

Inspection of Stepping Stones Pre-School

Lee Chapel South Community Hall, Kibcaps, The Knares, BASILDON, Essex SS16 5RX

Inspection date: 29 September 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	Good
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What is it like to attend this early years setting?

The provision is good

Children move freely between the indoors and the garden throughout the pre-school session. This helps to give them the confidence to choose where they wish to play and to follow their own interests. Children explore outside and excitedly tell an adult that they have found an item on a checklist. They show where they have placed ticks next to photos of a bird and a leaf. This activity supports children's early literacy skills and gives them a sense of achievement. Children run, climb and ride bicycles, finding out new ways to be active and use their bodies. The wide range of activities helps children to develop their fine motor skills in preparation for eventually becoming capable writers. For example, children practise using scoops and tongs to transfer pasta into bags and containers.

Children demonstrate many skills that provide the foundations for them to become successful learners in the future. They concentrate, and do not give up, as they solve how different locks and bolts work. They negotiate and collaborate when they decide together how to plan a train track. Children have opportunities to routinely use mathematics as they play. They count the number of scoops of pasta they need to fill a paper bag. Older children show how their mathematical knowledge has progressed. They skilfully read the numbers on a set of weighing scales and competently demonstrate how to use a tape measure. Children secure one end of the tape and proudly tell the inspector that the high chair is '24'.

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

- The ambitious new manager has worked alongside the outgoing manager to ensure that she is fully aware of her role and responsibilities. She is very reflective and has a comprehensive action plan to gradually introduce improvements. Staff and parents say that it has been a well-managed transition. The team of staff feel well supported and say that the new manager is 'very approachable'.
- The manager and staff are able to clearly explain the purpose of the activities they provide and how they support all children to make progress. They meet monthly to discuss their observations and plan activities that meet children's developing needs and interests. When the key-person system works effectively, children benefit from being cared for by staff who know them well. However, it does not yet take into account staff absences or shift patterns. Consequently, some children do not always receive the highest levels of support from a consistent adult.
- Following the COVID-19 pandemic, there is a sharp focus on building children's communication skills. As a result, staff ensure that their interactions encourage children to express their own ideas. For example, they get down to children's level, listen intently, and ask relevant questions as children recall their

experiences. Children choose to sit in the cosy book area and read their favourite books. There are dual-language books, and staff learn some key words in other languages to help all children to develop a sense of belonging.

- Children have a clear understanding of the pre-school rules. They readily help to tidy away the toys at the end of the session and know they must wash their hands before sitting down for snack. They pass around the plate of fruit and kindly ask other children if they would like some. Even the youngest children carefully use a jug to pour milk or water independently. This contributes to them building on their independence and self-help skills.
- Staff act as positive role models. They respectfully tell each other when they are going outside or taking children to the bathroom. This makes sure that children are well supervised at all times and shows them examples of courtesy and good manners. This is reflected in children's behaviour. For example, when they have finished playing, they calmly tell their friend, 'You can have it now.'
- Parents are extremely happy with the provision. They feel well supported and say that they made the 'right choice'. They appreciate the new online communication system that keeps them informed about their child's development. Parents comment that their children have made noticeable progress despite some of them only attending for a short time.
- There is successful partnership working with parents and other professionals for children who may have additional needs. This means that all children receive timely support and intervention. There are procedures in place to smooth children's transitions to local schools. However, the pre-school does not consistently share information with other early years settings children attend. Therefore, continuity of care and learning between providers is not consistent.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

The manager is aware of potential risk factors that may contribute to children being more vulnerable to abuse or neglect. All staff are confident to take appropriate action if they are worried about a child's well-being. They understand the importance of recording and reporting their concerns, including in the event of an allegation regarding any adult working with children. The manager recognises the significance of monitoring registers and accident records to swiftly identify patterns that may indicate a child is at risk. Recruitment procedures help to ensure that leaders only employ suitable adults to safeguard children's welfare.

What does the setting need to do to improve?

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

- strengthen the key-person system to ensure that each child has a consistent assigned key person to support their emotional needs and build a relationship

with

- develop partnerships with other settings that children attend, to promote continuity in their learning and development.

Setting details

Unique reference number	402243
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	10234541
Type of provision	Childcare on non-domestic premises
Registers	Early Years Register, Compulsory Childcare Register, Voluntary Childcare Register
Day care type	Sessional day care
Age range of children at time of inspection	2 to 3
Total number of places	26
Number of children on roll	22
Name of registered person	Stepping Stones Pre-School Committee
Registered person unique reference number	RP520635
Telephone number	07711 637159
Date of previous inspection	8 November 2016

Information about this early years setting

Stepping Stones Pre-School registered in 1992. It employs nine members of staff. Of these, eight hold appropriate early years qualifications. The pre-school is open from Monday to Friday during term time only. Sessions are from 8.45am to 3pm. The pre-school provides funded early education for two-, three- and four-year-old children.

Information about this inspection

Inspector

Fiona Sapler

Inspection activities

- This was the first routine inspection the pre-school 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 pre-school.
- The manager and the inspector had a learning walk together of all areas of the pre-school and discussed the early years curriculum.
- The inspector spoke to the outgoing manager, staff and children during the inspection.
- The inspector observed the interactions between staff and children, indoors and outside, and assessed the impact on children's learning.
- The manager and the inspector carried out a joint observation of snack time.
- The inspector spoke to several parents during the inspection and took account of their views, alongside written comments.
- The manager showed the inspector key documentation, including evidence of staff's suitability.

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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