



Stepping Stones Nursery

Inspection report for early years provision

Unique Reference Number 311839

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Inspector Julie Larner

Setting Address Market Lane, Swalwell, Newcastle upon Tyne, Tyne and Wear, NE16 3ED

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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 Nursery is one of two nurseries run by the organisation. It opened in 1997 and operates from a self contained building in Swalwell, Gateshead, close to the A1 and MetroCentre shopping complex. The nursery has four main base rooms for differing ages of children and all children share access to a secure enclosed outdoor play area. The nursery serves a wide area of the north east.

The nursery is registered to provide care for 72 children under five years. There are

currently 83 children aged from six months to under five years on roll. Of these, 21 receive funding for early education. Children attend for a variety of sessions. The nursery supports children who have English as an additional language.

The nursery is open five days a week all year round, closing only on bank holidays. It operates from 08.00 to 18.00. The nursery employs 14 members of staff. Of these, 11 have an appropriate qualification in early years.

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PROVISION

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

Children are cared for in a warm and clean environment. Staff follow the nursery's consistent procedures to ensure this is maintained. They wash down tables, clean younger children's toys and equipment on a daily basis and maintain their own personal hygiene well. Older children rest when they want to in a lovely, attractive quiet area. Younger children's individual needs are successfully met due to a very effective and successful partnership with parents. Staff place a very high priority on following children's individual routines to ensure babies feel safe and secure and a homely environment is provided. For example, children sleep and feed in line with their home routines. Staff know children extremely well due to the effective information they collect from parents and carers.

Children are protected from cross infection due to staff's thorough understanding of the nursery's comprehensive policies and procedures. Children use individual items for personal care and sleeping. Staff contact parents very promptly if they have concerns about children's health and show an exceptional understanding of how to deal with children who are ill. Children are beginning to learn about good hygiene. This is actively encouraged by staff, for example, older and younger children are given flannels to wash their hands and face after tea, and tissues are at a child's height so they can blow their noses.

Meals are a social occasion where children enjoy healthy and varied foods. Older children are particularly keen to try new foods due to the successful and appropriate encouragement they receive from staff. They are provided with choices about what to eat on some occasions, for example, if they do not like the food available staff prepare an alternative. All children are becoming very independent in feeding themselves. Staff are very patient and accepting of the necessity for them to develop this skill, as such meal times are a calm and pleasant occasion that children enjoy; they pour their own drinks, use cutlery successfully and enjoy the responsibility of being independent.

Babies are developing their physical skills well. Children take pleasure in trying to stand up, sit up and stretch for toys. Staff support babies well, for example, they hold children's hands as they try to walk and provide interesting toys, such as baby gyms to help develop their hand to eye coordination.

Children are beginning to gain good control over their bodies. They are involved in a

range of activities outside to stretch their physical skills. Older children successfully negotiate pathways both in and outdoors. They hop, skip, run and stop easily. Children enjoy playing on tricycles and chasing each other around, where they swerve to avoid being caught. Older children relish playing ring games, such as the farmer wants a wife and princess in the castle. They laugh as they play and join in with the actions of the song. Whilst children's physical development is good overall, older children's play sometimes lacks challenge.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

Parents and children are warmly welcomed into the nursery which provides a safe and secure environment to help them feel comfortable. This contributes to the open relationships shared by staff and parents and the lovely secure relationships the staff share with all of the children in the nursery. A very homely feeling is created, especially for the younger children, with the use of plants, neutral calming colours and framed pictures around the rooms. Photographs of children and their families help children to gain a sense of identity. Ideally placed at the children's height, they point to themselves on the wall. Staff join in their conversations showing that the links between home and nursery are highly valued.

Children are beginning to learn about safety. They have visits from the road safety officer and sound guidance from staff helps them to consider their actions. For example, children are reminded to stop safely on bikes outside and be careful beside the fence. Spontaneous discussions within the nursery routine add to children's learning. Children know that they must be careful with knives and comment that they, 'could be sharp'.

Consistent checks and procedures ensure that children can move safely and freely around the nursery. Staff are very vigilant and follow well thought out procedures to maintain safety at a high level. For example, wet floor signs are placed on spillages to make sure children are not at risk. When playing outdoors staff are careful not to use children's full names to ensure passers by can not gain information about them and confidentiality is maintained. All of the necessary paperwork and records are in place to ensure children are protected from harm, for example, comprehensive risk assessments, fire drill records and health and safety policies contribute to children's welfare. Whilst fire procedures are understood well by staff and drills are regularly practised and evaluated, not all fire exits in the nursery are clearly identifiable.

Children choose from a wide and varied range of equipment that they enjoy with enthusiasm and vigour. Some younger children have immense fun climbing in and out of cardboard boxes and putting their dolls to sleep in them. They concentrate for long periods on completing jigsaws and pretend play in the home corner. Most children choose from a good stimulating mix of manufactured and natural materials, however, this is lacking in some of the younger children's play experiences. Older children confidently make choices about what they want to play with due to easily accessible storage and the staff teams extremely good planning for different play areas. For example, the home corner is changed on a weekly basis, the baby clinic in

this area is hugely popular and an exciting hive of activity, with children weighing dolls, making appointments and using medical equipment.

Children's welfare is safeguarded in relation to child protection. Staff know and follow the nursery's acceptable policies to protect children. They complete child protection training and up-date this on a regular basis to ensure they are in line with current practice.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

Babies and toddlers are happy and settled in the nursery. Young children have developed good relationships with each other and lovely secure and trusting relationships with staff. Children enjoy their time at the nursery as staff engage them in play that they enjoy, for example, younger children play peek-a-boo with blankets, staff read children stories and help them to build tunnels for cars. Children are very confident and enthusiastic, they enjoy singing songs in group time by themselves and other children clap them for their efforts.

Children confidently make decisions about what they want to do and are engrossed in their play, for example, children persist at jigsaws for long periods and bring food from the home corner for staff. They have immense fun building tunnels for their cars and have the confidence to use the equipment their own way. For example, one child holds the tunnel up to their face and says "hello" to another child, they both laugh as they see each other. Children have developed good relationships with each other, they chase each other round and try to tickle each other, laughing.

Birth to three is used successfully in the nursery as staff have attended training to develop in this area and show a clear understanding of how this benefits young children.

Nursery Education

Children are gaining good self-care skills. Children show an extremely positive attitude to learning. They take pleasure in trying new experiences. Children rush to participate in activities, settle very quickly and concentrate for long periods. Children are developing good relationships with each other as they take turns, share and play together happily.

Children are extremely confident communicators they are keen to talk in both large and small groups. They enjoy stories immensely and older children are particularly successful at anticipating what will happen next and recalling their own experiences. They are beginning to recognise letters and words that are familiar to them and some older children can write their names. All children enjoy writing for a purpose as they make appointment cards for their babies at the clinic. Children express themselves freely, for example, they talk about their likes and dislikes.

Older children can count well. They are learning about numbers through good every day opportunities to count, such as counting children when they line up for outdoor

play. Children are interested in numbers and make observations about them in their play, for example, they comment on how many dolls they have and talk about which numbers are big. They compare shapes well and are beginning to use mathematical language accurately as they sort items from small to large. Whilst children are gaining a good understanding of numbers, some opportunities to allow older children to calculate are missed.

Children are keen explorers and are interested in finding out about things around them. They have opportunities to explore their local environment and learn about the people that help them such as, fire fighters, police, doctors and dentists. Children confidently talk about themselves and their experiences, for example, about their trip to a farm and their swimming lessons. Children build for a purpose, they construct roads from blocks and make vehicles from construction which they eagerly talk about.

Children confidently talk about what they see and hear. They have very good imaginations due to well stocked role play area. They take great pleasure in playing in the role play area as they weigh the babies in the clinic, listen to each others hearts and dress up as doctors. Children enjoy singing simple songs from memory at group time and on their own. They eagerly sing, 'London's Burning' and make their voices small and loud.

The quality of teaching is good. Staff deploy themselves very effectively to ensure all children can participate and learn, for example, they talk to children about what they would like to do and ask children key questions to develop their learning. Staff provide very good role models for behaviour and have successful methods to help children to listen. Children are consistently praised for their achievements and efforts which is highly successful. Staff stretch children, in most areas, due to knowing them extremely well, by asking them questions which successfully helps them to think. Staff have very good relationships with children. Lots of giggling, laughing and chatting between staff and children makes the nursery an enjoyable place. Children's progress is evaluated well due to clear planning and evaluation of activities.

Overall children are making good progress.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

Children are superbly cared for according to their individual needs. This is one of the nursery's particular strengths. Children are all highly valued as individuals and staff work hard to ensure they know all of the children in the nursery. Children's needs are quickly identified as staff know them so well. For example, staff regularly discuss what kind of day the children are having, whether they've been tired or behaved out of character and pass these observations on to the parents.

Children are beginning to learn about diversity. Children participate in fun and interesting activities to learn about other cultures. They dress up in saris, taste Indian food and enjoy Mendhi hand painting. Older children benefit from good resources in their everyday play promoting differences, such as disabled figures, skin tone paints

and pencils and dolls from different cultures. All children are welcomed into the nursery. Children from different countries who do not speak English make good progress in the nursery. Staff label play areas in the children's own language showing that they value their background and to help their development.

Children behave very well in the nursery. Staff follow a good, clear behaviour policy and provide good role models for children that are very successful. For example, younger children all clap each other after singing songs together. Children enjoy receiving worthwhile praise for their achievements, for example, they smile as staff tell them, 'well done', for sharing toys. They are keen to tidy away toys in the nursery and even the youngest children are beginning to take care of the environment, as they rush over to put their tissues in the bin. Children are beginning to learn about taking turns, younger children wait very patiently for a sticker after they have behaved well and staff talk to them about how positive this is. Children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is fostered, for example, children help each other by passing pens and equipment when they are involved in the same activities and talking to each other at lunch time.

Partnerships with parents are good. Parents are extremely complimentary about the care that is provided for their children. Some parents say that the staff love their children, which means they feel very secure in leaving them at the nursery. Parents are extremely well informed about their children's progress through detailed daily discussions with staff and formal parents evenings. A wealth of information is displayed for parents in the nursery to keep them informed about children's progress. Open and honest relationships with parents ensures they feel able to raise any concerns, a thorough response to these issues shows that the management team listen to parents and follow clear procedures.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

Children are supported well in the nursery by staff. Good deployment of staff ensures that children's learning is developed and their individual needs are met successfully. Children are happy and settled in the nursery. They move freely around the areas due to staff using resources and space well. Children are involved in the activities and play experiences they want to do. This is because staff are skilful in identifying areas that are popular with children and focusing on ensuring children can join in. For example, lots of older children enjoy playing in the home corner so staff move equipment around to create more space in here.

Babies are stimulated and interested as high ratios enable staff to provide individual attention. For example, they shake rattles, help children who are becoming more mobile to walk and gently comfort children who have recently woken up.

Children are cared for in a safe and secure environment due to staff having a very good understanding of the nursery's comprehensive policies and procedures and implementing them successfully. The necessary records to safeguard children's welfare are comprehensive and up-to-date.

Leadership and management is good. Effective induction procedures ensure that all staff show a good awareness of their roles and responsibilities and new staff can learn from the experienced staff in the nursery. The nursery's progress is monitored successfully by the manager, because of this the provision for children is improved, for example, staff attend training, such as Birth to three matters, to further benefit the care of the children.

Overall the provision meets the needs of the children attending.

Improvements since the last inspection

At the last inspection the group agreed to; ensure children in all areas of the nursery have easy access to resources reflecting positive images of culture, ethnicity and disability at all times; provide parents with written details of child protection issues and ensure that Area Child Protection Committee guidance is obtained from local authorities in which children live.

Children have access to several resources that help them to learn about diversity. They are involved in activities which help them learn about different cultures and spontaneous play with good adult support encourages them to think about disabilities. It is acknowledged that it is difficult for staff to create a homely environment and also provide images that reflect diversity for the younger children, however, resources could be improved to develop this aspect.

Parents are provided with details of child protection as the policy relating to this is displayed in the reception area and regular newsletters bring this issue to their attention, meaning they are well-informed about the care of their children.

The nursery have attempted to gain information about child protection procedures from other local authorities, however, this has been unsuccessful. The nursery were told that they can only gain this information in the event they have concerns about a child who lives in a different local authority. The nursery have ensured that they have all of the contact numbers to pass on concerns and further protect children's welfare.

Complaints since the last inspection

There are no complaints to report since the last inspection. The provider is required to keep a record of all 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 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):

- ensure all children benefit from a good range of natural play materials that contributes to their overall development
- ensure that all fire exits are easily identifiable

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):

- develop the opportunities for older children to develop calculating skills
- develop older children's physical skills, for example, by providing opportunities for them to climb.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the leaflet *Building better childcare: Compliments and concerns about inspectors' judgements* which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk