

Stepping Stones Pre-School

Meadway School, Dunsfold Road, Tilehurst, Reading, Berkshire, RG30 4NP

Inspection date

11/09/2014

Previous inspection date

07/10/2013

The quality and standards of the early years provision

This inspection:

4

Previous inspection:

4

How well the early years provision meets the needs of the range of children who attend	4
The contribution of the early years provision to the well-being of children	4
The effectiveness of the leadership and management of the early years provision	4

The quality and standards of the early years provision

This provision is inadequate

- The quality of teaching is poor and children do not make enough progress in key areas of their learning. Staff supervision fails to tackle underperformance and assessments are not regularly or accurately maintained. Staff do not share important information with parents or use resources well to support children's learning.
- Safeguarding procedures are inadequate. Senior staff do not understand their responsibilities to check staff's ongoing suitability. They do not store records of concerns securely. Risk assessments do not identify daily risks to children and staff deployment is poor. This does not ensure children's safety or well-being.
- Children with additional needs do not get effective levels of support because the key person does not meet their needs. Staff do not work in effective partnerships with parents and professionals to meet the needs of every child. Behaviour is not managed well.
- The committee has not urgently addressed a number of significant issues that relate to safeguarding measures and weak teaching. They have not addressed or monitored the issues raised at the last inspection or the weak management. Self-evaluation and the capacity to improve are poor.

It has the following strengths

- Children learn about the benefits of healthy eating. They have nutritious snacks.

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 looked at children's progress records, including observations, tracking and assessment records. Planning documentation, evidence of suitability of staff working with children in the setting, and a range of other documentation was also examined.
- The inspector spoke to members of the staff team about the progress of their key children, and their understanding of the setting's policies and procedures.
- The inspector took into account the views of children, written comments from parents and carers, and spoke to a number of parents and carers.
- The inspector mainly observed activities in the main play rooms and the garden area.
- The inspector spoke to the manager, staff and the chairperson.

Inspector

Melissa Cox

Full report

Information about the setting

Stepping Stones Pre-School is run by a voluntary committee and first opened in 1972. It registered with Ofsted in 2001. It operates from the premises of the closed Meadway School in Tilehurst, Reading. Children have access to an enclosed outdoor play area. The setting serves the needs of families in the surrounding area. It operates Mondays to Fridays from 9.30am until 12.30pm, with a lunch club on Tuesday and Thursday from 12.30pm until 1.30pm. The setting is registered on the Early Years Register. The pre-school currently has nine children attending in the early years age range. The children attending include those who are learning English as an additional language and children with special educational needs and/or disabilities. The setting is in receipt of funding for the provision of free early education for children aged three and four years. It employs nine staff including the supervisor and manager. Of these, over half hold appropriate early years qualifications to at least level 3.

What the setting needs to do to improve further

To meet the requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage the provider must:

- implement the behaviour management policy, and procedures, to promote consistency in behaviour management
- ensure confidential information and records about children are accessible and available to those who have the right and professional need to see them
- ensure that the premises and resources are suitable for the children to use safely, with specific regard to the safety of the sand pit and the suitability of the outdoor play space
- ensure there is a regular two-way flow of information between staff, parents and/or carers, other professionals working the children and other providers to promote continuity of care and learning to meet the needs of each child
- ensure staff gain a suitable knowledge of the learning and development requirements to provide educational programmes, particularly for expressive arts and design, which include an appropriate balance of adult-led and child-initiated activities and offer children challenging and enjoyable experiences, based on their individual needs, interests and stage of development
- promote the educational programme for personal, social and emotional development in order to support children to manage their own behaviour, follow group rules and form positive relationships

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

- develop the process for completing the progress checks for two-year-old children to accurately highlight areas in which a child is progressing well, and areas where some additional support might be needed, so that any special educational needs are identified promptly
- gather accurate information on children's starting points and share next steps for learning with their parents.

Inspection judgements

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

Staff are not secure in their knowledge of the seven areas of learning or how to carefully plan activities to provide challenging and enjoyable experiences tailored to children's individual learning needs. Teaching is also ineffective because staff do not act on information gained from parents when children come to the setting to identify clear starting points for their learning. The lack of systematic observation and assessment to track children's progress results in children's next steps in learning not being identified or being incorporated into planning to enable staff to fully promote children's learning. Although each child has an individual learning journal, staff do not use the information they gain effectively to promote children's independence. Additionally, they do not provide sufficient opportunities for children to gain skills that prepare them for their move to school. Although staff complete assessments as required for children between the ages of two and three years, they show a limited understanding of why the progress checks should be completed and shared with parents. For example, staff do not understand that these progress checks should identify where children are progressing well, and any areas where some additional support might be needed. These weaknesses mean staff are not supporting all children to make as much progress as they can.

The quality of teaching is inadequate. Staff have a poor understanding of how to support children's learning. Children join in a range of routine activities which are based around the timetable of whole group meetings, snack and mealtimes, and scheduled play outside. This structure allows very little purposeful time for children to become engaged or challenged in their learning because staff are either engaged in tasks, such as preparing or clearing away, or preparing for an adult-directed task. When children do have opportunities for free play, they mostly occupy themselves with the range of resources on offer because staff do not work and play alongside them.

Staff tend to supervise children and intervene only when a dispute occurs or there is a change in routine. When they do engage, they fail to inspire children in their learning because they are unclear how to interact purposefully with children. For example, during an art and craft activity, staff limited children's creativity because they provided too much direction about how children should complete the activity. They expected children to follow their instructions of what to do next, using pre-cut shapes, which discouraged from using their own design ideas. Throughout the session, staff consistently failed to question children to promote problem-solving and independent thinking. Because staff do not provide sufficient challenge for children during daily activities, the children are often disinterested and do not become purposefully engaged or motivated in their learning.

Partnerships with parents are not sufficiently focused on working together to meet children's learning needs. The setting provides parents with some information about the topics they are working on in the sessions so they know the type of activities on offer to the children. However, the quality of information shared with parents about their child's learning needs is poor. Parents do not get regular updates on their child's next steps for learning so they can most effectively support their child's learning at home. Staff fail to raise any concerns about children's development promptly with parents so they can work in partnership together to seek the support children need. This means that they also do not get a true picture of where their children are in their learning. This affects how well children's learning is supported consistently in the setting and at home.

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

Children come into the setting, greeting their friends and staff as they arrive. However because of the lack of well-planned activities and poor support from staff, children soon become restless in their play which impacts on their behaviour. Children's key persons do not do enough to help children to manage their feelings. For example, when children found it hard to share a resource, staff failed to respond to help children resolve the dispute even though a child looked over to them for help. Staff also fail to consistently address the frequent behaviour incidents that occur during the session in a consistent manner. While some staff show patience and kindness in supporting children when they have a disagreement, others ignore the issues and walk away. They do not follow the setting's behaviour policy adequately, which is confusing for young children. They also fail to support children to take part in routines, such as 'tidy-up time', or support some children to improve their levels of self-confidence. This does not promote children's personal, social and emotional development adequately. On occasions, children are excluded from activities they want to take part in, such as arts and crafts, because staff organise this on a one-to-one basis and children are made to wait their turn. For example, during a spider-designing activity, staff over-directed individual children and turned away others who were waiting to take part. This was despite the fact that more space was available to enable several children to take part at once and develop their own ideas. This does not support the development of children's self-esteem or their ability to become active and independent learners.

Overall, the setting has a suitable selection of resources; however, staff do not use those available well to provide sufficient challenge children to support their learning effectively. Children have some access to sensory play and creative resources; however, technology resources in both rooms are lacking and staff have an over-reliance on the daily adult-directed craft activity. The resources staff provide to encourage children to develop their early writing skills are limited. In addition, staff are not deployed effectively to help meet children's learning needs.

Outdoor play opportunities are also limited and do not support children in their learning. On the day of the inspection the children used the garden area for a very short time as part of the time-tabled day. Staff had not planned sufficiently well for this time and the range of accessible resources was limited to some hoops and balls. Although children enjoyed the opportunity to run around outside, they were unable to benefit from the recent improvements made to the garden area. This was due to the poor quality of support provided by staff and the very short amount of time they were able to play outside. This prevented them from becoming deeply engaged in any purposeful play to support their learning needs. Furthermore, the play areas are not always well maintained. For example, the sandpit was not covered to help keep the sand clean for children's use; and there were discarded felt tips pens, empty plastic bottles and other litter under and around the play equipment. Although the areas had been checked for hazards that morning, staff were not thorough enough in their daily risk assessment to ensure all aspects of the environment were suitable for children to use. This is a breach of requirements.

Children are developing some awareness of healthy lifestyles because they are offered a balanced range of snacks. Staff work in partnership with parents to ensure that children's dietary needs are catered for. There are some opportunities for children to manage tasks for themselves, such as washing their hands before snack time, but overall staff do not encourage children's independence enough in preparation for school. For example, children are not given the opportunity to become involved in preparing the snack, pour their own drinks or supported sufficiently well to tidy up the resources. Children have been involved in some topic work to promote their understanding of road safety and staff invited the local emergency services in to talk to children about being safe near roads. However, the overall weaknesses in staff supervision, risk assessment and behaviour do not provide children with an environment that fosters their well-being adequately.

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

Procedures to safeguard children are inadequate. Although an action was set at the last inspection for staff to update their understanding of safeguarding matters, their level of understanding is still very poor. Senior staff have not sufficiently extended their understanding to include all aspects of safeguarding. Leaders are unaware of their responsibilities to monitor ongoing staff suitability. Although there are no known current issues regarding staff suitability, there is no secure procedure for checking their ongoing suitability. This is because the leaders have failed to inform staff about their responsibility to disclose any changes to their suitability. Consequently, senior staff are currently unaware if there have been any changes. The leaders also have very little understanding of the requirement that relates to the disqualification of staff. As a result, they do not have a rigorous procedure in place regarding this. This lack of understanding from the leaders compromises children's safety, especially as initial staff suitability checks were completed some time ago. This is a breach in requirements.

Further safeguarding procedures are adequate and staff are suitably aware of possible signs and symptoms that would cause concern about a child's well-being. Staff have also attended training which supports them to make prompt referrals if they are concerned about a child. Although some staff are now more confident in this area of safeguarding, the procedures in place are still not robust. For example, details of a previous safeguarding incident reported to the local authorities by staff as required, were not easily available at the inspection. This was with regard to a concern staff reported about a child that no longer attends the setting and there was no further action taken by the local authorities regarding that concern. This demonstrates that the correct reporting procedures were followed, although there is no evidence of the record of this available at the inspection. Risk assessments and staff's supervision of the children are also poor. The security of the outdoor area has not been suitably assessed and as a result, an incident occurred where a child left the garden area for a short period of time before being escorted back by staff. Although this was not a significant incident due to the short time that elapsed, it does not indicate that staff supervise children well enough when playing outside.

Senior staff have not met their responsibility to oversee the delivery of educational programmes in the setting to ensure all children are making good progress. They have failed to monitor the quality of teaching, which is currently poor, or addressed actions in relation to children's learning that were set at a previous inspection. The majority of staff present on the day of the inspection demonstrate a poor understanding of their roles. Recently introduced staff supervision opportunities to tackle weak practice have not been used well enough to ensure rapid improvement. This is because the senior staff, who are responsible for mentoring and improving teaching, do not have a secure understanding of good quality teaching and have not been held to account by the committee. These failures in leadership and the significant weaknesses in teaching, including the over-reliance on routine practices, together with poor staff assessments of children's learning, have led to some children falling behind in their learning. There are significant gaps in children's personal, social and emotional development and children with special educational needs do not get the support they need to catch up with their peers. As such, the provision for learning and development is inadequate and requires immediate action to ensure children are making good or better progress in readiness for their move to school.

Self-evaluation of the quality of the provision is weak. The committee and senior staff have failed to create an action plan to rectify the key weaknesses in the setting. Rather than tackle previous issues, such as poor teaching, actions have focused on minor improvements of the outdoor area, new flooring or labelling in the classrooms. While this has made the environment attractive to children, these improvements have not addressed the key weaknesses highlighted at the last inspection, such as staff's lack of knowledge and understanding of the safeguarding and welfare and learning requirements.

The manager, committee and staff team still do not have a secure understanding of the regulations. The manager has yet to read the previous or current Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage. Consequently, she is unable to evaluate compliance with current requirements adequately and monitor staff practice sufficiently well.. Therefore, the setting's self-evaluation is based on an incomplete assessment of what is required. The setting has also failed to address a number of action points raised by the local authority in a timely way. For example, they were asked to complete an accurate self-evaluation of the setting. The capacity to make the necessary improvements is significantly limited by the overall lack of understanding, and by the leadership team and staff's failure to take prompt and effective action to address the concerns from the last inspection.

Partnerships with parents are friendly, but do not effectively support a joint approach to meeting children's learning needs. Most parents spoken to on the day of the inspection expressed their satisfaction with the setting. Information is pinned up on the noticeboards and parents are able to access publications, which staff have placed out for them to read. However, concerns were raised about the level of communication with staff and the lack of positive support for families. Partnerships with other professionals to support children's learning and development have not been initiated. This means that those children who are at risk of falling further behind in their learning have not had access to the additional support they need.

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	Requires improvement	The provision is not giving children a good standard of early years education and/or there are minor breaches of the safeguarding and welfare requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage. We re-inspect nurseries and pre-schools judged as requires improvement within 12 months of the date of inspection.
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 monitored and inspected again within six months of the date of this inspection.
Met		There were no children present at the time of the inspection. The inspection judgement is that the provider continues to meet the requirements for registration.
Not met		There were no children present at the time of the inspection. 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	EY275967
Local authority	Reading
Inspection number	963187
Type of provision	Sessional provision
Registration category	Childcare - Non-Domestic
Age range of children	2 - 5
Total number of places	26
Number of children on roll	9
Name of provider	Stepping Stones Pre-School Committee
Date of previous inspection	07/10/2013
Telephone number	07561506002

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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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