

Stepping Stones

Inspection report for early years provision

Unique Reference Number	316832
Inspection date	05 March 2008
Inspector	Janice Linsdell
Setting Address	Tottington Primary School, Moorside Road, Bury, BL8 3HR
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Registered person	The Governors of Tottington Primary School
Type of inspection	Integrated
Type of care	Full day 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 satisfactory. The registered person meets the National Standards for under 8s day care and childminding.

The quality and standards of the nursery education are satisfactory.

WHAT SORT OF SETTING IS IT?

Stepping Stones Pre-school opened in 1998. It operates from a classroom situated within the grounds of Tottington Primary School in Bury. The pre-school is organised and managed by the school governors. It is open each week day from 09.00 to 15.10 during school term time. A maximum of 20 children may attend the pre-school at any one time. Children have access to a secure enclosed outdoor play area.

There are currently 42 children aged from two to under five years on roll. Of these, 28 children receive funding for nursery education. The nursery currently supports a number of children with learning difficulties and disabilities.

The pre-school employs six members of staff including the manager. Of these, four hold appropriate qualifications in early years. The pre-school has completed modules one, two and three of the Bury Quality Assurance scheme.

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PROVISION

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is satisfactory.

Staff take appropriate steps to promote children's good health and reduce the spread of germs. For example, they regularly disinfect tables and wear plastic aprons to serve the children's lunch. Some staff are trained in first aid and basic food hygiene, which further safeguards children's health. The premises are kept reasonably clean and tidy, but the carpet can become quite messy when children are playing with the sand. Appropriate procedures are followed if children have an accident or if they are feeling ill. The arrangements for administering medication meet requirements, but parents do not always sign the medication form to acknowledge the entry.

Children consistently wash their hands as part of the daily routine, although they are not always reminded to use soap. They enjoy some healthy snacks, such as toast and a selection of fresh fruit, but they are not provided with plates during snack time. Children's meals are prepared in the main school and delivered appropriately to the pre-school. Most of the food is nutritionally balanced and includes some fresh ingredients. However, children are sometimes offered processed tomato sauce to accompany their meal, which is not particularly healthy. Fresh drinking water is provided to children with all meals and snacks, and on request.

The door leading to the outside play area is usually left open, which benefits the children because they can make independent choices about playing outdoors in the fresh air. Children can use the stepping stones and balancing beams to practice their climbing and balancing skills. They show strength as they sit in the wheeled toys and use their legs to push themselves uphill. Older children can access more challenging climbing equipment located in the school grounds and all children enjoy taking part in group exercises indoors. This benefits their physical health and well-being.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is satisfactory.

Children are cared for in a safe, stimulating and friendly environment. The main door has a key code to gain entry to the premises and staff closely monitor the door, particularly during children's arrival and departure times. Staff take appropriate measures to reduce hazards to children's safety. Fire safety procedures are clearly explained to visitors on arrival and fire drills are carried out in a timely, well organised manner. The risk assessment audit form is used to identify and address any ongoing hazards, but a full risk assessment of the premises, including outside play areas has not yet been conducted.

Children use a wide range of play materials which are mainly stored in open, low-level shelving units or clearly labelled storage boxes for children's easy access. Suitable procedures are in place to make sure resources are checked for safety and cleaned on a regular basis. Children are beginning to develop an awareness of how to keep themselves safe through gentle reminders from staff, such as walking carefully on the ramp and being careful when using resources.

Appropriate procedures are in place to protect children from harm. Most of the staff have attended training in relation to child protection and safeguarding children, which means they are clear about their responsibilities in keeping children safe. Relevant information is in place for staff to refer to and there is a detailed child protection policy, which is shared with parents.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is satisfactory.

Children enjoy their time in the group and develop positive relationships with the staff. They are eager to join in activities and become excited in their play. The daily routine enables children to take part in a variety of experiences both indoors and outside, as well as having opportunities to rest quietly after lunch watching children's television. The room is well set out so that children can choose to paint, draw, construct and complete jigsaws. Photographs show the children enjoying various activities, such as dressing up in different roles, playing on the computer and using the work bench in the garden. Staff also introduce simple dance and drama to the children, which helps to build their confidence.

Children have lots of fun getting dirty as they play outside in the mud. They spend a long time scooping up the mud and placing it on the slide, laughing as they make a 'gooey slide'. Children enjoy playing in the sand tray and have the freedom to develop this play further, for example, tipping sand on the floor and using the diggers to make patterns in the sand. Children concentrate as they build the train track and show interest as they join in with a game of nursery rhyme lotto. Some staff have attended 'Birth to three matters' training, although the framework is not currently used in the planning of activities for children under the age of three years.

Nursery Education

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory and children are making steady progress across the six areas of learning. They are beginning to develop social relationships with one another and show some understanding of expectations of behaviour. Their self care skills are developing well because staff encourage them to try things for themselves. Children show confidence as they speak in groups and chat to adults about what they are doing, but they sometimes struggle to listen because of the noise. Children are helped to recognise the letters of their name and enjoy stories read by staff, but they do not always select books to look at independently. They are beginning to develop an understanding of mathematics, for example, competently counting the number of children sitting on their table at snack time and deciding how many cups they will need.

Children's knowledge and understanding of the world is developing well. They enjoy seeing and learning about the hens in the neighbouring garden, and visiting the school pond as they learn about the life cycle of frogs. Outside visitors, for example, from the emergency services are invited to the pre-school to enhance the educational programme. Staff use these opportunities well to further extend children's learning, such as creating role play areas where children pretend to deal with accidents. Children's physical development is developing sufficiently well. They practise their fine motor skills as they use the small tools during craft activities, such as paint brushes and scissors. They enjoy taking part in hand printing activities, exploring different colours and learning that 'blue and yellow make green'. Children have some opportunities to play imaginatively, but role play areas are not always available as part of the continuous provision of resources.

Most of the staff have attended a good level of training to assist them in delivering Foundation Stage curriculum. They organise the environment sufficiently well so that children have some good opportunities to play and learn. However, noise levels in the room are consistently high, which does not always promote a positive learning environment for children and can impact on their ability to concentrate. Planning for children's learning is adequate and organised around different topics for each term. Play plans for focussed activities are detailed and include

the next steps in children's learning. Staff take an informal approach to carrying out observations of the children and evaluating activities, which means they are not consistently carried out. There are two different systems in place to monitor and assess children's progress in their learning, which is unnecessary.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is satisfactory.

Staff develop warm and supportive relationships with the children and encourage them to make choices in their play. There are some good quality posters and photographs displayed to promote positive images of culture and gender. Children also take part in activities where they learn about other countries and traditions, such as making Diwali lamps and learning about Polish Christmas decorations. This helps them to develop a positive view of the wider world. Parents value the care and support shown to children with learning difficulties and disabilities because staff work closely with them and outside professionals to ensure their needs are met. For example, staff manage to secure funding to increase staff ratios and obtain specialist equipment, such as a chair.

In the main, children behave reasonably well, but they often shout to be heard and their behaviour sometimes deteriorates when they are left unattended, such as during transition times between activities. Staff remind them to be kind to their friends and to apologise if they upset others. They offer lots of praise to reinforce positive behaviour and the 'stars for the week' showing photographs of children is a good method of recognising their efforts. Children are learning to be responsible, for example, as they help to brush up the sand and willingly tidy away resources. Children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is fostered.

Partnership with parents and carers is satisfactory. Activity plans are on display, and the information leaflet for parents gives them some good information about the curriculum and the areas of children's learning. A variety of useful leaflets are available for parents in the entrance hall and notices remind them that they can view the children's work at any time. Parent questionnaires are sometimes issued to gain feedback and suggestions for improvement. Parents speak positively about the staff and the support they give to the children.

Organisation

The organisation is satisfactory.

Most of the staff are qualified to level 3 standard and they have some good opportunities to attend a wide range of ongoing training to further develop their knowledge and skills. This benefits the children's care and education. Evidence is available to confirm all staff are appropriately vetted to ensure their suitability to work with children, but the system for recording this information does not fully meet requirements, as photocopies of staff disclosure notices are held on file. In the main, staff are appropriately deployed and work well together as a team. However, there are short periods of time when children are left unattended because staff are busy involved in other tasks, and this impacts on children's behaviour and noise levels within the group.

All relevant documentation to promote children's safety and well-being is accessible and appropriately maintained. Required policies and procedures to promote the safe and efficient management of the pre-school are in place and updated regularly. Leadership and management of the nursery education is satisfactory. The manager works closely with the staff team to offer children a broad and balanced curriculum. Some informal procedures are in place to monitor

the delivery of the educational programme. Staff show a commitment to ongoing development and improvement, for example, by undertaking professional training and taking part in the quality assurance scheme. Overall, the provision meets the needs of the range of the children for whom it provides.

Improvements since the last inspection

Since the last inspection the pre-school have improved arrangements for children's care by implementing a key worker system and restricting the number of children under three years attending each session, to ensure ratios are always maintained. New heaters have been fitted to enable a comfortable temperature to be maintained and access to the premises has been improved with the provision of new ramps. The behaviour management policy has been updated to include reference to bullying and any changes in the times of children's hours of attendance are recorded in the daily register.

Since the last nursery education inspection, staff have worked hard to develop children's knowledge and understanding of the world, for example, by providing various opportunities to learn about different cultures, nature and their local environment. Writing materials are more readily available to encourage children to practice their writing skills. Information gained from observing and assessing children's progress is used generally well by staff, to assist them in planning a suitable range of activities to meet children's learning needs. Also, an information leaflet about the curriculum has been devised and shared with parents. Planning for outdoor play is still in the process of being developed.

Complaints since the last inspection

Since the last inspection there have been no complaints made to Ofsted that required the provider or Ofsted to take any action in order to meet the National Standards. 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):

- provide children with plates at snack time and make sure the medication record is signed by parents to acknowledge the entry
- conduct a full risk assessment of the premises, including outside areas, to identify hazards and action taken to reduce risks

- review the organisation of staff roles, particularly during transition times, to ensure sufficient staff are supporting the children and monitoring their behaviour.

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):

- reduce noise levels in the group to create a more calm and positive learning environment for children (also applies to care)
- improve the arrangements for carrying out observations and evaluations of the children's learning and development
- improve the arrangements for recording children's individual progress through the stepping stones.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the leaflet *Complaints about Ofsted Early Years: concerns or complaints about Ofsted's role in regulating and inspecting childcare and early education (HMI ref no 2599)* which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk