

Stepping Stones

Inspection report for early years provision

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Inspector Esther Darling

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Type of setting Childcare on non-domestic premises

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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).

The setting also makes provision for children older than the early years age group which is registered on the voluntary and/or compulsory part(s) of the Childcare Register. This report does not include an evaluation of that provision, but a comment about compliance with the requirements of the Childcare Register is included in Annex B.

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Description of the setting

Stepping Stones opened under its current owners in 2009. It is registered on the Early Years Register and also on the compulsory part of the Childcare Register. It is one of a number of settings run by Headstart and Firststeps Nurseries. It operates from its own premises which are a converted Victorian school in the centre of Grantham. Children are cared for in groups according to their age and level of ability. There is a baby room, a toddler room and two rooms used by the pre-school and out of school care children. There is a separate sleep room for the younger children. There are three separate adjoining play areas, one for each of the age ranges. The provision is accessible and car parking is available on site. A maximum of 76 children may attend the provision at any one time, all of whom may be in the early years age range, 16 of whom may be under two years. The provision is open from 07.30 to 18.00, it is open all year round, closing only for Bank Holidays and for a week at Christmas. Children attending come from the local and surrounding areas and there are strong links with the college. There are 13 staff who work with the children, most of whom hold relevant childcare qualifications. The setting is supported by the development team from the local authority.

The overall effectiveness of the early years provision

Overall the quality of the provision is outstanding.

Staff plan a wide variety of worthwhile activities for children that result in them making good or rapid progress towards the early learning goals. They have an excellent grasp of the Early Years Foundation Stage and have fully embraced the idea of personalised learning to fully meet the developmental needs of individual children. All aspects of children's health and safety are promoted in a dedicated manner and every child's care needs are clearly sought and met to a high standard. Highly effective partnerships between providers, parents and other agencies ensure praiseworthy consistency in care and support smooth transitions. The setting has a strong capability to continue to make progress, and maintain the exceptionally high standards.

What steps need to be taken to improve provision further?

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

- build on the good work in partnership with parents by continuing to look at ways in which information can be shared and involving them in their child's continuous learning and development.

The effectiveness of leadership and management of the early years provision

Children are safeguarded because there is a comprehensive awareness of safeguarding issues among the adults within the setting at all levels, all of whom receive regular training and have a clear understanding of their personal responsibility to protect children. The extensive recruitment and vetting of staff, and ongoing commitment to their professional development ensures children are cared for and taught by practitioners of a high calibre. The robust policies and procedures are monitored to ensure their ongoing effectiveness in order to foster the safe and efficient management of the early years provision and to promote all children's welfare. For example, security of the premises is much enhanced and parents' cooperation has contributed towards this. All visitors to the setting are greeted at the door and escorted whilst inside. Risk assessment of outings and all aspects of the setting is comprehensive and children are cared for in a safe environment. The nursery places the promotion of equality of opportunity and diversity at the heart of all its work and is effective in ensuring that all children are well integrated. For example, all staff liaise closely with parents, other providers and inter-agency teams to regularly share and update information to ensure that every child receives support at an early stage. This means that any identified achievement gaps for children are narrowed because activities are planned to include all children and match with their particular styles of learning. Children with disabilities are fully supported and their care is exemplary. Boys' attainment is significantly enhanced because staff understand what inspires them.

Parents are valued as the primary carers and educators of their children and everyone working at the nursery makes sure that they are provided with good quality information about the early years provision and their children's progress. Parents and carers are increasingly involved in their children's learning. They are encouraged to share their children's achievements at home via the innovative achievement cards, which are posted in a box. These are then celebrated at nursery by proudly displaying them, fostering a great sense of self worth within the children. At the time of the nursery seeking parents views about the provision last year, their opinions were positive. Although at this time they did not know how their children were progressing, action has been taken to rectify this. Children and parents are warmly welcomed into a safe and stimulating environment that has been much improved under new ownership. An ethos of continuous provision works very well, enabling children to make the most of their play and ideas because it is largely uninterrupted. Resources are organised in a manner which enables children to initiate their own ideas because they are labelled with photos and text. Pictorial routines fosters a sense of security for all children as they know how the day will progress, regardless of what language they speak. Innovative environments encourage exploratory play, for example, the outdoor classroom is furnished with a variety of tools and natural materials. The grow green area is frequented by enthusiastic children and staff alike and a great sense of achievement is gained via growing and harvesting a selection of vegetables. Children who use the after school club are encouraged to contribute their ideas of what they would like to play with, or outings for the holidays. Pre-school children benefit from an innovative system of photographs to stick on a Velcro board and

indicate what toys they would like to play with.

Leaders and managers have an ambitious vision for the setting and this is communicated and shared with the staff team who have collectively made many positive changes to the provision. Searching analysis and collaborative working with other professionals has led to great strides being made since the new owners took over the nursery. For example, restructuring the group rooms to provide a kitchen and changing area within them means that staff now support children closely because they work directly with them all of the time.

The quality and standards of the early years provision and outcomes for children

Children are very happy and really enjoy their time at the nursery. High levels of challenge are offered during practical and first hand experiences which the children eagerly attempt. Staff have a noteworthy knowledge of the Early Years Foundation Stage and take full account of this when planning enjoyable and challenging experiences across the six areas of learning. This results in children making significant progress overall, and rapid progress in their personal, social and emotional development. Their social skills are good and prepare them well for the future, for example, they learn to share toys, to take turns and to work cooperatively with others. Young children become increasingly independent as they put on aprons before messy play, and go to wash their hands, unprompted, afterwards. Observations and assessments of learning are analysed carefully to enable staff to identify the next steps in each child's development and therefore plan meaningful experiences to help bring this about. The organisation of the day flows well and children are productively engaged for the vast majority of the time, showing exemplary levels of concentration. The free flow system means that children have open access to innovative opportunities to engage in a wide range of physical activities, both indoors and out. The well thought out rolling snack time is accessed when children choose, and they try a variety of foods such as Lithuanian dishes, provided by a parent. Children wash their utensils without prompting, and are happy to help keep their environment clean and tidy. All of this helps them to gain a secure understanding about the habits which foster their good health. Children safely use a range of tools and equipment within the setting and know how to handle these in order to keep safe. For example, pre-school children have superb skills whilst chopping vegetables with table knives to make vegetable fried rice during cooking club. The high quality adult interaction and exemplary organisation of routines help babies and very young children gain an exceptionally strong sense of security. Babies confidently explore their environment, and pick up skills very quickly by observing familiar and caring adults.

Children form rewarding relationships with the adults in the setting and through developmentally appropriate ways, they are developing a burgeoning understanding of diversity. Individual children are supported very well and staff are sensitive towards the importance of ensuring all feel valued. For example, they encourage parents to bring in food and music that reflects their culture, and this also serves to enable all children to respect the traditions of others. Children are learning about helping those less fortunate than themselves by being involved in

activities to support charities or plights that affect other children. Behaviour is exemplary at the nursery, and children remind each other of how they should or should not behave. They are kind and tolerant, which reflects very well on the staff who are excellent role models. Children are sociable and communicative, confidently engaging in conversation with others, or speaking in a group situation. They readily name the day, date and weather during the welcome gathering. Here they show their knowledge of numbers beyond ten, and also what comes after today's date. Children of all ages welcome the nurturing experience of sharing a book with a staff member on the settee, in front of the life-like fire. They learn to recognise and write their own names, and are beginning to understand that print has meaning. Children use emergent writing in their play and mathematical language to describe what they are doing. Exciting activities such as playing with jelly and an interesting variety of man made and natural materials are approached with glee. First hand experiences that include caring for the nursery guinea pigs or visits from parents who share interesting details about their jobs help foster a wonder and knowledge and understanding of the world. Children of all ages are growing in their ability to use remote controls, programmable toys and IT equipment. Pre-school confidently handle the mouse to complete simple educational programmes on the computer, fostering their skills for the future whilst having fun.

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

The overall effectiveness of the early years provision

How well does the setting meet the needs of the children in the Early Years Foundation Stage?	1
The capacity of the provision to maintain continuous improvement	1

The effectiveness of leadership and management of the early years provision

The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	1
The effectiveness with which the setting deploys resources	1
The effectiveness with which the setting promotes equality and diversity	1
The effectiveness of safeguarding	1
The effectiveness of the setting's self-evaluation, including the steps taken to promote improvement	1
The effectiveness of partnerships	1
The effectiveness of the setting's engagement with parents and carers	2

The quality of the provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage

The quality of the provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
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Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage

Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
The extent to which children achieve and enjoy their learning	1
The extent to which children feel safe	1
The extent to which children adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which children make a positive contribution	1
The extent to which children develop skills for the future	1

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Annex B: the Childcare Register

The provider confirms that the requirements of the compulsory part of the Childcare Register are:

Met