Arolygiaeth Gofal Cymru
Care Inspectorate Wales

Inspection Report

Stepping Stones 4 Schools Out of School Breakfast Afterschool and Holiday Club

Rhyd Y Penau Primary School, Rhyd Y Penau Road, Cardiff, CF14 0NX

07468461646

www.steppingstoneschildcare.rocks

The inspection visits for this service took place between 05/05/2026 and 06/05/2026

Service Information:

Operated by:	Stepping Stones 4 Schools LLP
Care Type:	Children's Day Care
Registered places:	50
Main language(s):	English
Flying Start service:	No
Receive funding to provide early years part time education:	No
Promotion of Welsh language and culture:	The provider is not promoting the Welsh language and culture needs of people, and this requires improvement.

Ratings:

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

Summary:

Children are happy and settle well. They have opportunities to develop independence and other skills through a wide range of activities. All children in this setting are able to engage in activities of their choosing and are free to develop their play in collaboration with their peers. They are listened to and their views are taken into account. Children form bonds with each other and staff, making them feel safe and secure.

Children benefit from warm relationships with motivated staff who have a good understanding of each child and are able to meet their needs. Care giving is relaxed and interactions are managed appropriately. Staff are responsive and respect the children in their care and the decisions they make.

Leaders ensure the premises are secure and safe. They provide an adequately welcoming and organised environment. Play areas and equipment are suitably clean and maintained. The outdoor

play area is secure and well resourced. It is well utilised, providing plenty of opportunities for children to be physically active.

Leadership and management is inconsistent. Leaders have high expectations regarding the standard of care provided, but some areas need attention. Records and recording systems are suitable. Staff receive regular, formal supervisions from managers and they feel valued and supported. Leaders produce an annual quality of care review, although it does not support them to make improvements to the service. Parents speak highly of leaders, staff and the care their children receive.

Findings:

Well-being — Good

Children have choice, and a purposeful voice at the setting. They move freely around their play space, making choices and decisions about the activities they want to join in or the resources they wish to play with. Children are given good opportunity to express themselves and talk about the things that are important to them. They join in enthusiastically with activities and are confident to express their opinions because they know care staff will listen to them. Children's likes and requests influence the activities that are provided, such as when playing outdoors and children asked for the roller-skates to be brought out for them to use.

Children feel safe, happy and valued at the setting. They develop warm relationships with other children and staff. Children approach care staff spontaneously to seek reassurance or support and enjoy receiving praise and recognition for their efforts. Children playing football were proud of how they had played and told staff about it when they came in. We saw children laughing and smiling during their play. Children are comfortable in the familiar routines and activities of the setting. Children told us they thoroughly enjoy their time at the club and love to play outdoors in particular.

Children co-operate, take turns and share, and their behaviour is becoming guided by their sensitivity to the emotions of others. They demonstrate a good understanding of what is expected of them whilst they are at the setting. Children are generally well behaved and play co-operatively with their peers across the age groups. Their interactions with staff also show that they respect the staff and they respond well to their requests and any guidance on their behaviour. Children have developed a strong sense of right and wrong and are, in the main, self-disciplined.

Children are active and engaged by the play-based activities on offer to them. They are happy and confident to move between activities freely but also sustain interest in activities of their choosing. For example, we saw children play very freely outside, making up their play with peers, such as games, sports and imaginative play. When indoors, children concentrated as they created drawings and craft, and playing with mall world toys such as cars and trucks. Children benefit from a good balance of organised and free-choice leisure activities. All of the children we spoke to told us they enjoyed their time at the setting.

Children have adequate independence in the setting, and they develop skills as a natural part of the routine of the session. They can freely access what is already set out in the room and know they can ask for additional resources. We saw children happily playing independently of staff, who allowed them the space to explore and progress their own play, as well as asking for staff to join their play, for example, with football or crafting.

Care & Development — Good

Staff are effective in their roles. They are clear about their responsibilities and have sound knowledge of how to keep children safe and healthy. Staff provide regular access to physical exercise and fresh air outdoors. They provide snacks after school; however, these are not fully in line with Welsh Government's food and nutrition guidance for childcare providers. An initial snack provided when children arrive at the setting is well managed; children wash their hands and sit at tables, and the food provided is nutritious and in line with guidance. However, a second snack is provided later in the session where children have antibacterial gel applied to their hands rather than washing them, they sit on the floor and the snack provided is not in line with guidance. This was raised at the last CIW inspection and has not been addressed. Staff know how to raise safeguarding concerns. They spoke with us about safeguarding procedures and they are confident managers will be responsive to any concerns they raise. Staff spoke positively about the support they receive from managers, and they are committed to on-going improvement. Staff follow procedures for recording the administering of medication, accidents, incidents and existing injuries.

Staff set realistic boundaries, are good role models and use a consistent approach to managing behaviour, taking into account children's age and understanding. They guide behaviour positively and praise children to reinforce good behaviour. Staff model good behaviour, encourage good manners, model good manners and speak to each other and the children respectfully. They are cheery and have fun with the children, often using humour effectively to support and encourage children and diffuse any conflict. For example, we saw how staff used humour to diffuse tensions whilst refereeing a football game. They also encourage children for making a good effort and we saw children respond well to this approach. For example, staff warmly and successfully encouraged children creating craft items.

Staff provide a nurturing and caring environment in which they promote children's play and well-being appropriately. They have a relaxed, happy and caring nature towards children. Staff enjoy their roles and are committed to the best outcomes for children. They speak in a reassuring manner, and this helps to ensure the play environment is calm and pleasant. The staff group are keen to ensure they are good play facilitators. Relevant staff and leaders have undertaken qualifications in order to improve their understanding of play for school-aged children. Staff know children well and understand their preferences. They record some observations of children's learning and development. Basic written activity planning is in place to support staff in providing a small selection of activities, and they allow children to choose most of the play that goes on. Leaders and staff do not support the inclusion of the Welsh language; no Welsh was heard during the inspection, nor any signage or documentation in Welsh seen.

Environment — Adequate

Leaders and staff take action to secure the site, and to ensure the environment is safe for children. Many people access the school site at the beginning of the after-school session, and staff are conscious of this when collecting children, moving them and registering them. They ask visitors to sign in and out of the service. They undertake fire drills with children regularly and record these appropriately. Leaders ensure insurance certificates are up to date, as well as routine safety checks for the building and appliances, such as fire safety equipment. The landlord undertakes gas safety and electrical systems checks routinely and managers ensure they have sight of these checks to assure themselves of the safety of the building. Staff undertake daily safety checks of the areas used by children. Leaders keep written risk assessments as well as staff risk assessing play as it progresses.

Leaders and staff maintain the environment appropriately and provide a welcoming, child friendly space, which is mostly suitable for the ages of the children cared for. Indoor play spaces adequately support children's play and development. They provide child-sized tables and chairs for children to do activities. A hall is the base for much of the week, but on occasions when the hall is unavailable, older children are taken to the school nursery, and younger children to the school library. Whilst the school hall provides adequate space and opportunity for children's play, the nursery and library are not ideal for the promotion of play for the ages of children cared for. Staff are not able to decorate the spaces to give the children a sense of belonging in the service due to the nature of the service being a pack-away service sharing a space used by others out of hours. Children's toilet facilities are suitable, but they are away from the play spaces and so staff escort children. The outdoor play spaces are dislocated from the indoors play spaces, and so children are not able to free-flow between the spaces. However, staff escort children when they ask to go outside, which is a favourite activity. We saw children making use of an all-weather sports area for ball games, as well as enjoying lots of free play and sports on the school field. This provides children with plenty of opportunities to develop their physical and creative skills in the fresh air. We saw children really enjoy this and make good use of the outdoors for various types of play.

Leaders ensure children have access to toys and equipment that are appropriate and suitable to their needs. A selection of resources are set out by staff in the play space, and these were adequate for the age and interests of the children attending. Staff confirmed there were further resources to cover a wide range of play opportunities for all age groups stored elsewhere. We saw children freely exploring the resources available on many occasions, easily finding what they wanted to play with. We also saw children ask for additional resources and staff providing them from stored resources.

Leadership & Management — Adequate

The quality of leadership and management varies at this setting. Leaders are experienced and are passionate about providing good quality care. However, some regulatory responsibilities have not been appropriately addressed, nor all recommendations made during the last CIW inspection. There is a detailed statement of purpose providing parents with essential information about how the setting runs. However, is it not kept up to date appropriately and as a consequence some of the information is now misleading. It also contains information about services provided off-site which is not part of this CIW registration. Ensuring the statement of purpose is accurate and kept up to date is required by the regulations, and was a recommendation at the last inspection that has not been addressed. This requires action to ensure clarity for parents/carers, and for children's safety, and we expect leaders to make improvements. There are adequate policies and procedures, and staff work consistently in line with these to support the smooth running of the setting. Some policies require updating to reflect changes to the National Minimum Standards (NMS) in 2023 and other national guidance. Registers of children's attendance contain all the necessary information and are completed in a timely manner. Leaders ensure records of the administration of medication, accidents, incidents and existing injuries are consistently completed.

Leaders have not effectively reflected on the setting's performance and used information from all stakeholders and national guidelines to plan improvements. This has contributed to the setting not maintaining the standards outlined in the NMS. The system in place to ensure that a formal self-evaluation of the service is undertaken on at least an annual basis is inadequate. The Quality of Care report suggests feedback from parents is good, but it does not state they consult with staff, children and relevant external agencies in order to review the quality of the service. It contains no analysis from leaders as to their views on the service, and no plan for improvement is set based on the findings. Several aspects of the service do not meet the necessary standards, in part related to recommendations not addressed following the last CIW inspection. An effective quality assurance system is required by the regulations and would help to mitigate these issues to ensure that the service remains compliant. This requires action, and we expect leaders to make improvements.

Leaders are not sufficiently effective in overseeing staffing. Leaders and staff are well organised in the daily practicalities of the running of the setting, and we saw that this allowed them to remain calm whilst delivering care and meet children's needs effectively. Staff confirmed they enjoy working at the setting. They feel supported, knowing they can approach leaders for help or support if needed. All staff have basic, regular supervision and appraisal meetings to reflect on their practice. Leaders conduct robust recruitment procedures to ensure suitable people work with children. However, this has not ensured that a sufficient proportion of that staff group are suitably qualified. Leaders and long-term staff have upskilled in playwork qualifications, and are suitably qualified and experienced for their roles. However, during the inspection, too great a proportion of

staff working were unqualified. Leaders told us that finding suitably qualified staff is a challenge they are working on. We also found that not all staff have undertaken a basic 6 hour paediatric first aid qualification, and an insufficient proportion of staff hold the full 12 hour paediatric first aid qualification, in line with the requirements of the NMS. In addition to this, we found that leaders had failed to notify CIW of staff changes in the last 9 months, as required by the regulations. This was raised at the last CIW inspection and has not been adequately addressed. This requires action, and we expect leaders to make improvements.

Leaders and staff value the positive partnerships developed with the community and parents. Staff told us that the relationships they build with parents are respected and important for making positive impacts for children. They are keen to ensure that parents feel they can approach them at any time. Parents were complimentary about the service. They reported that staff are friendly and approachable.

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
Children's health and safety is at risk because the provider has not ensured the statement of purpose accurately reflects the facilities they use, and consequently the procedures in place for their safe collection from the service. Not providing CIW with an accurate statement of purpose also does not allow for clear regulatory oversight. This was raised at the 2019 CIW inspection and has not been addressed.	05/05/26
Outcomes for children are at risk because the provider has not ensured the service is reviewed effectively and consequently it is not meeting the necessary standards in all areas.	05/05/26
Children's outcomes are at risk because the provider has not ensured CIW are notified of all significant changes, leaving the setting without clear and accountable regulatory oversight.	05/05/26

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 12 - Food and drink	Ensure all food and drink provision is nutritious, served hygienically, and in line with current Welsh Government guidance. This was raised at the last CIW inspection and has not been addressed.
Standard 20 - Child protection	The child protection policy should be updated to account for the changes to the Wales Safeguarding Procedures in 2019 and the amended safeguarding requirements outlined in the National Minimum Standards in 2023.
Standard 15 - Staffing ratios	It should be ensured the minimum ratio for qualified staff is met.
Standard 10 - Healthcare	It should be ensured the minimum required first aid qualifications for staff is met.

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)
Strengthen the inclusion of the Welsh language and culture.
Policies should be dated to ensure version control.
The uncollected child policy should include timescales to guide staff on when to contact emergency contacts and Social Services.

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