outcomes for children require improvement due to the need to address issues with cleanliness and maintenance, and we expect leaders to make improvements.

The setting is welcoming and filled with natural light. The walls feature children's colourful work and speech bubbles capturing their learning experiences. There is clever use of furniture to create little nooks and purposeful learning areas throughout, and a clear difference in age-appropriateness between rooms. For example, the preschool room has a clear mathematics and stem area with an abacus, counting resources, goggles and magnets. Quiet corners in each room are cosy, with teddies, cushions and reading materials.

A good range of toys are available to children, which are age-appropriate and mostly stored at the children's height for independent access. Staff explain how they rotate toys for children, based on their interests. Most of these are man-made and familiar across the setting, with the introduction of some recycled and authentic materials to stimulate children's curiosity and problem-solving skills in the preschool room. Across different areas, there are a few examples of books and dolls to celebrate Welsh heritage and diversity. Outdoors, children happily enjoy all the equipment and opportunities to enjoy different physical activities, with a tree rope swing, rock climbing wall and large and small loose parts.

Leadership & Management — Good

Leaders are hardworking and committed to driving improvements to create better outcomes for children. They engage positively with CIW and manage the setting effectively. The statement of purpose provides an accurate reflection of the setting and includes all information required by the regulations and National Minimum Standards. Leaders have a comprehensive range of beneficial policies and procedures which they regularly review and update. They gather important and useful information about children including personal details, medical information, permissions, and any other needs prior to them starting at the setting.

There are strong procedures in place for self-evaluation of the setting. The quality-of-care review is a purposeful and thorough document which strives to include the views and opinions of all stakeholders. It clearly identifies strengths of the service, such as children's positive bonds with staff, and prioritises areas for improvement, such as further enhancing the outdoor area. Leaders implement safe recruitment procedures to safeguard children. They carry out regular appraisals and supervisions providing support and an opportunity to discuss any issues which may arise. Leaders ensure staff receive regular training keeping them up to date with new initiatives to further their professional development. There is a strong ethos of teamwork amongst staff, those spoken to said they are very happy in their work and appreciate the relationships they have with one another and leaders.

Leaders and staff develop strong partnerships with parents. They keep parents well informed of their child's time at the setting providing opportunities to chat when dropping off or collecting their child. Leaders and staff also use a digital app to communicate with parents. Feedback received from parents following the inspection visit is mostly positive. With parents commenting, *"My child loves going to nursery, feels welcome and that she belongs,"* and *"The staff are friendly and have great empathy and compassion with the children and their families*

Areas identified for improvement

Where we identify **Areas for Improvement** but we have not found outcomes for people to be at immediate or significant risk, we discuss these with the provider. We expect the provider to take action and we will follow this up at the next inspection.

Where we find outcomes for people **require significant improvement** and/or there is risk to people's well-being we identify areas for **Priority Action**. In these circumstances we issue a Priority Action Notice(s) to the Provider, and they must take immediate steps to make improvements. We will inspect again within six months to check improvements have been made and outcomes for people have improved.

The table(s) below show the area(s) for priority action and/or those for improvement we have identified.

Summary of Areas for Improvement	Date identified
We found poor outcomes for children as several areas of the setting were not well maintained or cleaned to a good standard.	02/09/25

CIW has not issued any Priority action notices following this inspection.

National Minimum Standards

Where we find the provider is not meeting the National Minimum Standards for Regulated Child Care but there is no immediate or significant risk for people using the service, we highlight these as Recommendations to Meet National Minimum Standards.

We expect the provider to take action to address these and we will follow these up at the next inspection.

Standard	Recommendation(s)
Standard 10 - Healthcare	Consistently remind children of the importance of handwashing.

Best Practice

Where we think it helpful, we may make best practice recommendations. These are to encourage settings that are doing well to become even better at helping children thrive.

Recommendation(s)
Further develop staff's use of basic Welsh.

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