

Stepping Stones Pre-School

Inspection report for early years provision

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Inspector	Cilla Mullane
Setting address	Kendall Hall, Nunnery Fields, Canterbury, Kent, CT1 3JN
Telephone number	07980 492204
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Type of setting	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*.

The provider must provide a copy of this report to all parents with children at the setting where reasonably practicable. The provider must provide a copy of the report to any other person who asks for one, but may charge a fee for this service (The Childcare (Inspection) Regulations 2008 regulations 9 and 10).

The setting also makes provision for children older than the early years age group which is registered on the voluntary and/or compulsory part(s) of the Childcare Register. This report does not include an evaluation of that provision, but a comment about compliance with the requirements of the Childcare Register is included in Annex B.

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Description of the setting

Stepping Stones Pre-School opened in 1967. It operates from a church hall in Canterbury, Kent. It is situated adjacent to the church, which owns the property, and is run by a committee. All children share access to a secure, enclosed outdoor play area. The setting is on one level, and there is a toilet for disabled people. A maximum of 30 children aged under eight years may attend the pre-school at any one time. The setting is registered on the Early Years Register and 35 children in this age range currently attend. It is also registered on the compulsory and voluntary parts of the Childcare Register. Funding is received for children aged three and four years.

The pre-school is open each weekday morning from 9am to 12pm, during term time only. Staff support children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and children with English as an additional language.

The pre-school employs five members of staff. Of these, four hold appropriate early years qualifications. They receive support from a local authority advisor.

The overall effectiveness of the early years provision

Overall the quality of the provision is good.

Children make good progress in their learning, they are independent and active learners, and adults support their play and interact with them skilfully. Children are confident, safe and secure. They behave well and have strong friendships with one another and trusting relationships with adults. The environment and resources are generally well planned and presented. Strong partnerships with parents result in them being well included in their children's care and learning, and good links with outside agencies promotes continuity and consistency. Required documentation is well maintained, and policies and procedures are effective in promoting children's welfare and ensuring they are safeguarded. Adults are professional and have a clear vision for the future; they maintain continuous improvement by setting and achieving realistic goals.

What steps need to be taken to improve provision further?

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

- increase the range of resources to include more of those which promote children's understanding of information technology, for example by the provision of programmable toys.

The effectiveness of leadership and management of the early years provision

The pre-school is generally well organised by competent and well-qualified staff who work well as a team. Clear safeguarding procedures, which are implemented consistently by vigilant staff, ensure children's safety. Risk assessments identify potential hazards in the environment, and prompt action is taken when necessary. Therefore, children can move around safely in a safe environment.

Effective systems for self-evaluation result in clear priorities for improvement. Staff carry out peer observations to help them develop and share good practice. Recent developments, such as involving children in compiling the 'golden rules', have significantly improved outcomes for children by helping them to take control of their own feelings and behaviour. Thorough systems are in place to monitor children's progress. Clearly presented tracking sheets enable staff to check at a glance that children are making good progress across all areas of learning and to identify gaps where extra support may be needed.

Adults have a good knowledge of each child's background and needs, and they tailor activities to interest and challenge each child. A trained special needs coordinator has good links with other professionals in order to offer children with disabilities and/or learning difficulties the support they need. Local outings, such as to the zoo and shops, successfully promote children's understanding of the wider world and diversity.

Careful thought is put into setting up the environment so that it is attractive, welcoming and inviting to children. For example, there are cake papers, and candles with holders to accompany the play dough, and paper towels are displayed in a basket in the toilet area. Outside, there is a road painted onto the tarmac to make riding bikes more challenging. The digging and growing area has produced crops of beans, helping children to learn where vegetables come from. However, there are limited resources to promote children's understanding of information technology.

Parents are fully involved in their children's learning. Children's folders with observations and records of their achievements are a lovely record of their time at pre-school. Parents contribute comments to their children's 'unique stories' and receive information about their progress so they are able to continue supporting their learning at home. Parents are impressed with the friendly and professional staff and good communication. They feel very well informed and included in their children's learning. They feel that staff manage children's behaviour very positively. Where children attend other settings, staff exchange information about progress and well being so consistency of care is good. Furthermore, the setting has very good links with reception teachers from local schools, many of whom visit the preschool, which eases children's transition to school.

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

Children make good progress towards the early learning goals from their individual starting points. Staff carry out careful and systematic observations of children's achievements and link them clearly to the areas of learning. They use them to plan interesting and challenging activities, which build on each child's interests and abilities.

The balance of adult-led and child-initiated activities is good, so that children learn new skills or take charge of their own learning. Children throughout the setting are independent and active learners, choosing their own activities and concentrating well. Staff know when to leave children to learn independently, and when to offer their support. Therefore, children are consistently motivated, challenged and interested. Children are sometimes slightly frustrated by the slow pace of the routine, for example when they need to sit and wait for their snack to be served.

Children's writing skills are impressive. They are keen to label their work with their names, and some older children are able to write well. Adults draw children's attention to the sounds of letters, supporting their language development and pre-reading skills well. Children count well during group time, and are able to make realistic guesses as to how many children are present. Some calculate how many there will be when one more child arrives. Children's understanding of the natural world is well promoted as they use their own small garden, where they look for bugs, dig and grow vegetables and flowers.

There are 'golden rules', which the children helped to compile. When children are unkind to one another, adults ask them to remember the rules, and they reply 'we must be kind to each other', showing that they know and understand the rules. Children form firm friendships with one another, for example sitting with an arm around a friend during group time. Relationships with staff are also strong and trusting, and children feel able to tell adults if they are unhappy. Children are spontaneously kind to and share with their friends, and they say 'thank you' when offered a toy by another child.

Staff support the youngest children as they wash their hands, chatting about why this is important. Older children use the toilets independently and know that they must wash off 'dirty germs'. They play in the fresh air often, and use large apparatus adeptly, for example showing good co-ordination and spatial awareness as they ride bikes within the roadways drawn on the tarmac.

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

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

The effectiveness of leadership and management of the early years provision

The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	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	2

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

Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	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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Annex B: the Childcare Register

The provider confirms that the requirements of the compulsory part of the Childcare Register are: Met

The provider confirms that the requirements of the voluntary part of the Childcare Register are: Met