

Stepping Stones Nursery

C/O United Utilities, Lingley Mere, Great Sankey, Warrington, WA5 3LP

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| Inspection date | 07/10/2013 |
| Previous inspection date | 01/09/2011 |

| The quality and standards of the early years provision | This inspection: | |
|--|-------------------------|---|
| | Previous inspection: | |
| How well the early years provision meets the needs of the range of children who attend | | 1 |
| The contribution of the early years provision to the well-being of children | | 1 |
| The effectiveness of the leadership and management of the early years provision | | 1 |

The quality and standards of the early years provision

This provision is outstanding

- The nursery provides an inspiring, welcoming and highly stimulating environment. The enthusiastic and caring staff team ensure that excellent relationships with key persons are well established. This means that children are exceptionally well supported and demonstrate a strong sense of security and increasing independence.
- Highly effective strategies are in place to help children develop early language and communication skills and to support their physical, personal, social and emotional development. As a result, all children make extremely good progress from their starting points.
- The inspirational outdoor area means that children's imaginative play is extended as they explore their environment.
- Robust management systems are in place, based on focussed, in-depth evaluation of staff practice. As a consequence, staff constantly seek to improve their already excellent understanding of how children learn and how to meet their individual needs.
- Children's behaviour is exceptional because staff are exemplary role models. This ensures that children are well motivated, eager to join in all activities and clearly demonstrate the characteristics of effective learning.

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
- scheduled more frequently where Ofsted identifies a need to do so, for example where provision was previously judged 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 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
- scheduled at the completion of an investigation into failure to comply with the requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage.

Inspection activities

- The inspector checked all relevant documentation and scrutinised requested policies and procedures, including risk assessment, behaviour management and special educational needs provision.
- The inspector looked at children's records, learning journals, observation and assessment and planning documentation.
- The inspector checked evidence of staffs' suitability to work with children, the provider's self-evaluation form and the development and action plans in place to secure improvement.
- The inspector considered staff ratios, room supervision and staff deployment.
- The inspector spoke with the manager, provider, individual staff, children and parents at appropriate times throughout the inspection and carried out joint observations with the manager.
- The inspector took into account the views of parents and carers spoken to on the day and from written comments.

Inspector

Dorothy Williams

Full Report

Information about the setting

Stepping Stones Nursery was registered in 2004 on the Early Years Register. It is one of several nurseries run by a limited company and operates from a single storey building located on a business park in Warrington, Cheshire. The nursery serves the local area and is accessible to all children. It operates from five rooms within the building and there is an enclosed area available for outdoor play. The nursery employs 23 members of childcare staff and an apprentice. Of these, 22 hold appropriate early years qualifications at level 3 and above, including one with Early Years Professional Status and one holds a level 2.

The nursery opens Monday to Friday, all year round, from 8am until 6pm. Children attend for a variety of sessions. There are currently 111 children attending, who are in the early years age group. The nursery provides funded early education for three- and four-year-old children. It supports children, who speak English as an additional language and children with special educational needs and/or disabilities. The nursery is a member of the National Day Nurseries Association and receives support from the local authority.

What the setting needs to do to improve further

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

- strive to maintain the current exemplary practice, so that children continue to experience high quality teaching and learning that enables them to make excellent progress towards the next stage of their education.

Inspection judgements

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

The nursery operates from a building on a large industrial site. It is planned entirely around the needs of the children and families, who attend. It is inspiring, flexible and creative. The rooms are calm and inviting with an exceptional range of interesting, attractive and accessible resources and activities.

Children are exceptionally well supported in their learning and development because the staff know them and their families very well. Staff have an in-depth knowledge and understanding of the Early Years Foundation Stage. They take time to assess their key children's needs, explore their interests and plan appropriate activities for their development. Staff work very closely with parents and other professionals and regularly share what they know about child's learning in nursery and at home. Parents readily contribute to their child's learning journey records and support their children's interests.

For example, they bring in family photographs, contribute to the 'My time away from nursery' project and support nursery events. Children readily extend their interests through a variety of well-planned activities, such as writing letters and postcards to friends. Children approach the 'post office counter' to buy stamps and post parcels. They stamp their envelopes and put them in the post box. Staff support learning by asking questions, such as 'What do you think happens to the letters now?' and 'What will happen if you forget the stamp?' Children are encouraged to give clear responses and recall recent conversations. When exploring treasure baskets, young children are encouraged to feel, smell and investigate a wide range of natural materials. They squeal with delight when playing 'peepo' with a sheer scarf or finding pine cones under some leaves. Consequently, children learn to think critically and solve problems through excellent play experiences.

Staff give high priority to children's early language development. Using 'Every Child a Talker' and 'Sounds and Letters' strategies, they skilfully introduce new vocabulary, sing songs and rhymes and use a variety of resources to re-tell familiar stories. Areas of interest and investigation further support and extend children's vocabulary as they discuss things, such as the fire fighters recent visit, x-rays in the hospital area or camping experiences outdoors. Family photograph albums and well-annotated displays enable children to share home experiences and use recall to discuss past events. Quiet areas enhanced with a wide range of books are provided in each room. Children readily choose picture or story books to share. They talk to each other about letters and numbers, story characters and favourite songs. As a result of these experiences, children are able to make choices, work together and become highly independent, active and engaged learners.

Babies have many opportunities to develop early skills, such as pointing and reaching when choosing their activities. Toddlers extend their physical play using a variety of soft play resources to balance, climb and slide. They roll, crawl and explore a wide variety of natural materials, such as wooden and metal spoons, materials, rough and smooth textures. They access the sensory room to explore light, sound and textures. This multi-sensory approach to learning ensures that children's interest in exploration and imagination is highly valued.

Children have exemplary learning journals, which record their individual progress and development. These are regularly monitored by the management team to ensure accuracy of recording. Staff make excellent observations of children as they play and learn. They note the characteristics of effective learning, depth of involvement and follow children's interests in detail. Accurate planning, assessment and use of a tracking system enable staff to ensure that all children are making rapid progress in their learning and development. Activities are differentiated to suit the needs of all children within the age range. Visual timetables, dual language words and symbols enable all children to communicate their needs and access all areas of the nursery. As a result, children, including those with English as an additional language, thoroughly enjoy their time at nursery, develop high levels of self-esteem and make excellent progress within the highly stimulating environment.

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

The ethos of the nursery is that the child is at the centre of the provision. Staff quote 'All children are born ready and eager to learn - let us make a difference to their lives' Children are respected and treated equally and the voice of the child is evident throughout. On registration, parents complete an 'All about me' booklet with their child. This gives a very clear picture of their child's early development and of their family. Staff record the information and use it to assess the child's starting point, to support settling-in and inform early learning. Information includes children's sleep routines and feeding for babies and young children, medication for those with health needs, professionals involved with the child or family and any supporting documentation. During the settling-in period, the key person spends a good deal of time observing and getting to know each child. The booklet is completed again as children move from room to room, so that information is regularly updated and supports transition. This means that children develop strong emotional bonds with their key person and are highly motivated and eager to learn because staff always have an excellent understanding of their needs.

Children fully understand about healthy eating and making choices. They make interesting displays highlighting healthy options for food and drink. These displays and further discussions enable children to recognise healthy food and drink and make good choices. All meals are made fresh daily on the premises. The nursery employs a qualified cook, who listens to children's likes and dislikes and knows their dietary needs. Children grow fruit and vegetables in the outdoor growing area and enjoy making soup or fruit pies and crumble with their harvest. Menus are seasonal and are shared with parents, inviting comments and suggestions for alternative options. Children learn to socialise during snack and mealtimes. Older children are provided with real plates, bowls and glasses. They use metal cutlery and have napkins. Younger children use plastic plates and cups with smaller cutlery. Babies are given weaning food or formula milk as required. Independence is encouraged because older children queue up in a 'cafe style' and select their own food, carefully self-serving portions of potato, beans and cheese with salad. Younger children are supported to serve their own vegetables as appropriate. Snacks are provided throughout the day. These include fresh fruit, raw vegetable sticks, milk and water. At tea time, children are encouraged to make their own sandwiches from a choice of fillings. Water is readily available throughout the day in children's own labelled cups or bottles. Children readily talk about healthy eating and why fruit and vegetables are good for them. In this way, children's nutritional needs are extremely well met and they achieve high levels of independence.

Children recognise and manage their own personal hygiene needs extremely well throughout the day. Older children use the bathroom independently, they wash their hands at key times, use tissues to blow their noses and dispose of them in the bins provided. They are highly independent as they take off coats and hang them on the correct peg, change into slippers when entering nursery and put on waterproof clothing and boots for outdoor play. Younger children are very well supported in their toileting and nappy changing routines are highly effective in ensuring children's dignity is maintained. Babies sleep comfortably in cots or on mats with their own blankets and comforters, while older children seek quiet comfortable places for rest and relaxation. When babies are sleeping, a close check is kept on them and a chart is completed. Sleep routines are flexible to each child's needs. Room rotas and cleaning routines ensure a high standard of cleanliness is maintained at all times.

Children's behaviour is exemplary as the staff are very effective role models. The nursery has a calm and inviting atmosphere where all children and their families are respected and cared for. Children, who have special educational needs and/or disabilities have their needs exceptionally well met as staff support them through a variety of individual plans and behaviour strategies. These plans are effectively shared with parents, children and other professionals. The nursery's behaviour policy has recently been reviewed and all children have a heightened awareness of how to care for each other when playing. Staff are exemplary role models; they speak quietly, use good manners and always use correct language. They remind children to say 'please' and 'thank you' and use positive language to address behaviour. For example, they encourage turn taking by saying 'Please wait for your turn', and 'Let's make sure everyone has a go on the fire engine truck'. Children remind each other not to eat with their fingers as 'only babies do that because they can't yet use a knife and fork.' Children readily play alongside each other and encourage others to share. When making pasta and cheese on the 'camping stove', children take turns to stir the pasta and add green grass cheese. They laugh together and hand the utensils to each other. Toddlers play together in the sand and water, watching out for each other as they splash water and sift sand. They take turns with the funnels and pipes when making rain drops in the water tray.

Children feel very safe within the nursery as they are extremely well supported by their key persons. They form very strong attachments and are encouraged to share their feelings and thoughts with each other and with staff. Children ask each other 'How are you feeling today?' They use smiley or sad faces to express their mood and show care for others, who are not feeling well. This means that children's emotional and physical needs are exceptionally well met and their well-being is paramount within the nursery.

Children engage in a wide variety of physical activity both indoors and outside. They engage in music and movement sessions daily, make their own music using a variety of instruments and engage in physical exercise with interest and enthusiasm. Outdoors, the inspirational garden areas are designed to extend physical development. Babies and toddlers crawl, roll, reach and stretch on soft flooring. They explore mounds, tunnels and textured pathways. Stepping stones encourage exploration, balance and early walking skills. Older children explore various areas, such as, camping, storytelling, the hospital, fire station and police station. They ride on wheeled vehicles, build with crates, explore tyres and use real tools in the workshop/garage area. The areas are an extension of indoor areas based on children's interests and planning and are used to further to extend children's physical skills. The nursery encourages indoor and outdoor play throughout the session and as a result, children are confident and are developing an excellent awareness of their environment and how to challenge themselves and take risks safely.

Transitions within the nursery and to other settings are exemplary. Time is taken to visit settings and invite staff to visit within the nursery. Transition documents are thorough and information is sensitively shared. Children entering nursery or moving between rooms have a series of settling-in sessions with observations and staff support. Children move to their new room only when they are ready and feel secure, which supports their well-being.

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

The leadership team are inspirational in their practice and are proud of their achievements. They work closely with the provider to lead practice and provide the very best for the children, who attend the nursery and their families. Self-evaluation, development and action plans show continual reflection of staff practice and activities undertaken.

All required policies and procedures are extremely well written and embedded in practice. Staff have an excellent understanding of safeguarding and are clear about the process to report any concerns and when Ofsted should be notified. Strict cleaning routines and robust daily risk assessments are in place for all areas of the nursery and all activities. Risk assessments for outings and visits are undertaken before and during each outing and any issues are noted.

Recruitment procedures are rigorous following company practice. An extensive induction programme includes management, peer observations and self-reflection. Staff training and development profiles ensure that all staff reach the high standard of expertise and care expected at the nursery. Staff morale is exceptionally high. They feel that they have a clear voice within the nursery and are valued by the manager and provider. Through regular reflective practice, staff are able to influence change. They are very well deployed throughout the nursery. A monitoring grid is checked at key times during the day to ensure ratios are maintained at all times. The key person system is extremely well embedded. Children form very positive relationships and families feel that the key person is a trusted professional and a friend. A 'Buddy' system is in place for when the key person is out for any reason. Staff feel that they effectively support children to reach their potential and beyond. The ethos of making a difference is at the heart of the nursery and as a result, the child is constantly at the centre of the learning and development cycle.

Staff have an excellent knowledge and understanding of the learning and development requirements of the Statutory framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage. Observation, assessment and planning is effectively monitored, so that key persons know their children in depth and can readily discuss their age and stage of development. Assessment includes children's level of involvement, attitudes and characteristics of learning. Planning is robust; observations are very well written and used effectively to identify next steps in children's learning. This exemplary practice quickly identifies areas of need and highlights children's interests and is used to personalise planning and extend children's quality of learning. Tracking documents and the progress check at age two are used with great effect to accurately identify needs, show progress and ensure activities are planned to enhance learning. The management team effectively monitors and moderates all planning and assessment. Data collected on each child is used highly effectively to track all areas of learning. The manager and provider use the data to further enhance provision and ensure continuity and consistency of care for all children. The setting's practice consistently reflects the highest aspirations for all children and staff. Staff are wholly committed to maintaining the current exemplary practice, so that children continue to experience high quality teaching and learning that enables them to make

excellent progress and have the best start in life.

Partnerships are a key strength of the nursery. Strong relationships with the local authority and other professionals have enabled nursery staff to further support and meet the needs of children in their care. Parents are warmly welcomed into the nursery at anytime. The inspiring foyer and corridor displays contain a wealth of information about language development, progress checks, school transition and learning styles. Through daily information sheets, handover time, room diaries, informal chats and regular more formal meetings, parents are kept very well informed of their child's progress. Parents are encouraged to extend children's learning at home through the 'What I did at the weekend' interactive display. They are asked to observe and make comments about what their child enjoys doing outside nursery. Children's learning journals are available for parents to look through, comment on and add to as they wish. Parent communication records and notes of meetings enable parents to take an active part in their child's learning plan and for key persons to offer suggestions and support for families. Parents readily praise the nursery staff saying 'They are like family. I feel I can trust them and ask them to be part of my child's life' and 'The staff really care about the children. They are very good at bringing out the best in the children and will go the extra mile to make sure children have the best start to their education'.

This high quality, effective nursery puts children at the very heart of everything they do. As a result, children are interested and highly motivated to learn. The nursery has a strong capacity to improve because of the commitment, dedication and enthusiasm of the staff and the continued support of the company.

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 action. 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

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| Unique reference number | EY292630 |
| Local authority | Warrington |
| Inspection number | 935096 |
| Type of provision | |
| Registration category | Childcare - Non-Domestic |
| Age range of children | 0 - 5 |
| Total number of places | 98 |
| Number of children on roll | 111 |
| Name of provider | Little Acorns Group Limited |
| Date of previous inspection | 01/09/2011 |
| Telephone number | 01925 464081(464080) |

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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, which are usually the childminder's 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.

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