

Stepping Stones

Inspection report for early years provision

Unique Reference Number	118617
Inspection date	15 August 2007
Inspector	Deborah Ann Benn
Setting Address	Ardleigh Green Road, Hornchurch, Essex, RM11 2LL
Telephone number	01708 462827
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Registered person	Havering College of Further And Higher Education
Type of inspection	Integrated
Type of care	Full day care

ABOUT THIS INSPECTION

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

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

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

The key inspection judgements and what they mean

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

Good: this aspect of the provision is strong

Satisfactory: this aspect of the provision is sound

Inadequate: this aspect of the provision is not good enough

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

THE QUALITY AND STANDARDS OF THE CARE AND NURSERY EDUCATION

On the basis of the evidence collected on this inspection:

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

The quality and standards of the nursery education are satisfactory.

WHAT SORT OF SETTING IS IT?

Stepping Stones Day Nursery is run by Havering College of Further And Higher Education. It opened in 1991 and operates from a purpose built pre-fabricated unit within the premises of the Ardleigh Green campus of Havering College of Further and Higher Education. It is situated in a residential area in Hornchurch in the London borough of Havering. A maximum of 43 children may attend the nursery at any one time. The nursery is open each weekday from 07.45 to 18.15 for 51 weeks of the year. All children share access to a secure enclosed outdoor play area.

The nursery serves HSBC bank staff, college staff, students and the local community. There are currently 58 children aged from three months to under five years on roll. Of these, 12 receive funding for early education.

The nursery employs 14 members of staff. All hold appropriate early years qualifications.

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PROVISION

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

Children benefit from the high standard of hygiene and cleanliness throughout the nursery. Simple routines such as regular cleaning rotas and clear nappy changing procedures, help to promote children's health. Staff encourage children's awareness of keeping themselves healthy through discussion and being good role models. Children readily verbalise the need to wash their hands before eating to make sure that they don't eat anything dirty and get a "tummy ache". The need for good hygiene is also promoted through other activities such as cookery where children understand that the first thing they do before starting the activity is to wash their hands. The use of photographs and pictorial representations in the toilet area remind children to wash their hands after using the lavatory.

Children learn to be 'sun-aware', they recognise the importance of protecting themselves from being burned and patiently wait to have their sun-cream reapplied and put a hat on before going outside to play.

Good record keeping ensures that children's health is appropriately safeguarded. Staff are very aware of children's individual dietary and medical needs and practical systems ensure that this information is passed on appropriately. Parental permission is in place to administer medication and all accidents and first aid action taken is clearly recorded. All staff have current first aid training in the care of children and babies and a significant number hold a full first aid at work certificate in addition to this.

Substantial meals are provided which actively promote healthy eating. Displayed menus keep parents well informed and demonstrate the value placed upon giving children good quality food and balanced meals. Children have fresh fruit and vegetables daily and are given regular drinks of fresh water. Meal times are social occasions, staff sit with the children and encourage discussion, however, opportunities are missed for children to develop independence skills or make choices as current systems do not support children serving themselves.

Daily use of the garden supports children's physical development, use of a wide range of outdoor equipment helps children to practise their large motor skills such as running, jumping, climbing and balancing. Children use smaller tools such as the computer mouse and scissors with accuracy and confidence.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

Children have ample space to play in most of the play rooms and staff take effort to make the best use of the limited space available in the pre-school room. Staff move furniture to provide more room for different activities and enable children to access resources easily. Good use is made of the safe and suitable garden area for frequent outdoor play activities for all of the children. The variety of surfaces and amount of shade in the garden area means that it can be utilised throughout the year to provide for a wide range of activities. Good quality furnishings and fittings throughout the nursery support children's needs, providing safe and comfortable places for them to eat, sleep and play. Children access the age appropriate toys and play equipment freely, making their own choices from the wide range of good quality resources available.

The pre-fabricated premises are well maintained and thought and consideration on behalf of the staff team has resulted in a welcoming and homely atmosphere. The entrance areas and playrooms are attractively decorated with appropriate posters, photographs and displays of children's work. Daily checks of all areas plus monthly room inspections and six-monthly building checks means that any concerns are noted and corrected as soon as possible. Effective communication with the estate office at the college ensures that any maintenance issues are dealt with swiftly and high standards upheld.

Children are cared for in a safe and secure environment. High regard is given to safety throughout the premises. The use of security code keypads means that only staff are able to access the building without using the intercom. Staff check visitors identity before agreeing access. Parents are required to inform staff who will be collecting their child at the end of the day and the use of an individual password system and photographs further confirms the identity of the person collecting the child. Detailed risk assessments are carried out to identify hazards and improve procedures to keep children safe both on and off the premises.

Children's well-being is appropriately safeguarded. Staff have a clear understanding of what constitutes abuse and what action to take if concerns were raised. The child protection policy appropriately has regard to local procedures and National Standards.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is satisfactory.

Children are happy and enjoy their time at nursery. They interact positively with each other and respond readily to staff who treat them with affection and warmth. Babies' language development is supported and encouraged as staff interpret their sounds and gesticulations and value their participation. Toddlers listen with wrapt attention to stories, enthusiastically pre-empting what happens next. All children have daily access to art and craft activities and are actively encouraged to represent their own thoughts and ideas. Children enjoy playing outdoors and take part in a number of activities where they can practise their physical skills as well as play with sand and water on a regular basis. Children show delight as they giggle whilst playing with foam and eagerly talk about its smell and texture as well as using their imaginations. Although the playrooms have role play areas, these are not consistently well presented or resourced. This limits children's opportunities to extend their play and stimulate their imaginations on a daily basis.

Children are encouraged to make choices such as which toys they would like to play with, which songs they want to sing and which story they would like to listen to but have limited opportunity to practise independence skills in daily routines and activities such as meal times.

Nursery Education

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. Staff have a sound understanding of the Foundation Stage and are aware of how children learn. Children express themselves clearly, they are able to explain how they feel and what they want. Staff help them to develop their self-awareness through the use of conversation supported by puppets. Children confidently count and use mathematics within their play, they are able to make comparisons stating readily which bucket of sand has more in it and using language such as full and empty. They are also beginning to calculate as they work out how many more scoops it will take to fill the bucket up. Children are developing good information technology skills, they use the computer with confidence and understand that how they use the mouse affects the screen. Children recognise

their names and many are able to write and spell them accurately. They enjoy forming letters in the foam as they play. However, children's opportunities to practise phonics and see the purpose of the written word and practise their skills in everyday activities is limited.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

Children's social, moral, spiritual and cultural development is fostered. Children are acknowledged as individuals, staff seek to support children's development through regular assessments and planning and provide for their needs. Children's home routines are followed in the baby room, providing very young children with consistency and a relaxed atmosphere where they are able to feel secure. Older children are well supported to recognise their own needs and helped to make choices, such as whether they are tired and need to rest or if they are particularly hungry and want another serving at lunch. Children bring in their own comforters to help them sleep and staff are very aware of individual preference such as how children like to sleep and whether they like a blanket over them or prefer a 'gro-bag'.

Staff are good role models, they speak to each other and children with respect and warmth helping children to learn natural conversation. Children's behaviour is very good, they are aware of the 'nursery rules', which are based on respect and friendship, and clear on expectations made of them. Children are polite, friendly and inclusive in their play. The regular use of board games help older children to learn to take turns and the importance of being a gracious loser as well as a generous winner. They are able to celebrate each others' successes and take pleasure in their friends' achievements. Staff speak gently to children who listen well to instruction and learn to be responsible and aware of others' needs as well as their own.

Children learn about their own and others' cultures and faiths through the use of books, stories and posters which are used to support the acknowledgement of world festivals and celebrations. Children take part in craft activities and are able to taste food and listen to music from different countries to help them learn about the wider world. Children learn about the local community as they take part in short walks and gather information which helps them to be more aware of their surroundings. Children talk of their outings with glee and enjoy looking at photographs recalling what they saw and experienced, for example demonstrating the noise that the geese make on a recent visit to a nearby duck pond.

Appropriate procedures and systems are in place to support children with additional needs. Staff receive ongoing training and meet regularly with other professionals to improve their knowledge and ability to support children with learning difficulties and disabilities.

Parents are provided with good quality information about the nursery when their child starts. Regular newsletters and posters keep them well informed about any changes as well as any specific activities and points of 'nursery news'. A 'Nursery Parent Discussion Group' is held quarterly, all parents are invited to attend and can add items to the agenda. Parents and extended families attend regular social events, helping to promote a feeling of community and inclusion.

The partnership with parents of children who receive nursery education is satisfactory. Parents are aware that they may access their child's records at any time and appreciate the opportunity to discuss their child's progress on a regular basis. Open evenings provide regular opportunities for parents to speak with their child's key worker and see how their child is progressing. Written records are shared with parents showing which stepping stones children are meeting toward

the early learning goals and what the next step is. However, although parents' input regarding their child's stage of development is sought when children first attend nursery, parents are not actively involved in forming a base line regarding children's learning when they first commence the Foundation Stage. They are also not given specific guidance as to how they can be actively involved in their child's learning.

Organisation

The organisation is satisfactory.

Comprehensive policies and procedures are in place which underpin the organisation of the provision. Particular care is taken to ensure that all staff working with the children have been fully vetted. Appropriate systems are also in place to secure their ongoing suitability. The stable workforce provides consistency of care and good team work is evident. Staff feel valued and this is reflected in their positive, confident and friendly manner. Annual appraisals are used to identify areas for development and staff are well supported and actively encouraged to attend training and extend their qualifications. Adult:child ratios are met at all times, the manager is available to cover staff breaks and staff are deployed within the unit to ensure children are appropriately supervised at all times. All required records are in place, appropriately maintained and stored with an awareness of confidentiality. The setting meets the needs of the range of children for whom it provides.

Inconsistencies in the organisation of the playrooms means that not all children have the same opportunities to have free access to the same range of resources throughout the day. Although available in some way to all children, role play areas are not well thought out and limit children's play experiences.

Leadership and management of nursery education is satisfactory, plans cover all areas of learning but the system for monitoring the delivery of the Foundation Stage is not yet fully effective. Although regular observations are carried out on children these are not fully evaluated and records of children's achievements include general statements rather than specific evidence.

Improvements since the last inspection

At the last inspection recommendations were made to improve safety. These have been satisfactorily addressed providing a safer environment; large cleaning equipment is not accessible to children as it is kept behind a locked barrier in the toilet area and appropriate procedures are in place regarding the use of the slide.

Recommendations were also made regarding nursery education, these too have been satisfactorily addressed. Opportunities for children to develop mathematical understanding through everyday situations have been increased. For example, children are encouraged to count the number of children present and calculate how many places are needed at lunch time. Individual play plans have been introduced for each child, these are shared regularly with parents and include confirmation of which stepping stones toward the early learning goals children have achieved. Parents are actively encouraged to discuss their child's progress and make comment on the way in which the child will be supported to move forward.

Complaints since the last inspection

Since 1 April 2004 there have been no complaints made to Ofsted that required the provider or Ofsted to take any action in order to meet the National Standards. The provider is required

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

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WHAT MUST BE DONE TO SECURE FUTURE IMPROVEMENT?

The quality and standards of the care

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

- provide more opportunities for children to practise their independence skills
- improve the organisation and planning of the role play areas to better support children's play and stimulate their imaginations

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 children's opportunities to learn about the purpose of the written word within their play and to link sounds and letters
- develop a system to better monitor the delivery of the Foundation Stage of learning

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