

# Stepping Stones Montessori Nursery School

Inspection report for early years provision

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<b>Inspection date</b>	06/06/2011
<b>Inspector</b>	Sue Birkenhead
<b>Setting address</b>	Stepping Stones Montessori School, 8 Prestbury Road, MACCLESFIELD, Cheshire, SK10 1AU
<b>Telephone number</b>	01625 619687
<b>Email</b>	info@steppingstonesmontessori.co.uk
<b>Type of setting</b>	Childcare on non-domestic premises

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## Introduction

This inspection was carried out by Ofsted under Sections 49 and 50 of the Childcare Act 2006 on the quality and standards of the registered early years provision. 'Early years provision' refers to provision regulated by Ofsted for children from birth to 31 August following their fifth birthday (the early years age group). The registered person must ensure that this provision complies with the statutory framework for children's learning, development and welfare, known as the *Early Years Foundation Stage*.

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## Description of the setting

Stepping Stones Montessori Nursery School was re-registered in 2007 and is run by Cheshire Montessori Ltd. It operates from a converted property in a residential area near to the centre of Macclesfield. Children are cared for within two rooms on the ground floor and one room on the first floor with no lift access. There is access to a secure outdoor play area. A maximum of 30 children may attend the nursery at any one time. There are 43 children on roll, of which 30 are in receipt of nursery education funding. The setting currently supports children with learning difficulties.

The nursery school is registered by Ofsted on the Early Years Register and is open each weekday from 8am to 6pm for 49 weeks of the year. The nursery employs seven members of staff who work with the children using the Montessori approach. Of these, six staff hold appropriate early years qualifications five to Level 3 or equivalent and one to degree level. The setting receives support and advice from the Early Years Consultant.

## The overall effectiveness of the early years provision

Overall the quality of the provision is good.

The nursery provides a very relaxed, welcoming as well as inclusive environment where children are confident, happy and secure. The dedicated manager and staff team successfully combine the Montessori approach with the Early Years Foundation Stage. As a result the welfare, learning and developmental needs of children are on the whole successfully met to support the good progress they make. Excellent procedures ensure good relationships between parents, carers and outside agencies are maintained, which significantly contribute to the children's care and learning. However, links with some other settings children attend is recognised as an area for future development. The effective procedures for self-evaluation outline the setting's practice and support their strong commitment to drive improvement and promote better outcomes for children.

## What steps need to be taken to improve provision further?

To further improve the early years provision the registered person should:

- obtain information regarding children's developmental starting points on entry to the setting
- develop further links with other settings children attend
- update the record of risk assessment to include any assessments of risks for outings and trips
- implement a regular programme of continuing professional development of staff, which includes regular appraisals to identify their training needs and ensure their needs are met.

## **The effectiveness of leadership and management of the early years provision**

Children are effectively safeguarded because there is a comprehensive awareness of safeguarding issues among the staff, many of whom receive relevant training. Robust recruitment procedures ensure the suitability of all staff employed. They attend some additional short courses to support the development of their knowledge, skills and enhance children's care and learning. Opportunities for staff, such as, '15 minutes me time' are planned for weekly with the manager to discuss issues arising. However, regular appraisals are not currently completed. On the whole comprehensive systems for ensuring children's safety are in place. For example, they practise and record emergency evacuation and use necessary safety equipment, which includes finger guards to doors. In addition comprehensive risk assessments reflect how risks to children are clearly minimised within the nursery and although risks are assessed prior to outings the details are not documented. Written policies underpin the good nursery practices and changes to the detail of the safeguarding policy have been made following the recommendation raised at the last inspection. The management team and staff work together well to develop effective systems for monitoring and evaluating nursery practices. For example, they all contribute to the process of self-evaluation and the manager works with children to obtain their views. As a result, the outdoor play area is currently being refurbished and group rooms have been reorganised. Through the use of the local authority 'Moving On' document action plans developed outline plans for the future with associated timescales. The previous recommendations raised have since been addressed. Consequently improvements have been made to the accessibility of staff records, children's personal hygiene and the evaluation of activities to benefit the children's care and learning. The enthusiasm of the management team and staff supports the positive commitment to the continuous development of the setting. All required documentation that contributes to the safe and efficient operation of the nursery is consistently completed, well organised and respects a confidential approach. Individual educational plans for children with learning difficulties are developed well, actively involving parents and outside agencies. One to one support and the adaptation of activities according to children's ability support the effective inclusion of all children and ensure children's needs are consistently met.

Many superb initiatives support the development of extremely positive relationships with parents and carers. Parents are actively encouraged to come into nursery as part of the 'open door policy'. They receive monthly newsletters, which update them on events and nursery practices. Excellent opportunities actively encourage parents to become involved and contribute to their child's learning. For example, termly parent-teacher meetings and the completion of parent information slips. Parents' views are clearly valued and they actively contribute to the self-evaluation procedures through questionnaires sent home. Information regarding their well-being and content of the children's day is clearly documented and fed back to parents on collection. They have access to the many written policies, which underpin the effective nursery practices and include the comprehensive safeguarding policy and procedures for complaints. Parents say they are very happy with the service and support they receive and describe the management

and staff as 'amazing' and say they offer 'good attention to detail and care'. Some very positive links have been established with outside agencies to support children with learning difficulties and disabilities. As part of the children's transition to school contacts are established and end of year reports shared. However, such links have not been established with all other settings children attend to promote a complementary approach to the delivery of Early Years Foundation Stage. Management recognise this as an area for future development.

## **The quality and standards of the early years provision and outcomes for children**

Children are happy, confident and secure within the relaxed learning environment where they sense of belonging is actively promoted. They develop positive friendships, good social skills and have many opportunities to exercise their independence. The good displays throughout the nursery contribute to the welcoming and inclusive environment where children's sense of belonging is effectively promoted. Good quality resources and specific Montessori equipment reflect a wide range of more natural every day materials for children to explore, which provide innovative ways of further supporting their learning and development. As a result, children from a young age are able to make decisions about their play, follow their interests and actively instigate their own learning. Staff approach learning in a calm and supportive manner to extend and challenge children as well as encourage them to have fun and enjoyment in learning. Consequently, children become very inquisitive and play an extremely active part in their learning as a result of the Montessori approach. Activity planning is consistent throughout the nursery taking into account the children's individual interests and promote a good balance of adult-led and child-initiated opportunities. The children's individual profiles incorporate photographic evidence, appropriate observations, which are linked to the areas of learning and reflect their next steps, effectively used to inform the planning. Summary assessments are completed regularly to monitor the good progress they make towards the early learning goals and shared with parents. However, children's developmental starting points are not obtained on entry to the setting to act as a baseline from which to monitor their progress.

Many valuable learning experiences support the development of children's 'practical life skills' for the future. Children are encouraged to take responsibility for all they do. For example, children select a tray which interests them and proceed to fill containers with water, add bubbles and watch the changes as they whisk the solutions. They explore items that float and sink and use different items such as sponges to move water from one container to another. They clean and tidy all the equipment afterwards, returning it to its place ready for another child to use. At the beginning of the session they reflect what jobs they want to be involved in on the 'responsibility board'. Opportunities allow children to develop their imagination well. For example, they pretend to be a fireman, wear the helmet and access the hose to put out the fire. They build dens and make 'beans on toast' for the other firemen. They learn about spatial awareness and further develop their physical skills as they take part in 'Stretch and grow' sessions weekly. Children's

understanding of number and problem solving is incorporated into all activities and discussion of textured number templates is a common feature throughout the nursery. Children refer regularly to number as they take part in activities and confidently count and enthusiastically explain the spider they draw has '26 legs'. Older children skilfully compare the towers they build and distinguish between the biggest and the smallest with ease. By exploring programmes on the computers and taking part in the 'computer club' children develop a positive understanding of technology. They enjoy exploring various textures, and use a range of different media to explore their creativity. Children make folders using paper and sticky tape and explain the content is about the computer. Older children skilfully learn about letters and sound associated with their own names, short words they link to objects and begin to read simple words such as bat and cat. Children excitedly attend the French lessons planned weekly and demonstrate what they learn as afterwards they show how they can count to 10 in French. Children develop a positive interest in books. They visit the library regularly, access books independently and pretend to read them from the pictures. This effectively contributes to the children's literacy skills and enjoyment of books.

Young children indicate they feel safe as they explore their environment confidently knowing staff are close by. Older children confidently say they feel safe 'because the ladies look after me'. The Montessori 'grace and courtesy exercises' reinforce how to handle tools safely actively encouraging children's understanding. They develop a positive understanding of personal hygiene through the daily routines staff follow. They explain why they do this and know it is to 'get rid of germs that can make you sick'. The rotating menus reflect the healthy, balanced diet children receive, which includes fresh fruit and vegetables daily. Children competently assist in preparing snacks for others by adding the content to the dishes and setting out the cups and saucers for drinks. They serve their own meals enabling them to make some choice, choose between milk and water and skilfully pour their own drinks; hence their self-help skills are effectively encouraged. Children have access to a range of resources and activities to positively promote diversity and acknowledge cultural differences. Positive techniques for the effective management of children's behaviour foster the development of their self-esteem and confidence. As a result, children develop the good use of manners and behave very well.

## Annex A: record of inspection judgements

### The key inspection judgements and what they mean

*Grade 1 is Outstanding: this aspect of the provision is of exceptionally high quality*  
*Grade 2 is Good: this aspect of the provision is strong*  
*Grade 3 is Satisfactory: this aspect of the provision is sound*  
*Grade 4 is Inadequate: this aspect of the provision is not good enough*

### The overall effectiveness of the early years provision

<b>How well does the setting meet the needs of the children in the Early Years Foundation Stage?</b>	2
The capacity of the provision to maintain continuous improvement	2

### The effectiveness of leadership and management of the early years provision

<b>The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage</b>	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
The effectiveness with which the setting deploys resources	2
The effectiveness with which the setting promotes equality and diversity	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding	2
The effectiveness of the setting's self-evaluation, including the steps taken to promote improvement	2
The effectiveness of partnerships	2
The effectiveness of the setting's engagement with parents and carers	1

### The quality of the provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage

The quality of the provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
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### Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage

<b>Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage</b>	2
The extent to which children achieve and enjoy their learning	2
The extent to which children feel safe	2
The extent to which children adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which children make a positive contribution	2
The extent to which children develop skills for the future	2

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