

Stepping Stones

Inspection report for early years provision

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Inspector Anne Felicity Taylor

Setting Address Wychavon District Council, Civic Centre, Queen Elizabeth Drive, Pershore, Worcs, WR10 1PT

Telephone number 01386 565404

E-mail

Registered person Emma Dixon

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 good.

WHAT SORT OF SETTING IS IT?

Stepping Stones day nursery opened in 1992. It operates from three rooms in Wychavon District Council Civic Centre, in Pershore, Worcestershire. A maximum of 24 children may attend the nursery at any one time. The nursery is open each week day from 08:00 until 18:00 for 51 weeks a year. All children have access to a secure outdoor play area.

There are currently 31 children under five years on roll. Of these, 11 children receive funding for early education. The nursery serves the local community and surrounding areas. Special terms are available to parents employed by Wychavon District Council. Children attend for a variety of sessions and full day care. The nursery currently supports a number of children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and also supports a number of children who speak English as an additional language.

The nursery employs seven full-time and two part-time staff. All the staff have appropriate early years qualifications, several at degree level.

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PROVISION

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

Children are very well nourished and enjoy the healthy and varied diet offered. Dietary needs and feeding routines are discussed with parents regularly to ensure individual needs are met. Children are offered a two course lunch, a meal at tea time plus regular drinks and snacks. All food is cooked on site from fresh ingredients and menus are planned carefully. This ensures that children enjoy their food and eat well. Babies relish the home made roasted vegetable puree, effectively developing their healthy eating habits and aiding their development. Staff eat with the children and meal times are happy social occasions. Children confidently request second helpings of home made pizza, salad and potato wedges. Developing independence skills with the older children is limited at meal times as they are not generally involved in the preparation of the tables. Opportunities to count and calculate are also missed due to this lack of involvement. Children enjoy a variety of sandwiches, vegetable sticks and home made cakes for tea and milk shake and fruit for snack. Water is available to the children all the time and therefore they are well hydrated. All food is stored safely as refrigeration temperatures are monitored and recorded in the main kitchen and the baby room. Daily menus are always displayed.

Children throughout the nursery learn the importance of good personal hygiene routines with the consistent support of the staff. Pre school children develop their independence taking themselves to the toilet and washing their hands, sometimes receiving gentle reminders from staff. Toddlers are well supervised as they complete potty training and learn to use the liquid soap and paper towels for hand washing. Babies 'chat' as they have their nappies changed, learning about keeping clean and observing the good example set by the staff. A comprehensive health and safety policy is in place which is easily available to parents, including information about infectious diseases. Parents are always well informed about any events during the day as comprehensive procedures are in place for accident recording and the administration of medication. Medication is stored safely. Children are cared for well if they have an accident or become ill as all the staff are first aid trained and a fully stocked first aid box is easily available.

All the children enjoy regular access to the enclosed outdoor play area. The equipment available enables them to develop pedalling and ball skills. The outdoor area is not always used for exciting and interesting play, effectively limiting the children's learning and development. Staff organise local walks for the children, to the park and library, which contribute to the children's health and well-being. Older children enjoy balancing and climbing as they use adventure play equipment in the park, which helps their physical development. They are enthusiastic as they play 'What's the time Mr Wolf?', with the active participation of the staff. Pre school children have regular physical education sessions enabling them to learn about the benefits of regular exercise. They also have the valuable opportunity for weekly swimming lessons and many of them achieve Duckling Certificates before they go on to primary school. Older children move safely and confidently indoors and outdoors and staff support the physical development of the younger children well, as the babies and toddlers have plenty of space as they learn to move, crawl and walk.

Children's individual needs regarding sleep and rest are met well, for example, babies have a quiet sleep room with a baby monitor. Children are comfortable on sleep mats or in cots with individual clean bedding. Cots and mats are cleaned daily. Children sleep safely with close staff supervision.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

Children are cared for in a clean, very secure, and adequately maintained environment. The setting has a warm and welcoming atmosphere with friendly staff and plenty of informative notice boards. The size of the nursery ensures that all the children and parents are well known to staff and therefore fully involved in their child's care. Senior staff constantly review the organisation of the building, looking at all aspects of meeting the children's needs.

In all areas of the nursery children are provided with equipment to meet their needs and aid their development. Children have access to a wide range of appropriate equipment, much of it at child height, encouraging independent choice, for example, a variety of musical baby toys within easy reach. Older children learn to care for equipment well as they help to tidy up. Effective procedures are in place for staff to check and clean all equipment and toys regularly ensuring it is all suitable and safe for the children.

Clear staff deployment and a rota system are in place enabling staff to be vigilant about children's safety at all times. Children have pictorial rules displayed which include safety, for example, sitting carefully to avoid hurting others. They discuss safety issues and as children practise fire drill they develop a good awareness of keeping safe. Each area of the nursery completes a daily safety check list and therefore all areas are safe. Risk assessment are in place and reviewed as necessary. Fire exits and evacuation plans are displayed and fire safety equipment and electrical treatment are checked regularly.

Children are kept safe because vetting procedures and induction are in place for all staff and students. Very good security procedures ensure that all visitors are monitored and generally accurate registers of staff and children are kept. However, sometimes signing in sheets are not completed by parents creating a risk that accurate records are not in place should there be an emergency evacuation.

Children are protected from abuse or neglect. All staff attend training and appropriate policies and procedures are in place. Senior staff take a lead role for child protection and all staff are aware of the signs to look for and the procedure to follow.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

Children in all areas of the nursery take part in a broad range of quality activities. As children arrive they are greeted individually and welcomed and therefore they settle down happily. Children are confident and secure in their age groups. They display great warmth and affection for staff as they receive individual loving care and attention. Parents have a clear understanding of how the key worker system operates and are comfortable to approach their child's key worker and other staff to exchange information and discuss any issues.

Babies are happy and contented as they are nurtured and cared for by staff. They are very well supported as they learn and develop. They are captivated as they respond to musical and pop-up toys and enjoy their time in the soft play ring. Children benefit from the knowledge staff have of them and good use is made of the 'Birth to three matters' framework and the Early Years Foundation Stage for appropriate planning. Staff continually assess the babies and are skilled at planning the next steps for a young child. Younger toddlers are becoming confident communicators, chatting excitedly as they throw soft balls and listening to joining in with an

inter active book. They persevere fitting pieces into a tray puzzle, making the animal noises as they complete each piece. Children use their imaginations freely with a wide range of creative materials, for example, painting and collage activities. They are proud of their 'work'; some is taken home and some displayed effectively in their room. They explore and investigate using challenging materials, for example, soil and cooked spaghetti.

The toddler room is a relaxed environment where the children are offered stimulating activities which are fun and help their learning and general development. Staff are secure in their knowledge and understanding of how children progress and encourage the toddlers to experiment and explore, for example, they cook square shortbread as part of a shape theme. They develop their imaginations as they 'make tea' for friends and the staff. Interesting collage and painting inspires the children's creativity as they complete pictures with a variety of materials and do potato prints. The younger children concentrate well at group time, reading stories and singing 'I'm driving in my car' enthusiastically. Staff plan carefully for individual learning needs and activities are evaluated and adapted appropriately. Reward sticker books encourage the children to be considerate and kind to their friends.

Nursery Education

The quality of teaching and learning is good. Children are progressing well towards the early learning goals. The emphasis on personal, social and emotional development underpins all areas of learning with three- and four-year-olds. Children understand the rules in the pre school and behave well, showing kindness and consideration to their friends. They are confident when requesting and selecting their own choice of play, organising themselves to make a track, taking turns with the support of staff. Children are sometimes limited in developing and continuing an aspect of play because the routine is inflexible. This can compromise children's learning.

Children relish the wide variety of books available to them and they are learning how to use books for facts and for stories. Children's language skills are developed effectively as speaking and listening skills are a priority. They speak confidently telling their news to the group and they are learning to be considerate when listening to others. They look forward to going to play outside and chat excitedly about 'swimming tomorrow'. Clear labelling on children's pegs and boxes ensures that they make good progress recognising their names. However, the lack of role play opportunities and easily accessed graphics materials means that writing for a purpose is limited.

Effective teaching ensures that children have fun beginning to understand numbers and simple sums, for example, growing and comparing the height of sunflowers. They complete simple sums as they sing 'Five Little Monkeys'. However, counting and mathematical language is not used in routine activities therefore limiting children's learning. Water and sand play ensures that children gain an understanding of size and volume and interesting cookery sessions introduces them to weighing activities.

Children benefit from a very wide range of interesting activities to extend their knowledge and understanding of the world. A theme about the weather develops children's observation and recording skills, as they do pictures of weather and display them with pride. They take an active part in a recycling scheme having completed a project about the use of the world's resources. Visits from the local police and fire officers develops the children's understanding of their own community. Opportunities to garden and create miniature gardens broadens the children's awareness of nature and growth. They enjoy improving their skills with the mouse as they 'dress the panda bear' at the computer. Children begin to understand direction and estimating as

they programme robot toys. They develop their design techniques creating interesting space models from recycled materials.

Many valuable opportunities are offered to the children in creative development. This means that they generally use their imaginations and express their feelings with confidence. Role play opportunities are limited which compromises some learning in this area. However, the children use their imaginations well as they 'dress the babies' and play with the dolls' house. Children respond to music as they take part in a music and movement session and enjoy exploring a variety of media in collage work. Pictures that are displayed encourage the children to think about and discuss their emotions.

Children's achievements and progress are observed constantly and recorded. Achievement records are clearly linked to the planning and observations are used well to develop the next steps for a child's learning. Individual learning objectives are clear and staff deployment ensures children are supported and generally challenged appropriately. Staff are experienced at adapting learning to meet the needs of the individual child, ensuring that children with special educational needs and children who speak English as an additional language are given appropriate consideration.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

All children are welcomed into the nursery and staff respect and value them and their individual family context. Therefore children feel cared for and comfortable. They develop positive attitudes to others following the strong example set by all the staff. They learn about their local community and the wider world through interesting projects, for example, visits from local police and fire officers and discussions and celebrations of different festivals. Celebrations are enhanced by the daily menus being adapted, for example, a Chinese meal to celebrate Chinese New Year. Children have access to a range of play resources and posters that show positive images of culture, ethnicity, gender and disability. Therefore they develop a respect and understanding of others.

Children's individual needs are met, with staff knowing the children and their families well and constantly exchanging information with parents. Parents contribute to an initial assessment of their child and are invited to attend an assessment meeting for older children to discuss their child's progress and achievements. Progress and achievements are observed and recorded during the daily routine and activities. This ensures that ongoing care and learning needs are met well, for example, individual planning. Staff have experience of children with special educational needs and disabilities and there are comprehensive arrangements in place to meet their needs.

Children are encouraged by staff to take turns, share and to be considerate and helpful. Therefore the children's social, moral, spiritual and cultural development is fostered. They begin to understand right from wrong through the consistent boundaries being set and the age-appropriate methods staff use to manage behaviour, for example, distraction and explanation. Older children and staff discuss the 'rules' regularly and children love receiving stars for helping and being kind. Children respond positively to the praise offered and their self-esteem is enhanced as they point out their projects and displays, for example, weather pictures.

The partnership with parents and carers is good. Children benefit from the strong, open relationships between parents and staff, effectively developing the involvement of parents in all aspects of their child's care and learning. Parents are consulted regularly about the service offered through questionnaires. They appreciate the easy access they have to key staff and the 'open door' policy at the setting encouraging their involvement and confidence. The regular general newsletter and the written information they receive about the Foundation Stage curriculum ensures that parents are very well informed about all activities their children are completing. They appreciate the quick response they receive to requests regarding the care of their children.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

Children's care and learning is enhanced by the constant evaluation of the service offered at the nursery. The leadership and management is very good, with senior staff monitoring the general organisation regularly as they strive to meet the needs of all the children. Children develop well, have lots of fun and learn effectively with the good care and the quality and range of activities offered in all areas of the nursery. All the staff are offered and complete a wide range of training including short courses and training to add to their qualifications. This ensures that staff have an up-to-date knowledge of developments in early years, for example, health and safety training. Students are welcomed into the setting. Staff display a thorough knowledge and understanding of the Foundation Stage and 'Birth to three matters', and are preparing for the introduction of the Early Years Foundation Stage.

The welfare of the children is the highest priority in the nursery and all staff work as a team to meet all the needs of the children. Babies and children, including those needing extra support, receive a lot of individual attention because the ratios of staff to children are always maintained or exceeded. The organisation of the play areas ensures that all the children have plenty of interesting play space, with easy access to equipment. Children are comfortable and confident as they are cared for and learn well within the daily routine.

The care and learning offered is generally well supported by effective procedures and policies. Confidentiality is generally maintained although the display of medication forms compromises this policy. Children benefit as their family are welcomed and involved with the life of the setting. The team work of the management and the staff ensures that the nursery meets the needs of the range of children for whom it provides.

Improvements since the last inspection

Following the last care inspection the nursery was asked to ensure good hygiene practices at sleep times and to ensure children can access all outdoor activities safely. All children have their individual needs regarding sleep met well. Cots and sleep mats are provided and each child has their own clean bedding. Cots and mattresses are cleaned daily. There are set times of day for each age group to access the safely enclosed outdoor play area and therefore all children are offered regular fresh air and exercise.

Following the last education inspection the setting was asked to ensure that group times and all activities are organised so that all children are able to participate fully. All group and learning activities are now easily available to the pre school children ensuring they benefit from all learning experiences.

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.

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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):

- continue to develop the outside area and the play offered to give children an exciting play and learning experience outdoors
- ensure all policies and procedures are reviewed and updated with special regard to completing signing in sheets, the confidentiality of medication records and the information in the prospectus.

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):

- organise the pre school area to give children regular access to an independent choice of activities and materials with special regard to role play, graphics and creative learning
- ensure routines are flexible to meet the needs of the child, enabling them to continue and extend their play, concentrating and learning effectively
- ensure all opportunities are taken up in activities and general routines to develop independence, count and introduce simple sums, match sounds to letters and recognise words.

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