

# Stepping Stones Pre-school

Inspection report for early years provision

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	251670
<b>Inspection date</b>	02 November 2007
<b>Inspector</b>	Rosalie Mary Turner
<b>Setting Address</b>	The Rear of Exning County Primary School, Oxford Street, Exning, Newmarket, Suffolk, CB8 7EW
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<b>Registered person</b>	Stepping Stone Pre-School (Exning)
<b>Type of inspection</b>	Integrated
<b>Type of care</b>	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](http://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 outstanding. The registered person meets the National Standards for under 8s day care and childminding.

The quality and standards of the nursery education are outstanding.

### WHAT SORT OF SETTING IS IT?

Stepping Stones Pre-school is run by a voluntary committee of parents and carers. It opened in the local church hall in 1976 and moved to premises within the grounds of Exning County Primary School in 1995. All children share access to a secure enclosed outdoor play area. A maximum of 26 children may attend the pre-school at any one time. The pre-school is open each weekday from 09.20 to 13.20 including an optional 'lunch club'.

There are currently 24 children aged from two to under five years on roll. Of these, 15 children receive funding for early education. The pre-school serves the local community and surrounding areas.

The pre-school employs four members of staff, all of whom hold appropriate early years qualifications. Two members of staff are working towards a higher level of qualification.

## **THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PROVISION**

### **Helping children to be healthy**

The provision is outstanding.

Children thrive because the pre-school follows highly effective procedures and practices that meet their physical, nutritional and health needs. They are cared for in a very clean and hygienically maintained environment and have exceptional support and guidance to help them develop robust personal hygiene routines. For example, staff ask 'why do we wash our hands before lunch?' and the children show that they have learnt the importance of keeping themselves healthy by answering 'so we don't get germs on our food'. Staff place a high emphasis on preventing the spread of infection and they are all trained to ensure food is prepared and stored in accordance with food hygiene regulations. In addition, surfaces are cleaned with anti-bacterial spray, floor surfaces regularly washed and children are not allowed to attend if they are suffering from a contagious illness.

Children enjoy a superb range of nutritious snacks from around the world such as fresh fruit and vegetables, pita bread, noodles and pizzas with a range of toppings that contribute significantly to their understanding of a healthy diet. They manage the snack bar routine impressively by self-registering, making their own cheese sandwiches, pouring drinks and clearing their plates away after themselves. Staff plan activities to help children to learn about healthy living and they take gardening groups to the pre-school allotment where they grow some of the vegetables that are enjoyed at snack time. The staff respect parent's wishes and take account of children's likes and dislikes when providing food. As a consequence, they provide appetising options that appeal to the children and meet their individual dietary needs exceptionally well.

The continuous provision of outdoor play offers children excellent opportunities to access fresh air regardless of the weather conditions. They delight in showing off their increasing stamina as they chase staff around the large grassed area and relish splashing in puddles when it is raining. Children have constant access to fresh drinking water and staff remind them to help themselves from the jug that is kept on a low-level shelving unit when they come in from outside play. As a result, children very quickly learn to look after their own health.

### **Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe**

The provision is outstanding.

Children are cared for in an extremely welcoming environment that quickly helps them to become emotionally secure. They separate very easily from their carers because they receive a warm, enthusiastic welcome from all staff members and children say that they particularly like 'the smiley faces of the adults'. The pre-school settling practices are superb. Staff visit new children at home before their first session and collect photographs of people or things that are important to them. These are skilfully used to make 'key person' key rings that successfully reassure children who feel insecure. The staff work hard to decorate the walls with examples of art and craft work and they set out an excellent range of safely maintained toys prior to children's arrival so that they all come in happily.

Children's safety is given priority and staff are vigilant to monitor play to protect them from danger. Comprehensive risk assessments are completed and worthwhile steps taken to minimise any perceived hazards. Staff check the premises each day and ensure all low-level electrical sockets are covered, the kitchen area is secure and any broken or damaged toys are removed.

They talk to children about using the resources safely and three-year-olds demonstrate an excellent awareness by saying 'you have to be careful with scissors because you might cut yourself'. Superb practices are in place to reinforce particularly important or difficult messages. For example, the manager dresses up as 'Colin the clown' to ensure that children understand fireworks are dangerous. Regular fire drills are carried out, therefore children know how to keep themselves safe and they can escape quickly and safely in an emergency.

Children's welfare is exceptionally well safeguarded. The pre-school ensures that parents complete a comprehensive range of paperwork that permit staff to act quickly if their children become ill or there is a medical emergency. Children are particularly well protected from 'stranger danger' because they are never left alone with persons who have not been vetted or released to adults unless the staff have written consent from their parents. All staff complete annual training to recognise and respond to the signs and symptoms of possible child abuse. The pre-school keeps Local Safeguarding Children Board guidance to hand and the person nominated to co-ordinate concerns has very good links with outside agencies so that immediate action can be taken. Consequently, children's safety is robustly assured.

### **Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do**

The provision is outstanding.

Children arrive at the pre-school happy and confident to try the new experiences offered to them. They cannot wait to explore the corn flour with their hands or feet and staff effectively extend learning by encouraging them to add water and colouring. Children squeal with excitement as they watch their mixture drizzle through a colander on to their hands and capably describe the feeling as 'tickly'. However, staff are particularly sensitive to those who are quieter to ensure that they are fully engaged in play, therefore all children are able to make excellent progress. A superb balance is achieved between focused activities and allowing children the freedom to lead play. Staff work directly with children throughout the session, giving them guidance and encouragement to cut materials or place sequins on their pictures of rockets. They effectively extend learning by introducing new words such as 'astronaut' and assist children to persevere by saying 'you can do that! Try!' As a result, they are competent learners and children concentrate extremely well from an early age.

All the staff display an exceptional enthusiasm and show that they genuinely enjoy working with the children, and as a result, they maintain a vibrant learning environment. The key worker system helps staff to quickly build very pleasing relationships and parents comment that their children seem to be as comfortable in pre-school as they do at home. They make friends easily and most children play happily alongside each other. Staff sensitively help those who find it difficult to share by using sand timers and giving copious praise when they take turns saying 'well done for sharing! It's good to wait your turn'. Consequently, children are beginning to show pleasing consideration for each other.

### **Nursery Education**

The quality of teaching and learning is outstanding. All staff have an in-depth knowledge of the Foundation Stage and a full understanding of how young children learn and develop. They are skilled in treating children as active partners in their learning and take every opportunity to offer them choices and the flexibility to pursue their interests. Staff deploy themselves particularly well in order to give every child ample small group or one-to-one support and they pose questions that extend their thinking. Children make very rapid progress towards the early learning goals in all areas of their learning because the play programme is planned according

to their individual developmental needs. For example, parents complete detailed initial child profiles that allow staff to establish each child's starting points and immediately set challenges to address any gaps in their learning. Staff continue to observe play and evaluate their findings which are incorporated into children's 'step by step' records and used to inform future planning.

Children have an excellent attitude to learning and they remain actively engaged in an extensive range of stimulating activities and experiences. Their independence is exceptionally well fostered and they select play resources from the low-level units, decide when to take their snack and dress themselves before playing outside. Children are strong conversationalists with wide vocabularies and they enjoy chatting amongst themselves during imaginative play to make their 'babies' better. They practise making marks for a meaning by writing prescriptions and children have designed and posted cards to themselves. Resources are clearly labelled to ensure children learn that print carries meaning and they are helped to recognise their names because their coat pegs and name cards show their photographs alongside the text.

Children's mathematical development is exceptionally well promoted through a wealth of practical activities within routine play. For instance, children use pennies to buy fuel for their vehicles, look for numbers on houses and cars when they go for walks and access resources such as sizing cups, scales and tape measures to help them to count or compare. Consequently, many can sequence numbers reliably to 10 and beyond. Children enjoy number rhymes and demonstrate impressive calculation skills by answering 'three' when staff challenge them by asking 'if there's two left, how many have gone away?' They are fascinated by the early science resources that tempt them to question how things work such as torches and hand-held metal detectors. Walks to local places of interest such as the church, post office and village stream effectively promote children's curiosity in the world around them. However, they particularly like tending their allotment, feeding the ducks and exploring the tractor brought in by a local farmer.

Free movement between the outside and inside play environment allows children to experience plenty of physical activities. Staff allow them to take supervised risks in order to help the children to develop control of their bodies. They climb, slide and balance on the adventure play equipment in the school play area with great skill and learn body control and co-ordination during their weekly Tai Chi and keep fit sessions. Children demonstrate very good spatial awareness as they propel their scooters around the outside play area, stopping quickly, changing direction with ease and successfully avoiding each other. They respond imaginatively to a wide variety of music and percussion instruments are used effectively to encourage children to learn about volume and rhythm. Staff create a very restful and relaxing experience by providing soft furnishings, fairy lights and soft music in the 'whisper corner' to develop children's aesthetic awareness. They access a wealth of textured materials including sequins, glitter, cellophane and tissue paper to design collages and children are given a sense of pride in their work because it is displayed to decorate the room.

### **Helping children make a positive contribution**

The provision is outstanding.

Children feel a sense of belonging because they are highly respected by all staff who value each child's individuality. Their key workers take time to get to know families so that they are able to meet children's individual needs exceptionally well regardless of their ability or culture. Children are able to appreciate their multicultural society through the superb range of books and other positive resources available to them. Staff welcome visitors to the pre-school who use a wheelchair for mobility to help children to learn respect for those who are less able.

Children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is fostered. They show concern by quickly saying 'I'm sorry' if they inadvertently upset their friends and have excellent opportunities to value diversity when they celebrate Rosh Hashanah or make Diwali lamps. Children's behaviour is exemplary because they have outstanding support to help them to manage their own actions. For example, staff work closely with parents to develop individual behaviour plans so that children who are finding it difficult can learn to control their behaviour. All adults have high expectations of the children and they work together to create the pre-school rules that are consistently and positively applied. Staff are superb role models and give children clear explanations if they intervene. They get down to the children's level and quietly talk about their actions, therefore they begin to understand right from wrong.

The pre-school has considerable experience of providing care for children who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The person nominated to co-ordinate support for those having additional needs has completed comprehensive training and is robust in her knowledge and understanding of her role and responsibilities. She competently works alongside staff, parents and other agencies to develop straightforward individual educational plans that ensure children have their needs met extremely well. All staff promptly recognise if children do not appear to be reaching milestones in their development and there are robust procedures in place to help children of all abilities to be fully included in all activities.

The partnership with parents and carers is outstanding. Parents receive an abundance of high quality information about the care and early years education that the pre-school provides through the detailed brochure, newsletters and notice boards. An excellent two-way flow of information makes sure that parents remain fully involved in their children's learning and the informal handovers at the beginning and end of each day help the staff to provide a highly effective service. Parents say they know about their child's achievements through regular opportunities to look at their folders and frequent discussions with their key worker. Consequently, they speak extremely positively about the pre-school stating 'the staff are very open and they tell me everything'. Parents say they are impressed with 'the friendly atmosphere' and feel 'the staff are particularly good with the very quiet children so that they build confidence'. This excellent relationship between staff and parents significantly contributes to the very rapid progress that children make towards the early learning goals and the high quality of care that they receive.

## **Organisation**

The organisation is outstanding.

Overall, children's needs are met. They benefit greatly from the excellent organisation of the space and resources in a vibrant, child-centred environment. Robust recruitment and vetting procedures ensure that staff are employed who are appropriately skilled and suitable to work with the children. The experienced staff team clearly enjoys their work and individuals show remarkable support for each other. All staff are committed to training to ensure their knowledge and skills remain up to date and they strive for continuous improvement through evaluative and reflective practice. Action plans are regularly developed to identify the areas for improvement and to monitor the staff's success in enhancing the provision. As a result, children say that they thoroughly enjoy their time in the setting and when they are asked to explain 'my worst thing about pre-school is?' many reply 'going home'.

All legally required documentation is in place and meticulously maintained to promote the welfare and care of the children. The robust records of attendance ensures staff are always aware of who is present so that children are kept particularly safe in an emergency. The

pre-school is guided by a commendable range of policies and procedures that are consistently applied by staff and regularly reviewed to ensure the provision operates efficiently.

The leadership and management is outstanding. The manager offers excellent support and guidance to enable the staff to effectively plan, deliver and monitor the educational programme. Her energy and drive are inspirational and significantly contribute to the rapid progress that children are making towards the early learning goals. The committee successfully identifies and responds to the staff's needs for future training within their appraisals and is receptive to new ideas to improve the care and education that they provide. They regularly seek parents and children's views through self-evaluation questionnaires and are currently working towards revamping the outside play area, increasing their storage facilities and obtaining funding for a new computer system. As a result, children are able to develop their personalities in a rich play environment.

### **Improvements since the last inspection**

At the last care inspection the pre-school was asked to update the medical records, the child protection policy and complaints procedure.

Children's health and well-being is assured because their parents sign all accident and medication forms to acknowledge that medical care has been provided. The child protection policy details actions that would be taken if an allegation is made against an adult in the pre-school and the complaints procedure includes a contact address and telephone number for Ofsted. Therefore, children are more effectively safeguarded.

There were no key issues at the last early education inspection but the pre-school was recommended to provide further opportunities for parents and carers to contribute to their children's development.

Verbal exchanges with parents and carers occur on a daily basis and any information that relates to children's development is now transferred to children's 'step by step' records. Folders are available for inspection at every session and parents are prompted to view and contribute to children's developmental records. Furthermore, two formal consultation meetings are arranged for parents to discuss children's progress with their key workers in addition to the social meetings within the pre-school. As a result, parents are fully involved in their children's learning.

### **Complaints since the last inspection**

Since April 1 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.

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

The quality and standards of the nursery education are outstanding.

## WHAT MUST BE DONE TO SECURE FUTURE IMPROVEMENT?

### **The quality and standards of the care**

No recommendations for improvement are made because the quality and standards of care are outstanding.

### **The quality and standards of the nursery education**

No recommendations for improvement are made because the quality and standards of nursery education are outstanding.

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](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)