

Stepping Stones Playgroup

Inspection report for early years provision

Unique Reference Number	109865
Inspection date	26 April 2007
Inspector	Lisa Jane Cupples
Setting Address	The Scout Hut, Inmans Lane, Sheet, Petersfield, Hampshire, GU32 2AN
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Registered person	Stepping Stones Playgroup - Petersfield
Type of inspection	Integrated
Type of care	Sessional 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 Pre-school has been registered for over 20 years. It is a community group, which is managed by a committee of volunteers and serves the children of Sheet and the surrounding area. The pre-school operates from the scout hut, which is situated in the village recreation ground. A maximum of 26 children may attend at any one time. The pre-school is open Monday and Wednesday from 09:00 to 15:00 and Thursday and Friday from 09:00 to 12:00 during school term-time only. Children attend for a variety of sessions.

There are currently 18 children aged from two to five years on roll. Of these, 16 children receive funding for early education. It is the pre-school's policy to take children from two years and nine months. The pre-school supports children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and also supports children who have English as an additional language.

The pre-school employs six members of staff. Of these, three hold appropriate early years qualifications and two are working towards a qualification.

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PROVISION

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

Children learn the importance of personal hygiene and are developing good self-care skills through discussion and daily routines. For example, they are actively encouraged to wash their hands at appropriate times and use individual paper towels to help prevent the possible spread of infection. Children talk about 'washing away the germs' as they wash their hands, showing a clear understanding of why they have to wash them. Staff follow good hygiene procedures to provide a healthy environment for the children. The kitchen used for the preparation of snacks is clean and well-maintained. Staff ensure all tables are cleaned with anti-bacterial spray before and after each snack-time. Staff have an extremely good understanding of the procedures to follow if an accident occurs on the premises. Clear records are kept and the parents are required to sign them, ensuring they are fully informed at all times. Children will receive immediate treatment if a minor accident occurs because all members of staff hold current first aid certificates and a fully stocked first aid kit is stored in the kitchen. Parents also give written consent for staff to seek emergency medical advice or treatment if necessary.

Children's health is promoted effectively because all staff are fully informed about allergies, medical and cultural requirements. Detailed records are completed with the parents to ensure all the children's needs are being met in the best possible way. Children are beginning to learn the importance of healthy eating as they talk openly about their favourite foods and what things are good for them during snack-time and free-play. The pre-school provides an extensive range of fresh fruit and vegetables for snacks, promoting children's good health in line with their healthy eating policies. Snack-time is a good social occasion for the children as they chat to the staff and their peers about the things they like to eat and what they have been doing during the morning.

Children have opportunities to develop their physical skills during outdoor activities. For example, they ride wheeled toys with precision, showing good spatial awareness as they avoid collisions with others. Children have the use of the adventure playground in the village recreation ground. They practise balancing on the apparatus as they walk along the rope bridges and are supervised well by the staff. Children have good hand to eye co-ordination as they play ball games and roll hula-hoops along the field. They enjoy nature walks around the village and the recreation ground, reaping the benefits of the fresh air and burning off their excess energy, helping them to settle down to activities which require more attention when they go back inside. For example, building complicated train tracks or completing difficult jig-saw puzzles.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is satisfactory.

Children's safety on the premises is promoted because staff are vigilant and carry out risk assessments daily, as they check the premises before the children arrive. Staff also check the equipment daily as they set up the hall. Children learn how to keep themselves safe through discussions and routines. For example, they remind each other of the rule not to run in the hall and are able to explain what happens during a fire drill. Drills are practised every half-term to ensure the children and staff are fully aware of the evacuation procedures. Children are supervised well during outside play as staff are positioned effectively to ensure all children remain within the limits set by the staff. For example, one child explained that they are not allowed to go past the end of the building when they are on the field.

The main hall is set up before the children arrive and activities are related to the six areas of learning. There is ample space for the children to take part in table-top activities and floor play on mats and rugs with construction toys and train sets. Children have access to a range of equipment, resources and learning materials which are suitable for their age and stage of development. The resources are clean and well-maintained and are brightly coloured to attract the children's interest. Cleaning rotas are used to ensure the play materials are safe and provide a healthy play environment for all the children. The staff team have a clear understanding of the child protection procedures and the supervisor has attended an advanced training course to ensure she is fully up-to-date with current practice. All staff report any concerns to the supervisor to help safeguard the children in their care.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is satisfactory.

Children are happy and settle quickly on arrival, talking openly to the staff and their peers. They hang up their coats and bags and eagerly look to see what activities are out for the session. Staff listen actively to the children and respond well, engaging them in detailed conversation about themselves and their families, building trusting relationships and helping the children to feel safe and secure. Children benefit from the interaction with staff, as they play on the floor building large scale models, sit quietly in the book corner to hear their favourite stories and receive encouragement during table-top activities. Children laugh and giggle throughout the session, having fun with the staff as they make jokes, sing songs and invent characters during role-play.

Nursery Education

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. Children are making steady progress towards the early learning goals. The staff team have a clear understanding of the Foundation Stage and plan a well-balanced programme in the hall. Staff observe the children's progress and achievements well and use the information gathered to inform the planned curriculum to ensure it meets the needs of the children. Staff are aware of the intended learning outcomes for the children, although the effectiveness of the activities are not consistently monitored or evaluated at this time. Children's outdoor play experiences are limited and they have few opportunities to take part in a full range of activities covering all six areas of learning when they are outside. Staff are skilled at asking open-ended questions during free-play, encouraging the children to problem-solve and think about what they are trying to achieve. For example, when the children are building trolleys with the Big Builder resources and constructing complicated train tracks. The challenges for children are sufficient and aimed at each child's level and stage of development. Children take part in many different activities throughout the sessions and benefit from one-to-one activities and large and small group activities, developing their social skills well.

Children are independent and are developing good self-care skills. They understand the group rules and often remind each other as they play. They concentrate well and confidently suggest ideas and interact well with each other. Children's vocabulary is developing well; staff extend the children's vocabulary at every opportunity during practical activities. For example, staff introduce new words, such as occupations as they talk about the people who help us at circle time. Children recognise letters and link the sounds with confidence. They are beginning to understand that text has meaning as they handle books independently and make good use of the comfortable book area. Children have opportunities to practise their emergent writing skills, during free-play and are encouraged to attempt to write their names on their work. Writing

materials are available to the children throughout the session, encouraging them to develop their skills.

Children count confidently up to and above 10 throughout the day using one to one correspondence with everyday items and they recognise numerals with ease. Children are able to recognise and recreate simple patterns during planned maths activities, using small building blocks. They use mathematical language to describe size, position and height. Children are beginning to solve problems and staff ask open-ended questions, encouraging the children to think about what they are trying to achieve. Children are observant and notice when a rescue helicopter flies across the sky. Staff talk to the children making the most of the incidental learning opportunity. They talk about where they think the helicopter might be going and then about other forms of transport. Children are developing a good sense of time and place as they recall past events and talk about the places they have been.

Children have opportunities to explore a range of materials; they enjoy water play incorporating mathematical language and concepts. They use a selection of natural and manmade materials with confidence during craft activities. They are able to mix their own colours and choose the materials they want to use developing their freedom of choice and self-selection. Children manipulate a range of tools and resources with increasing control. They use musical instruments with ease, paint pictures and create recognisable models with play dough. Children sing songs from memory, often linked to themes and confidently match actions to rhymes.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

Staff have a very clear understanding of equal opportunities and implement the policies and procedures effectively. Children have equal access to the resources and activities, staff supply additional resources if necessary for children to complete their own ideas e.g. extra paint, paper, more puzzles. Parents complete detailed registration forms about their children, this helps to ensure that children's individual needs are met. Children work well together and recognise the need to share and take turns. They have a positive attitude towards themselves and one another, and involve themselves in each others play. Children have access to a wide range of multi-cultural resources, and see positive images around the display boards and enjoy playing with a variety of dolls, books, figures and puzzles. Children's social, moral, cultural and spiritual development is fostered.

Children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and children who have English as an additional language are strongly supported in the setting. The special needs co-ordinator has a clear understanding of her role and liaises effectively with the parents and other agencies. Children behave extremely well and are polite. Clear rules and boundaries are implemented consistently, so the children know what is expected of them. Children are encouraged to use their manners throughout the sessions. Behaviour policies and procedures are included in the parents information pack to help keep them informed. Staff are very positive role models and deal with issues calmly and with a relaxed manner. Staff develop strong relationships with the parents and take the time to get to know each family well. Parents feel staff are friendly and approachable, they are able to discuss any issues that may arise with the staff at any time. Parents receive regular newsletters and the notice board is used effectively to keep parents informed about the curriculum, events and any changes to practice.

Partnership with parents of children who receive funding for early education is satisfactory. Parents receive information about the Foundation Stage and the planned curriculum. They are

kept informed about their children's progress through discussion with their children's key worker and they have access to the records of achievement at any time on request. The setting also holds parents evenings to discuss the children's achievements. Parents are encouraged to share what they know about their child. When the child first attends the pre-school they fill out a registration form and meet with the pre-school supervisor to go through the information. However, parents do not have the opportunity to make written contributions to their children's records at this time.

Organisation

The organisation is satisfactory.

Daily routines are organised well and run smoothly. The children move freely from one activity to another, never having to wait around. This ensures they are occupied throughout the day. The ratios are maintained at all times and staff deployment is good, enabling staff to provide support for the children. The setting meets the needs of the range of children for whom it provides. Children are not fully protected because some the policies and procedures are out-of-date and need to be reviewed in line with current practice and procedures. All of the required paperwork is in place, although the children's full names are not always recorded, which could cause confusion in the future if the information required is not clear. The recruitment and vetting procedures are not robust and do not currently include health checks to ensure all staff are suitable.

The leadership and management of the setting are satisfactory. The committee plays an active role in the pre-school, providing support for the staff team. The committee employs a supervisor to oversee the day to day running of the group. Roles and responsibilities are defined, ensuring that most procedures are followed to protect the children and the staff. The staff team work well together providing an appropriate environment for the children. However, the nursery education is not being monitored effectively and planned activities are not evaluated to ensure the learning intentions are being met by the children. Activities are not revisited if children do not grasp the concepts aimed for, slowing their progress through the stepping stones.

The supervisor organises the nursery education programme well. She ensures most elements are covered appropriately, although some development is needed during outside play. The supervisor checks the children's progress records to ensure they are maintained and up-to-date. Children's individual needs are discussed and additional activities or resources are provided if a child needs extra support in one area, this helps to ensure all the children make steady progress towards the early learning goals during their time at the setting.

Improvements since the last inspection

At the last care inspection the setting was asked to ensure that at all times resources are organised so they are readily accessible to children and staff are deployed effectively to support children's play and learning. They were also asked to ensure the complaints procedure includes the address and telephone number of the regulator. The committee have purchased low-level storage trolleys to ensure the children can freely access the resources to increase and develop the children's independence. The complaints policy still includes an old Ofsted contact number and needs to be updated. However, the current number is displayed on the notice board for parent's information, ensuring they can contact Ofsted if necessary.

At the last inspection for nursery education the setting was asked to review the information provided to parents, ensuring they are provided with information about the Foundation Stage

and how the setting promotes children's learning in all six areas of learning. To develop the current systems for planning and assessment to cover all sessions, ensuring that the six areas of learning are included and that planning contains details of the intended learning outcomes for activities; ensure that the assessments of children's learning and the educational programme clearly inform the planning. They were also asked to evaluate the use of time and staff deployment, ensuring that all elements of the session, for instance snack time, meet the needs of all children. The group have since developed a prospectus for parents, which includes information about the Foundation Stage and wall displays are used to show how the setting incorporates the six areas of learning into the daily routines. Staff fully assess the children's achievements and progress and use the information to identify their next steps. The information is then used to inform the short-term curriculum planning to ensure it meets the needs of the children. However, the effectiveness of the nursery education is not being monitored or evaluated adequately at this time. Staff deployment is good and the daily routines work well. Snack-time has been re-organised to ensure all children benefit from the social time in small groups, enabling them to develop their social skills well.

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):

- ensure children's full names are recorded on all documents
- review and update the policies to reflect current practice and procedures
- improve the recruitment and vetting procedures to ensure children are fully safeguarded when new staff are appointed.

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):

- increase and improve the children's outdoor play experiences to incorporate the six areas of learning on a regular basis

- provide opportunities for parents to make written contributions to their children's records of achievement
- develop a system to consistently monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the learning intentions during planned activities.

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