

Inspection of Stepping Stones

Castlegate Annex, Agnes Street, GRANTHAM, Lincolnshire NG31 6QP

Inspection date: 26 January 2022

Overall effectiveness	Good
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The quality of education	Good
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Behaviour and attitudes	Good
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Personal development	Good
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Leadership and management	Good
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Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Outstanding
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What is it like to attend this early years setting?

The provision is good

Children show spirit and confidence. When they arrive, they know the routine and instantly play and explore independently. Children approach visitors and invite them into their play, they say, 'come on, come see'. Babies' bonds with their key persons are exceptionally good. When their key person returns from a break, they greet her with a beaming smile. This demonstrates secure emotional attachments. Children enjoy being physically active. Outside, pre-school children show they enjoy taking risks as they climb a low wall and jump off into the arms of staff, who offer praise and encouragement. When children say, 'I can't do it', staff say, 'yes you can'. This helps develop children's physical skills and encourages them to have a positive attitude to completing tasks on their own.

Children receive support from staff to help them progress, both at the setting and at home. Although parents no longer enter the nursery, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, they comment that staff share information daily with them about children's achievements. Furthermore, they say they get ideas to continue to support their children's learning at home. Children have positive attitudes to their learning and demonstrate good curiosity and concentration as they play. For example, two-year-olds use knives when exploring real vegetables in the role-play kitchen. This contributes to their manual handling skills. Pre-school children's literacy skills are developing well. They recognise their names and can identify and say their initial letters.

What does the early years setting do well and what does it need to do better?

- The manager is passionate about her role. She places high priority on staff mental health and well-being. The manager ensures she asks each staff member daily how they are feeling. Staff say that there is a strong team spirit and they speak highly of the emotional support they receive. Staff value the one-to-one meetings they have with the manager. However, these are not yet consistently focused on raising the quality of education to the highest level. For example, occasionally staff interrupt children's play when they are highly engaged, in favour of routine activities such as snack time and welcome time.
- The manager uses additional funding thoughtfully. For example, it is used to provide hot lunches for some children. Furthermore, she uses funding to pay for forest school sessions and to enhance staffing to meet the one-to-one needs of some children. These extra benefits help to promote children's progress, health and well-being.
- The manager and staff plan a curriculum to meet the emerging needs of the children attending. Staff consider the sequence in which they teach the children the skills they will need to make good progress. For example, in the baby room there is an emphasis on developing physical walking skills and encouraging

simple words. This contributes to their journey through nursery, such as into the toddler room.

- Staff encourage children to listen to adults and their peers. During welcome time, children are encouraged to take turns in the conversation. Staff acknowledge and encourage children to label their feelings. For example, staff ask, 'do you feel happy or sad today?' Children say, 'I feel sad, I miss my family'. This helps children to understand their emotions.
- Staff help children develop their independence. They support children to wash their hands before eating and to pour their own drinks at snack time. However, the organisation of routine events such as snack time, and getting changed before lunch is very long. Some children become distracted from their learning at these times.
- There is a strong emphasis on community. Prior to the COVID-19 lockdown, children visited local cafés, parks and a care home. More recently, this community spirit has continued with the children speaking with care home residents over the internet. This helps children to have experiences beyond the nursery and home.
- The manager and staff have ambitious expectations for all children. Those with early identified needs are supported well. Staff have a good understanding of each child's learning journey, what they can do and what they need to learn next. For example, staff encourage those children who may be overwhelmed in group times to use their 'safe tent'. This patience and understanding contributes to children making good progress over time.
- Staff working with toddlers captivate and mesmerize children as they read familiar stories in an exciting and engaging manner. Children recognise and repeat familiar words and anticipate what is going to happen next. This promotes early literacy skills and a love of books.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

The manager is very confident in her role in protecting children from harm. She acts promptly and effectively on any concerns she may have. The manager works closely with other professionals to help safeguard children and their families. Staff have a secure knowledge of the signs and symptoms that may indicate a child is at risk of harm. They know where to find contact details for their local safeguarding partnership, should they need to report a concern. Staff are vigilant about safety and maintain correct ratios to keep children safe. For example, staff complete a 'staff movement register' when they leave and enter the room. This helps to maintain children's safety and welfare.

What does the setting need to do to improve?

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

- adapt and enhance support for staff to focus on raising the quality of education to the highest level
- support staff to further improve the organisation of routine events to enhance learning experiences during these times.

Setting details

Unique reference number	EY397245
Local authority	Lincolnshire
Inspection number	10138590
Type of provision	Childcare on non-domestic premises
Registers	Early Years Register, Compulsory Childcare Register
Day care type	Full day care
Age range of children at time of inspection	0 to 4
Total number of places	125
Number of children on roll	63
Name of registered person	Lincolnshire Childcare (Boston) Limited
Registered person unique reference number	RP909944
Telephone number	01476 593643
Date of previous inspection	20 August 2015

Information about this early years setting

Stepping Stones registered in 2009 under the current owners. They are based in Grantham, Lincolnshire. The nursery employs six members of childcare staff, plus two on maternity leave. Of these, six hold appropriate childcare qualifications level 3 or above. The nursery opens from Monday to Friday all year round, except for bank holidays and a week at Christmas. Sessions are from 7.30am until 6pm. The nursery provides funded early education for two-, three- and four-year-old children.

Information about this inspection

Inspector

Sharon Alleary

Inspection activities

- This was the first routine inspection the provider received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. The inspector discussed the impact of the pandemic with the provider and has taken that into account in their evaluation of the nursery.
- The manager and the inspector completed a learning walk together of all areas of the nursery and discussed the early years curriculum.
- Staff and children spoke to the inspector during the inspection.
- The inspector observed the quality of education being provided indoors and outdoors and assessed the impact that this was having on children's learning.
- The manager and the inspector carried out two joint observations together.
- The inspector looked at relevant documentation and evidence of the suitability of staff working in the nursery.
- The inspector spoke to several parents and took account of feedback offered.

We carried out this inspection 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.

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