



Stepping Stones Playgroup

Inspection report for early years provision

Unique Reference Number	511221
Inspection date	05 July 2005
Inspector	Sue Taylor
Setting Address	10 Station Road, Bexhill-on-Sea, East Sussex, TN40 1RE
Telephone number	01424 215455
E-mail	
Registered person	The Youth and Community Centre
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 Playgroup opened in 1987. It is located in the Bexhill Youth and Community Centre, which is close to the town centre and Bexhill railway station. The group operates from rooms within the centre.

The playgroup is open for five mornings a week, during the school terms. Sessions run from 09:15 until 12:00 with a lunch club until 13:00.

The playgroup cares for a maximum of 24 children aged from 2 to 4 years at one time. Of the 23 children on roll, 12 receive funded nursery education. Most children live in the local area. The group supports children with special educational needs, and children who speak English as an additional language.

There are six part time staff who work with the children, of whom four including the supervisor, have appropriate early years qualifications.

The setting receives support from the School Improvement Service.

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PROVISION

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is satisfactory.

Children learn about the importance of personal hygiene through the overall effective practices reinforced by the staff. For example, by washing their hands after using the toilet and before eating. Staff are informed about children's health care matters and as a result children are protected from infection. Related documentation is in place, though parents are not countersigning medication records.

Generally, the snacks provided are healthy and children have some choices. They get to pour their own drinks, having some control over their own needs, though children are unable to access drinking water easily during the session. Children begin to understand the importance of keeping healthy and about personal hygiene through activities such as a visit by the dentist or participating in fruit tasting. They enjoy cooking activities where they make things such as soup and try foods from other countries whilst learning from the staff about healthy foods.

Children enjoy a range of physical activities that help contribute to their good health. The planning for physical development is limited and often the children have little constructive purpose to what they do. They gain skills in running, balancing and controlling ride on toys. Their fine motor skills develop as they use a variety of equipment such as pencils and glue sticks. Along with planned opportunities, for example practising to throw and catch using a variety of smaller equipment such as balls, hoops, beanbags.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

Children benefit from a safe and secure environment. Thorough risk assessments carried out ensure that potential hazards are minimised. The effective and planned organisation around outings, keeps children safe when out and about. The staff supervise the children well, supported by relevant documentation such as the daily register and visitor's record.

The children learn to keep themselves safe through clear instructions from the staff, such as when using the stairs. Children use toys and equipment that are safe and

age appropriate. They make choices from those available. Some resources that support children's learning are of good quality and interesting.

Children are well protected by staff who have a clear understanding of child protection procedures. Most staff have had recent training and liaise as necessary with parents and social services to promote and safeguard children's welfare.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is satisfactory.

Overall, the children enjoy their time at the playgroup and arrive happily. The majority settle well making choices about their play. Most spend good levels of time at self-chosen activities. Positive relationships develop between children and staff with some nice friendships developing between some children. Staff plan for some interesting and creative activities, such as painting to music and outings to the post office, library or the beach. At times, some activities lack constructive aim and limit children's development and learning.

The staff group has recently looked at the Birth to three matters framework though this has not yet been included in the session planning. At times, the groupings of the children for some activities, such as story time, are not beneficial, with the younger ones becoming restless and the older children finding it hard to concentrate.

Nursery Education

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. The children are making progress towards the early learning goals, supported by the caring and committed staff team. The curriculum planning is balanced ensuring children participate in activities and play that covers the six areas of learning. However, the learning intentions are not meeting all of the children's individual needs, resulting in some children not challenged adequately.

The staff make informative and descriptive observations of children's achievements and use these to complete the assessment profiles, showing children's progress along the stepping stones. Future planning does not use this information effectively; consequently, the group is not fully promoting or developing children's next steps in their learning.

The staff interact with the children during planned activities and children's self chosen play. The quality of this varies with children not always asked questions that stimulate their thinking or promote their understanding. Children respond reasonably well to adults and form caring relationships with them. They make choices about their play and develop some independence, for example by pouring their own drink at snack time. Most children communicate effectively with the staff and others. They listen well and follow simple instructions such as during tidy up time.

There is very little labelling around the room to aid children's understanding of the written word. Children with limited language skills are not supported, for example by the use of pictures symbols. The majority of the children enjoy books and have

regular opportunities to practice mark making.

Most children count confidently. They recognise simple shapes. They explore measuring and weighing, for example during a trip to the post office they used the scales. At times, staff promote children's understanding of simple calculation during everyday routines, such as counting cups at snack time, but this is not always fully explored to extend their understanding.

Children explore a variety of different textures such as cornflour and water, shaving foam, rice and pasta as well as sand and water. However there are limited objects, either natural or man made, for them to investigate freely. They have access to simple technology and enjoy using electronic educational programmes.

Children enjoy singing and craft activities. They use their imagination in role play and when using dressing up clothes. They participate in activities that encourage them to use free expression such as painting to music and dance.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is satisfactory.

Staff show respect to each other and the children, with differences acknowledged. However, staff do not fully enable children with special needs or with English as an additional language to be involved in all activities. Most children develop self-esteem and confidence as they make choices and decisions. They have access to a range of play resources that show positive images of culture, gender and disability.

Children's behaviour is good. They learn to take turns and negotiate with others. Positive methods used by the staff, such as stickers and praise encourage cooperation. Most children like to help and tidy up. They are generally responsive to requests from staff and their wishes are valued. As a result, most children are secure and happy. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is fostered.

Partnership with parents is satisfactory. They feel welcomed into the playgroup and find the staff friendly and approachable. They receive good detail about the playgroup, which includes information about the Foundation Stage and Birth to three matters. Formal and informal arrangements are in place for parents and keyworkers to discuss children's progress. However, parents and carers receive few ideas on how they can support their child's learning at home and rarely contribute to the assessment profiles. Parents can make their own comments about their child's learning verbally or use the observation contact books.

Organisation

The organisation is satisfactory.

The recruitment and induction processes help ensure the employment of suitable persons. The required documentation is in place. The relevant policies and procedures are followed by staff, helping to safeguard children's welfare. The staff

work together as a team and communication is supported through the weekly meetings.

The playgroup has moved temporarily from its usual room to the sports hall and the children's sense of belonging is lessened. The environment is not very stimulating and there are very few displays. The organisation of the session is not always effective and occasionally some grouping of the children limits their development and learning opportunities. For example, the session after snack time only has one activity planned for. The children who do not join in, are left to their own devices and not engaged. At times, the planned activity is not well organised to ensure children of all ages and abilities benefit.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The supervisor is responsible for the continued monitoring and evaluation of the nursery education provision, ensuring a balance across the areas of learning. However, at times children's individual learning needs are not promoted. The staff are valued in their professional development. Annual staff appraisals identify any learning needs and further training is encouraged. Weekly staff meetings allow discussion about individual children and the sharing of observations, helping staff complete assessment profiles for the children. The setting meets the needs of the range of children for whom it provides.

Improvements since the last inspection

The previous care inspection recommended that the playgroup improve the recruitment process, look at the safety of the water temperature and improve documentation. The recruitment process is organised and includes the relevant checks to help ensure the suitability of staff. The water temperature has been looked at. Children do not access the bathroom area unsupervised and staff are vigilant when children wash their hands. Documentation and contacts books, shared with parents and carers, ensure that significant information is recorded and shared with all staff.

The previous nursery education inspection recommended making better use of assessment, developing planning and opportunities for children to extend their learning during the daily routine. An action plan was devised to look at the issues and support from an early years advisor obtained. Movement has been made in all areas and the group are continuing to improve their practice.

They were also asked to create a more positive learning environment. This has been hindered by the group moving temporarily from their usual room within the centre to the sports hall. Overall issues have been addressed though further improvement has been identified at this inspection.

Complaints since the last inspection

There are no complaints to report.

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):

- further develop opportunities and support for all children with regard to inclusion in activities, particularly for those with special needs and for whom English is an additional language
- improve the overall organisation of the session to ensure that the development and learning needs of all children are met, for example making effective use of Birth to three matters for the younger children (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):

- further develop the staff's knowledge and understanding of the Foundation Stage to ensure children's continued learning is promoted at all times during a session
- ensure all activities and planned learning intentions are purposeful and constructive, meeting and appropriately extending children's individual learning needs

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the leaflet *Building better childcare: Compliments and concerns about inspectors' judgements* which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk