

Inspection of Stepping Stones Pre-School

Kendall Hall, Nunnery Fields, Canterbury, Kent CT1 3JN

Inspection date: 30 June 2023

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	Good

What is it like to attend this early years setting?

The provision is outstanding

Staff welcome children at the start of the day, and children hurry excitedly to their activities. Children fully understand the routines of the day, which staff enable through repetition and visual timetables. Children's engagement and enjoyment are at the heart of all planning. Staff go above and beyond to provide children with exciting, high-quality experiences. For example, children visit the cathedral, library and parks and help to plan how they will travel to their destination. Children are extremely well behaved and develop wonderful bonds with their friends and with all staff.

Staff implement an ambitious and broad curriculum, which incorporates all areas of learning. Children demonstrate high levels of engagement and thrive through their play. For example, children play happily together in the home corner and use herbs they have grown, pretending to flavour their cooking. The outdoor area is excellent and has been superbly planned by staff to offer a wide range of learning opportunities. For example, children thoroughly enjoy wandering through the wild grass and constructing towers with the wooden blocks. Staff consistently extend children's vocabulary and they fully understand the importance of communication and language. For instance, staff ask children questions about how materials feel as they engage, through messy play, in making potions. Even the younger children use new vocabulary and communicate effectively.

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

- Children flourish through stories, songs and rhymes, which staff read in an exciting and engaging way. Children giggle with delight as they are invited to join in with the story. Staff recognise the importance of instilling a love of reading from an early age and read to the younger children in small groups. Reading is embedded throughout the pre-school. Children select their own books linked to each area. For example, staff have created photograph books linked to trips the children have been on, such as 'I live in Canterbury. This is what it looks like'.
- Provision for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) is excellent. Staff recognise that each child is unique and have clear intentions for all children. For example, children with sensory needs enjoy using an enclosed swing and tent, which staff have bought recently. The manager regularly seeks support from outside agencies and has a thorough understanding of children's starting points.
- The manager is passionate about supporting the superb members of staff and fully recognises the strengths within the team. All staff speak highly of the manager and how she offers opportunities to further their knowledge, based on their own development and the needs of the children. The manager also

supports other settings in their recovery from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic through a project funded by the Department for Education. She recognises the excellent strategies that have been put in place and shares these with other managers.

- Children have an excellent balance of adult-led activities and child-initiated play. Staff model skills initially, and then children practise and embed them through their play. For instance, staff plan a superb activity using pots and foam, and they model vocabulary as children develop their listening skills. The children explore this activity for themselves and use the language staff have taught them.
- Partnerships with parents are exceptional. Staff ensure parents are well informed about children's progress and development. They are always available to speak to parents. The manager understands the importance of the relationship between home and pre-school and makes continuous efforts to strengthen this link. For instance, the manager visits children at home, before they start, and she regularly shares home-learning resources. One parent spoke very highly of staff and was thrilled with the progress his child had made.
- Staff sequence children's activities to build on their knowledge, and they understand children's next steps. For example, the manager explained there was a particular focus on number for children to develop their understanding of an amount. This is embedded throughout the pre-school for children to practise this in a variety of situations, such as counting out the snack and matching to number frames. Children also demonstrate this independently, for example, when choosing to thread beads and using language linked to amounts.
- Equality and diversity are embedded and woven through all areas of the pre-school. The manager has worked extremely hard to ensure children develop an understanding and respect for families and communities different to their own. For example, children celebrate the languages and cultures of the children at the pre-school, and staff read children books related to cultures around the world. Family members are invited in to teach children about celebrations around the world that are relevant to the children attending the pre-school.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Children regularly demonstrate their own understanding of keeping safe, which is reinforced by staff. They encourage each other to follow the rules at the pre-school, and they know these are in place to keep them safe. Staff complete safeguarding training regularly and have a robust knowledge regarding how to keep children safe. They understand the procedures to follow when concerned about a child and are aware of the possible signs of abuse. The manager completes regular risk assessments and is vigilant about the premises being safe and secure for the children to use, both indoors and outdoors.

Setting details

Unique reference number	127645
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	10295265
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 4
Total number of places	24
Number of children on roll	36
Name of registered person	Stepping Stones Pre-School Committee
Registered person unique reference number	RP522600
Telephone number	07980 492024
Date of previous inspection	4 December 2017

Information about this early years setting

Stepping Stones Pre-School registered in 1967 and is run by a voluntary committee. It operates in Canterbury, Kent. The pre-school is open each weekday morning from 9am to midday, during term time only. The provider receives funding to provide free early education for children aged two, three and four years. The committee employs five members of staff. Of these, one holds a relevant early years qualification at level 3 and two hold a qualification at level 6.

Information about this inspection

Inspector

Jade Mellin

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 manager and has taken that into account in their evaluation of the provision.
- The manager and the inspector completed a learning walk together and discussed the early years curriculum.
- The inspector and the manager carried out a joint observation of a group activity.
- Parents shared their views during discussions with the inspector about the pre-school.
- The inspector observed the interactions between staff and children and assessed the impact on children's learning.

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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