

Stepping Stones Day Nursery

Inspection report for early years provision

Unique Reference Number	317402
Inspection date	21 May 2007
Inspector	Carys Millican
Setting Address	Stepping Stones Day Nursery, 58-62 Wood Street, Maryport, Cumbria, CA15 6LD
Telephone number	01900 812773
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Registered person	Stepping Stones Day Nursery (Cumbria) Ltd
Type of inspection	Integrated
Type of care	Full day care, Out of School 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 good.

WHAT SORT OF SETTING IS IT?

Stepping Stones Day Nursery is a privately owned day nursery. It opened in 1991 and operates from within a converted mid-terraced property in the centre of the West Cumbrian town of Maryport. Children have access to the whole of the ground floor except the staff office, kitchen, utility room and staff toilet. There are two main playrooms on the ground floor, accommodating children up to age two years (the baby room) and two to three years. There is an additional pre-school room on the first floor. A maximum of 65 children may attend the nursery at any one time. The nursery is open, Monday to Friday 07.30 to 18.00 for 51 weeks of the year. The nursery also operates a holiday play scheme and out of school club (the Jungle Club). The Jungle Club occupies the toddler room and pre-school rooms (when pre-school children are not present) and is registered for a maximum of up to 23 children. Children are escorted across a shared yard to the rear of the property to an enclosed outdoor play area. There is an additional upper play area available for outdoor play.

There are currently 80 children aged from birth to under eight years on roll. Of these, 25 children receive funding for early education. Children attend from within the town and the surrounding

rural areas. The nursery currently supports a number of children with learning difficulties and disabilities and also supports a number of children who speak English as an additional language.

Stepping Stones Day Nursery employs 11 members of staff, of these nine hold appropriate early years qualifications and one is working towards a qualification. The nursery is a member of the National Day Nursery Association.

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PROVISION

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

Children's health is promoted by staff who have a sound knowledge of the setting's health and hygiene procedures. Appropriate health and hygiene practices and routines are followed by staff in the preparation, handling and serving of food. Tables are cleaned before use and after eating, staff brush up any spilt food to prevent accidents. Children learn basic hygiene practices from an early age, such as washing hands before eating and after toileting. They explain clearly why they must wash their hands to get rid of germs. Staff follow appropriate hygiene practices and procedures when changing nappies. Children's welfare and the protection of other children are fully considered by staff following the sick children's policy.

Children learn about healthy eating and begin to understand the importance of a balanced diet. Although children are provided with appropriate drinking utensils, they do not use plates at snack time. They are provided with a selection of healthy fruit snacks and enjoy the social occasion created at snack and mealtimes. However, children's independence and development of self-help skills are not encouraged at this time. They do not help to pour their own drinks nor are they encouraged to hand out the snack. Fresh drinking water is readily available to children at all times. Children's dietary needs are met as the staff follow children's individual needs, preferences and parental wishes closely. Records of babies and toddlers care needs are maintained for parents.

Children's physical development is promoted. Most children access the outdoor play area on a rota basis where they ride on scooters and balance on coloured basins. Physical activity is encouraged indoors on most days. using a number of music and movement tapes. They children enjoy this activity which contributes to their good health and all-round development. Children go on outings and trips to local facilities and places of interest, such as the animal farm and marina. Outdoor activities are limited for babies. They can access a range of climbing frames, slides and tunnels as they play indoors. The use of household furniture in the baby room encourages babies to pull themselves up and staff encourage walking skills. Children rest according to their needs and quieter activities are provided for children as they look at books and listen to stories.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

Children are cared for in a warm, welcoming, safe and secure environment. Safety equipment is in place to ensure children's safety in all rooms. Children can confidently move around the spacious play areas indoors and help themselves to a range of easily accessible, age-appropriate resources and activities. Children make independent choices and decisions about their play using safe and suitable equipment. Resources are checked regularly for loose or broken parts. Children feel a sense of belonging. Their art and craft work is creatively displayed and

photographs show them enjoying a number of different activities. Staff continually adapt the free play areas, such as role play, to relate to the planned topics and activities. Resources are rotated to maintain stimulation and interest.

Children are kept safe and secure when playing indoors and outside. Risks of accidental injury to children are minimised because staff use detailed risk assessments to help reduce potential hazards. Children cannot leave the premises unsupervised and there is no unauthorised access to children. They are escorted by staff to the upstairs pre-school room and the lower outdoor play area. They are kept safe when playing outdoors. The gate is securely locked and staff supervise the children. Children are protected by the health and safety practices and procedures staff follow to help prevent accidents. Children begin to learn about what is dangerous and how to keep themselves safe. Visits from the local police and fire fighters are beneficial in raising children's awareness of 'stranger danger' and fire safety. Fire fighting equipment is in place and the fire evacuation procedure is clearly displayed and practised regularly with the children. Older children clearly explain what they must do in an emergency and where they must go to. Children are kept safe on outings as adult-child ratios are maintained and permission is obtained from parents.

Children are protected by staff who have a sound knowledge and understanding of child protection policies and procedures. Children are kept safe and secure by staff. The lost and uncollected child policy is in place and the attendance of children, staff and visitors is recorded. There are secure systems in place to protect children from non-vetted persons. A chain is used on all outer doors to allow staff to restrict the door opening fully to persons not known to them. Children are protected by the staff ensuring that only persons known by them collect the children. Children's safety and well-being is enhanced by the staff's commitment in undertaking additional training.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

Children thoroughly enjoy their time at the nursery. They enter happily and eagerly greet the staff and their friends. Children benefit from the good support that they receive from staff and the sensitive and calm approach to their care and learning. They achieve because the staff are experienced and have a good knowledge and understanding of child development, the 'Birth to three matters' framework and 'Curriculum guidance for the foundation stage'.

Children are happy, contented and eager to take part in activities. They settle in easily and quickly become confident in unfamiliar surroundings. Children enjoy a wide range of indoor activities. They are busy, well motivated and actively engaged in their play. Children enjoy the post office role play area where they pretend to buy stamps and cards and then confidently use the writing area, to write their name on the card. Information is obtained from parents on their child's individual needs. Information is used as a starting block to build on and used to further children's development in line with practice within the 'Birth to three matters' framework. However, the key-worker system is not implemented. Staff complete observations and developmental records for younger children and babies. Babies enjoy playing with a selection of home made sensory bottles and watch and giggle as the contents mix together and form patterns. Children sing a range of action songs and traditional nursery rhymes, starting at an early age and thoroughly enjoy joining in. Children's access to outdoor physical play is limited, however, staff encourage access to this area on a rota system. Indoor physical play is limited for older children. Younger children, however, enjoy crawling through tunnels, balance of climbing frames and use the slides. Children enthusiastically join in the music and movement

tape and play musical instruments to the music played. Staff constantly explain things to children and children confidently ask questions.

Children relate well to each other and socialise well, building up good relationships with staff and other children. They begin to distinguish between right and wrong as they learn to take turns and share resources. Children develop self-esteem through the constant praise received from adults. Younger children make choices and decisions in their play and there is a balance between adult and child-led activities, which allows them to experience new ideas and to acquire new skills. Children begin to make sense of the world and express their ideas and interests. They enjoy the interesting and stimulating activities provided and their concentration levels are maintained. Children make new modelling dough and enthusiastically explain how many cups full of salt and flour they used. Children sit quietly at story-time and they join in enthusiastically with the story, as their communication skills are supported through good adult-child interactions.

Nursery Education.

The quality of teaching and learning is good. Children make steady progress towards the early learning goals. They are provided with a range of stimulating and interesting activities related to their needs through the continuous free play provision and focussed activities provided for them. Children access a range of resources which support their learning. They use Information and Communication Technology equipment, such as computers, calculators, shop tills, phones. They access a range of construction materials which are rotated to maintain stimulation and interest. Children are eager to learn, being self-assured in their play and confident to try out new experiences. They access a range of free choice activities in areas, such as role play, creative, construction, sand and mark-making.

Children chat confidently using a wide range of language, vocabulary and sentence construction when interacted with, their thinking and recall skills are promoted at story time. Children recognise each letter of the alphabet and the sound each makes. They listen to each other, share experiences and are inquisitive by asking questions. Children are confident, friendly and having fun. They join in activities, such as story time and recite the story with the staff member. Children gain confidence in using numbers in their play, however, opportunities to extend children's mathematical skills and problem solving during everyday experiences and daily routines are not encouraged.

Children begin to make sense of the world around them. They enjoy outings to places of interest and benefit from visits from people who help us within the community. Their art work is creatively displayed on walls and in the cloakroom. Children listen to staff and follow simple instructions within the focussed activities provided. They enjoy using the different textured paper to create their post van collage. They develop their hand-eye coordination when using rollers and cutters to make their pretend current buns out of modelling dough. Children work well together and develop socially. They benefit from mixing with younger children at mealtimes in the toddler room.

Children's learning needs are understood by the manager and staff as they have a sound knowledge of the Foundation Stage, early learning goals and the six areas of learning. Children's learning experiences are planned for, observations made and their achievement and the stepping stones towards the early learning goals are recorded. However, individual learning needs are not identified and the next steps in learning are not recorded. The medium term plans and topic are displayed for parents and staff on the wall. Staff follow the good role model set by

the manager and their teaching practice is effective in helping children to learn. Staff are aware of the stepping stones and areas of learning and contribute ideas towards planned activities. They find out about children's skills, interests and needs and build on this information as a starting point. Staff know the children well and use questions to challenge their thinking and language skills.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

Children's understanding of equality is promoted through activities that encourage equal play. The children play harmoniously together as they learn to share and take turns. They enjoy playing the postman, delivering the letters and use the paint computer programme. Children are familiar with the routine. They help tidy up and explain that it is nearly snack time. Children begin to value each other's contributions in group-time activities. They generally sit quietly during circle-time and listen to staff during story time. They listen to their friends as they sing nursery rhymes. Children are generally well motivated in their play and actively engaged throughout their time spent in the nursery. Children develop good relationships with each other, as they sit together and share experiences. They form good relationships with the staff who are on hand to help, praise and support the children during the session. Children are confident, friendly and extremely happy in the setting. Their individual care needs are known and met by staff in discussion with their parents. Children become aware of the wider society as they explore their own and others' cultures and traditions, such as Chinese New Year and Divali.

Children are generally well behaved. They respond to staff's consistently positive strategies, such as giving time to listen, praising achievements and providing individual support and comfort. Children form good relationships with staff and other children. They become aware of their own needs and the needs of others and begin to learn patience and understanding. Children learn about right and wrong as the staff consistently encourage their understanding as they play together. They share resources and show a willingness to help put away toys and equipment when requested by staff. Children make suitable choices and decisions about their play. Their confidence and self-assurance is fully encouraged. These positive approaches foster children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

Partnership with parents is good. Children are well supported as they settle into the nursery by the induction arrangements agreed with their parents and through the good partnership between parents and staff. Children's individual care needs are discussed and recorded at registration. Information about children's attainment is obtained on entry and through detailed observations of children at play. Parents and children are made very welcome and praise the friendliness of the staff caring for their children. The quality of the care and education for children provided by the setting is valued by parents as they indicate that their children are eager to attend, enjoy the activities and make good progress in the nursery. Children's experiences during the pre-school sessions are shared with their parents in detail at the daily handovers and through observational diaries and stepping stone progress sheets. The use of initial assessment to inform the planning to meet individual needs is in place and children are placed in groups according to age. The arrangements for children's care are shared in detail with their parents on collection with detailed record sheets maintained for toddlers and babies. Information is available for parents on two notice-boards, with additional information in parents leaflets, regular newsletters and within the policies and procedures. The arrangements for children's care are supported by a complaints procedure and the established system for recording complaints, however, parents are not fully aware of who to contact other than the provider.

Children's steady progress is welcomed by parents. Opportunities to extend and reinforce children's learning potential at home is in place. Children take books home each night and newsletters contain ideas to help children with their learning, such as use of the 'Jolly phonics' system. The transition into school is made easier by the good partnerships and links formed with the several local schools in the area.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

Children are well cared for by adults who have a clear sense of purpose and a commitment to continual improvement. The staff are qualified and experienced. The recruitment and vetting procedures ensure children are well protected and cared for by staff with a sound knowledge and understanding of child development. The induction procedure ensures that the pre-school policies and procedures are applied and staff appraisals are completed. Individual training needs are recognised and continual training and development is encouraged. Staff and planning meetings are encouraged to make sure continuity is maintained and information and curriculum planning developed in the interest of the children. Although staff are consistent in each room the key worker system is not established and opportunities for babies to access fresh air is limited. Staff use appropriate strategies to manage children's behaviour, which are consistently applied in practice. Members of staff work well together as a team and are clear about their roles and responsibilities. The premises are generally well organised and indoor space is suitably laid out to maximise play opportunities. Children are provided with opportunities to enable choice and decision making and to encourage exploration in the environment through their senses. Younger children are provided with natural materials to enable investigation and exploration. They access text labels to recognise what is in the containers and drawers and they choose a book to read and relax in the quiet areas. Documentation and record keeping that ensures the efficient and safe management of the provision, and contributes to the health, safety and well-being of children, is in place.

Leadership and management of the nursery education provided for children is good. An all inclusive environment is encouraged and all children are included and treated with equal concern. Children make steady progress towards the early learning goals from their learning experiences within the resourced, free choice areas and focussed activities. The manager has a strong commitment to development and improvement. This is shown in documents, such as minutes of staff meetings, and lead teacher reports. Planning is established to indicate the focussed activities, to help children's development across the six areas of learning. The evaluation of activities and child observations are maintained, however, children's next steps are not clearly identified to inform future planning for individual needs. Children's personal information is collected and recorded in detail. Parents are provided with information about the provision including how to help their child at home. Pre-school children benefit from the close working relationship established between the local schools, enabling those children who will join schools to settle in seamlessly.

Overall, the provision meets the needs of the range of the children for whom it provides.

Improvements since the last inspection

At the last inspection the provider agreed to improve the following documentation, health and hygiene, planning of the environment and mealtimes and staff involvement in planning.

Since the last inspection a number of policies have been reviewed and updated with recent changes in legislation and parental permission has been obtained for outings using the managers car. Appropriate steps are taken to prevent the spread of infection and the successful extermination of ants. Staff follow appropriate hygiene practices when changing nappies by ensuring they are protected by the use of aprons and by ensuring gloves are provided. Staffs regular attendance at planning meetings ensures a combined effort is made to plan for and monitor the use of the environment, resources and facilities to ensure a broad and balanced curriculum is provided. Mealtimes are arranged to allow children to socialise together and enable staff to maximise children's behavioural development.

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

The quality and standards of the nursery education are good.

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):

- provide children with suitable utensils at snack time
- establish a key worker system and increase opportunities for babies to experience outdoor activities.

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):

- provided opportunities within everyday routines for all children to experience physical activities and to reinforce children's mathematical skills and problem solving
- make sure observation of individual children's progress and achievement identify what children need to learn next.

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