



Stepping Stone Pre-School Group

Inspection report for early years provision

Unique Reference Number	146763
Inspection date	08 February 2006
Inspector	Jo Blackman / Susan Ennis
Setting Address	111 London Road, Knebworth, Hertfordshire, SG3 6HD
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Registered person	Stepping Stone Pre-School
Type of inspection	Integrated
Type of care	Sessional care

ABOUT THIS INSPECTION

The purpose of this inspection is to assure government, parents and the public of the quality of childcare and, if applicable, of nursery education. The inspection was carried out under Part XA Children Act 1989 as introduced by the Care Standards Act 2000 and, where nursery education is provided, under Schedule 26 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998.

This report details the main strengths and any areas for improvement identified during the inspection. The judgements included in the report are made in relation to the outcomes for children set out in the Children Act 2004; the National Standards for under 8s day care and childminding; and, where nursery education is provided, the *Curriculum guidance for the foundation stage*.

The report includes information on any complaints about the childcare provision which Ofsted has received since the last inspection or registration or 1 April 2004 whichever is the later.

The key inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding: this aspect of the provision is of exceptionally high quality

Good: this aspect of the provision is strong

Satisfactory: this aspect of the provision is sound

Inadequate: this aspect of the provision is not good enough

For more information about early years inspections, please see the booklet *Are you ready for your inspection?* which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

THE QUALITY AND STANDARDS OF THE CARE AND NURSERY EDUCATION

On the basis of the evidence collected on this inspection:

The quality and standards of the care are good. The registered person meets the National Standards for under 8s day care and childminding.

The quality and standards of the nursery education are good.

WHAT SORT OF SETTING IS IT?

Stepping Stone Pre-School opened in 1992. It operates from part of converted council hostel situated adjacent to the school in the village of Knebworth, Hertfordshire. The pre-school is a registered charity and is managed by a voluntary committee serving the local rural area.

A maximum of 30 children may attend the nursery at any one time. Sessions are from 09:10 until 11:40 and 12:35 until 15:05 with a lunch club being available. All children

share access to a secure enclosed outdoor play area.

There are currently 60 children from two to five years on roll. This includes 23 funded 3 year olds and 11 funded 4 year olds. Children attend for a variety of sessions. The setting currently supports a number of children with special needs and who speak English as an additional language.

The group opens five days a week during school term times. 5 part-time and 4 full-time staff work with the children. 6 staff have early years qualifications to NVQ level 2, 3 or 4. The setting receives support from a teacher/mentor from the Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership (EYDCP). The pre-school has successfully completed both the Pre-School Learning Alliance and Herts Quality Standard accreditation schemes.

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PROVISION

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

Children stay healthy because staff follow effective health and hygiene policies and procedures. Sick children are excluded from the provision to minimise the spread of infection and the premises are maintained in a clean and hygienic state. Tables are regularly sprayed with anti-bacterial spray to prevent cross contamination. Children independently use tissues to blow their noses and discard used tissues appropriately under staff guidance. Children receive appropriate treatment in a medical emergency because staff hold suitable first aid qualifications and the first aid box is accessible and suitably stocked. Accidents and the administration of medicines are recorded in line with requirements to safeguard children's welfare. Children are learning about germs throughout their daily routines and show good awareness for why hand washing is necessary. Staff remind children about the rules of cleanliness consistently and children independently use the toilet and wash their hands afterwards.

Children benefit from a healthy diet where all snacks are healthy and nutritious. Snack time is used to full effect as a learning time for children. Children bring items of fruit from home, and staff encourage snack time to be a time for social conversation. Children gain independence and confidence as they select their snack box and find their name cards before sitting down to eat. Children do not become thirsty because they have regular access to drinking water. The children can ask at any time for a drink of water as well as staff offering children a drink when returning indoors after physical exercise.

All the children enjoy daily outdoor activities whenever possible in the large secured outside area. This enables them to develop control of their bodies and improve their physical skills through an appropriate level of challenge. For example, children enjoy playing with hoops, bats and balls of different sizes. The staff follow the children's interests, throwing, catching and rolling. The children have access to a climbing frame which is supervised by staff ensuring that they remain safe. Regular opportunities are offered to children for music and movement activities including

rhyiming and action songs.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

Children are very warmly welcomed into the friendly pre-school and cared for in a bright, stimulating, safe and secure environment. Children are well supervised and staff give priority to the security of the premises. For example, the pre-school follow a one way system where children, staff and parents enter through one door and leave through another. Ensuring that congestion is limited and children's safety is promoted. Visitors to the setting are always promptly introduced to the children and this contributes to children developing trust and feelings of security. The setting uses space creatively and areas are set aside for dedicated activities, reflecting the six areas of learning. Children have independent access to an extensive range of quality resources which promote their care, learning and play.

Relevant risk assessments are completed on a daily basis enabling staff to minimise hazards to children. The setting has clear fire evacuation procedures which are regularly carried out and recorded. Therefore children are familiar with the evacuation drill and this fully promotes their safety. Children's welfare is safeguarded because they are protected by informed adults who understand current child protection policies and procedures and have completed relevant training. The manager holds the responsibility of child protection in the setting and has attended relevant training. The written policy includes details of procedures to be followed in the event of an allegation being made against a member of staff and all staff show awareness for protecting children's welfare.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

Children enjoy their time at the setting and are happy and settled. Staff relate sensitively to them and provide a wide range of activities which are interesting and stimulating. The warm and comfortable relationships developed by staff enable children to feel secure and develop a strong sense of self-esteem. They achieve well due to practitioner's knowledge, understanding and use of early years guidance such as the 'Curriculum guidance for the foundation stage'. Staff adapt activities for younger children to ensure that their needs are met by the excellent use of the 'Birth to three matters' framework. Therefore, this fully supports them in planning and assessing for younger children.

Children receive very good levels of support from the stable staff team. Older children make friends with their peers, initiating conversations and involving other children and adults in their play. Staff interact well with all children during planned and free play activities and children spend their time purposefully in this environment.

Nursery Education.

The quality of teaching and learning is good. Children are making progress towards the early learning goals in all areas of the curriculum. They are extremely confident in their surroundings, enthusiastically selecting toys and activities from the wide variety available. Children develop independence skills and are eager to assist in daily tasks. For example, tidying up and preparing for snacks. At group times, staff encourage children to put forward their thoughts and feelings, which they do with confidence. For example, children enjoy listening and participating in the stories about the pre-school bear 'Weatherby' who regularly goes home with children to stay. They talk about the bear's experiences and enjoy looking at the pictures drawn by the children, leading to some lively conversations about the bear. Children are very well behaved and thoroughly aware of the boundaries and expectations in place, for example, sharing toys and using equipment appropriately.

Children always have access to books and enjoy sharing them with other children and adults as well as quietly looking at them independently. They enjoy joining in with stories and anticipate what may happen next. Children are highly confident and skilled speakers, using a wide vocabulary, supported fully by staff. All children have opportunities to learn French whilst at the pre school and they thrive on this experience which is fully supported by staff.

Children confidently select from a range of tools to make marks and some older children are trying to write their names independently. They are developing an excellent awareness of letter shapes and sounds and benefit from seeing a wide range of print, including letters of the alphabet and labels around the setting.

Children make some progress in mathematical development and are able to use numbers when counting and solving simple number problems such as addition and subtraction. However, there are limited opportunities for children to use maths in everyday life. Children enthusiastically explore a wide range of apparatus both inside and outside promoting the development of concepts such as capacity, weight and measure, using appropriate language to describe and compare size and shape.

Children have excellent opportunities to find out about the natural world. They are able to watch stick insects grow within the setting, learning about them along the way and have had opportunities to observe and touch a snake, developing their understanding of the natural world.

They are developing a good awareness of the uses of information technology in everyday life and are able to operate equipment such as the computer confidently with support. Children talk with interest about their own lives and learn about people in the community.

Children's physical skills are extremely well promoted through a variety of mediums such as music and movement. They learn to recognise changes which occur to their bodies when they are active, such as the need for a drink when coming in from outside play because they are thirsty after exercise. Children's imaginations and free expression are given very high regard through a vast range of activities such as playing musical instruments, singing, role-play and craft activities.

Children achieve well as a result of clear planning and assessment systems covering

most areas of learning and highly effective teaching methods. Plans show how activities will be adapted to meet individual needs and abilities to ensure that all children are appropriately challenged. Staff are clearly aware of their role within an activity and are committed to supporting children's learning in most areas. Practitioners find out about each child from the beginning, through home visits and discussions with parents they cultivate a considerable knowledge and awareness of the needs, interests and skills of individual children in their care. Staff provide a vibrant and rich learning environment both indoors and outside to engage children's interest and enable them to maximise and enjoy their play and learning experiences.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

Children from the local community are warmly welcomed and included in all activities. Children develop their understanding and appreciation of a wide range of diverse cultures through activities that promote a greater awareness of the wider world. This enables the children to develop a positive attitude to others. Children who have particular requirements have their needs met well and knowledgeable staff support their learning in this inclusive setting. Children are well behaved in response to the consistent expectations of caring practitioners. Large group times hold the interest of all children and they gain confidence and self-esteem through staff encouragement to vocalise and participate. Children take turns and show concern for others. This positive approach actively fosters children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

The partnership with parents and carers of children who receive nursery education is good. Staff develop a very positive partnership with parents to support children's progress in learning. There is a wealth of information which is easily accessible which includes general care and educational literature. The setting keeps a record of any complaints. However, the complaints procedure is not in line with new requirements. Parents value the service provided and are informed of their children's progress. Staff have built good relationships with parents and communication is encouraged fully by providing parent evenings, newsletters and regular reports on their children's achievements. The increased adult to child ratios support children well and parents are encouraged to spend time with their children at pre-school. Staff and parents share relevant information about the children who receive nursery education on a daily basis. Parents are able to meet with their child's key worker regularly. This two way sharing benefits the child and enhances their learning. This underpins their progress in the pre-school and consequently their ability to fully contribute to the provision.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

The quality of leadership and management of the nursery education is good. Children's safety, care & welfare is promoted. The manager has clear vision for the development of the group and supports her staff very well. For example, she ensures

that staff feel valued by working alongside her assistants, promoting a good team spirit and monitoring the daily practice at close hand. The mature and stable staff team are well qualified and dedicated to the concept of quality childcare and education. They follow children to the activities which engage their interest and provide effective support to draw the learning from play. This promotes positive outcomes for children. The dedicated staff team ensure that children benefit and enjoy their time at this welcoming provision. The inspection identified one or two minor omissions in otherwise comprehensive documentation. Staff demonstrate a real affinity with children; they respect children's feelings, value their comments and clearly enjoy their company. Planning and assessment systems are suitable to ensure that children's learning is promoted. The pre-school meets the needs of all children who attend.

Improvements since the last inspection

At the last care inspection the provision agreed to review infection control measures. The provider also agreed to ensure that written permission for seeking emergency medical treatment or advice was requested. Children's health is now further promoted through the group's comprehensive health and hygiene procedure, which includes steps to take should a child be ill or infectious, and permission for each child to receive emergency medical treatment is in place.

At the last Nursery Education inspection the provision agreed to provide activities to encourage the children to express their ideas through creative play. Children's ideas are fully expressed through the activities that are provided including role play and music and movement.

Complaints since the last inspection

There have been no complaints since the last inspection. The provider is required to keep a record of complaints made by parents, which they can see on request. The complaints record may contain complaints other than those made to Ofsted

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WHAT MUST BE DONE TO SECURE FUTURE IMPROVEMENT?

The quality and standards of the care

To improve the quality and standards of care further the registered person should take account of the following recommendation(s):

- ensure that the complaints procedure is updated to include the recent changes relating to the national standards.

The quality and standards of the nursery education

To improve the quality and standards of nursery education further the registered person should take account of the following recommendation(s):

- continue to improve the quality of teaching with particular reference to planning, and providing children with opportunities for Maths development in every day life.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the leaflet *Building better childcare: Compliments and concerns about inspectors' judgements* which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk