

Stepping Stones Pre School

Inspection report for early years provision

Unique Reference Number	133083
Inspection date	21 September 2007
Inspector	Sue Vernon
Setting Address	Ascension Church Hall, Claude Avenue, Oldfield Park, Bath, BA2 1AG
Telephone number	07811 973568
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Registered person	Stepping Stones Pre School
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 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 Pre-School was registered in 1994. It is a committee run group, based in a church hall in the Oldfield Park residential area of Bath. It has an established staff team of four, all of whom have early years qualifications. The group is registered for up to 24 children, and there are currently 30 children on roll. Of these, 15 receive funding for nursery education.

The group is open each morning in term-time, except Wednesdays, from 09.30 to 12.00. A lunch club until 12.30 is offered on some days later in the academic year. The group has use of the main hall and a separate story room, and there is a separate enclosed garden for outdoor play. The pre-school has gained Pre-school Learning Alliance accreditation and has been awarded the Children's Rights Charter.

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PROVISION

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

Children benefit from healthy foods being offered for snacks, such as bread sticks and a selection of fresh fruit daily. This includes apples, bananas and sliced pears which the children pick from the fruit tree in the group's enclosed play area. Regular drinks of water are available which children can freely access. Staff collect information from parents about any special dietary needs such as allergies and plan well how to support them. This ensures both children and parents feel secure.

A written sickness and medication policy is in place which helps parents understand about possible cross-infection if they send in a child who is infectious. Staff hold appropriate first-aid qualifications and keep written records about both medication and accidents which are shared with parents. This builds continuity of care for the children. Children learn about good hygiene within the daily routine as they independently clean their hands with wipes before eating and wash their hands after messy play.

Daily physical play is offered to all children. Both indoor and outdoor activities are planned which ensure children's physical skills are developed. For example, activities in the main hall include dancing with ribbons and negotiating an obstacle course where children develop their climbing, balancing and jumping skills. In the outdoor environment children run and enjoy ball games. They learn about how exercise affects their bodies as they become hot after ball games using the basket-ball net in the hall. Children develop small muscle skills effectively as they use cutters with play dough and learn to hold pencils and rulers when drawing.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

Children play in an environment where risks have been assessed and effectively minimised. Appropriate safety features, such as a locked front door during sessions are in place. This enables children to move safely around the hall during play as they access different play resources set ready for floor play or table play. Children enjoy taking responsibility for their own safety as they learn to hold on to the soft rope as they all walk together to the nearby enclosed garden. Fire safety issues have been addressed, evacuations recorded and suitable equipment is in place which supports a safe environment for the children.

The hall used by the group is safe, secure and welcoming to parents and children alike. A good range of play resources are put out ready before children arrive. This helps children separate from their parent/carer. Notice boards and displays give parents information about the daily routine of the group which help them feel involved. The selection of toys and play equipment such as balancing beams and climbing frames are safe, attractive and suitable for the age groups attending.

The staff have a good understanding of child protection issues and the required procedures to be followed if any concerns arise. There is a written policy in place which is available for parents. This supports a safe environment for children.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

Staff build good relationships with the children through getting to know them well and implementing a key worker system. Children are greeted warmly and helped to settle well as they explore play resources and join in circle time. Staff know children who need support to settle in the group and they are encouraged to try different play activities and join in circle time which helps them feel involved. A good range of play opportunities is planned each session. This ensures that children enjoy a good balance of activities that stimulate their development. For example, they try imaginative play with small world zoo animals and construction sets as well as creative play with collage resources or coloured sand.

Nursery Education.

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory.

Staff have a sound knowledge of the Foundation Stage and use this to plan activities relating to the six areas of the curriculum. They use open questioning effectively in order to stimulate children's thinking, for example asking 'what's happening now?' as children mix paint from dry powder. Observations on children's learning are made and used to make a record of children's work. However, children's profiles do not always clearly link to their learning progress or show gaps in learning. This means planning does not clearly show the next stage of individual learning needs. Staff work with the children to encourage them to persist in their play, for example, as they write a card for a 'special' family member.

Children confidently take part in circle time, listening well and contributing their comments, for example, as they explain their family photographs that they have brought in. They develop their independence well as they put aprons away and wash their plates after snack time. They build relationships with each other as they are encouraged to tidy toys away together. Children develop writing skills as they enjoy mark-making for a purpose. They try writing their names on their work or make menus in the home corner café. They value books as they enjoy story time, sometimes with puppets and large books. Children are encouraged to develop their vocabulary, as they describe 'sticky' icing sugar however there is little linking of phonetics to letters.

Opportunities to count are offered within the session, for example, in circle time as children count how many children are present. Children use simple addition and subtraction as they use their fingers to count how many ladybirds are shown on different pages in a numbers book. Mathematical language is used for problem solving as children work out if more bricks are needed to make a taller tower and looking at which is bigger or smaller. Children enjoy learning about shapes as they complete shape puzzles.

Children learn about the value of technology as they use a programmable toy or put story tapes in a tape recorder and listen to the story on headphones. They learn about different cultures as they make clay Divali lights or use multi-cultural musical instruments. Children have some opportunities to enjoy the natural world as they pick pears from their garden tree or put food out for the birds on their garden bird table, although they do not have consistent opportunities for exploring natural resources indoors. Children learn about changes as they play with plastic animals frozen in their water tray or mix icing sugar with water to ice their cakes.

Different opportunities for creative play are offered as they make models with boxes or paint outdoor walls with water and brushes. Children enjoy expressing themselves to different types

of music or explore different textures such as wet, coloured sand, 'gloop' and play dough with glitter or scented oils. They use tools such as scissors, glue and tape as they make collage pictures. Children enjoy exploring music and rhythm as they join in familiar action songs and rhymes. Different resources such as ribbons and light fabric scarves are used as children explore waving them around both indoors and out in the garden where they make shapes as they run.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is satisfactory.

Staff work with parents to ensure they are aware of children's individual needs. For example, they support and special dietary or medical needs. Staff are sensitive to each child's needs, for example, helping shy children to settle in the group. Children learn about the value of diversity from a wide range of play resources such as posters, books and dressing-up clothes. All children enjoy access to the play resources, with both boys and girls enjoying icing cakes or playing in the home corner. This helps all children feel included and valued. Children's social, moral, social and cultural development is fostered. Children's own family and culture are valued as they make cakes for a special day where they invite grandparents or special family member to visit.

Appropriate and positive methods are used to encourage acceptable behaviour. For example, staff use distraction well as they help children learn to share and take turns. Staff give consistent praise for children's efforts which encourages them well. Children learn to respect each other as they share pieces of fruit and talk together at the open snack time. Small responsibilities help children develop their self-esteem as they enjoy helping at tidy-up time. Staff are good role models as they are consistently warm, friendly and polite with the children.

Information about the group is offered to parents in a variety of ways which helps them feel involved. Notice boards and displays give information on topics, staff qualifications and current events. Parents receive leaflets with information about some policies and procedures though not all details are current or consistent. Parents are greeted warmly and verbal feedback is given on their children's experience. Partnership with parents of children receiving nursery education is satisfactory. Outline information is given on the six learning areas when children start receiving a funded place and weekly information outlining topics is displayed. This includes ideas for parents to get involved, for example, by bringing in photographs for a topic on families. Appointments are offered twice yearly for parents to discuss their child's progress and view their photographic record. Parents value regular access to staff who are happy to make themselves available particularly when parents stay as volunteer helpers. This builds secure relationships with parents.

Organisation

The organisation is satisfactory.

Effective recruitment and appointment processes are in place in order to ensure that staff working with children are appropriately cleared and have suitable qualifications. Records that support children's welfare are kept and up-to-date, for example, accident and medication records. Group policies and an operational plan are in place which builds consistency for the staff team, however not all details are current and included. Staff hold first aid and Early Years qualifications. They are supported in attending workshops and training days in order to further develop their skills which continues to benefit the children. The use of the registered areas is organised effectively in order to meet the play and care needs of the children attending, for

example, play areas are set out with toys in order to greet the children and help them move smoothly into play.

Leadership and management is satisfactory.

Children who receive funded nursery education benefit from the group's commitment to employ qualified staff who work well together as a team. Time is given for curriculum planning and children's record keeping though weaknesses in assessing any gaps in children's learning and linking these into short term planning have not been identified. Staff appraisals are in place and are linked to future training development. The setting meets the needs of the range of children for whom they provide.

Improvements since the last inspection

At the last care inspection the group were asked to develop their understanding of special educational needs. Staff have attended training in order to develop their awareness of how to support any child with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. They were also asked to ensure garden plants were not a hazard. The group work closely with the garden owners but still have to monitor plants and possible hazards closely.

At the last nursery education inspection the group were asked to monitor their planning to ensure all areas of the curriculum particularly knowledge and understanding were included. Planning now covers the six areas including knowledge and understanding of the world which promotes children's awareness of their own and other cultures and the value of technology through play activities.

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):

- ensure all details on policies and procedures such as the complaints procedure are consistent and made available to parents.

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):

- ensure children's individual learning needs are identified and planned for, in order to support consistent progress through the stepping stones.
- further develop opportunities for linking phonic sounds to letters
- extend opportunities for exploring the natural world.

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