

Stepping Stones Pre-School

Inspection report for early years provision

Unique Reference Number	EY356433
Inspection date	09 May 2008
Inspector	Diane Mary O'Neill
Setting Address	Bedford Road Lower School, Hillgrounds Road, Kempston, BEDFORD, MK42 8QH
Telephone number	07748 405 212
E-mail	steppingstones.preschool@ntlworld.com
Registered person	Stepping Stones Pre-School
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 Pre-school operates from a purpose built dwelling. It is run by a parent voluntary committee. It is situated on the campus of Bedford Road Lower School in the town of Kempston, close to Bedford, in Bedfordshire. There are 52 children on roll of whom 39 are in receipt of funded education. The pre-school is open each weekday from 09.00 to 15.15 term- time only. All children have access to a secure enclosed outdoor play area.

Children come from the local catchment area. The pre-school has systems in place to support children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and who speak English as an additional language. The pre-school employs six staff. All of the staff, including the play leader hold appropriate early years qualifications. The provision receives support from the local authority.

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PROVISION

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

Children have excellent opportunities to learn about the importance of good personal hygiene through extremely well-planned daily routines and excellent support from the staff. All children develop their understanding through watching others, discussion and through positive role modelling by the adults. Children have an excellent awareness of how and why we wash our hands and the importance of eradicating germs in order to sustain their health as they follow the pictures displayed in the bathroom.

Children are exceptionally well protected from infection and are extremely well taken care of if they have an accident or become ill as staff rigorously abide by the pre-schools health and safety procedures. For example, a majority of the staff hold a current first aid qualification and there is a rolling programme to ensure this is continually maintained. Staff have a portable first aid kit and cloths for cleaning children's hands when outside in the garden or on trips. The pre-school has a clear written sickness policy which clearly references stipulated exclusion periods for childhood communicable diseases. This is openly shared with parents as are all documented first aid and emergency procedures which are recorded using appropriate forms. The pre-school has clear procedures for children who are on long term medication. Staff seek support from parents and seek appropriate medical advice to enable them to continue with children's superb care.

Children benefit from an excellent well-planned and presented healthy diet. The pre-school has a variety of snacks on offer to the children. To help with their learning and understanding staff have small groups of children in the café-style snack area, they talk about the importance of washing our hands, eating a healthy diet as well as having books available to further give guidance. Children thoroughly enjoy the snacks and are encouraged to try new tastes to develop their experiences. For example, the children help prepare pitta bread to go with hummus. Children who stay for lunch club bring a packed lunch and parents are advised off healthy options to put in the lunch boxes as well as ice packs to keep food cool. Children do not go thirsty as drinks are freely available throughout the day.

Children enjoy an extensive and stimulating range of equipment to promote their physical development. Staff effectively use the 'Birth to three matters' guidance to provide young children with extremely well-planned physical activities both inside and outside. For example, space is organised to enable children to get the most out of their physical play. This is effectively achieved as the pre-school positively promotes free play from inside to outside so all areas of children's physical development are effectively promoted. Children clearly enjoy using the garden whatever the weather. They benefit from exerting their energy and developing their imagination. For example, whilst building with large bricks they see how high a tower they can build. They enjoy playing in the play house in their pretend play, and get excited as they manage to get the ball into the large basketball-type net. Children have quiet activities built into the daily routine and learn about having a quiet time especially after lunch.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

Children are cared for in a bright new building that offers them a safe and secure setting. The entrance has an informative notice board and bright displays of their work are all around the

pre-school. Children's safety and welfare is paramount to the organisation of the pre-school. Staff are very vigilant when recognising hazards and take positive steps to minimise these. Risk assessments are carried out and all the staff share in the responsibility for keeping children safe. Staff practise evacuation procedures with all the children on a regular basis. Fire notices are on display for everyone to see. Children's safety and well-being are positively promoted through the staff being vigilant at all times both inside and outside. Access to the premises is well monitored through the supervision and management of the entrance area. Visitors to the pre-school are requested to provide identification and to record their presence on site in the visitors' book. Parents also have to knock on the pre-school door or be invited in at collection time to gain access to their children.

Children use a broad range of safe, good quality and developmentally-appropriate toys, furniture and equipment. These are very well organised throughout the setting in child-height storage units to encourage children to become independent and gain safe access to their resources. In the whole of the pre-school space children are encouraged to help tidy toys away and notify an adult if something is broken. Sensitive reminders by staff encourage children to share in their responsibility for their own safety and that of others. For example, staff explain the correct way to carry scissors when walking. Outside the children have good access to a fully enclosed area which is monitored at all times by the staff. Within this area children have a good variety of equipment that enables all areas of their physical development to be challenged. However, staff have not fully assessed the risk to children as, when the weather is hot and sunny, the rubber safety surface and some of the plastic climbing equipment get very hot. Therefore there is the potential for children's safety to be comprised. If the weather is poor then children have access to an indoor play space to further develop their physical skills.

Children are well protected by staff who have a clear understanding of safeguarding children policies and procedures and give high priority to children's welfare. Staff are confident in their knowledge of child protection, reporting concerns appropriately to senior staff and documentation is in place to support them in the event of any concerns. The staff undertake regular training to ensure their knowledge and understanding is continually up to date so children's welfare is fully safeguarded.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

Children are exceedingly happy, contented and thrive well in this secure and stimulating and caring environment. Children are encouraged to make their own choices from the play materials. Staff set up some of the actives for the children as well as leaving them to make their own choices. Staff are excellent at supporting the children in their play and learning as well as taking their lead from them. Children access the stimulating and challenging range of play materials with enthusiasm and gusto. For example, some children excitedly make their 'power ranger' arm bands for a game they are playing. They are beginning to form secure relationships with both the staff and other children.

Staff have an extremely good awareness of the 'Birth to three matters' framework and use it in a highly positive manner to successfully motivate and enable the younger children in their enjoyment and achievements. Staff effectively plan activities in line with this framework and have gained a secure knowledge about what children can learn. The children enjoy exploring the sand, water, and other mediums that the pre-school bring into their learning environment. Children show wonder and surprise at finding worms in the soil. Staff confidently expand the children's learning as they give them magnifying glasses. The children are captivated as they

watch a mini beast uncurled itself. Staff's dedication to the children has a positive effect on their learning and contentment.

Children exhibit high levels of confidence and security and this has been achieved by the consistent support and direction of staff. Older children are able to resolve their differences when any conflicts arise. They are encouraged to talk about them and find their own solutions. This provides children with tools to become aware of the needs of others and negotiate differences. Younger children often seek out staff to share experiences with or to gain support for an activity.

Attractive displays all around the pre-school give children pride in their work and show they are highly valued. Staff throughout the pre-school make the experiences enjoyable and meaningful for children which in turn aids their confidence. Children are receptive to the constant praise and encouragement that is provided by staff. This has a clear impact on their self-esteem and encourages them to try new tasks and participate in activities. Children of all ages and abilities develop concepts of counting, sorting, shape and colour and problem solving through the very well planned and managed activities on offer.

Nursery Education

The quality of teaching and learning is good. Staff are very skilled at enriching the experiences for all children with exceptionally well-organised and planned activities and resources. They have a very good awareness of children's starting points and use this fairly well to plan the next steps in their development. However, these do not identify where children need more challenge. Assessment and observation are beginning to show progress in children's learning. Some further development of these will show where children are learning and challenges especially for more able children can be achieved. Staff are excellent role models and inspire, praise and encourage children to try things for themselves. They encourage children to gain the confidence to succeed and support them well as they aspire to do so. Staff are extremely skilled when motivating the children and know how to capture their interest by involving them in activities they can extend for themselves. Children are progressing well, supported by a highly motivated and able staff team who are confident in their abilities to develop and challenge children's learning accordingly.

Children enjoy registration time and all children confidently answer their name when called. Staff are getting to know the children well and know when to step back and let children take over an activity, creating a realistic balance between adult-led and child-initiated play. For example, some children pretend to be a power ranger and staff talk to them about their favourite character and what they are doing when making their pretend arm bands. These ongoing discussions help the children extend their use of their imagination and communication skills.

Children are totally absorbed and happy in the activities provided. Staff are extremely well skilled at extending the range of activities which supports the children's learning and enables them to make progress. For example, children play in the soil play area and find bugs and worms. Staff get out the magnifying glasses so the children can explore these creatures further and discussions take place about the creatures so children's learning is expanded.

Children have a strong sense of belonging as they have an awareness of the daily routine, for example, where to hang their coats when they arrive, the layout of the room and choice of play materials. They are developing friendships and seek out friends to share activities with. Behaviour is very good as the children are fully absorbed in their play. If conflicts arise children respond

well to direction, more able children resolve their own conflicts and some will seek staff support. For example, when two children push one another staff get down and talk quietly to them who say sorry to each other and then carry on playing their game. Older children recognise that they can make mistakes, but through high levels of encouragement staff help the children to develop coping skills which aids them to move forward.

Children have extensive opportunities to learn through play and staff will often start at a child's baseline to encourage them to develop the skills required, this in turn helps children build their confidence and self-esteem. Children enjoy using language in their imaginative play. For example, a group of children in the home corner enjoy their game and lots of chatting to each other is involved. Later staff go over and the children encourage them to join in their game. Children have a variety of opportunities to discovering their mark-making skills, through painting, using crayons and chalks. They are starting to enjoy books and stories, for example, at story time they join in with the story of the 'Hungry caterpillar'. Simple labels around the room and seeing their names on their name cards develop children's early word recognition. They are confident counters and have excellent opportunities to practise these skills when participating in counting songs and when counting objects within an activity such as the bricks in a tower of bricks. Children have a growing concept of matching, sorting, size, shape and simple problem skills. These are gradually introduced through a range of well-planned activities, as the children are ready. Staff provide children with opportunities to extend their knowledge and understanding of the world around them. Children are able to explore nature first hand in their garden, such as looking at bugs, as well as taking part in planting things to grow such as vegetables. Creative activities give children a sense of achievement as they are able to create spontaneously using their imagination and skills.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

All children are warmly welcomed into the pre-school. They attend from a variety of backgrounds, are highly valued as individuals and their needs are effectively met through the very committed and supportive staff team. The staff team ensure that the resources positively represent the children who attend as well as individuals from the wider community which helps children develop positive attitudes to others as well as a positive view of the wider world and increasing their awareness of diversity.

Children's behaviour is very good as they are fully absorbed and motivated in their play. This behaviour is further encouraged by the good role models and excellent staff support for the children. This ensures any incident is dealt with calmly and with consideration for all involved. There is an excellent team spirit throughout the pre-school with children getting on with one another, playing happily together, being respectful of each other and sharing resources. Children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is fostered.

All children are valued and respected as individuals and all their needs are well met. Staff recognise that some children will need extra care and attention, and the pre-school works very hard at including all children within the setting. One of the staff has had special training and works closely with the special educational needs co-coordinator within the local authority as well as any outside support in ensuring children's individual needs are met.

The partnership with parents and carers is good. This successful partnership contributes significantly to children's sense of belonging, security and well-being. Parents are warmly welcomed into the pre-school where staff are on hand to discuss any issues and share

information. For example, they are invited to regular open days and have appointment times for more formal exchange of information about their child's progress and achievements. Informative notice boards throughout the nursery also help with this process. Parents receive clear information through the nursery prospectus which is also written in other languages such as Punjabi to help families who English is a second language. Information about the Foundation Stage through newsletters and information boards gives them an understanding of how their child will make progress. There are limited opportunities for children's development to be extended at home.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

The leadership and management of the nursery education is good. Children's care is greatly enhanced by the strong management and committed and dedicated staff team. This benefits all the children within the pre-school. The pre-school committee provide effective support for the management and staff team on a day-to-day basis and by enabling them to attend various training courses. All staff have considerable knowledge of the Foundation Stage and have a high regard for the wellbeing of the children, their group sizes, adult support they may need and ensuring that their enjoyment and achievements contributes to the overall effectiveness of the organisation of the pre-school.

The premises are extremely well organised. Indoor and outdoor space is set out to ensure children obtain the maximum enjoyment and play opportunities that will enhance all areas of their development and learning. Children arrive keen to participate in the pre-school life and freely move both inside and outside the play room. Staff work very effectively as a team, moving with the flow of the children where they can actively involve themselves in their play.

Well-organised records and documents ensure children's welfare and enables parents to play an active role in their child's care. The required documentation is very well organised and in place to support the management and efficient running of the setting. There are very informative notice boards and leaflets for parents as well as excellent daily communication to share information about their children.

Staff are extremely knowledgeable and have a very good understanding of child development. Most of the staff hold relevant childcare qualifications and extend their own professional development through access to training and childcare literature. For example, staff attend training such as in safeguarding children and the new Early Years Foundation Stage training course. Taking these positive steps in their own development enables them to extend, challenge and further enhance children's learning and development. Overall children's needs are met.

Improvements since the last inspection

Not applicable.

Complaints since the last inspection

Since registration 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):

- conduct a risk assessment for the summer use of the physical play area.

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 assessment and observations to show where children's learning requires further challenges
- further develop opportunities for children's learning to be continued at home.

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