

Stepping Stones Nursery

Inspection report for early years provision

Unique Reference Number	EY279030
Inspection date	23 January 2008
Inspector	Janet Fairhurst
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Registered person	Vicky Johnston
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 Nursery opened in 2004. It operates from the ground floor of a two storey industrial unit on a main road about one mile from the centre of Carlisle. There is an enclosed outdoor play area available at the rear of the property. Stepping Stones Nursery serves the local and surrounding area.

There are currently 55 children from a few months old to four years on roll, of these 11 receive nursery education funding. Children attend for a variety of sessions. The setting supports children with learning difficulties and disability issues. The group opens five days a week all year round. Sessions are from 08:00 until 18:00.

There are six members of staff who work with the children of which, five hold a relevant childcare qualification and one is working towards a level 3 qualification. The setting receive support from the local authority.

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PROVISION

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is satisfactory.

The children are cared for in a warm and welcoming environment where they learn to manage their personal hygiene needs independently. Children are encouraged to wash their hands ready for snack and appropriate nappy changing routines are in place. Staff use anti-bacterial spray when wiping tables down after messy play and before snack. Children who are ill or infectious are excluded to minimise the risk of cross infection. The daily routine allows for all children to have periods of rest and activity, which suit their individual needs. Children are well cared for in the event of illness or injury as staff are trained in first aid and follow suitable procedures for accidents, illness and the administration of medication.

All children benefit from regular outdoor play sessions. They have access to a satisfactory range of outdoor equipment, such as wheeled toys, scooters, hoops and balls that promote their large physical development and coordination. Babies and toddlers have their physical needs met well. They are able to move freely, practising crawling and newly emerging walking skills.

Children's growth and development is generally promoted through healthy snacks which usually consist of fresh fruit and toast. Children's main meal is provided by their parents and these are stored and reheated appropriately. The nursery endeavours to promote a healthy eating policy, providing parents with verbal guidance as to the content of packed lunches. All children eat together with the aim to providing a social occasion for the children. However, as staff do not always sit with them during meal times to encourage discussion and good manners this is not fully successful. Although some staff try hard, during meal times young children do not always receive the one-to-one attention that they need to help them develop the skill that leads to independent feeding.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is satisfactory.

Children are cared for in an environment which is secure. Appropriate risk assessments are conducted and practice is consistently evaluated to increase all children's safe participation in everyday activities. There is clear planning for safe evacuation in an emergency and records are maintained. Staff supervise children well so as to create a balance which allows children to move freely within the setting, whilst ensuring their well-being is maintained. Children are beginning to understand how to keep themselves safe; they know and accept safety rules, for example, no running in the nursery and the reason why it is not acceptable to throw toys. Children's safety is further promoted through staff's awareness of the potential risks and the steps they take to minimise these. For example, during outdoor play a padlock is fitted to the external gate and the effective procedures for the collection of children.

Children can move freely around the space available and make independent choices about where they wish to play. They have access to an acceptable range of age appropriate play equipment. Most of the resources are stored on open shelves which enables the children to make choices and decisions about what they want to play with. However, not all of the equipment is easily accessible due to the storage which is cluttered and disorganised.

Children's welfare is effectively safeguarded by staff who recognise their responsibility to protect children in their care. Staff are guided by a clear child protection policy which outlines

the procedures to follow should they have concerns. Staff attend regular training in order to update their knowledge.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

Children are happy, settled and enjoy their time at the nursery. They know the routine well, enter the group confidently and leave parents easily. They are keen to participate in the activities and play opportunities provided. The close and caring relationships established increase children's sense of trust and help to develop a strong sense of self. Babies and toddlers play contentedly, learning to enjoy being with others. They have opportunity to explore treasure baskets with different materials, wooden and metal objects, which stimulate their senses and curiosity.

There is a key worker system in the nursery. This helps to ensure that staff get to know the children well and parents are informed about their children's progress. All staff are responsible for making observations about children's achievements and recording these. Staff use the 'Birth to three matters' framework when planning activities for younger children and this means that activities meet their needs. Effective systems are in place between parents and staff which ensures that children are cared for in line with their own routines. Children are developing early communication skills as staff warmly interact with them through play and everyday activities, such as nappy changing.

Nursery Education

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. Staff are developing their knowledge of the Foundation Stage, use a reasonable range of teaching methods and have an appropriate understanding of how children learn. Documented observations of individual children are used to inform future planning. The planning includes a range of interesting topics which are mostly taught successfully. Children's progress records and assessments are in place and are closely linked to the stepping stones towards learning. Children benefit from good quality interaction and appropriate use of questioning techniques to encourage them to talk and think about what they are doing. However, some aspects of learning, particularly in mathematical development and communication language and literacy, receive insufficient attention and challenge as resources to support the activities are limited and do not offer sufficient challenge to provoke children's thought processes to extend their own play.

Children are very happy and settled in the group and have formed good relationships with adults and their peers. Their confidence and self-esteem is built up by staff who are sensitive to their needs and know them well. Children's social skills develop well. They learn to share and take turns and be polite and considerate to others. They are keen to participate in activities and generally concentrate well as they complete tasks. Children are aware of what is right and wrong and their behaviour is good. Children enjoy stories staff read to them and regularly choose books independently. They listen attentively and contribute to conversations about stories and their own experiences. Some children are beginning to recognise their own name and are showing some interest in print within the environment. However, activities are not consistently extended to incorporate opportunities to mark make.

Children are beginning to show an interest in numbers and regularly sing number songs. Most of the children confidently count to five and beyond, however, opportunities to increase their recognition and problem solving skills are missed. They recognise and name some shapes and enjoy completing shape puzzles. Ideas about numbers and simple mathematical concepts are

not sufficiently reinforced. Children do not have regular access to a computer to progress appropriately in their use of technology in their play. The regular daily routine helps children to develop a sense of time and they confidently talk about themselves and their experiences. There are some opportunities for children to learn about nature and the natural world. For example, the children enjoyed a 'forest school session' in the woodlands nearby. They created pictures from the various objects they found in the wood, made faces from clay and discussed important issues, such as not dropping litter. Children's awareness of their own environment and the people within it is brought to life by a range of visitors, such as the community policeman and fire brigade.

Children exercise regularly in a range of fun ways. They show developing coordination as they manipulate equipment and develop a good awareness of space as they manoeuvre wheeled toys and run around. They participate in musical movement sessions and use their imagination well to interpret the instructions and music. Children's keen participation in action rhymes and singing at group time shows that they are able to effectively sing simple songs from memory and recognise repeated sounds and patterns.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is satisfactory.

Staff take time to find out about the individual children who attend, such as what their likes and dislikes are. As a result, their needs are met whilst at the setting. Children engage in suitable activities to promote an understanding of the wider world as they celebrate festivals, such as Divali and Chinese New Year. Staff demonstrate a good understanding and awareness of learning difficulties and disability issues. Very good arrangements are in place for children to have individual staff support to help them take part in everyday activities. Staff work extremely well with other professionals to ensure all children's needs are met. Additional training has been undertaken by staff, such as Makaton and this has had a positive impact on the ability to communicate with all children.

Children are well behaved. For example, they take turns, share, and show concern and acceptance of the needs of others. Children are encouraged to take responsibility for their own behaviour through effective management strategies and methods. They are generally well supported by staff as they are given lots of encouragement, support and praise which raises their self-esteem and self-worth. As a result, children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is fostered.

Partnership with parents and carers is satisfactory. Parents are greeted at the beginning and end of the nursery session, where there is always time to talk to staff about how their children have enjoyed their day. Short-term plans are shared with parents via the noticeboard which means that parents have some knowledge of what their child is participating in. However, at present there is little written information that tells parents about the Foundation Stage and the six areas of learning. Parents of funded nursery children have limited opportunities to become involved in their children's learning. Parents are encouraged to participate in social events, such as annual outings and are also invited to some focused advice sessions held by staff which include potty training, sleep problems and play ideas. The key worker system is implemented well in order for parents to build a positive relationship with the main carer of their child and exchange information regularly.

Organisation

The organisation is satisfactory.

The nursery is organised in a way that enables children to be grouped appropriately according to age. Each area has clear routines in place to support the day to day running of the nursery satisfactorily. Staff are deployed well, they work together as a team, and are clear about their roles and responsibilities. The nursery manager encourages the staff to undertake training to extend their professionalism. The staff have a positive attitude towards training and development. There is a formal induction procedure and an annual appraisal system to ensure staff's continuing suitability.

The leadership and management for nursery education is satisfactory and generally supports the implementation of the Foundation Stage. The manager is committed and motivated. She works directly with the children and provides a good role model to staff. She informally assesses the strengths and weakness of the setting and staff, however, this system is not fully effective, resulting in some gaps in the curriculum and teaching. The staff work closely as a team and meet regularly to review the nursery provision.

All legally required documentation which contributes to children's health, safety and well-being is in place and is regularly reviewed. Overall, the provision meets the needs of the range of the children for whom it provides.

Improvements since the last inspection

At the last care inspection the nursery was asked to; develop the range of activities to promote equality and diversity, review arrangements to ensure children are able to access drinking water and review arrangements for the storage of food. The nursery have made some progress with regard to the previous recommendations. They have purchased some additional resources that reflect diversity and equality. Children now participate in different celebrations and festivals from around the world and this is reinforced further by the opportunity to taste a variety of foods and engage in craft activities. Snack time is made totally flexible where children are able to decide for themselves when they wish to eat it and their individual drinking cups and bottles are always accessible to them. Children's packed lunch boxes are stored in the kitchen. All high risk or dairy foods are labelled and stored in the fridge. The improvements made are beginning to develop children's awareness and understanding of the wider world and enhance their overall safety and well-being.

Complaints since the last inspection

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.

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.

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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 arrangements and organisation of meal times to ensure that all children receive appropriate care and attention
- provide more opportunities for children to use natural, real and everyday objects during imaginative play (also applies to nursery education)
- improve the presentation of resources to encourage and enable children to make independent choices (also applies to nursery education).

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):

- improve the range of activities that cover mark making, mathematics and information technology. Improve the teaching methods to support these so that children are interested and motivated to learn
- provide parents with information about the curriculum and how it links to the progress their children are making towards the early learning goals
- develop further the opportunities for parents to become involved with their child's learning.

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