

Stepping Stones Pre-School

Bedford Road Lower School, Hillgrounds Road, Kempston, Bedford, MK42 8QH

Inspection date	25/02/2013
Previous inspection date	22/04/2010

The quality and standards of the early years provision	This inspection:	2
	Previous inspection:	2
How well the early years provision meets the needs of the range of children who attend		2
The contribution of the early years provision to the well-being of children		2
The effectiveness of the leadership and management of the early years provision		2

The quality and standards of the early years provision

This provision is good

- Children are secure, happy and keen to learn. Their behaviour is good and they demonstrate high levels of independence. This means they are well prepared for school and have a positive approach to learning.
- Practitioners have a clear knowledge of the Early Years Foundation Stage and a thorough understanding of how children learn. They therefore make good use of most opportunities to promote children's learning through play and structured activities.
- Practical assessments mean that children's interests are noted and they are offered a wide variety of activities. The key person system is also used well, ensuring that practitioners and families can work together to promote children's learning and development.
- Practitioners get to know the children and interact well with them, extending their vocabulary and meaningfully including them in discussions. Children therefore develop good language, social and communication skills, which support their future learning.

It is not yet outstanding because

- Opportunities for children to write and make marks are not always optimised in all areas of play.
- Partnership working with other providers is not used to the maximum to include the consistent sharing of detailed information to further update children's assessments.

Information about this inspection

Inspections of registered early years provision are scheduled:

- at least once in every inspection cycle. The current cycle ends on 31 July 2016
- more frequently where Ofsted identifies a need to do so, for example where provision was previously judged as inadequate
- brought forward in the inspection cycle where Ofsted has received information that suggests the provision may not be meeting the legal requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage; or where assessment of the provision identifies a need for early inspection
- prioritised for inspection where we have received information that the provision is not meeting the requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage and which suggests children may not be safe
- at the completion of an investigation into failure to comply with the requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage.

Inspection activities

- The inspector observed activities indoors and in the outside area.
- The inspector held meetings with the manager, deputy manager and nominated person for the setting.
- The inspector talked with children present.
- The inspector carried out a joint observation with the deputy manager.
The inspector looked at children's assessment records, planning documentation,
- evidence of suitability of practitioners working within the setting, the provider's self-evaluation form and a range of other documentation.
- The inspector took account of the views of parents and carers spoken to on the day.

Inspector

Kelly Eyre

Full Report

Information about the setting

Stepping Stones Pre-school was re-registered in 2007 on the Early Years Register. It is situated in purpose built premises in Daisy Hill Children's Centre in the grounds of Bedford Lower School in Kempston, Bedfordshire. It is managed by a voluntary management committee. The setting serves the local area and is accessible to all children. It operates

from one main room and there is a fully enclosed area available for outdoor play.

The setting employs seven members of childcare staff. Of these, six hold appropriate early years qualifications at level 3 or above.

The setting opens Monday to Friday during term time only. Sessions are from 9am until 12noon and from 12noon to 3pm, with the option of a lunch club from 12noon to 12.30pm. Children attend for a variety of sessions. There are currently 45 children attending who are in the early years age group. The setting provides funded early education for two-, three- and four-year-old children.

What the setting needs to do to improve further

To further improve the quality of the early years provision the provider should:

- enhance the opportunities and resources for children to write and make marks during role play and other activities
- extend the arrangements for sharing information and partnership working with other people who care for the children, with particular regard to childminders.

Inspection judgements

How well the early years provision meets the needs of the range of children who attend

Practitioners are skilled and have a thorough knowledge of the Early Years Foundation Stage. They also pay close attention to creating an environment where children are happy and enjoy their time. This contributes to children feeling secure at the setting and being enthusiastic and positive about their play and learning. For example, they persevere with tasks and are confident to try new activities. Teaching techniques are strong, with practitioners confidently encouraging children to determine and develop their own play, offering support whenever needed. For example, children have time to explore dough before a practitioner encourages them to describe the texture and note how this changes when they add flour.

The key person system is used well to support practitioners and parents in working together in order to assess and review children's needs and promote their development. For example, practitioners work with parents to gather initial information and assess children's starting points, giving them a clear overview of their individual needs, developmental stages and interests. This information is used to inform the planning of initial activities and resources and then to check children's progress during their time at

the setting. Good communication procedures mean that parents have opportunities to share updates about their children and regularly view their child's assessment files. The setting also provides practical information about the areas of learning and current activities and planning. Parents are therefore supported in understanding how to promote their child's learning at home.

Practitioners use thorough assessment procedures and also keep a daily record of children's current interests, feeding this information into the planning. This enables them to promote children's next developmental steps and monitor the provision of opportunities in all areas of learning to ensure that this is balanced. Thorough tracking means that practitioners can check that all children are making good progress. They seek additional help whenever needed so that they are able to promote the progress of all children towards the early learning goals. Children are supported in acquiring the skills to learn effectively and to achieve well. Practitioners demonstrate a positive approach to learning and model inquisitive behaviour, thus encouraging children to experiment. For example, a practitioner works with children as they build towers with wooden bricks. The practitioner wonders which bricks to use in order to make the towers taller. Children become engrossed as they experiment with the bricks and work out which combination of shapes will make the most secure structure.

Practitioners attend additional training and make good use of any information gained from this in order to improve the provision for children and support their development. Information from 'ICAN' and 'Every Child a Talker' training is used to aid children's communication and help promote their language development. For example, children experiment by running items along lengths of guttering and are encouraged to work together, describe what they are doing and share their ideas. Children have appropriate opportunities to make marks and develop early writing skills. For example, they paint and use pens and pencils as part of craft activities. However, writing materials are not always readily available in role play areas and alongside other activities. This means that children are not fully encouraged to develop the use of writing for a purpose, such as writing lists and making notes while they pretend to talk on the telephone.

The flexible approach to activity planning means that children have balanced opportunities to play independently and to participate in structured activities. They are therefore able to take an active role in their learning and also learn to work in partnership with others. This helps prepare them for school and enables them to develop essential skills for use in future life. The careful planning of individual activities means that these are used well to enhance children's enjoyment and promote their development. For example, children enjoy a nature walk at a nearby park. They note the changing colours of the leaves, look for insects and examine conkers and acorns. On their return to the setting, they weigh and count the conkers and make leaf prints using the leaves they have collected. Activities such as this enable children to develop a knowledge of nature and the world around them and to extend their early numeracy skills.

Children are offered a creative range of opportunities that promote their physical development. For example, they learn to select and manipulate small puzzle pieces and construction sets. Structured activities help them to develop further skills, such as balance, control and coordination. For example, they thoroughly enjoy joining in with music and

movement sessions. Structured activities are also used well to help children gain an awareness of themselves and others. For example, they make their own self-portraits, discussing and comparing their characteristics and features. This awareness is extended and children gain a good understanding of the wider diversities of our society. For example, they enjoy looking at different cultures and explore these in a meaningful way through participating in linked craft activities, cooking traditional dishes and using associated role play resources.

The contribution of the early years provision to the well-being of children

The key person system is used well to support good partnership working with families. This helps to ensure that all children feel secure and form strong relationships with practitioners. The ongoing monitoring of all children enables practitioners to check that children are happy, their needs are met and they are making good progress. Resources are accessible and children are actively encouraged to explore these and are well supported in expressing their views and preferences. This aids them in developing essential skills and a positive approach to learning, thereby preparing them for the transition to school. This is further supported through the setting's thoughtful procedures. For example, practitioners accompany children on visits to the school and also arrange for children's prospective teachers to visit them at the setting.

Practical settling-in procedures aid new children in quickly settling and help parents to feel confident in the setting. For example, practitioners spend time with new parents to make sure that they fully understand the setting's policies and the daily practicalities. They also gather information about children's needs, abilities and preferences, using this to inform the initial planning of activities and resources. For example, new children feel valued and secure when practitioners talk with them about family members and when they see familiar or favourite toys on entering the setting. Children's transitions within the setting are natural as they interact in mixed age groups throughout each session. This enables children to learn from each other and thus gain skills that support their learning and social interactions. Vigilant practitioners know the children well and offer them sensitive support. They praise children for their efforts and achievements, thus promoting their confidence and self-esteem. Children work well together and the setting's thoughtful daily procedures mean that they are offered relevant opportunities to start taking on responsibility. For example, clear guidance from practitioners means that all children can participate meaningfully in tidying the setting before sitting down together at the end of the session.

Practitioners demonstrate a genuine interest in the children and show them that they care for and respect each individual. This creates a positive environment and supports children in appreciating each other and respecting the needs and values of others. Children are offered a range of practical opportunities that support them in developing their self-care skills. For example, they make independent choices about when to go outside and are encouraged to collect and put on their own coats before going out to play. Children are gaining a good understanding of the importance of healthy lifestyles. For example, their awareness of good oral hygiene is promoted as they engage in associated role play and talk about how diet affects teeth and bones. Children have good opportunities to engage

in physical exercise and to learn about the effect it has on their bodies. Ongoing explanations from practitioners support children in gaining a good understanding of safety issues. For example, children independently use the dustpan and brush to sweep up sand as they know this can cause a hazard if left on the floor.

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

The voluntary management committee and the setting manager ensure that all practitioners are well supported. Their thorough monitoring of practitioners' performance means that their work is valued and they are supported in developing their professional practice. For example, the formal appraisal system is actively used to monitor performance and review the personal development plan of each practitioner. Resources are used well as any training attended is cascaded to all staff. This means that all practitioners have a good understanding of child development and of the requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage. They can therefore promote children's health, welfare and development. There are very good procedures for practitioners and the voluntary management committee to work together. This means that they have a good understanding of the roles and responsibilities of others and can work together to provide the best environment they can for the children.

Thorough self-evaluation covers all areas of the setting's work and enables the manager to obtain a good overview of the strengths and weaknesses. She uses this information to develop practical action plans that will improve the provision for children. For example, plans include the development of the outdoor area so that children are offered increased play and learning opportunities outside. Children's welfare is promoted well because arrangements for safeguarding children are practical and comprehensive. Practitioners have attended relevant training and demonstrate a good understanding of the process to follow should they have any concerns about a child in their care. There are robust procedures to ensure that all practitioners are suitable to work with children and also to check the suitability of members of the voluntary management committee.

Practitioners keep accurate records of each child's progress in every area of learning. The manager uses this information to monitor children's progress. She can therefore ensure that they are offered a wide range of experiences that support their good progress towards the early learning goals. Practitioners are experienced in liaising with other professionals in order to support children and their families. For example, they work closely with staff at the children's centre. There are clear procedures for sharing information with others caring for the children. For example, practitioners ensure that all involved with the children receive the setting's regular newsletters and updates. However, these procedures are not used to the optimum to share detailed information, particularly with childminders, in order to fully update children's progress and thereby plan further activities. Good partnerships with parents mean that children's care is consistent and their development promoted. Parents are kept well informed of their child's progress, for example, through frequent consultation events and the use of daily communication books

for each child.

What inspection judgements mean

Registered early years provision

Grade	Judgement	Description
-------	-----------	-------------

Grade 1	Outstanding	Outstanding provision is highly effective in meeting the needs of all children exceptionally well. This ensures that children are very well prepared for the next stage of their learning.
---------	-------------	--

Grade 2	Good	Good provision is effective in delivering provision that meets the needs of all children well. This ensures children are ready for the next stage of their learning.
---------	------	--

Grade 3	Satisfactory	Satisfactory provision is performing less well than expectations in one or more of the key areas. It requires improvement in order to be good.
---------	--------------	--

Grade 4	Inadequate	Provision that is inadequate requires significant improvement and/or enforcement. The provision is failing to give children an acceptable standard of early years education and/or is not meeting the safeguarding and welfare requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage. It will be inspected again within 12 months of the date of this inspection.
---------	------------	--

Met		The provision has no children on roll. The inspection judgement is that the provider continues to meet the requirements for registration.
-----	--	---

Not Met		The provision has no children on roll. The inspection judgement is that the provider does not meet the requirements for registration.
---------	--	---

Inspection

This inspection was carried out by Ofsted under Sections 49 and 50 of the Childcare Act 2006 on the quality and standards of provision that is registered on the Early Years Register. The registered person must ensure that this provision complies with the statutory framework for children’s learning, development and care, known as the Early Years Foundation Stage.

Setting details

Unique reference number

EY356433

Local authority

Bedford Borough

Inspection number	863448
Type of provision	
Registration category	Childcare - Non-Domestic
Age range of children	0 - 5
Total number of places	24
Number of children on roll	45
Name of provider	Stepping Stones Pre-School
Date of previous inspection	22/04/2010
Telephone number	01234 400114

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'raising concerns and making complaints about Ofsted', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk. If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

Type of provision

For the purposes of this inspection the following definitions apply:

Full-time provision is that which operates for more than three hours. These are usually known as nurseries, nursery schools and pre-schools and must deliver the Early Years Foundation Stage. They are registered on the Early Years Register and pay the higher fee for registration.

Sessional provision operates for more than two hours but does not exceed three hours in any one day. These are usually known as pre-schools, kindergartens or nursery schools and must deliver the Early Years Foundation Stage. They are registered on the Early Years Register and pay the lower fee for registration.

Childminders care for one or more children where individual children attend for a period of more than two hours in any one day. They operate from domestic premises that are usually their own home. They are registered on the Early Years Register and must deliver the Early Years Foundation Stage.

Out of school provision may be sessional or full-time provision and is delivered before or after school and/or in the summer holidays. They are registered on the Early Years Register and must deliver the Early Years Foundation Stage. Where children receive their Early Years Foundation Stage in school these providers do not have to deliver the learning and development requirements in full but should complement the experiences children receive in school.

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may copy all or parts of this document for non-commercial educational purposes, as long as you give details of the source and date of publication and do not alter the information in any way.

To receive regular email alerts about new publications, including survey reports and school inspection reports, please visit our website and go to 'Subscribe'.

Piccadilly Gate
Store St
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 4234
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

© Crown copyright 2012

