

# Stepping Stones Pre-School

Inspection report for early years provision

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	305344
<b>Inspection date</b>	21 November 2007
<b>Inspector</b>	Suzette Butcher
<b>Setting Address</b>	Melbourne Road, Blacon, Chester, Cheshire, CH1 5JG
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<b>Registered person</b>	The Trustees of Stepping Stones of Chester
<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 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 Pre-School is managed by a parents' committee. It opened in their present premises in 1992. The pre-school operates two classrooms within J.H. Godwin Primary School in Blacon, Chester. Sessions are from 09.00 to 11.30. and 12.30. to 15.00 during term time only.

Children share access to a fully enclosed outdoor play area.

There are currently 32 children on roll, which includes 23 children who are funded for early years education. The setting supports a small number of children with learning difficulties. There are five members of staff employed, of whom, four hold appropriate early years qualifications and one is working towards a qualification. The group is a member of the Pre-School Learning Alliance and is supported by a pedagogue from Sure Start.

## **THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PROVISION**

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

The provision is good.

The promotion of children's confidence and independence in all their self-help skills is given a very high priority and is, consequently, a key strength within the pre-school. Children confidently follow good health and hygiene routines as they learn about the benefits of following a healthy lifestyle. Younger children learn to follow clear routines during the session, such as hand washing, wiping their nose or putting on their coats to go outside. They are gently reminded of the importance of good hygiene when handling animals or insects. Older children happily accept responsibility for their personal care and understand the purpose of good hygiene routines. For example, they quickly go to wash their hands when snack is announced without further prompts. Children receive appropriate levels of care in the event of illness or minor injuries because staff are vigilant and suitably qualified in first aid. The environment in which the children play is well maintained and clean. Staff ensure that surfaces are wiped regularly with anti-bacterial wipes, minimising the risk of contamination and cross-infection.

Children eagerly look forward to snack times and the exemplary organisation creates a focus for children's active learning within a healthy lifestyle. Children proudly and confidently organise their own placemat and select a drink. They help themselves to a selection of fresh fruit and vegetables and join staff and their friends at the table. Snack time is a relaxed, social event where children and staff chatter happily to each other. They compare their likes and dislikes and experiment with new tastes and textures. A Gold award for healthy eating has been awarded to the setting. Regular cookery sessions reinforce children's awareness and workshops are organised to explore healthy options, such as making smoothies. Children's dietary needs are recorded and respected, ensuring that snacks provided are suitable for children with allergies and special diets. Staff develop children's awareness of the benefits of drinking water as part of a healthy lifestyle. This is regularly reinforced and especially after exercise or in hot weather. Children confidently and independently help themselves to a drink from the water dispenser in the playroom whenever they are thirsty.

Children enjoy daily energetic exercise where they have lots of fun and make steady progress in their physical development. Lively music and movement sessions encourage children to gain confidence and move with control as they learn to follow instructions and use their bodies in different ways. They happily put on warm clothes to play outdoors where they benefit from the fresh air and healthy exercise throughout the year. Different areas of the school playground are available with a wide range of adventurous activities for children to practise and develop skills, such as climbing or balancing. Children enjoy experimenting with a wide range of different consistencies as they make good progress in their fine motor skills when they learn to use different tools.

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

The provision is good.

Children and their families are warmly welcomed into the pre-school. Colourful displays of children's art work, photographs and informative posters create a purposeful learning environment and develop a strong sense of identity and ownership for young children. Play and learning areas are well organised to enable children to move around their immediate environment with ease and confidence. Areas are clearly identified for children's comfort and safety. For example, a large square on the carpet indicates the boundary for children to sit and,

consequently, creates a calm, relaxed situation. The setting has a wide range of good quality, safe resources to meet the needs of children who attend. Equipment and resources are very well organised in labelled accessible containers and in low-level storage units around the room. This enables children to independently make their own choices as they become active learners with discreet staff support.

Secure entry procedures are in place to ensure children's safety and clear procedures are followed for the safe collection of children. Children's details and registration procedures accurately record all the required information. However, times of arrivals and departures for staff and children are not clearly identified which compromises children's well-being. Risk of accidental injury is minimised by the use of appropriate safety features and consistently good supervision of the children. Rigorous risk assessments are carried out and indoor and outdoor areas are checked daily. Fire drills are clearly displayed and carried out regularly. This allows children to confidently follow defined procedures in the event of a fire or emergency evacuation. Children learn about what is dangerous and how to keep themselves safe during general discussions. For example, staff carefully explain the safety issues and required changes in routines when building work is carried out on the outdoor play area.

Children's welfare is safeguarded because staff have a clear awareness of the signs and symptoms of abuse and know who to contact if they are concerned. They attend training on a regular basis to update their knowledge. The child protection policy offers clear guidelines for parents and carers.

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

The provision is good.

Young children enjoy themselves and are helped to achieve in a caring, supportive environment. They have fun trying out new skills, such as mark making or sorting, with appropriate guidance and support from staff. Children are given time to practise and consolidate their learning when they choose an activity and this helps them to develop independence and self-motivation. Young children learn to concentrate for longer periods during group times and gain confidence when, for example, they take turns to choose a picture of an action song or rhyme.

Staff have a good understanding of the 'Birth to three matters' framework and aspects of this framework have been implemented to underpin their ongoing good practice. For example, children enjoy exploring and experimenting with many different sensory materials both indoors and outdoors. Activities are linked to children's interests and staff skilfully differentiate activities to meet the needs of each child. Starting points are established on entry, based on information from their parents. Observation and assessment profiles successfully identify individual children's progress. This is used to inform future planning although next steps in learning are not consistently identified to fully promote their development.

### **Nursery Education.**

The quality of teaching and learning is good and the effective organisation of early years education has a significant impact on children's learning. Systems are reviewed and adapted on a regular basis to maximise high quality learning opportunities. Children make significant progress in all areas of their learning because staff have a very secure knowledge of the early learning goals, and a good understanding of the underlying principles of early years education. Staff record their observations on individual children's play and learning and link this to the early learning goals. They record children's progress and identify next steps for groups and

individual children. For example, staff gather together at the end of each session to evaluate activities and improve further practice. However, the recording of observations on individual children does not fully reflect the high quality of children's play and learning in the setting. This means that the observation, assessment and planning cycle is not fully secure to support children's learning. Children's profiles, with photographs and work examples, are shared with parents and reviewed on a regular basis.

Activities are based on children's interests and preferences, with some aspects of High/Scope 'Plan, do and review' successfully implemented. Whole group times introduce opportunities for children to recall and review what they have done during the day and highlight what they have learnt. For example, children describe how they made a fire engine 'go really fast' or experimented with green paint. Photographs from recent exciting activities are projected onto a whiteboard where children excitedly remark and reflect on what they saw and learnt. Consequently, children are actively involved in their own learning programme. Short term themes, such as 'Care of Living Things' are also based on children's interests and provide a focus to stimulate and extend children's experiences and learning. Children eagerly observe and learn about the similarities and differences between corn snakes, tarantulas or scorpions when specialists visit the pre-school. They make connections with home and other areas of learning when they bring in pictures of their pets. Children's experiences are reinforced when they take turns to care for the pre-school's giant snails, or use magnifying glasses and watch caterpillars change into butterflies. Subsequently, children are eager to learn more about the wider world and about their natural environment. For example, they ask what apple pips are at snack time or remember how they grew beans and flowers together.

Language and communication skills are very strongly promoted as a key aspect throughout the pre-school. Staff skilfully use Makaton signs to enhance children's speech and language. Signs, symbols, facial expressions and gestures are consistently introduced and acknowledged to enrich communication. Pictures, photographs and labels also provide strong visual images in the setting. Children learn to be good listeners when they are introduced to Lola and consider the importance of looking and remembering. Language is enriched as staff skilfully use open ended questions to extend children's learning and experience. Consequently, children are confident communicators and happily participate in lively conversations with adults and other children.

A good balance of stimulating adult-led and free play opportunities are available for children to choose from. Informal learning opportunities are skilfully and imaginatively maximised. For example, they count how many adults, boys and girls there are and calculate how many altogether. Children absorb mathematical concepts and make practical comparisons when they ask their friends 'Is your straw bigger?'. They confidently find their own name and regularly link sounds to letters. Children help themselves to the wide selection of creative and writing materials, such as stamps, ribbon or dry pasta, when they create a lively picture. They initiate their own role play games and play imaginatively in the home corner with everyday objects.

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

The provision is good.

Children are cared for in a calm, friendly environment where everyone relates very warmly to one another.

Activities are adapted to ensure that all children are actively involved and fully included in play and learning opportunities. Children's individual strengths and weaknesses are clearly identified

which provides a good foundation to support children with learning difficulties. Key staff have a clear understanding of Code of Practice procedures and attend relevant training to increase their knowledge and experience. Staff take an active role in multi-disciplinary meetings to support children and families. Effective links are maintained with local support agencies, such as speech therapy, to promote children's development.

Children are helped to consider and value diversity in a caring and supportive environment where every child is valued highly as an individual. They gain awareness of their local environment and develop strong links with their local community as they look at photographs and explore aspects of their neighbourhood. Children have access to a good range of resources and play opportunities, which reflect diversity and acknowledge cultural differences. Children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is fostered.

Children are well-mannered and considerate towards adults and each other. They behave well because they are happily involved in their play and learning and feel valued as individuals. Staff create a calm environment by using appropriate strategies, such as, ringing bells quietly and reminding children that the activity will change in two minutes or singing a song to gently gather children for group times. Children happily accept responsibility for organising and tidying away their resources and learn to value the benefits and safety of an organised environment. Children follow the staff's consistent and respectful example and, consequently, eagerly remind each other of the importance of sharing, taking turns and playing together cooperatively. They learn to consider other people's feelings and to recognise different emotions. For example, they consider whether they had a good time or not and indicate with their thumbs up or down. Kind actions and helpful behaviour is promptly recognised by staff and celebrated with everyone.

The partnership with parents and carers is good. The supportive and positive relationships shared between parents and staff promote good continuity of care for children. Information is shared during informal chats at handover times. Meetings are arranged to provide opportunities for a fuller discussion of their child's progress and share any ideas or concerns. Parents are regularly invited to participate in sessions and offered opportunities to become actively involved in their child's play and learning. For example, healthy eating workshops, information events about High/Scope or Bookstart launches are organised. Regular newsletters and notices keep parents informed of special events and current topics. Parents opinions are valued highly when they are consulted in questionnaires every six months. Their ideas and preferences are acknowledged in appropriate changes to routines. Parents comment that they particularly value the way the setting develops children's confidence and independence, and they are very happy with the quality of care and education provided.

## **Organisation**

The organisation is good.

The quality of leadership and management is good. Management are strongly committed towards providing high quality care and education to meet the needs of every child and their family. They regularly review the setting's strengths and weaknesses and prioritise areas for improvement. Action plans are agreed and clear targets implemented to achieve their goals. For example, significant improvements to the outdoor play area have been identified as a priority and are currently being implemented to enable staff to provide further exciting opportunities for children's play and learning. Robust procedures are in place for the recruitment, selection of staff and assessment of their suitability to work with children. Comprehensive induction procedures are followed for new staff and effective annual staff appraisal systems identify future training needs and support staff development.

Staff are dedicated, well qualified and aware of their individual roles and responsibilities. They work well together and communicate effectively. This creates a happy, caring environment where children and staff relate warmly to each other. Staff regularly attend training on subjects, such as High/Scope or 'Playing with Sounds', to increase their knowledge and experience. The manager is currently working towards an early years degree to further improve standards within the pre-school. Most of the staff have worked together for a number of years and consequently, provide valuable stability and consistency for parents and children. Regular staff meetings and informal discussions take place to share and develop good practice.

Children's progress is monitored on a regular basis and systems are in place to ensure that every child accesses all areas of the Foundation Stage curriculum. The quality of teaching and learning within the setting is regularly monitored as management and staff observe and reflect on their practice. There are strong links with the head and staff in the adjoining school, and imaginative transitional procedures are implemented to create a more positive experience for children. For example, children take photographs and create a book about people and areas in the school.

Space is organised to provide children with a balanced range of activities. Staff are deployed effectively to ensure that children receive good levels of support throughout the session. Documentation, relating to the continuity of care for the children, is in place and organised to reflect confidentiality. Policies and procedures are reviewed, agreed with the committee and updated on a regular basis.

Overall, the provision meets the needs of the range of the children for whom it provides.

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

At the last care inspection, the pre-school agreed to implement a system to record visitors to the premises. This has been completed to further safeguard children. At the last inspection, the providers agreed to further develop the system for sharing children's progress and achievements with parents. Systems and procedures have improved, with regular meetings and discussions, to strengthen the quality of the partnership with parents and carers.

### **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.

## **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 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):

- improve systems to record times for arrivals and departures for children and staff.

### **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 observation and assessment procedures to predict next steps for individual children and share with parents (also applies to care).

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)