

Footsteps Nursery & Forest school

Unique reference number (URN): 2588109

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

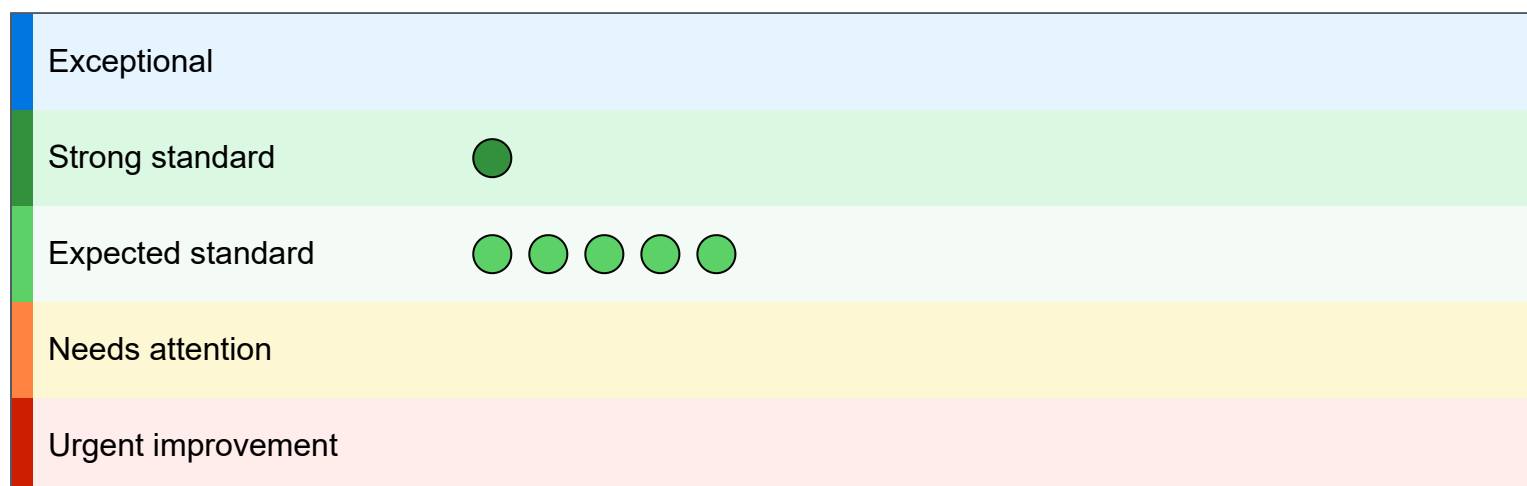
Type: Childcare on non-domestic premises

Registered with Ofsted: 04/05/2020

Registers: EYR, CCR

Registered person: Footsteps Day Nurseries Limited

Inspection report: 2 February 2026



✔ Safeguarding standards met

The safeguarding standards are met. This means that leaders and/or those responsible for governance and oversight fulfil their specific responsibilities and have established an open culture in which safeguarding is everyone's responsibility and concerns are actively identified, acted upon and managed. As a result, children are made safer and feel safe.

How we evaluate safeguarding

When we inspect settings for safeguarding, they can have the following outcomes:

- Met: The setting has an open and positive culture of safeguarding.
- Not met: The setting has not created an open and positive culture of safeguarding. Not all legal requirements are met.

Strong standard ●

Inclusion

Strong standard ●

Leaders establish a strong and inclusive culture where children feel secure, valued and able to participate fully in learning. Staff identify children's individual needs quickly and accurately through careful observation, ongoing assessment and close partnership with parents. This enables leaders to act promptly and ensure that children receive the right support at the earliest opportunity.

Staff build support in small, manageable steps and respond swiftly to emerging needs. For example, when a child shows early difficulties with balance, coordination and communication, staff recognise these differences within the first month and put targeted support in place. They observe closely, plan achievable next steps with parents and implement practical strategies, such as sensory activities, visual cues, quieter learning spaces, adapted routines and additional adult support. Staff apply these adjustments consistently and review them regularly, adapting support quickly as children's needs change.

Leaders monitor children's progress rigorously through ongoing observations, structured review meetings and tracking information. They evaluate the impact of support carefully and ensure that children make steady progress over time. Leaders provide purposeful training, so staff deliver inclusive practice confidently. They work pro-actively with families and external professionals and use funding, including early years pupil premium, thoughtfully to remove barriers to learning. As a result, children develop increasing confidence, independence and engagement in their learning.

Expected standard ●

Achievement

Expected standard ●

Children make steady progress overall from their starting points, particularly in communication and language. Warm, responsive interactions and book-rich spaces indoors and outdoors help them build vocabulary, listen well and share their ideas confidently.

Children also develop increasing independence and resilience. Those who need additional support benefit from tailored strategies that strengthen their physical development, communication and confidence. Children who receive additional funding engage more readily in small-group activities and participate with growing assurance. New starters settle quickly because staff learn their routines and comfort items, helping them feel secure from the outset.

At age 2 years, progress checks draw on practitioners' observations, parents' input and information from health visitors to identify the right next steps. These are incorporated into daily routines and shared with families, ensuring that children are well prepared for their next stage of learning, including starting school.

Behaviour, attitudes and establishing routines

Expected standard 

Children experience a warm and inclusive environment where staff set clear expectations for behaviour and routines. Staff build calm, respectful and trusting relationships with children. These help them feel secure and ready to learn. Children show kindness, cooperate well and stay focused in ways that reflect their age and stage.

During an outdoor digging activity, soil flicked onto nearby children. Staff noticed straight away and acted gently. They helped the first children understand what had happened and guided them to a better digging spot. They then reassured the children who had been flicked with soil, helping them feel comfortable again. This moment shows how staff co-regulate, restoring calm while supporting children's understanding and relationships.

Leaders promote arrival routines and monitor attendance closely. This supports good attendance and helps children settle quickly at the start of the day. Staff follow these routines consistently and guide children well during them. However, transitions between routines are not always as clear, and some children become confused about what is happening next. Leaders have identified this and support staff to use active songs, rhymes and simple cues to guide children through these moments. With continued support from leaders, these transition routines will embed further, so children move smoothly and confidently through their day.

Children's welfare and wellbeing

Expected standard 

Children's care is unhurried, predictable and child centred. Staff use face-to-face communication, gentle narration and objects of reference during intimate care and transitions. These approaches promote security and trust, particularly for babies and new starters. A 2-visit induction enables staff to quickly understand each child's routines, preferences and comfort items. This helps babies settle swiftly and form secure attachments with their key person. Warm, responsive relationships support children's emotional wellbeing and confidence to explore.

Staff meet children's individual needs effectively, including those with allergies, emerging vulnerabilities and special educational needs and/or disabilities. Hygiene and safety routines are consistent and well embedded. These include safe sleep practice, clear labelling, a shoes-off policy, prompt hazard removal and regular risk scanning. Leaders have implemented a traffic light allergy system that helps staff keep children safe at mealtimes and ensures that children's health needs are well managed.

Children develop physical confidence and resilience through outdoor learning and forest school experiences, where they learn to manage risk safely. Staff naturally weave health and wellbeing messages, such as dental hygiene and healthy choices, into play. They also support children to recognise and express their emotions through sensitive interactions and predictable routines.

Curriculum and teaching

Expected standard 

Leaders demonstrate a secure understanding of curriculum quality and teaching. Their clear vision of developing independent investigators, resilient resolvers and confident communicators is evident across the setting and forest school. Leaders use walk about and coaching effectively to evaluate practice and make improvements aligned with self-evaluation priorities.

The curriculum is well designed and meets early years foundation stage learning and development requirements. Staff plan purposeful experiences that build on children's interests and developmental stages. Teaching supports language and communication well. Small-group activities and gentle guidance extend children's vocabulary, thinking and problem-solving. For example, older children explore how to free a toy animal from ice, helping them make simple predictions and understand early ideas of cause and effect. When staff are engaging directly with children in play and focused activities, the teaching is of a high standard. However, practice varies when staff call across rooms or when language-rich interactions lessen during busy free-flow periods. Leaders are working to improve consistency, so all children experience high-quality interactions throughout the day.

Children's physical, personal, social and emotional development is prioritised. Regular forest school sessions promote safe risk taking, collaboration and resilience. Practitioners know children well, including those who are disadvantaged or those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, and make appropriate adjustments. Assessment is used effectively to understand children's starting points and tailor teaching to their needs.

Leadership and governance

Expected standard 

The strengthened leadership team, with a manager and deputies in place, has helped stabilise the setting and build capacity for improvement. Leaders understand the setting's strengths and priorities well. They use clear and consistent monitoring systems, including daily checks, weekly walk abouts, audits, supervision, coaching notes and parents' feedback. Leaders stay visible and available. They offer timely support and coaching to staff.

Leaders root decision-making firmly in children's best interests, particularly for those who are disadvantaged, those with special educational needs and/or disabilities or those who face barriers to learning and wellbeing. They identify needs early, make timely referrals and use funding purposefully to support low pressure, small-group learning. Leaders continue to strengthen workforce stability by reducing reliance on agency staff and inducting bank staff effectively.

Leaders look after staff's wellbeing and manage workload by using simple planning, a buddy system and regular check ins. They provide training that is useful and focused on improving interactions, communication and safeguarding. Leaders also identify what needs to improve next and work to make sure staff provide high-quality interactions and clear whole-group routines in every room, so these approaches become consistent every day.

✔ **Compulsory Childcare Register requirements**

This setting has met the requirements of the compulsory part of the Childcare Register.

How we check if a provider meets the requirements of the Compulsory Childcare Register

When we check if settings meet the Compulsory Childcare Register requirements, they can have the following outcomes:

- Met
 - Not met
-
-

What it's like to be a child at this setting

Children across the setting arrive happy, settled and ready to explore. They are cared for by warm, attuned staff who know them well. They create useful routines that help even the youngest children feel safe from the start. Babies quickly form secure attachments because staff take time to learn their routines, cues and comfort items. Toddlers and older children seek reassurance confidently, showing that they trust the adults who care for them.

Children enjoy their learning. Across rooms, they engage deeply in sensory, physical and exploratory experiences from forest school adventures to small-group investigations that spark curiosity and language. Staff model rich vocabulary and encourage children to think, talk and persist. As a result, children develop early confidence, independence and resilience. Children with special educational needs and/or disabilities, disadvantaged children and those facing barriers access the same rich curriculum as their peers. They are supported through well-judged adaptations, such as visuals and sensory tools, quieter spaces and reduced ratio moments. These approaches help children overcome barriers and make secure progress from their starting points.

Children build positive relationships with one another. They collaborate in play, share resources and show emerging empathy. For example, they pull out chairs for friends or support peers during group games. Staff reinforce emotional security through consistent co-regulation, calm tone and clear expectations, helping children learn to manage their feelings. While group routines are generally smooth, a small number of moments, particularly during busy transitions, can reduce the very best levels of engagement. Leaders are already addressing this so that consistency continues to strengthen.

Families feel welcomed and included. Parents describe feeling well informed and valued, and children benefit from this strong home nursery partnership. Overall, children achieve well, feel a strong sense of belonging and thrive in an environment that nurtures their uniqueness, keeps them safe and prepares them well for their next steps.

Next steps

- Leaders to ensure that highly effective teaching and high-quality interactions with children are consistently embedded across all rooms so that every child benefits from rich language development throughout the day.
 - Leaders to support staff's professional development to establish consistently high expectations for children's behaviour throughout all their activities.
 - Leaders to continue embedding consistent, high-quality interactions across all staff, especially during busy routines, ensuring that improvements become fully sustained and typical of daily practice.
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About this inspection

The inspector spoke with leaders, staff and the special educational needs coordinator during the inspection.

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.

A quality assurance visit by an additional inspector was carried out at this inspection.

Inspector:

Vicki Abrahart

About this setting

Unique reference number (URN): 2588109

Address:

Sandy Hill Farm
Fradley Junction
Alrewas

Staffordshire
DE13 7DW

Type: Childcare on non-domestic premises

Registration date: 04/05/2020

Registered person: Footsteps Day Nurseries Limited

Register(s): EYR, CCR

Operating hours: Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday : 07:30 - 18:00

Local authority: Staffordshire

Facts and figures used on inspection

This data was available to the inspector at the time of the inspection.

 This data is from 2 February 2026

Children numbers

Age range of children at the time of inspection

0 to 4

Total number of places

114

Our grades explained

Exceptional 

Practice is exceptional: of the highest standard nationally. Other settings can learn from it.

Strong standard 

The setting reaches a strong standard. Leaders are working above the standard expected of them.

Expected standard 

The setting is fulfilling the expected standard of education and/or care. This means they are following the standard set out in statutory and non-statutory legislation and the professional standards expected of them.

Needs attention ●

The expected standards are not met but leaders are likely able to make the necessary improvements.

Urgent improvement ●

The setting needs to make urgent improvements to provide the expected standard of education and/or care.

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