

Stepping Stones Pre-School

Inspection report for early years provision

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Inspector

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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).

Children only attend this setting before and/or after the school day and/or during the school holidays. The judgements in this report reflect the quality of early years provision offered to children during those periods.

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 Pre-school is run by a voluntary committee of parents and carers. It is situated in the grounds of Exning Primary School, in Exning, Suffolk. It opened in the local church hall in 1976 and moved to its current site in 1995. The pre-school has the use of a large room and a secure enclosed outdoor play area within the school grounds. It also has use of the school hall and playground by arrangement.

The pre-school is open Monday to Friday from 9am until 3pm. Children attend for a variety of the sessions on offer. The pre-school is registered to take a maximum of 26 children, none of whom can be under two years of age. Currently there are 35 children on roll, all of whom are within the early years age group. It receives funding for early education places. The pre-school is able to support children special educational needs and/or disabilities and who speak English as an additional language.

There are six members of staff. The manager has an honours degree in Early Childhood Studies. Two staff are qualified to National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) level 3, two are qualified to NVQ level 2 and one is working towards a qualification. The pre-school has close links with the staff of the host school and receives support from the local authority. It is a member of the Pre-School Learning Association and Suffolk Quality Scheme. It is registered with Ofsted on the Early Years Register and the compulsory and voluntary parts of the Childcare Register.

The overall effectiveness of the early years provision

Overall the quality of the provision is outstanding.

In this exceptional pre-school children's individual needs are met extremely well. Staff draw very successfully on their detailed knowledge of the Early Years Foundation Stage and their astute assessments of what children know and can do to provide high quality learning experiences. These are matched precisely to children's abilities and interests so they make rapid progress. The pre-school is fully inclusive and works in close partnership with other professionals to give the most effective support. All staff evaluate their practice daily to ensure excellent outcomes for every child, and the pre-school's capacity to improve is outstanding.

What steps need to be taken to improve provision further?

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

- accelerating the plans to make the outside area more stimulating so that it extends and enriches children's learning experiences.

The effectiveness of leadership and management of the early years provision

Staff are meticulous in their efforts to safeguard the children. Comprehensive policies and procedures are updated and implemented robustly. Rigorous checks ensure that staff are vetted prior to employment and are suitable to work with children. High levels of staffing mean children are engaged fully in activities indoors and outdoors and feel safe at all times. The building and outside area is secure and children are only released to known adults at the end of the session. There is a comprehensive awareness of safeguarding among the staff, as all have been trained in child protection and relevant first aid procedures. Their responsibilities are made clear to parents, who are also clearly informed about the procedures to follow should they become concerned about a child's safety. To limit the hazards to children, thorough risk assessments for every aspect of the pre-school's provision and visits out are carried out frequently.

The pre-school has sustained its high level of effectiveness since the last inspection. This is because all staff are determined to do their very best for all of the children. They are self-critical about their approach and are committed to improving their skills. The pre-school strives for improvement and encourages all staff members to make notes of significant events that take place. In their regular meetings staff also examine the effectiveness of the pre-school and the changes that need to be made in the short term. In addition, they all contribute their views to a termly evaluation of the pre-school's overall effectiveness and long term developments. At the end of every day, staff review the quality of activities that have taken place and look at their impact on children's learning. Children's achievements are recorded and next steps in learning noted for inclusion in the next session that they attend. Parents' views are sought regularly, as are those of the children. As a result, the number of pre-school sessions has been increased and times of opening changed. Children's interests are taken into account fully when planning, and photographic evidence of children's progress has been entered into their learning records. These rigorous self-evaluation procedures have enabled the pre-school to identify key areas for improvement. The pre-school has recognised that the outside environment does not allow children to fully appreciate activities based on the natural world, which impacts on their choice of learning.

The pre-school is highly committed to working with parents, the school and other professionals to benefit children's learning, development and welfare. Resource boxes that parents can borrow to help their children are greatly appreciated. Open evenings and workshops, when parents can meet with staff to talk about their child's progress and hear about the methods used to help children learn, are well attended. Links with the school are excellent. Children's confidence and speaking skills are promoted by the opportunities provided to perform plays in the school's hall. The pre-school also has the use of the school's play areas, and this enhances children's physical development. Children get to know the teachers and school really well, and parents view the transfer from pre-school into the reception class as 'seamless'. Links with other professionals ensure that children's needs are met precisely.

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

Staff ensure that children really enjoy their time in the pre-school. Children often become absorbed in activities and play happily alone or with others for extended periods of time. Staff plan fun activities, such as using shaving soap to promote learning about the senses and early mark-making skills. Children delight in playing weighing and measuring games with the modelling dough. These activities allow them to understand instructions, count in sequence to numbers over ten and take turns. Children's involvement in artwork linked to the Chinese New Year helps them to explore colours and textures as they make a Chinese dragon. The strong emphasis on engaging children in talking about what they are doing or answering questions acknowledges the importance of language in learning. Children demonstrate high levels of confidence when choosing what they want to do. Some interests lead them to sing and dance along to their favourite songs or to invite an adult to share a book or a game with them. Whether involved in child-initiated or adult-led activities, staff notice and applaud achievements by stating, 'good sharing' and 'well done'. Staff build rapidly on children's achievements so they make excellent progress by the time they leave.

Children's exemplary behaviour contributes significantly to the happy atmosphere of activity. Children use tools and equipment sensibly. Excellent relationships and staff's reminders ensure children have a strong sense of safety. Children are considerate to one another and to adults. For example, when a member of staff wants to speak to all the children, children stop what they are doing and listen. Snack times and lunch times are very social occasions when children and staff sit together to eat their healthy food choices. Outdoors children climb, slide, jump and balance well, but there is limited space to enrich their experience of the natural world. To make up for this, children go on trips to the park. From their work on their allotment children learn what living things need to grow, and learn about nutrition as they taste freshly harvested and cooked vegetables.

Resources in the pre-school are excellent. When playing alongside the children, staff spontaneously incorporate counting activities, sing songs and ask effective questions that challenge children to solve problems. A strong emphasis is placed on enabling children to become independent, use their initiative and make decisions. Although very young, children learn a great deal about other cultures through their celebrations of the Chinese New Year and Diwali. These factors contribute significantly to children's rapid rate of progress and excellent outcomes. Children make a significant contribution to their community. There is a pre-school council and children who wish to be a part of this explain why they want to be a councillor. There is an election day and those chosen meet regularly with staff to say what they like about the pre-school and what can be improved. Recently children have raised funds for new information and communication technology equipment. They have chosen the equipment and ordered it themselves. Children vote on visits, such as to Colchester zoo. These are very ambitious challenges for such young children. They demonstrate the exceptionally high expectations of the staff, and the children's capacity to rise to them. These experiences provide a very secure foundation for their future education.

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	1

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

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