

Inspection of Stepping Stones Day Nursery and Nursery School

5 Edington Square, Witney, Oxfordshire OX28 5YT

Inspection date: 8 August 2022

Overall effectiveness

Inadequate

The quality of education

Inadequate

Behaviour and attitudes

Inadequate

Personal development

Inadequate

Leadership and management

Inadequate

Overall effectiveness at previous
inspection

Requires improvement

What is it like to attend this early years setting?

The provision is inadequate

Significant weaknesses in safeguarding impact on children's safety and health. Children are not effectively supervised by staff to help keep them safe. Babies' emotional well-being is adversely affected by inattentive staff, who do not meet their basic care needs or ensure a safe environment for babies to sleep or play.

Staff have limited ambition for children's learning. They fail to provide any purposeful planned activities for children. Older children lead their own play, selecting from the limited range of toys available. They quickly become bored, disengaged and wander around aimlessly. Babies are not provided with opportunities to develop new skills, such as crawling and walking. The absence of a language-rich environment slows their progress in communicating. All children, including children with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) fail to receive the education they deserve. They fall further behind and make no gains in their learning.

The lack of planned activities and the ineffective staff deployment leads to a decline in children's behaviour. Younger children's experiences are negatively impacted by the older, holiday club children who play fight and wrestle in the garden unchallenged by staff. Some younger children become upset as they witness this. Staff's failure to address poor behaviour does not support children to learn right from wrong.

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

- The provider cannot assure their capacity to bring about the necessary change, despite intensive support from the local authority. Ineffective leadership and staffing shortages have led to a decline in standards since the last inspection. Allegations against staff are left unreported and unresolved. The provider does not ensure a safe environment or regular opportunities for babies and young children to play outside daily. They have very limited expectations for children's learning. The provider has failed to notify Ofsted of a number of significant events that have affected the safety of children, as required.
- Inconsistent staffing affects the effectiveness with which staff support children's learning. Staff do not know the children well enough. They do not help children build on what they know and can do. Educational programmes lack challenge or focus and staff do not plan well for children's individual learning. Children do not make adequate progress in readiness for the next stage of their learning, including their move on to school.
- Weak oversight of staff performance impacts adversely on staff's effectiveness to fulfil their roles and responsibilities. Staff fail to implement policies and procedures robustly, including those vital to keeping children safe. They are not

held to account for their poor practice or given direction on how to improve. Staff who are working towards recognised qualifications get limited support for their development. Some staff work tirelessly to make changes and demonstrate commitment to caring for children well. However, their efforts are not recognised. Morale is low which affects staff's resilience and impacts on their mental health.

- Staff do not offer a caring environment that fosters babies' and young children's emotional well-being or confidence. They leave distressed and crying babies for prolonged periods without emotional support. Staff prioritise tidy-up tasks or care for their own children over meeting the needs of unsettled or new children. Staff's poor attitude to ensuring children's needs are met does not foster a strong foundation for children to develop their self-worth or learn that they are valued.
- Ineffective staff deployment at mealtimes does not assure babies safety. Staff sit with their backs to children as they eat. There are limited first aiders on site and a swift response to a choking incident is not guaranteed due to the layout of the premises and availability of staff. Some babies are placed to sleep in fold-up pushchairs, which is not reflective of the government safe sleeping guidance for young children. Children do not settle and remain upset and tired for much of the day.
- Partnership with parents and carers are weak. Information sharing does not support a purposeful two-way flow of information to support children's learning or care needs. Staff provide inaccurate information to parents on their child's day, such as the amount of food a child has eaten. They fail to work with parents to support children's learning, especially when a child shows a delay. Parents raise concerns about children's access to daily outdoor play and the menu options given to children. Unreliable staffing arrangements disrupt parents' working arrangements and impacts negatively on the children's attendance at the setting.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are not effective.

The provider fails to ensure robust oversight of safeguarding matters, in order to keep children safe and protected from harm. The safeguarding policy and procedure provides inaccurate information to staff in the event of an allegation. It does not contain a procedure to follow when a non-mobile baby presents with a bruise and staff's knowledge in this area is weak. Staff do not identify or act on early risk indicators, such as non-attendance of vulnerable children or act swiftly on unexplained injuries to children. Some staff show an understanding of basic signs that would give them concern. However, weaknesses in leadership means that it cannot be certain that children are safe and protected from harm.

Staff's initial and ongoing suitability to work with children cannot be assured. The provider does not obtain sufficient information to verify staff's suitability. Staff's unsafe behaviour is left unchallenged by leaders, such as when they breach the

mobile phone and camera policy repeatedly. Deployment of staff continues to be ineffective, and staff do not supervise children well to ensure they are kept safe, including in the garden. The provider has failed to notify Ofsted of a significant event that occurred when children were playing outside, that placed children at risk of harm.

What does the setting need to do to improve?

The provision is inadequate and Ofsted intends to take enforcement action.

We will issue a Welfare Requirements Notice requiring the provider to:

	Due date
ensure the safeguarding policy and procedure is in line with local safeguarding partners guidance and includes a clear procedure to follow in the event of bruising to a non-mobile baby or in the event that there are concerns about the behaviour of a member of staff	22/08/2022
ensure all staff, including the designated lead person for safeguarding, understand the safeguarding policy and procedures and act on safeguarding concerns in a timely way, with particular regard to responding to inappropriate behaviour displayed by other members of staff and the implementation of an effective mobile phone and camera policy	22/08/2022
follow effective recruitment procedures that include rigorous scrutiny of any gaps in staff's employment and qualifications history, so that staff's suitability to work with children is assured	22/08/2022

ensure the effective deployment of staff, particularly at times when young children are eating or children are playing outside, so that any risks and hazards to children's health and well-being are identified and minimised	22/08/2022
ensure that staff understand their role as a key person and provide effective care that is tailored to meet children's individual needs, helps children become familiar with the setting, offer a settled relationship for the child and build a relationship with their parents	22/08/2022
ensure all staff, including the manager, receive regular and effective support, coaching and training in order to fulfil their roles and are provided with opportunities to discuss any issues, particularly concerning children's development or well-being, including child protection concerns	22/08/2022
take immediate action to ensure babies are placed to sleep safely, in line with latest government safety guidance and have access to cots/bedding which are suited to the age of the child	22/08/2022
ensure that babies and younger children are provided with daily opportunities for outdoor play in spaces that are suitably resourced for them to play safely	22/08/2022
ensure the effective deployment of staff who hold a paediatric first-aid certificate, taking into account the number of children, staff and layout of premises to ensure that a paediatric first aider is able to respond to emergencies quickly.	22/08/2022

To meet the requirements of the early years foundation stage, the provider must:

	Due date
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ensure children with SEND receive early identification of their needs and benefit from high levels of consistent support to help them make progress in line with their individual learning plans and stages of development	22/08/2022
implement an ambitious educational programme that inspires, challenges and consistently supports children to make good progress.	22/08/2022

Setting details

Unique reference number	EY258333
Local authority	Oxfordshire
Inspection number	10248429
Type of provision	Childcare on non-domestic premises
Registers	Early Years Register, Compulsory Childcare Register, Voluntary Childcare Register
Day care type	Full day care
Age range of children at time of inspection	0 to 7
Total number of places	73
Number of children on roll	57
Name of registered person	Stepping Stones Day Nursery & Nursery School Limited
Registered person unique reference number	RP908150
Telephone number	01993 708822
Date of previous inspection	8 November 2021

Information about this early years setting

Stepping Stones Day Nursery and Nursery School registered in 2003. It operates from purpose-built premises over two floors, in the area of Deer Park in Witney. The nursery accepts funding for the early education of children aged two, three and four years. It is open each weekday from 7.30am to 6pm, all year round, excluding bank holidays. The nursery employs 17 members of staff. Of these, 13 hold relevant qualifications.

Information about this inspection

Inspector
Melissa Cox

Inspection activities

- The inspector discussed any continued impact of the pandemic with the provider and has taken that into account in their evaluation of the provider.
- We carried out this inspection as a result of a risk assessment, following information we received about the provider.
- The deputy and the inspector completed a tour of the setting and discussed how the early years provision and curriculum are organised.
- The inspector observed the quality of interactions during activities indoors and outdoors, and assessed the impact this has on children's learning.
- The inspector completed a joint observation of staff deployment at mealtimes and discussed safety and deployment with the deputy manager.
- The inspector took account of the views from parents spoken to on the day of the inspection.
- The inspector looked at relevant documentation, including the evidence of staff qualifications and the suitability of the adults working with the children.

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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