

Solihull Early Years Team support from the Early Years Lead Practitioners.

SD – Area SENCo and RP- Early Years and Childcare Advice

I started supporting First Steps Nursery Solihull in January 2022 as their Area SENCo. They were passionate about providing high quality care for the children in their setting with SEND but were feeling somewhat overwhelmed by the processes and procedures surrounding this. We began our journey by developing some key strategies to support children, with varying SEND needs. The setting identified that they would like to further improve staff's knowledge in this area, so the Early Years Team arranged a block of setting support from an Early Years Practitioner, to provide modelling of a range of key strategies to support a child in setting with Global Developmental Delay.

We then looked at the nursery's Assess, Plan, Do, Review cycles. The manager, SENCo and I worked together on how to write effective and relevant support plans which could be used to support children with SEND in the nursery and provide evidence of the graduated approach for future referrals.

The manager identified that they wanted to develop their confidence in arranging and leading regular support plan review meetings with parents and other professionals. I think it is fair to say that this can be a daunting experience for any setting, but with some background support and support through my initial attendance at the meetings, the nursery quickly grew in confidence and were soon leading their own effective and professional reviews of children's progress with a range of professionals and parents.

Over the course of the last 16 months the nursery has developed their knowledge of completing referrals to a range of services and professionals, including several successful applications for Education and Health Care Assessments to both Solihull and Birmingham Local Authorities. The manager is always keen to share referrals with me and act upon any advice or suggestions that are offered. They have developed a clear understanding of how to access additional funding for individual children and how to best use this funding to support the development of children with SEND in their setting.

In March 2022 I also visited the setting, as their Setting Improvement Adviser, to complete their annual visit. The leadership team were keen to pursue an outstanding Ofsted outcome, and were very reflective throughout the visit. We discussed their approach to delivering the EYFS and meeting Ofsted requirements, and then spent time jointly observing practice. Together, the manager and I identified a number of teaching strengths, in particular the range of strategies and sensitivity used to support children's differing needs. We also considered some areas for development. We agreed that I would complete some wider setting observations, particularly as post-pandemic staff were far less used to being observed or discussing practice with visitors. We considered aspects from the Ofsted teaching definition that could be strengthened, and shared these with the wider staff team who enthusiastically engaged. I took two practitioners to visit another local setting. This was to further their experience of enabling learning environments that were developed in response to the interests and needs of the current cohort. The practitioners fully engaged with the opportunity and took their learning back to the setting. Then, supported by the manager, they identified aspects that would work for their children, and how to carefully implement over time.

Leaders and managers have planned a highly ambitious and broad curriculum for all children. All staff know the curriculum extremely well and work harmoniously to deliver it. The quality of teaching across the nursery is outstanding. Staff know each and every child exceptionally well. This is reflected in children being highly engaged in their play and learning throughout all the rooms in the setting. Staff place great focus on the interests of the child and harness these interests to plan a curriculum that they thoroughly enjoy and excel in.

First Step's hard work and achievements were recognised in January 2023 when they were awarded a grading of Outstanding in all areas by Ofsted. [Ofsted's report](#) referenced the quality of provision for children with SEND, and celebrated the setting's passion, knowledge and skills, and how these have led to children making exceptional progress.

Children with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) make exceptional progress from their starting points. The SEND coordinator is passionate about her role and works closely with other external agencies and parents to create highly effective target plans for children. She has a wealth of knowledge and experience and disseminates this with her team, to ensure all staff have the optimum skills to support children. All staff are well informed these plans and celebrate collectively when children achieve their milestones.

It is a pleasure to be part of First Steps' journey. I believe, that one of the keys to their success has been their openness and ability to self-evaluate, identifying where they needed support, and their willingness to work together to develop inclusive, high-quality provision for all the children in their setting.