

Stepping Stones Day Nursery

Inspection report for early years provision

Unique reference number	311839
Inspection date	07/05/2009
Inspector	Janet Fairhurst
Setting address	Market Lane, Swalwell, Newcastle upon Tyne, Tyne and Wear, NE16 3ED
Telephone number	0191 488 9000
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Type of setting	Childcare on non-domestic premises

Introduction

This inspection was carried out by Ofsted under Sections 49 and 50 of the Childcare Act 2006 on the quality and standards of the registered early years provision. 'Early years provision' refers to provision regulated by Ofsted for children from birth to 31 August following their fifth birthday (the early years age group). The registered person must ensure that this provision complies with the statutory framework for children's learning, development and welfare, known as the *Early Years Foundation Stage*.

The provider must provide a copy of this report to all parents with children at the setting where reasonably practicable. The provider must provide a copy of the report to any other person who asks for one, but may charge a fee for this service (The Childcare (Inspection) Regulations 2008 regulations 9 and 10).

Description of the setting

Stepping Stones Day Nursery opened in 1997. It operates from a self-contained building in Swalwell, Gateshead, close to the A1 and Metro Centre shopping complex. The nursery has four main base rooms; the Baby Nest for children aged under one year, the Ducklings for one to two-year-olds, the Cygnets for two to three-year-olds and the Swans for three and four-year-olds. The baby room is situated on the first floor and is accessed via a flight of stairs. The nursery serves a wide area of the north east.

The nursery is registered on the Early Years Register to provide care for 72 children within the early age range. There are currently 104 children on roll. Children attend for a variety of sessions. The setting supports children with English as an additional language.

The group opens five days a week all year round, closing only on bank holidays. Sessions are from 07.30 until 18.00. There are 16 members of staff employed, 11 of whom have early years qualifications. The setting receives support from the local authority.

Overall effectiveness of the early years provision

Overall the quality of the setting is outstanding. The nursery provides extremely well for all children in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), where children are highly motivated and extremely well cared for. Their individual needs are recognised and valued by the staff, who are exceptionally well informed of children's starting points and capabilities derived from discussion with parents and sensitive ongoing observations. There is a very positive partnership with parents. Effective systems for the evaluation of the nursery ensure that all staff understand the strengths and recognise the areas of improvement within the setting.

What steps need to be taken to improve provision further?

To further improve the high quality early years provision the registered person should consider:

- continue to develop effective links with other settings providing EYFS to ensure that children's needs are met and there is continuity in their learning.

The leadership and management of the early years provision

The teamwork among staff is excellent with the interests of the children at the forefront of their thinking. All staff form positive relationships with children, establishing the basis of respect which permeates the nursery, and show enormous pleasure in children's achievements. They have a real understanding of the way

that young children learn and use this to plan a wide range of activities inside and outside the nursery. Staff are sensitive and friendly and this helps to create an atmosphere in which children feel secure and are keen to learn. Recruitment procedures promote children's welfare because all staff undergo all necessary checks before working with children. Detailed induction and appraisals ensure that training needs are identified. The staff's professional development is strongly encouraged and they need very little encouragement to continue their training and personal development.

All policies and procedures for the safe management of the provision are in place and are constantly reviewed. Highly detailed risk assessments are drawn up and ensure that identified risks are well managed on a daily basis so that children learn in a safe and secure environment. Child protection procedures are well known and followed consistently. The management team appreciates the importance of developing effective links for liaising with other settings where children also attend to assist in the transition and to provide consistency in their care, learning and development.

Staff make time for parents at the beginning and end of the day to discuss their children. In addition, staff in the baby room display a series of photographs depicting the nursery day and activities their children enjoy. All staff encourage parents to look at and contribute to their children's development files which contain photographs and text showing their children enjoying a range of activities. In this way, parents can be assured that their children are happy in nursery and progressing well. The management team are ambitious for the nursery and constantly seeking to develop it further. They provide a clear direction for the nursery, which they very successfully share with all staff so that there is a willingness to adopt new ideas to improve children's learning. Monitoring and evaluation are central to the nursery's development. Their completed self-evaluation successfully identifies their strengths and areas they plan to improve.

The quality and standards of the early years provision

The staff provide rich and stimulating play experiences, firmly based on an understanding of how young children learn. They achieve an excellent balance between following and developing children's interests and ensuring that, over time, all areas are covered by all children. There are excellent systems for all staff to observe and record what the babies and children know, understand and can do, and for monitoring the progress they make over time. This information is used effectively to plan for children's next steps in their learning. Meticulous tracking of children's progress enables staff to tailor learning to the individual needs of each child which helps them to do as well as possible.

The calm atmosphere and the high expectations help children to settle quickly and enjoy their learning. Their behaviour is excellent because most of the time they are totally absorbed in what they are doing. The learning environment is bright and welcoming. Whether indoors or outside, children find worthwhile activities that add to their learning. For example, the toddlers play outside and with various utensils beat out sounds on different home-made instruments, such as pots, pans and

wooden slats, which have been secured to the perimeter fence. Indoors, the older children may be kneading 'flubber', working on the computer or re-enacting familiar events in the home corner, whilst the babies are enthralled by the bubbles they try to catch. Wherever they are, they are supported extremely well by the staff and surrounded by light-hearted laughter and continuous challenge, thus successfully engaging children and turning them into eager learners.

Because the nursery is run on the principle of making best use of every opportunity to explore and enjoy what is happening, children learn about the magic of nature and growth as they look at the life cycle of the caterpillar and frog, plant seeds and grow vegetables in test tubes to observe root growth. Staff and children laugh and marvel together at all the revelations children experience during each activity, such as trying to find bugs and spiders in the garden. Children confidently recognise shape in their own environment, for example, one child pointed out that the window is an arch shape. They are keen to explore shape properties, when asked 'can you roll the triangle' this prompts some children to test out what they can do with shapes. This investigative approach adds excitement and fun to children's learning. Numbers and counting are woven into all activities. Staff caring for the babies sing number songs and count as they help them to build towers; older children develop concepts of weight and measurements through their baking activities and water play.

Children know that at times they must listen and they do so very attentively without undue restlessness; they comply with requests willingly and are eager to take on small responsibilities. Children learn very well from the exemplary role models provided by the staff, who value what children say and recognise their achievements with smiles and encouraging praise. Staff are particularly good at catching children's attention and interest through sharing stories in ways that feed their imaginations. For example, the children have grown their own tray of grass and with use of additional props outline the story of 'The Hungry Caterpillar'. Consequently, the children are able to remember the sequence of what happens as well as developing their imagination further as they make up different characters and events. They have an increasing awareness of different cultures. They thoroughly enjoy celebrating festivals, such as Chinese New Year, and learning about different countries their food and their language.

Children have a very good understanding of how to adopt a healthy lifestyle, for example, through regular exercise, eating a range of good food and staying safe. The regular access to the outdoor environment boosts children's physical and emotional well-being as well as keeping them healthy.

Annex A: record of inspection judgements

The key inspection judgements and what they mean

Grade 1 is Outstanding: this aspect of the provision is of exceptionally high quality

Grade 2 is Good: this aspect of the provision is strong

Grade 3 is Satisfactory: this aspect of the provision is sound

Grade 4 is Inadequate: this aspect of the provision is not good enough

Overall effectiveness

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage?	1
How well does the provision promote inclusive practice?	2
The capacity of the provision to maintain continuous improvement.	1

Leadership and management

How effectively is provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage led and managed?	1
How effective is the setting's self-evaluation, including the steps taken to promote improvement?	1
How well does the setting work in partnership with parents and others?	2
How well are children safeguarded?	1

Quality and standards

How effectively are children in the Early Years Foundation Stage helped to learn and develop?	1
How effectively is the welfare of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage promoted?	1
How well are children helped to stay safe?	2
How well are children helped to be healthy?	2
How well are children helped to enjoy and achieve?	1
How well are children helped to make a positive contribution?	1
How well are children helped develop skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being?	1

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