

Inspection of Stepping Stones Play and Learn Group

Wilson Marriage Centre, Barrack Street, Colchester, Essex CO1 2LR

Inspection date: 6 December 2022

Overall effectiveness	Outstanding
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The quality of education

Outstanding

Behaviour and attitudes

Outstanding

Personal development

Outstanding

Leadership and management

Outstanding

Overall effectiveness at previous
inspection

Outstanding

What is it like to attend this early years setting?

The provision is outstanding

Children jump up and down with anticipation and excitement before entering this astounding setting. The gate opens and children are welcomed by caring and friendly staff. Children happily wave goodbye to their parents and skip into this warm and inviting setting. New children settle with ease. Many attend a 'tots' group with their families before starting and are familiar with the environment. Children show they feel safe and secure. They confidently delve into the beautifully designed indoor and outdoor learning environments. Children lead their own play and explore activities with enthusiasm and curiosity. A stunning outdoor area and sensory room support children's physical and emotional well-being. Children let off steam and challenge their physical abilities while completing the outdoor wooden circuit. The sensory room provides tranquillity, where children relax in a cosy snug that twinkles with fairy lights.

All children, including children with special educational needs and/or disabilities, benefit from highly qualified and experienced staff. Robust partnership working with parents and outside professionals, such as physiotherapists and occupational therapists, ensures individual children's needs are met. Staff build strong attachments with the children. Children go to their key person for reassurance when needed. Staff's knowledge of the children is superb. Subsequently, children are learning through their interests and preferred learning style. All children make significant progress in all areas of their learning and development.

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

- Teaching is exemplary. The manager provides a clear, inclusive and ambitious curriculum. Staff share this high-quality vision and provide suitably challenging activities and learning experiences for all children. Sequenced learning, where children build on what they already know, is securely embedded in daily practice. For example, staff provide group times to support early listening and attention skills. Children then progress from this group activity to story groups, for children getting ready for school. As a result, children consolidate and deepen their knowledge, understanding and skills across all areas of learning.
- The way that communication and language are prioritised in this setting is exceptional. With high staff ratios, children often benefit from one-to-one support, enabling a focus on supporting individual children's needs. Staff have incredible working relationships with speech and language therapists to ensure that children's speech progresses and they receive continuity of teaching. Staff extend children's language development by repeating words and introducing lots of commentary as they play. Children rejoice as they join in singing Christmas songs and talk to Santa about what they would like for Christmas.
- Staff teach children to become increasingly independent in managing their

personal needs. Children are motivated to learn through trial and error. Positive praise from staff supports their resilience and perseverance. Children pour their own drinks and prepare their own snack.

- With their wealth of knowledge, staff specialise in using visual tools to support children to communicate. These include Makaton and a picture exchange system that encourages the use of spoken language. Staff are consistent in their implementation, which means children make their own choices and respond well to these teaching strategies. Consequently, all children's voices are heard. Staff ring a bell and use sand timers before a change of routine. As a result, children are learning to regulate their emotions and develop an understanding of the behaviours expected of them.
- Early mathematical concepts are skilfully integrated into children's everyday play experiences. For example, staff encourage children to count how many seats there are on the role-play train. Children who prefer sensory play learn about space and capacity. Staff introduce words, such as 'full' and 'empty', as children scoop sand into buckets.
- The way that staff promote children's emotional and personal development is exceptional. Children start to learn about feelings through colour recognition and activities based around a favourite children's book. Staff choose quiet times to maximise this intended learning. As a result, children are developing empathy and compassion for others.
- The management team and staff are passionate and extremely dedicated to continuous development and enhancing the setting. Staff are highly motivated by this inspirational leadership. Parents compliment the setting on the remarkable and significant progress their children are making and the ongoing support they receive.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Safeguarding is of paramount importance, and all staff go through a secure recruitment process to ensure their suitability to work with children. The provider and staff have regular safeguarding training, and they all have a robust knowledge to ensure the safety of children in their care. All staff can recognise the signs and symptoms of abuse and know what to do if there is a concern about a child or a colleague. Staff undertake meticulous training to ensure they know how to use specialist equipment safely. They have a good understanding of any complex health needs of children in their care.

Setting details

Unique reference number	650140
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	10234597
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	2 to 4
Total number of places	26
Number of children on roll	31
Name of registered person	Stepping Stones Play & Learn Group (Colchester) Committee
Registered person unique reference number	RP527783
Telephone number	01206 860467
Date of previous inspection	16 March 2017

Information about this early years setting

Stepping Stones Play and Learn Group registered in 1991. The nursery employs 16 staff, 11 of whom are childcare staff. Of these, eight hold appropriate early years qualifications at level 3 or above, including one member of staff who holds early years professional status. The nursery opens from Monday to Friday, term time only. Sessions are from 9.30am until 2.30pm. The nursery provides funded early education for two-, three- and four-year-old children.

Information about this inspection

Inspector

Louisa Taylor

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 provider.
- The manager and the inspector completed a tour of the setting, both indoors and outdoors, to understand how the early years provision and curriculum are organised. Additionally, the manager showed the inspector the premises and discussed how they ensure they are safe and suitable.
- The inspector observed the quality of teaching during activities, indoors and outdoors, and assessed the impact that this had on children's learning.
- The inspector carried out a joint observation of group activities with the manager and also discussed self-evaluation.
- The special educational needs coordinator spoke to the inspector about how the setting supports children with special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- Children spoke with the inspector during the inspection. Parents and carers shared their views of the setting with the inspector.
- The inspector held a meeting with the manager and also discussed self-evaluation. The inspector looked at relevant documentation, such as evidence of the suitability of the staff working in the setting and a selection of other records.

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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