



Stepping Stones Uppingham

Inspection report for early years provision

Unique Reference Number	EY271344
Inspection date	11 January 2007
Inspector	Alison Edwards
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Registered person	Stepping Stones Uppingham
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 satisfactory. The registered person meets the National Standards for under 8s day care and childminding.

The quality and standards of the nursery education are satisfactory.

WHAT SORT OF SETTING IS IT?

Stepping Stones, Uppingham re-registered in 2003. It is a committee-run organisation, which operates within the premises of the Church of England Primary School on the outskirts of Uppingham in Rutland. In addition to the main playroom, children also use the school hall and library and a designated classroom area at certain times. Toileting facilities are shared with the school and are sited across the foyer to the main playroom and near the designated classroom. There is a disabled access cloakroom off the school's main reception area. Staff use kitchen areas off the classroom and main playroom for snack preparation, with main cooked meals being prepared by the school kitchens. Two inter-connecting outside areas, leading from the main playroom, provide enclosed outdoor play space. In addition, staff sometimes take children to use the main school playing fields for supervised outdoor activities.

The setting opens 51 weeks a year within the hours of 07:30 to 18:00. It provides wrap-around care before and after school, during term times, with collection arrangements within the school and with some other local primary schools. Between 09:00 and 15:15 it offers care for children aged 2 years and over, including provision of nursery education to funded three and four year olds. It offers holiday care out of school terms. The setting is able to make provision for children with special needs and for children with English as an additional language. There are currently 134 children on roll in total of whom 38 attend the pre-school provision. Of these, 26 are in receipt of funded nursery education, including 6 4year olds.

There are 10 regular childcare staff, of whom 7 have completed recognised training at level 3 or above.

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PROVISION

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

Children are cared for in clean and well maintained premises, so helping to maintain their health. They enjoy frequent easy access to a very well-planned and resourced outdoor area enabling them to participate readily in a wide range of interesting activities in the fresh air. Careful records are maintained of children's individual health and dietary needs, enabling these to be managed effectively, for example with regard to provision for use of life-saving medication for allergies. A good proportion of staff hold current paediatric first aid qualifications and the setting seeks written parental authorisation to obtain emergency medical treatment. Consequently, they are able to deal with minor or more serious illnesses and accidents effectively.

Children across the age range enjoy a varied selection of activities enabling them to develop their hand to eye coordination, for example younger children enjoy building towers of chunky wooden bricks, whilst school aged children enjoy more complex construction materials. Children show confidence when using equipment to move in different ways, for example as pre-school children balance on simple stilts or clamber on sturdy wooden climbing equipment. However, planning for pre-school children's physical development is not yet fully effective in identifying ways to ensure older and more able children fully extend their skills across all aspects of learning.

High priority is given to encouraging children's healthy eating. Children staying during the day are offered substantial and well balanced main meals such as chicken casserole, and jacket potatoes prepared in the school kitchens in accordance with current healthy eating guidance. Alternatively, they bring substantial packed lunches to suit their own individual dietary needs and preferences. They routinely enjoy varied fruits and salad vegetables such as apples and carrots during their snack time. They learn about many different fruits and vegetables in a variety of interesting ways. For example, they learn how food is produced and prepared as they grow tomatoes, potatoes and herbs in their garden or prepare fruit salad. They are introduced to more exotic fruits such as mangos and pomegranates when looking at particular books such as 'Handa's Surprise' Children attending after school are offered substantial and balanced teas, such as cheesy pasta, fresh fruit and chocolate crunchy cakes. Fresh drinking water is available throughout the session and children are offered milk or water at regular intervals to ensure they take sufficient fluids.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is satisfactory.

Children settle readily in the bright and suitably maintained premises which provide sufficient space for them to play, eat and relax comfortably. Attractive displays, and provision of benches and picture books in the foyer waiting area help to create a welcoming environment for children and parents. Children are confident when using the outdoor play areas adjacent to the main playroom. Here, they are able to climb on sturdy fixed equipment, relax in a covered seating area, participate in simple gardening and mini beast watching activities, or play with a variety of resources such as sand or mark making materials. Effective security arrangements for the main playroom and enclosed outdoor area, such as sturdy gates and an entry buzzer system, minimise the risks of pre-school children leaving the premises unsupervised or of unauthorised visitors gaining access. Children are accompanied by cleared staff when using other designated areas of the school, so helping to ensure they are supervised at all times.

Sound arrangements are generally in place to help keep children safe. For example, staff are familiar with procedures to be followed in the event of emergencies such as a fire or a child being lost. Children begin to learn about some aspects of safety, for example when a staff member takes time to show a child that a particular piece of outdoor equipment is unsafe for use because it has become wet and slippery. Systematic risk assessments are regularly reviewed, so helping to identify and minimise most potential hazards to children. However, as yet these assessments do not include consideration of children's use of full height wall bars in the school hall. In this instance, they therefore do not take full account of factors such as insurance cover, children's stage of development and ability, and staff familiarity with the equipment to fully underpin children's safety.

Appropriate furnishings, such as display racks, low tables and chairs, enable children to safely and comfortably make use of a wide range of resources such as books, construction sets, creative activities and jigsaws. These are in clean and sound condition and generally suited to children's interests. However, they are occasionally not always presented to fully extend children's sustained and purposeful play. For example, pre-school children are sometimes frustrated in their attempts at making patterns because many plastic pegs are too big to fit into the available peg boards. Children are able to safely and independently use additional resources accessibly stored in low storage cupboards.

Staff are familiar with what child abuse and neglect mean and understand their responsibility to follow up any child protection concerns. However, the current child protection policy does not clearly identify the nationally and locally agreed procedures to be followed in the event of any allegation being made against a staff member. It therefore does not fully underpin arrangements to safeguard children's welfare effectively in such circumstances.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is satisfactory.

Children across the age range are usually relaxed and happy when arriving in the group and generally quickly become involved in their play. They move freely between a range of activities, both child-chosen and adult-led, which provide a broad range of experiences generally suited

to their stage of development and interests. They show growing cooperation with each other, as younger children begin to share resources such as road and rail layouts and school aged children play simple board games like snakes and ladders, without needing adult support. Staff often spend time talking and playing with children, so helping them feel their activities are valued. They show awareness of the needs of individual children, for example encouraging a two year old who has recently started at the group to participate in activities, and trying to provide specific resources, such as construction kit motors, to meet the interests of older children attending after school. Staff are familiar with the 'Birth to three matters' framework giving guidance on provision for younger children. They are developing use of planning and observation systems linked to this framework to help support younger children's development and learning.

The quality of teaching and learning for the funded nursery education programme is satisfactory. Staff are generally familiar with the areas of learning identified in the 'Curriculum guidance for the foundation stage' and recognise that children learn through practical play activities. This helps them to provide a range of activities and experiences generally appropriate to children's needs and interests. Long term planning, linked to particular topics such as colour or mini-beasts, provides varied opportunities for children to participate in an interesting range of activities. However, at present long-term planning is not consistently monitored to ensure that all aspects of learning receive balanced coverage. Consequently, children have relatively few well planned opportunities to develop their skills and understanding in some aspects of learning, for example, mathematical problem-solving, or awareness of sounds and letters. Systems are in place for key workers, who are responsible for small groups of individual children, to observe and assess their activities and development. However, at present there are often significant gaps in these records. Consequently, they are not fully effective in establishing a clear overview of children's stage of development at the start of the foundation stage, or in giving an accurate picture of children's rate of progress through the stepping stones towards the early learning goals. As a result, although staff do set some individual targets for children's learning, these do not always provide good levels of challenge to support children's progress in all aspects of learning because they are not based on comprehensive and reliable assessments of children's actual stage of development.

Children are usually occupied and busy during their time at the setting, as when they enjoy making patterns on the ground outside with washing up liquid foam and assorted rollers, brushes and squeegees. However, time and resources are occasionally not well organised to promote and extend their sustained attention. For example, some children wishing to play with peg boards and plastic pegs lose interest because pegs often do not fit the available boards. Children are sometimes unable to extend their independent imaginative play when role play resources, such as a pretend post office, are packed away halfway through a morning session.

Children are often sufficiently assured and confident to play independently or in small groups, as when two three year olds cooperate in fitting a rail layout together. They begin to show care and concern for their surroundings and living things as they help pack toys away, and when they talk with staff about putting worms back on the soil after they have looked at them. They show growing independence within some daily routines as they select toys from low cupboards and try to put on their own outdoor clothes.

Children are starting to use spoken language confidently in a group, as when a child stands up in circle time and talks briefly about a toy which has been brought in from home. They often talk about what they see and hear, for example when catching worms in the garden. They sometimes begin to use language to extend their thinking and understanding, for example by talking about why the worms come to the surface and whether they can swim if accidentally dropped in a container of water. They often enjoy joining in with songs and rhymes, but less often participate in well-planned and challenging activities to help them extend their awareness of sounds and letters. They enjoy sharing familiar books individually or in small groups. However, story sessions in larger groups are not always organised well to promote their sustained attention and interest. They enjoy varied activities introducing them to different forms of mark-making, such as using a selection of brushes and rollers to make patterns with foam in the playground. However, they are not consistently encouraged to develop more purposeful writing within their daily activities, for example in their independent role play or by trying to write their own names on their paintings.

Children are often encouraged to use number names and sometimes begin to count in sequence, particularly with adult encouragement, for example when counting the number of bricks in a tower. They learn about two- and three-dimensional shapes as they manipulate construction sets with variously shaped pieces or spend time working out how curved road and rail layouts fit together. They sometimes participate in number songs such as 'Five little ducks' introducing them to simple problem solving. However, at present, older children do not fully extend their mathematical skills and understanding because activities are not consistently well planned to offer good levels of challenge and progression across all aspects of learning.

Children undertake a variety of activities helping them begin to develop their knowledge and understanding of the world. For example, they become familiar with some aspects of everyday technology as they use a toy microwave oven in the role play area or use simple computer programs. They are introduced to some aspects of the natural world as they find mini-beasts, or grow vegetables in the outdoor play area. They show interest in aspects of different cultures as an adult shows them how a sari is worn. They frequently handle different substances such as sterilised compost, ice or lavender, so helping them recognise that these have different properties. However, at present activities are not always organised and planned to best effect to fully extend and challenge children's thinking across all aspects of learning.

Children enjoy joining in familiar songs and using simple percussion instruments like tambourines. Planned activities introduce children to a varied range of creative materials and techniques such as collage or different types of painting, so helping them learn about colour, texture and form. At times, children show sustained enthusiasm for imaginative role play, for example when an adult spends time with them in a pretend post office with a good selection of resources such as shop accessories and pretend forms. However, children do not always have time to fully extend their independent imaginative ideas because accessories are often packed away half way through a morning or afternoon session.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is satisfactory.

Most children across the age range settle readily and usually readily become involved in their activities. They respond willingly to staff's requests and instructions, for example as pre-school children move from one area to another as staff rearrange groups of children during story time. They are able to exercise choice in their activities at most times, and sometimes show sustained independent interest in their play, for example as two school aged children play board games together. However, activities are sometimes not organised to best effect to consistently promote all children's attention and interest. For example, pre-school children become restless when a story is repeated three times to enable everyone to take turns in acting out roles with glove puppets. Children begin to show independence within some daily routines, such as when staff encourage pre-school children to manage putting on their outdoor coats and boots. They begin to take account of their surroundings and of others' feelings, for example when two pre-school children cooperate in fitting a rail layout together.

Sound arrangements are in place to help staff meet children's individual care and cultural needs. Appropriate records are kept regarding children's individual health and dietary needs, enabling these to be met. Children begin to recognise and respect individual and cultural differences as they mark festivals such as Chinese New Year, or enjoy stories reflecting different lifestyles, such as 'Handa's Surprise'. Staff recognise the importance of liaison with parents and other relevant professionals to establish how the requirements of any child with identified special needs can be met. They have some experience and training in supporting the inclusion of children with individual learning needs. Children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is fostered.

The partnership with parents and carers is satisfactory. Parents speak favourably of the caring environment which helps them feel confident in the care offered to children. Attractive displays help create a welcoming atmosphere in the foyer and main playroom. A well presented prospectus and accessible copies of policies provide parents with generally useful information about staffing, routines and procedures, so helping staff and parents work together to meet children's needs. However, this written information does not always fully reflect current national guidance, for example with regard to the handling of any complaints. Newsletters, displays and photographs help to provide parents with information about current and previous activities. Parents of children receiving funded nursery education are given initial information about the foundation stage. They receive regular reports about their children's progress towards the early learning goals, although the observational records on which these are based are sometimes sketchy. Parents are able to have some involvement in their children's learning, for example by helping them find objects of a particular colour as part of a specific topic.

Organisation

The organisation is satisfactory.

Children are usually settled and busy and enjoy their time at this friendly setting. Staffing is organised to ensure there are sufficient adults to supervise children using different areas of the provision, for example when older children move between the main playroom for creative activities, the outdoor play space or hall for physical activities, or the additional classroom for

cooking activities or their meal. A recent staff training programme ensures that a good proportion of staff now hold relevant qualifications at Level 3 or above, so helping to ensure they have a sound understanding of current childcare practice. Necessary records, such as daily registers and children's contact details, are readily accessible to underpin children's care. Staff are generally familiar with, and able to implement, most of the setting's identified policies. However, these policies are not fully effective in underpinning children's care because the child protection procedure and complaints procedures do not fully reflect the nationally agreed procedures identified in the National Standards and in the October 2005 Addendum to these.

The leadership and management of the funded nursery education programme is satisfactory. Staff work cooperatively together and are willing to try new ideas to develop the effectiveness of the nursery education programme, as when they try out new ways of sharing responsibility for the planning and delivery of the programme of activities. Several members of the team have shown a commitment to ongoing training to develop their practice by undertaking Level 3 childcare qualifications, and they make use of their links with the local early years service to access some in-house and local training. Systematic arrangements to identify continuing professional development needs through an on-going appraisal programme are currently being developed but are not yet established. Participation in a local quality assurance scheme is enabling staff to begin to evaluate their practice and consider possible priorities for further development. Overall, children's needs are met.

Improvements since the last inspection

At the last inspection the provider was asked to improve organisation of care by ensuring staff qualification requirements were fully met and that children were cared for in groups of 26 or under to comply with space ratios. Several staff have now just completed recognised early years training at Level 3, and the new manager has completed early years training at Level 4 in addition to her existing playwork qualification at Level 4. Staffing is therefore now arranged to ensure that children are cared for by appropriate numbers of fully qualified staff to support their care and welfare. Pre-school children attending during the day are based in one room and organised in a single group of less than 26 so they have enough space for their needs. When school-aged children are in attendance, they have fully supervised use of additional designated classroom space within the school to ensure they have enough space for their needs.

At the last inspection the provider was also asked to ensure the child protection policy reflected national and local guidance with regard to the procedures to be followed in the event of any child protection allegations against staff. Although staff recognise their responsibility to act on any such allegation, they are not yet fully familiar with the procedures to be followed, and these are not clearly identified within the child protection policy. A further recommendation has therefore been raised.

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.

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 satisfactory. The registered person meets the National Standards for under 8s day care and childminding.

The quality and standards of the nursery education are satisfactory.

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 safety arrangements by reviewing risk assessments in relation to use of wall bars in main hall
- review policies to ensure they are fully in line with current national and local guidance with particular reference to complaints procedures and allegations against a staff member.

The quality and standards of the nursery education

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

- develop effective use of observations to assess children's stage of development on entry to the foundation stage and to reliably track their progress in all aspects of learning towards the early learning goals
- develop planning so that long term plans effectively identify how all aspects of learning will be given balanced coverage and so that short term plans build on assessments of children's stage of development to provide good levels of challenge and progression for all children
- develop organisation and use of available time, space and resources to ensure they are best used to promote children's sustained, purposeful, challenging and independent play and learning.

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