

Stepping Stones Nursery

Inspection report for early years provision

Unique Reference Number	EY276264
Inspection date	04 June 2008
Inspector	Jan Leo
Setting Address	55 Glanville Road, Oxford, Oxfordshire, OX4 2DD
Telephone number	01865 717139
E-mail	
Registered person	Natalie Alexandra Greatbatch
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 inadequate – notice of action to improve. The registered person does not meet 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 Nursery has been operating with the present management since December 2003 but was originally established in 1990. The nursery operates in a converted detached house situated in East Oxford. The accommodation comprises of three playrooms, toilets and a small kitchen on the ground floor, and two play rooms, a toilet and an office on the first floor. An enclosed outside area is available for all children. Children come from the local and surrounding areas.

The nursery is open Monday to Friday from 08:00 until 18:00 all year round. A maximum of 25 children may attend the nursery at any one time. There are currently 32 children aged under five years on roll. Of these, 16 children receive funding for nursery education. The nursery supports children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and also supports a number of children who speak English as an additional language.

The nursery employs 15 staff, of whom nine hold appropriate early years qualifications. Five staff are working towards a qualification.

The setting receives support from the local authority.

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PROVISION

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is satisfactory.

Children stay healthy because the staff provide significant amounts of outdoor play for children to benefit from fresh air while they develop their physical skills. The children use a variety of equipment, such as slides, tricycles, a trampoline and pushchairs to develop co-ordination and most children move well with increasing confidence. The indoor areas are clean and children learn to wash their hands from an early age. The staff supervise hand washing to make sure children know what to do, but they do not remind children to use soap to ensure thorough removal of dirt and germs before children eat. A basic key worker system operates in an attempt to settle children when they start at the provision, but this is not effective in continuing support and helping the children build close bonds with adults. Some staff have a first aid certificate to enable injured children to receive appropriate treatment and the first aid supplies are in date. The children have free access to drinking water and eat healthy snacks consisting of fresh fruit and crackers, to sustain them between meals. They bring their own packed lunches from home and there is a refrigerator available to keep food fresh. All ages join together to participate in 'cooking' activities to develop children's interest in food making, for example, fruit salad containing a wide range of fruits to eat for snack.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is inadequate.

The children have ample space overall, but the layout of the building and current use of space results in some small rooms becoming crowded while some lie almost empty. All areas are bright and welcoming and children have easy access to resources because they are stored at floor level for children to access safely. The staff conduct daily safety checks to remove hazards but appear to have little understanding of safety. For example, a small slide used by toddlers was positioned part on and part off the safety surface. When made aware of the risk the staff re-positioned the low end of the slide on the soft surface leaving the steps and highest point over the concrete, unaware of the risk of injury if children fall from the top. The level of supervision throughout the nursery is poor. Some staff have their backs to the children, unaware of what is happening around them, while others busy themselves with general tasks, such as showing visitors around or finding specific resources from within the shed. Children play reasonably safely because they have an appropriate range of equipment, suitable for their ages and stage of development, but do not develop a real understanding of safety and how to avoid accidents. The staff ask visitors to sign in to record who is on site. However, they fail to keep consistent records of children's attendance and consequently, some children are missing from the register while others are not marked out when they leave. This seriously compromises safe evacuation in an emergency. The children practise fire drills approximately twice a year but several children and staff attend on a part time basis and miss the opportunity to experience the process. The staff understand their responsibility to safeguard children from harm but several have only scant knowledge of the child protection procedure, despite some having attended recent training. There are currently no systems in place to revise what staff know and ensure they can make a referral if necessary. All rely on the manager to take the necessary steps when concerns arise, but in her absence, staff fail to follow the correct course of action.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is inadequate.

Children learn to be independent and successfully occupy themselves by playing with a range of appropriate activities laid out for them by the staff. Some link with friends to play together while others play alone or watch their peers before copying what they do. The staff ratio is often high because the different age ranges join together for some activities but, despite that, the children have little support to develop their skills and understanding. Staff virtually ignore younger children at times with some receiving no verbal interaction from staff for considerable periods of time. Others, during the same time, receive only cursory comments, being told only to 'slow down' or 'take care'. As a result, the children busy themselves by flitting from one activity to another, without developing any real understanding of things around them or learning to extend ideas to develop new interests. None are unhappy but they sometimes squabble with their peers over toys, and get louder and louder to make themselves heard. Older children are now beginning to ignore their friend's pleas to join in play, copying what adults do instead of declining the offer politely. Some of the staff who care for younger children respond appropriately when they do communicate by, for example, saying 'Are you waiting at the traffic lights?' when they see children queuing on the bikes. However, they do not develop the play to bring in road safety, discussing waiting for the green light, and reinforcing work on colours. One child, when showing interest in a puddle was simply told, 'Now you're wet aren't you! Let's wipe your hand'. There was no encouragement from staff to inspect the water, make splashes or use the water to paint with fingers to build the children's enthusiasm. As a result, many development opportunities are lost. Older children receive more valuable attention from staff, but the room layout sometimes results in only one adult in each room. As a result, staff move from one activity to another, focussing on one small group of children at a time. Consequently, children at the other activities play without support and encouragement, diminishing the value of much of what they do.

Nursery Education

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. The children in the pre-school benefit from a better standard of attention, enjoying a varied programme of activities planned around themes and topics. The staff prepare a number of tasks and learning opportunities for children to choose from, designed to help children progress towards the early learning goals. They offer collage, water play, role play resources, and climbing equipment among other things, providing something to interest everyone. Some activities are underused and the learning outcomes are not always clear. For example, a tray of pasta was hardly touched when placed on the ground with metal bowls, spoons and two coloured plastic dishes. The aim of the activity was to develop counting and colour work, but without adult input children found it uninspiring. The staff let children choose what to do and play freely. They spend time visiting each group to help support learning and development and, when joining in an activity, they competently extend discussion to add meaning to what the children do. For example, they talk about shapes and colours when helping build a jigsaw puzzle, getting the children to compare the picture on each piece they try. They let children learn by trial and error while asking questions about the noise made by the fire engine in the picture to link with the current theme. This helps the children make steady progress. However, by focussing on only one activity at a time, some learning opportunities go unnoticed where other children play. Most children remain productively occupied, playing racing games on the computer to practise letter recognition, making a collage to develop scissor control, or inventing scenarios when playing with cars in the garage, to share knowledge of the wider world with their friends. Most children play contentedly for the majority of the day and link with others to try out different activities. The children are generally quite sociable and

beginning to develop a caring attitude, with one asking another to, 'Come and play with me' or passing plastic footprints to a friend and saying, 'You can play with these'. The children confidently organise their own games and help pack away to develop their independence. They behave reasonably well but some make connections by pushing or taking a toy and starting a squabble. The children are beginning to stick up for themselves and protest loudly over injustice, often to little effect. They have well developed physical skills, using the climbing frame to dangle, bouncing high on the trampoline, and steering push and ride equipment without collision. Some children count for their own purpose, telling a friend how many different fruits are in the fruit salad and they have a sound understanding of size, shape and position. The staff monitor what children do and make notes on their achievements. They update children's profiles regularly and date entries to provide a clear record of children's rate of progress and identify gaps in learning. Planning supports children's continued development but does not clearly show increased challenges for children of different abilities.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is inadequate.

Children are let down by the ineffective key worker system and staff's inability to help them feel valued. The children and staff are a diverse group with a wide range of values and experiences. Some staff learn words from children's home language to help children know what to do and they learn a little about children's home life to discover things that are important to the children. The staff treat children with variable degrees of concern resulting in children feeling reasonably secure without forming strong bonds with the adults who work with them. Some staff show disrespect by making derogatory remarks or turn their backs on the children and ignoring what they do. Children with special needs are monitored and staff work with parents and carers to ensure a consistent approach to their care and development. The children behave very well considering the level of input and guidance they receive. Some manage successfully to solve their own problems when shrieks of protest fall on deaf ears and all are learning to stick up for themselves. Staff working with older children do try to teach harmony and get children to apologise when they upset their friends. They help older children understand about feelings to promote friendships and encourage children to be sociable. Parents and carers have mixed views about the setting. Some value the individual attention they and their family receives, while others are happy with recent improvements to the setting. Some, however, find a lack of management presence problematic when wanting to discuss their children, and others say their children are not very happy. Families receive a booklet about the setting before taking up a place and staff are willing to talk to adults at any time. The essential information, such as certificate of registration and insurance, is on display in the entrance hall and a complaints log is available for parents and carers to see on request. The complaints policy steers adults to the local authority rather than Ofsted and does not reflect recent regulatory changes. In addition, the complaints log currently breaches confidentiality by containing names of children and their families.

As far as the nursery education is concerned, the partnership with parents and carers is satisfactory. The planning and children's progress records are available for parents to see if they wish and the staff display photographs of what the children do. They talk to parents about their children's interest and plan activities to link with what they do at home to ensure consistency. Staff use parents' evenings and newsletters occasionally to provide parents with more information about their children's learning and help them feel involved, but these are used only intermittently. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is fostered.

Organisation

The organisation is inadequate.

The setting does not meet the needs of the range of children for whom it provides. There are serious failings in the provision resulting in children receiving sub-standard care. Children learn the basics of good hygiene and play in a secure environment but young children receive little valuable attention to help them learn about safety and develop to their full potential. The standard of supervision is poor and this impacts on children's behaviour. As a result, the children do not form strong bonds with staff, show signs of being unsettled as the day wears on, and some are beginning to ignore their friends. The staff read the policies when they take up their post and ongoing training is encouraged. There is currently no system for identifying staff's level of knowledge and understanding or revising what they know to ensure they can put policy into practice. The leadership of the care aspect of the provision is compromised due to a lack of monitoring procedures and the absence of a manager for significant parts of the day. The staff review policies occasionally to keep them up to date but do not always include correct information. Completion of the record of attendance is erratic and consequently, there is no accurate record of children's hours of attendance as required by regulation.

The leadership and management of the provision, for the nursery education, are satisfactory. The staff working in the pre-school rooms organise the learning programme themselves. They plan and prepare the activities, monitor children's progress and inform parents about the day when they collect. They record children's achievements to track progress and plan future development, making sure each child continues to make steady progress.

Improvements since the last inspection

At the last inspection, the quality of care was judged as inadequate. There were three actions set to improve the level of care requiring the provider to: notify Ofsted of changes to the premises or their use, revise the use of space and include details of children's hours of attendance in the daily registers. The provider agreed to notify all future changes as required by regulation and she has altered the use of some rooms to make better use of the available space. This has resulted in more floor area for children to use but insufficient seating at times to help children relax as they play. In addition, support for the older children is difficult, particularly when staff absence occurs, as only one adult is present in each room for much of the time. The provider has reviewed the method of recording attendance and now has an acceptable system to record all necessary information. However, the staff do not consistently record children's presence resulting in a further breach of Regulation.

The nursery education was found to be satisfactory at the last inspection and the provider was required to make better use of space and provide a full range of activities for children to explore freely. The children do now benefit from a wide range of learning opportunities to explore but current use of space impacts on the level of support children receive as previously stated.

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

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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, the registered person **must** take the following actions:

- actively promote enjoying and achieving for younger children to ensure they receive the attention they need to develop new skills and meet their potential
- ensure the complaints procedure reflects recent Regulatory changes and record only appropriate information in the complaints log for parents and carers to see
- develop staff's knowledge and understanding of the child protection procedure and monitor concerns to ensure appropriate action is taken when they arise
- consistently record children's arrival and departure times to keep a record of children's hours of attendance.

These actions are set out in a *notice of action to improve* and must be completed by the date specified in the notice.

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):

- deploy staff more effectively to support and develop children's learning at all times.

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