

# Stepping Stones Play and Learn Group

Inspection report for early years provision

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**Unique reference number** 650140  
**Inspection date** 16/05/2011  
**Inspector** Sarah Williams

**Setting address** Wilson Marriage Centre, Barrack Street, Colchester, Essex,  
CO1 2LR

**Telephone number** 01206 860467

**Email**

**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 Play and Learn Group opened in 1991 and operates from a purpose built extension within a community education building in Colchester, Essex. A maximum of 26 children may attend the group at any one time. The group is open each weekday from 9am to 3pm during school term times. Additionally, an after school and holiday club operates for children of school age. All children share access to a secure, enclosed outdoor play area.

There are currently 56 children in the early years age range on roll. Children come from the local area and surrounding towns and villages. The nursery specialises in support for a children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

The nursery employs 16 members of staff. Of these, 13 hold appropriate early years qualifications.

## **The overall effectiveness of the early years provision**

Overall the quality of the provision is outstanding.

Children's welfare, learning and development in the Early Years Foundation Stage is exceptionally well supported by the setting's staff team. They understand children's individual needs very well and undertake regular observations with the next steps in their learning clearly identified and included in the planning. The setting has excellent relationships with parents and values the support and advice from other professionals involved with the children to ensure that their specific individual needs can be met. The setting has clear procedures to evaluate and monitor their practice and have identified areas for development to benefit children's continued learning and maintain continuous improvement.

## **What steps need to be taken to improve provision further?**

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

- developing further the partnerships and exchange of information with other early years settings attended by children to ensure continuity of care for children's learning and development
- reviewing arrangements for parents to contribute to children's developmental records by commenting and adding information related to children's interests.

## **The effectiveness of leadership and management of the early years provision**

Children's welfare is fully supported as all staff are trained to ensure they have secure knowledge of child protection procedures. Staff are fully aware of the

procedures to follow should they have any concerns about the welfare of a child. There are clear written risk assessments for all areas and equipment within the setting to ensure that children are well protected from any potential dangers. The emergency evacuation of the premises is practised on a regular basis. This ensures that children's safety is a high priority and is a reminder to help develop children's knowledge of keeping safe. Children are taken on regular outings, which are all carefully risk assessed, and staff ensure that children's safety is paramount when out walking or visiting places of interest within the local community.

Parents are kept very well informed about their children's learning and development through daily verbal feedback. This is of extra importance for some of the children who have additional needs and may not be able to communicate easily. Children's Learning Journey records are available for parents to view at any time, additionally they are used as the basis of regular meetings between key persons and parents. Parents currently do not regularly add comments about their children's interests and learning at home to their Learning Journey records. Parents are kept fully informed about the provision through the regular, well produced newsletters and the outside notice board, which displays information about the day's events and activities. The setting's policies and procedures are made available to parents when they register and are accessible thereafter on request. The pre-school has established good links with local feeder primary schools and staff ensure that all essential information is exchanged prior to children's transition. This ensures that children's learning and development, with any additional help that is in place, is fully supported and continuous.

All staff are involved with planning activities each week around the individual needs of their key children. The staff are fully supported by the manager in further training for their continued professional development. This ensures that outcomes for children continue to remain positive and helps to extend and update staff's knowledge. The range of courses attended is impressive and includes specialised care for children's medical needs as well as general childcare based topics. Staff are particularly enthusiastic about their forest school training which has introduced some positive new methods of working to the group, benefitting all children. The move into new premises since the last inspection has been extremely positive for the setting, with easier access to the outside area and purpose designed bright, well equipped playrooms, sensory room and soft play areas, enhancing children's learning experiences.

All staff are included in reviewing and evaluating the setting's practice. Areas for improvement have been identified to benefit children's learning and development and to further improve the staffs' current, highly effective practice. The pre-school has in place a full set of policies and procedures which cover all aspects of operation. Parents are invited to complete questionnaires so their feedback can be obtained on the setting's practice. Comments received are overwhelmingly positive, allowing staff to be proactive in implementing changes to develop and improve the nursery's practice further. Parents particularly appreciate the support from staff in regard to obtaining information and securing specialist help when required.

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

Children are provided with a variety of nutritious foods at snack time to maintain energy levels and help them learn about healthy eating. Packed lunches sent from home are stored safely until required. Children's individual health and medical needs are fully supported through the range of clear policies and procedures, staff undertake specialist training if necessary to meet children's needs, for example tube feeding. Snack time is a social occasion where children sit in small groups, with staff, to facilitate conversation and encourage social interaction.

Children's opportunities for physical development are outstanding. The setting benefits from a superbly resourced, imaginatively designed outside area which entices children to explore and investigate the different equipment and spaces. For example, they can use the tunnels and climbing equipment, or trampoline. They have wheeled toys such as scooters and buggies to help them negotiate moving around obstacles. A growing area is set aside to cultivate vegetables and flowers while the gravel garden is great for seeking out bugs and minibeasts. Covered seating is conducive to story telling sessions, the various colourful, themed playhouses and a potting shed develop children's imaginative and creative thinking. They have all-weather equipment so that rain is no obstacle to outdoor play, and a recent addition is a canopied area close to the main building where sand and water play can now be enjoyed year round. The high staff to children ratio ensures that all children can access the equipment, some of which is adapted or especially designed for wheelchair users and children with limited mobility. Children enjoy regular outings either in small or larger groups, where they experience the wider community by visiting shops, a pet centre and other places of interest.

All resources are within children's reach and they move freely between areas such as the home corner, craft area and floor play. The book corner is inviting and appealing, and books are used effectively by staff to instill a love of stories and promote children's interest in literacy. Staff ask open ended questions and give children clear and unambiguous instructions to follow to promote their thinking skills. A large interactive screen is available for use with a laptop, enabling a group of children to enjoy IT based educational programs. Children learn about the wider world, other cultures and beliefs through a range of resources and celebration of festivals and cultural events throughout the calendar year.

Children are happy and settled, and demonstrate exceptionally good behaviour, mutual politeness and respect for each another and staff. They help to tidy away resources at the end of a session, showing care and a sense of belonging for their surroundings.

Regular, sensitive observations on children's individual achievements and the next steps in their learning are clearly identified by staff. Children's Learning Journey records are updated regularly to ensure that challenging activities are planned to promote their development.

## 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

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

### The effectiveness of leadership and management of the early years provision

<b>The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage</b>	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

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### Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage

<b>Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage</b>	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