



Stepping Stones Nursery School

Inspection report for early years provision

Unique Reference Number	955834
Inspection date	25 January 2007
Inspector	Amanda Jane Tyson
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Registered person	Alison Sellers
Type of inspection	Integrated
Type of care	Full day care

ABOUT THIS INSPECTION

The purpose of this inspection is to assure government, parents and the public of the quality of childcare and, if applicable, of nursery education. The inspection was carried out under Part XA Children Act 1989 as introduced by the Care Standards Act 2000 and, where nursery education is provided, under Schedule 26 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998.

This report details the main strengths and any areas for improvement identified during the inspection. The judgements included in the report are made in relation to the outcomes for children set out in the Children Act 2004; the National Standards for under 8s day care and childminding; and, where nursery education is provided, the *Curriculum guidance for the foundation stage*.

The report includes information on any complaints about the childcare provision which Ofsted has received since the last inspection or registration or 1 April 2004 whichever is the later.

The key inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding: this aspect of the provision is of exceptionally high quality

Good: this aspect of the provision is strong

Satisfactory: this aspect of the provision is sound

Inadequate: this aspect of the provision is not good enough

For more information about early years inspections, please see the booklet *Are you ready for your inspection?* which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

THE QUALITY AND STANDARDS OF THE CARE AND NURSERY EDUCATION

On the basis of the evidence collected on this inspection:

The quality and standards of the care are good. The registered person meets the National Standards for under 8s day care and childminding.

The quality and standards of the nursery education are outstanding.

WHAT SORT OF SETTING IS IT?

Stepping Stones Nursery operates as one nursery based on two sites; Thames Ditton and Long Ditton. Thames Ditton was registered under the current owner in 1996, and Long Ditton was registered in 2002.

There are currently 94 children on roll at Thames Ditton, of whom 34 are aged under three years, and 61 are in receipt of funding for nursery education. Of these, four children have identified special educational needs. A number of children are bilingual. Children are based within one of three classrooms. Two year-olds attend afternoon sessions. Children transfer to Long Ditton at the beginning of the term in which they turn three. They remain there for three terms before returning to Thames Ditton until they start mainstream school.

Both venues operate an early drop off (08:30) and extended day care facility. Session times for nursery education are from 09:15 until 12:15. Lunch club operates from 12:15 until 13:00 and the afternoon care from there after until 15:30. The session for two year-olds, at Thames Ditton finishes at 15:45. The nursery is open term time only, but a holiday club operates from the Thames Ditton premises during some of the holiday periods. Opening times are from 09:00 until 16:00 and children who do not attend the pre-school are welcome. The club is registered for children aged from three years to under eight. Full and part time sessions are available.

There are 17 staff employed to work with the children across the two sites. Some staff work in both settings, for example mornings with the three year-olds (Long Ditton) and afternoons with the two year-olds (Thames Ditton). Of these staff, two are qualified teachers and eight are qualified to level three and four in early years childcare and education. In addition, two staff are studying for a degree in early childhood studies. The remaining staff, although unqualified attend regular training and are experienced. Both settings have a named manager, deputy, and special educational needs coordinator.

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PROVISION

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

Superb curriculum and activity planning, skilled teaching and adult interaction with children is helping the children to adopt a healthy and active lifestyle. Both younger and older children benefit from the well designed outdoor play area where they practise their balancing, climbing and pedalling skills. Daily music and movement sessions are enabling high levels of coordination. Furthermore, children's understanding of how the body works is brought to life as they listen to their racing heartbeat and notice the changes to their hands and foreheads after vigorous exercise. An abundance of varied fresh fruit is offered to children each day and the risk of dehydration is minimised because the freely available drinking water encourages frequent visits.

Children's knowledge and understanding of how germs are spread is similarly developed, for instance they were reminded that the melted snow was collected from the ground which had contained germs. Staff ensure that good hygiene practice is followed at all times. The nursery rooms are cleaned thoroughly each day and high priority is given to ensuring hygienic nappy changing procedures. Children are well protected from the risk of cross-infection from others because the nursery policy on sick children is comprehensively explained to parents in written information provided prior to placement. In the event that children become unwell whilst in the setting, their needs are well met by the clear operational plan.

Parental wishes regarding children's health needs are clearly understood and documented, and they in turn are fully aware of the nursery's regulatory responsibilities. For example, written parental consents are obtained to enable medicines to be administered, minor accidents to be treated by first aid qualified staff, and emergency treatment to be sought. A record is kept of all accidents and any administered medication. Children's individual health information is detailed in writing, and specific requirements, such as relating to allergies, are appropriately to hand. However, the organisation of health records is a little disjointed which may compromise the efficiency of monitoring procedures.

Younger children's emotional needs are well catered for. They are very well prepared for the transition to the Long Ditton morning session, which takes place in the term that they are due to turn three. Younger children are confident and secure in their environment. Their sense of belonging is well fostered by the small group size and effective key-work system. Staff are caring and affectionate towards the children, and the bond between them is very strong.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

Children are cared for in a very well maintained and secure purpose built environment. Comprehensive risk assessments protect children well from possible harm. A log of all visitors to the premises, including times of arrival and departure is maintained. There are robust systems in place to minimise the possibility of children being able to leave the building unsupervised, for example when parents are coming and going. There is a well thought through outings and missing child procedure. Electrical sockets are all fitted with child safety covers, computer cables are well placed out of children's reach, and the fire evacuation procedure is regularly practised so that the children are familiar with what to do and where to go.

Both the registered person and the manager updated their child protection knowledge through training in 2005. They are familiar with the new responsibilities of the Local Safeguarding Children's Board, (LSCB). They are secure in their knowledge of possible signs and symptoms of abuse and neglect, and of the procedure to record and report concerns. However, recording systems are disjointed in the same way that health records are, and not quite succinct enough to ensure rigorous monitoring purposes. For example, records of existing injuries are kept in one file and not transferred to a central system for each individual child. The written record is not consistently detailed enough, although good use is made of pictorial diagrams.

The nursery have a tremendous supply of first-rate play and learning resources which are all maintained in excellent condition. Children use small tools safely because staff take the time to explain the dangers. For example, two year-olds know to use scissors at the table and not carry them around, older children are learning to use hammers and nails in well supervised woodwork sessions, and the dangers of electricity are well explained as they experiment with scientific equipment.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

Staff use their highly secure knowledge and understanding of the 'Birth to three matters' framework to guide their planning, and to monitor and record children's developmental progress. As a result, two year-olds are provided with a superb range of activities which inspire their natural impulse to explore and experiment through imitation and the use of their senses. For example, shaving foam is delightfully squelched between the palms of hands before they proceed to cover themselves in it. Children plant 'smelling' and 'feely' herbs in the garden and in pots to take home. They have fun identifying fruits without using their eyes. The development of musical skills are becoming firmly established by the time children transfer to Long Ditton in the term before they are three. Children sing with gusto. They move their bodies in time to

music with unbelievable confidence and have opportunities to use a wide range of instruments. Staff use music to guide children through the routine of the session, such as to initiate tidy up time, to welcome everyone and to say goodbye. The home corner is well equipped with multicultural resources that enable all children to act out their varied home experiences. Children have tremendous fun in the well equipped garden; they experiment with sound by banging giant metal spoons onto hanging chimes and saucepans, ride pedalled equipment, work the see-saw with their friends and find out about nature as they dig for small creatures in the nursery garden. Children create and design their own interpretations based on their real, imaginary experiences and images. Their self-esteem is consistently raised by the high value staff and parents place on their efforts and achievements, for instance when they are displayed or taken home. The frequent opportunities for children to take part in whole group learning during circle and story times are absolutely excellent. Children's confidence and enthusiasm has no boundaries and is well demonstrated by the animated conversations and frequent bouts of laughter. Discussion times are skilfully led by staff with the support of 'Panda puppet' whose active role encourages their enthusiastic participation.

Children who attend the holiday club enjoy a wide range of out of school activities, such as Christmas crafts, cookery, party games, face painting and disco dancing. Planning follows a theme, but is very much play-based, which pays appropriate recognition to out of school care principles.

Nursery Education.

The quality of teaching and learning is outstanding. Children are making exceptional progress towards the early learning goals because staff use their broad range of skills and knowledge to deliver an exciting and very well planned curriculum. Children's progress and development is comprehensively monitored through succinct record keeping which is used to clearly identify and set next steps for learning for every child. Planning covers the three terms of children's attendance before transferring to mainstream school and is broadly based upon three themes; colour and light, shape, and growth and change. The final term concludes with a comprehensive revision and application of children's mathematical and literacy knowledge which ensures that they are exceptionally well prepared for reception class. Morning circle time is expertly used by staff to sow the seed of interest for the sessions focused learning. Children are then inspired to explore and experiment independently as they access the full range of activities and resources.

Teaching staff have thoroughly researched methods for delivering the programme for literacy and mathematics. As a result, planning follows a distinct process for introducing print gradually. By the end of the third term children are able to recognise letters through their phonetic sound, name many if not all, and write clearly recognisable letters including their names. Children are keen to write. They attempt to label their own pictures, make their own books and enthusiastically detail what they want to say on each page. With high levels of innovative support from skilled practitioners, they are learning the value of purposeful print. Children routinely use mathematical language, explore shape, weight, volume, measure and capacity through a wide range of planned and spontaneous activities. For example, they observed and monitored the increasing volume of water from the melting snow over a two day period. They measured their feet in the snow and compared their different sizes. Children became excited as they begun to recognise the square shape being created on the floor with string, and

confidently identified that a square has four sides. Children practise rhythm and beat by clapping specified numbers during music sessions, which are superbly led by staff.

Opportunities for children to explore the wider world are extensive. They create and design their own models using recycled materials, construction equipment and engage in woodwork. They use the computer very competently following pictorial and voice activated instructions to navigate the mouse around the screen, and enjoy experimenting with electronic scientific equipment. They learn about natural life cycles, such as how frogs and butterflies evolve, and have regular opportunities to grow seeds, bulbs and vegetables in the nursery garden. Children's awareness and understanding of the cultures and traditions of others is well integrated within the thematic approach to planning. For example, the theme of colour and light introduced children to the festivals of Hanukah and Divali. Children are keen to share their news and home experiences during group discussions.

Children consistently use their imagination in all activities. For example, a three year-old remembers the circle time message to think about a square and combines this with his familiarity of the popular 'Elma' story. A beautiful recognisable elephant with a colourful decorated body of small squares is independently created on a white board. Children make very good use of the varied role play scenarios to act out their real and imaginary experiences. They use writing resources to make library tickets, swipe credit cards through the shop cash till, and invite their friends to tea in the 'home'.

The majority of children confidently make their own decisions, manage their own personal care, and attempt new and difficult challenges with remarkable persistence. Less confident children are particularly well supported by sensitive and caring staff who know all the children very well, and by the fantastic resource of the persona dolls. The skilled use of these dolls encourages children to contribute during whole group times and provides them with comfort and security during play. Furthermore, staff cleverly use them to address important moral messages and to raise their awareness of every day life issues, such as being frightened to try something new as a result of assumption.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

The setting pays outstanding attention to recognising children's individual needs and enabling their full inclusion. The proprietor has gone to considerable lengths to secure accessible speech and language therapy for the nursery, which is providing highly beneficial support to both younger and older children. Staff's knowledge of the code of practice for special educational needs is highly secure and well demonstrated by the comprehensive early years action plans in place for all identified children. Staff easily recognise early signs of distraction and opportunities to encourage and support individual children because they know each and every child very well indeed. Children glow with pride when they are asked to help with practical jobs, or to take responsibility for a special part of an activity. High levels of adult praise and encouragement throughout the day leaves two year-olds brimming with excitement at home time because they cannot wait to show off their accomplishments to parents. Children's awareness of disability issues, and different cultures and religions is consistently raised as they play with exceptionally good quality resources which provoke lengthy discussion and investigation. The use of pigeon

holes for children to keep their personal and precious things is a particularly effective feature in securing their strong sense of belonging and encouraging them to keep the classroom tidy. Children are delightfully polite, considerate and sociable with each other. They are secure in their understanding of right and wrong and know what adults expect of them. For example, pictorial ground rules remind them that ears are for listening, chairs are for sitting on, heads are for remembering, and a raised hand means 'ask me to help'. Children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is fostered.

Parents and carers are provided with very clear written information about the settings operational policies and procedures. This is then further consolidated at the pre-placement information evening and through regular newsletters and well displayed notices. This highly communicative approach is a significant factor in the effectiveness of the transfer arrangements for two year-olds moving onto the Long Ditton morning session. Staff and parents work closely together to ensure children are very well prepared. As a result, children are excited about the event and settle into the new environment happily. Each week parents are given a very helpful breakdown of the planned activities and learning objectives for toddlers which enables them to continue and extend children's learning within the home. They are fully conversant with the 'Birth to three matters' framework and therefore understand the methods used to monitor and record children's progress and development, and of the purpose of the planned activities.

The partnership with parents and carers of children in receipt of funding for nursery education is outstanding. They are provided with exceptionally well explained Foundation Stage curriculum information, and have regular formal opportunities to meet with class teachers to discuss children's individual progress and development towards the early learning goals, and to agree what children's learning targets are for the term ahead. They know exactly what the weekly curriculum plans are because they are provided with a written breakdown each week. They frequently take home children's 'busy books' and browse through children's progress and development records. As a result, parents are enthusiastic contributors to children's learning.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

All records and documentation required for the safe and efficient management of the children, and to promote the welfare, care and learning of the children are maintained. The systems for the holiday club are similar, but suitably reflect the differences between the services provided. However, there is no central system for keeping each child's various records, such as health and medical information, and registration details. This makes it difficult to gain a clear profile of children's overall development and raises the possibility of issues or concerns being missed, although the dedicated staff team do know the children very well. Comprehensive written policies and procedures clearly underpin the settings operational practice.

Staff are all suitably vetted, extremely skilled, have considerable experience and notable enthusiasm. They keep up-to-date on developing childcare issues through regular external and in-house training and benefit from good managerial support to complete further professional qualifications. The team's commitment towards continual improvement is well demonstrated by the recent reorganisation of circle times, and introduction of a key work system within Panda room. The organisation of space, time, and resources is a key strength of the provision. Children

are generally grouped according to age, but their individual needs and parental preferences are equally taken into account. This enables staff to pitch learning very appropriately to ensure maximum outcomes for all the children.

Leadership and management of the nursery education is outstanding. Their dynamic and pro-active approach towards providing high quality nursery education, and the inclusion of children with specific developmental difficulties is inspirational. Unsurprisingly therefore, staff work harmoniously together and are highly motivated. The strive for continual improvement is well demonstrated by the rigorous monitoring and evaluation systems that highlight strengths and weaknesses of teaching and learning. For example, the methods used to encourage writing skills were recently changed to increase children's levels of confidence. The vision for the future is clear and currently focuses on enabling more opportunities for outings and visitors to the premises. Management use their astute knowledge of the team's individual attributes to delegate roles and responsibilities, which results in expert delivery of teaching in all areas. The setting meets the needs of the range of children for whom it provides.

Improvements since the last inspection

Five recommendations for improvement were raised at the last inspection for care which relate to staff qualifications, key working systems, the recording of children's dietary needs and children's accessibility to drinking water, and the detail included in the statement for special educational needs.

Two year-olds are linked to a key member of staff when they first start and older children's care and development is overseen by the lead staff based in each classroom. The system is effective. More than half the staff team between the two settings hold appropriate qualifications. Children are making such good progress because the staff are so highly skilled, experienced and well qualified to at least level three in early years childcare and education. A qualified member of staff takes the lead role in each classroom. Children's health and dietary needs are documented and children have constant access to fresh drinking water, all of which contribute to ensuring their well-being. There is a comprehensive written statement of special educational needs and the levels of support offered to children with a physical and/or learning disability is exceptionally high.

The setting's inspection for nursery education reported that there were no significant weaknesses, but that consideration should be given to further extending the opportunities for three year-olds to recognise their names. This is no longer applicable because this age group now attend the Long Ditton setting.

Complaints since the last inspection

Since the last inspection there have been no complaints made to Ofsted that required the provider or Ofsted to take any action in order to meet the National Standards.

The provider is required to keep a record of complaints made by parents, which they can see on request. The complaints record may contain complaints other than those made to Ofsted.

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WHAT MUST BE DONE TO SECURE FUTURE IMPROVEMENT?

The quality and standards of the care

To improve the quality and standards of care further the registered person should take account of the following recommendation(s):

- improve the overall organisation of documentation relating to children's records; pay particular attention to accidents and existing injuries.

The quality and standards of the nursery education

No recommendations for improvement are made because the quality and standards of nursery education are outstanding.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the leaflet *Complaints about Ofsted Early Years: concerns or complaints about Ofsted's role in regulating and inspecting childcare and early education* (HMI ref no 2599) which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk