The inspection of educational provision for children before compulsory school age

Nursery report on:
Stepping Stones Day Nursery

Registered Nursery Education Inspector:  Mary Dyas
Date of inspection:    1st October 2008
Contract number:    T/001/08N

© Queens Printer and Controller of HMSO 2008: This report may be re-used free of charge in any format or medium provided that it is re-used accurately and not used in a misleading context. The copyright in the material must be acknowledged as aforementioned and the title of the report specified.
Report on the inspection of nursery settings in the non-maintained sector

Name of nursery:  Stepping Stones Day Nursery

Address:  Coleg Gwent
          Ebbw Vale Campus
          College Road
          Ebbw Vale

Post code: NP23 6GT

Telephone: 01495 333014

Person responsible for day-to-day management  Tracy Hunt

Position  Officer in charge

About the inspection

This inspection took place as part of a national programme of inspections of the educational provision for children before compulsory school age in Wales. It was commissioned by Her Majesty’s Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales.

The purpose of inspection is to identify good features and shortcomings so that providers can improve the quality of education offered and help children achieve their full potential. Another purpose is to inform parents and the public about the quality of nursery education. A copy of the inspection report must be given to all parents/carers with a child at the nursery and should be available on request to other people.

Inspectors have used a five point scale to record all judgements. Grade definitions are:

Grade 1  good with outstanding features
Grade 2  good features and no important shortcomings
Grade 3  good features outweigh shortcomings
Grade 4  some good features, but shortcomings in important areas
Grade 5  many important shortcomings
1.0 Context of the setting

Context of the nursery setting

Stepping Stones Day Nursery is situated on the Ebbw Vale campus of Coleg Gwent in South Wales. It was opened in September 1994 to meet the needs of parents who attend the college and also the wider community. The nursery takes children from 18 months to 5 years divided into two age groups. The older group takes children from 2½ years and at the time of the inspection there were 12 on roll in this group of which seven were 3-4 year olds. Three of these are in receipt of funded educational provision. There are currently no children for whom English is an additional language in this group.

Priority for admission is given to college students who also receive up to 85% support for nursery fees. Children with special educational needs are welcomed and supported.

Blaenau Gwent is the second most deprived authority in Wales. Most of the children in the nursery came from socially deprived young single parent families who are dependent on benefits. Language development is a major feature of the nursery due to the low level of language of most children on entry and the children make good progress in this area. The children come to the nursery from a wide geographical area and leave to move on to many different primary schools.

The nursery occupies a specially adapted area in the college building. There are two main rooms with an additional ‘quiet’ room where younger children are able to sleep after lunch, toilets which the children access independently, a small office and a small kitchen for preparation of snacks. The children’s lunches are brought down from the college cafeteria kitchen. Outdoors is a securely fenced area mainly surfaced with astroturf and small areas of grass, bark and sand. The outdoor space is set out with different learning areas, a climbing frame with slide and a see-saw. Children have access to the outdoors in all weathers.

The nursery has recently achieved the Quality Counts assessment from the National Day Nurseries Association. The setting was last inspected by the Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales in November 2007 and this is the first time it has been inspected by Estyn.

2.0 Main findings of the report

2.1 The overall quality and standards of educational provision and whether or not the provision successfully promotes the goals for children’s learning

The quality and standards of educational provision, taken overall, are appropriate and successfully promote the Foundation Phase Outcomes for children’s learning.
2.2 Standards achieved by children in the seven areas of learning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Six areas of learning</th>
<th>Grade for under-fives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal and social development, well-being and cultural diversity</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language, literacy and communication skills</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathematical development</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welsh language development</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge and understanding of the world</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical development</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creative development</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.3 Inspection judgement on the quality of education provided by the setting

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality of education</th>
<th>Grade for under-fives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quality of provision for children’s spiritual, moral, social and cultural development</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of planning for children’s learning</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of teaching</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of assessment and recording of children’s progress, and reports for parents and carers</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of the relationships with parents, carers and the community</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The contribution made by the setting to children’s well-being</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of the leadership and management of the setting</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The progress made by the setting in implementing the key issues for action identified in the last inspection report</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.0 The standards achieved by children in the six areas of learning

Standards achieved by 3-4 year-olds

3.1 Personal and social development, well-being and cultural diversity

**Good features**
The standards achieved by children in personal and social development, well-being and cultural diversity are good. The children are very confident in the setting. They enjoy good relationships with each other and with the practitioners who work with them. Most children enjoy talking to visitors. They understand the need to share and to take turns and a most demonstrate this in practice. The children are eager to take their turn at new experiences, which they approach with interest and eagerness. Through their activities learning about different cultures and the work they have done looking at disability they are developing a positive sensitivity towards other people who may be different. Many children are already quite independent. Most are able to use the toilet, wash and dry their hands themselves and brush their teeth after lunch. All are developing appropriately their skills of using scissors and glue independently and putting on and taking off their outdoor clothes and shoes. All children also help to tidy up the classroom and outdoor area and put things away in their correct places with the help of shadow shapes. Many of the children are very confident with the use of a computer and are able to use a mouse to make selections and to move objects around on the screen.

**Shortcomings**
No important shortcomings were identified.
3.2 Language, literacy and communication skills

**Good features**
Good features of the standards achieved by children in language, literacy and communication skills outweigh shortcomings. Nearly all children make good progress during their time in the nursery. Most converse simply and are able to respond appropriately to others. Most three to four year olds recall and join in with familiar songs and nursery rhymes and enjoy learning new ones. They sit quietly to listen with enjoyment to stories and at least half are able to recall and retell the main features of a story they have heard. Many children choose to look at books during the course of their play and show an interest in their content. Children enjoy mark making and a majority are able to make meaningful marks using a range of implements on appropriate surfaces. The children are beginning to understand some of the functions of writing when they make entries in a personal news book of events which are special to them by drawing a picture under which their keyworker writes a sentence.

**Shortcomings**
Despite the good efforts of the practitioners in the nursery, the speech of many three year olds is still quite unintelligible.

3.3 Mathematical development

**Good features**
Most children join in with familiar number songs and rhymes and try to show the correct number of fingers – many with help and support. All children join in counting together to ten and a minority are able to count a few objects reliably. A few are able to recognise and name one or two numbers and a very few can name and recognise numbers past five. During the course of their play children generally only use mathematical language with support from adults. This is due more to their general language delay than to lack of mathematical understanding. Most three and four year olds understand the concepts of size and are able to compare and recognise longer and shorter. They also show understanding of the language of capacity and are able to recognise simple two dimensional shapes. All children show an understanding of time as they anticipate activities during the course of the day.

**Shortcomings**
No important shortcomings were identified.
3.4 Welsh language development

**Good features**
The standards achieved by children in Welsh language development are good with no important shortcomings.
Children enter the nursery with a low level of language skills. Despite this the majority have developed a good understanding of the concept of a second language and are making positive progress.
The children understand and respond to a wide range of Welsh words and phrases. Most make attempts to copy these and many use Welsh colour words independently. Almost all children join in singing familiar Welsh songs and rhymes and join in with daily discussions of the weather. Most children confidently join in counting together to ten in Welsh.

**Shortcomings**
No important shortcomings were identified.

3.5 Knowledge and understanding of the world

**Good features**
The standards achieved by children in their knowledge and understanding of the world are good with no important shortcomings.
Many of the children understand that their environment changes with the different seasons. They join in reciting the days of the week, a few are able to say what day it is and many are able to talk about the weather correctly. With help most children are able to talk about past events.
Children enjoy the many different activities provided for them to investigate and confidently explore new experiences both indoors and outdoors and are eager to find out more.
Most children know the names of, and are able to identify confidently, the main parts of the body and features of the head.
Children sort and match items during the course of their play according to given criteria and with support a majority are able to discuss the criteria they have selected. When tidying up at the end of a session they successfully put items away matching them to shadows or pictures.

**Shortcomings**
No important shortcomings were identified.
3.6  Physical development

**Good features**
The standards achieved by children in their physical development are good with no important shortcomings.
All children use and handle equipment with confidence. They use a CD player independently to listen to music, switch a bubble blower on and off, operate a large digger outdoors and use a computer mouse to select and move objects on the screen.
They are developing good manipulative control including the ability to thread laces through holes, handle small objects such as beads to make a collage and use scissors and glue independently.
A majority of three year olds are able to follow instructions to move in different ways and in different directions and to play simple games. As they play and explore outdoors all children are developing good skills of balancing, building, climbing, jumping and running and most are able to steer and pedal bikes and trundle cars without bumping into others.

**Shortcomings**
No important shortcomings were identified.

3.7  Creative development

**Good features**
The standards achieved by children in their creative development are good with no important shortcomings.
Many children respond positively to suggestions or to music and move in different ways changing their body shape to pretend to be different types of animals or people. They enjoy experimenting and exploring a range of materials and are able to use these to make both 2D and 3D images and models. For example they make paper plate faces choosing from a selection of items to create features.
All children play a range of untuned percussion instruments with enthusiasm and respond appropriately to suggestions to vary the speed and/or volume of their playing.
Most children play imaginatively in the role play area and with small world settings both together and independently taking on different roles and giving life to dolls, puppets and play figures - sometimes following suggestions modelled by the practitioners.

**Shortcomings**
No important shortcomings were identified.
4.0 The quality of educational provision

The quality of educational provision for 3-4 year-olds

4.1 The quality of provision for children’s spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Good features</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The quality of provision for children’s spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good with no important shortcomings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The life and work of the pre-school group successfully reflects positive attitudes and values and promotes respect for the diversity of beliefs, social and cultural traditions within society.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The policies and routines of the group successfully promote positive behaviour.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practitioners provide good role models and support the children through the use of praise. The nursery has a very positive ethos. Children are cared for and valued as individuals, they treat one another with respect, get on well together and play well together.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The use of Welsh by the practitioners is a very strong feature of the nursery. All use Welsh words and phrases confidently and positively and make use of every opportunity to use incidental Welsh during the sessions. They have recently introduced a Welsh phrase of the week to help them to extend their vocabulary with the children. There is a good selection of Welsh books which are read to the children and which the children are able to access themselves. St David’s Day is well used to introduce the children to some of the culture and traditions of Wales.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children are introduced to the concepts of other faiths and cultures through opportunities to taste different foods, to dress up and to make items relating to the topics they are learning about.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Shortcomings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No important shortcomings were identified.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.2 The quality of planning for children's learning

**Good features**
Planning for children’s learning is good with no important shortcomings. Planning follows practice recommended by the local authority is centred on topics identified in long term planning and covers the seven areas of learning of the Foundation Phase. Plans clearly identify learning intentions and activities for the outdoor area. Irrespective of background, gender, needs or ability the children have equal access and opportunity to learn and achieve. The lead practitioner involves all the staff in the planning process. Staff meet together weekly to review each area of learning and to feed their evaluations into the planning for the following week. All practitioners know what role they will take in the planned activities for each week and, although differentiated activities are not formally recorded, are aware of any particular needs of individual children. Plans for each week are displayed for parents in the welcome area.

**Shortcomings**
No important shortcomings were identified.

4.3 The quality of teaching

**Outstanding features**
The quality of teaching is good with outstanding features. Practitioners in the nursery are a strong team with shared values. They work well together and support one another positively. As a team they are constantly seeking new ideas and ways in which to engage the children to make their learning meaningful.

As language development is a particular need in this setting the practitioners are continually talking to the children while alongside them in play, introducing new vocabulary and phrases and encouraging them to speak.

**Good features**
Practitioners are appropriately qualified. The lead practitioner and three of her staff hold NNEB qualifications and the lead practitioner herself is currently pursuing training towards an NVQ level 4 qualifications. The deputy and sixth member of staff both hold BTEC in Childhood Studies qualifications.

All practitioners demonstrate understanding of when to intervene and when to allow children to follow their own interests; for example when making playdough ‘worms’ with added glitter they allowed the children to follow their interest in the glitter and to move on to mark making pools of glitter.

Children are supported in their play and exploration and practitioners routinely model play for the children.

**Shortcomings**
No shortcomings were identified.
4.4 The quality of assessment and recording of children’s progress and reports to parents and carers

**Outstanding features**
The quality of assessment and recording of children’s progress is good and the quality of reports to parents and carers is good with outstanding features. Children take a daily diary home each day in which the keyworkers indicate learning areas the child has experienced that day, the planned activity in which they have taken part and some play activities they have enjoyed. Additional comments indicate personal targets for the child. There is also space for parents to comment.

**Good features**
On entry to the group children are given the baseline assessment adopted by the local education authority. This is supplemented by parental input and an additional child profile completed by the child’s keyworker.

All focus activities are observed by the practitioner supporting the activity. Each observation identifies the relevant skill and learning objective. Comments are relevant and helpful and generally identify the next step feeding into future planning. Information from the observations together with informal notes and observations made by all practitioners are entered into the child’s personal folder by their keyworker.

At the end of the summer parents and carers receive a report for their child written under the seven areas of learning indicating skills which their child is working at and working towards.

When children leave the nursery transition forms, including parental involvement, are sent to the child’s next school.

**Shortcomings**
No shortcomings were identified.
4.5 The quality of relationships with parents, carers and the community

**Good features**
The quality of relationships with parents, carers and the community is good with no important shortcomings.
The information handbook for the nursery has been carefully prepared to be accessible to the parents who are students at the college and gives clear information of the curriculum covered by the seven areas of the Foundation Phase. Parents and carers have daily opportunities to speak to their child’s keyworker or another practitioner when they bring and collect their child. Planned activities for the week are displayed in the welcome area.
The children make regular visits around the grounds of the college to look at the environment, visit the library and sometimes to use other rooms in the building. They also take trips out to local supermarkets to shop for ingredients for cooking. Results from parental questionnaires were very positive and parents spoken to report that they are very happy with their children’s progress and feel able to speak to staff. They reported no problems but would feel happy to speak to the lead practitioner should they have any.
The nursery has carried out a short course with parents as part of the local education authority’s Parents And Children Together programme. Feedback forms were very positive and parents reported that they had enjoyed spending time with their child.

**Shortcomings**
No important shortcomings were identified.

4.6 The extent to which the setting contributes to children’s wellbeing

**Good features**
The attention given to children’s wellbeing is good. There are good policies in place covering all areas of keeping children safe and these are freely available to all parents, carers and visitors. Procedures are in place to ensure that all new staff have enhanced checks by the Criminal Records Bureau and an induction process ensures that new staff are made aware of policies. The officer in charge is the named person for child protection and has attended training within the past year. Meals and snacks provided for the children are carefully planned to ensure a balanced and healthy diet and children have regular opportunities during the day to take part in strenuous physical exercise riding bikes, running and climbing in the outdoor area. Comprehensive risk assessments are carried out covering outings and visits to other parts of the college campus.

**Shortcomings**
No important shortcomings were identified.
4.7 The quality of the leadership and management of the setting

**Good features**
The quality of the leadership and management of the nursery is good with no important shortcomings. The lead practitioner is very well organised and she and her staff demonstrate good understanding of the Foundation Phase and have a clear and shared vision of the way forward for the group. Following a system recommended by the Early Years Partnership she has carried out self-evaluation exercises looking at different aspects of teaching, learning and management for the past two years. Targets have been set, reviewed and met and the system is now well established.

Annual staff appraisals are in place. The lead practitioner meets with her line manager in the college and she conducts appraisals with her staff. Targets are agreed and training needs identified.

Staff from the nursery attend all courses offered by the local education authority’s Early Years advisory team and there is clear evidence that ideas from this training have been implemented.

The lead practitioner and her team have worked hard with considerable success to develop the outdoor area to support the recommendations of the Foundation Phase.

**Shortcomings**
No important shortcomings were identified.

4.8 The progress made by the setting in implementing the key issues for inspection identified in the last inspection report

This is the first time the nursery has been inspected by Estyn.

5.0 Recommendations

**The setting needs to:**

Build on the already excellent start that has been made to introduce the children to the Welsh language and to develop further the children’s experience and understanding of Welsh culture and traditions.

Continue to focus on the children’s language development and in particular to build on the start made with the Parents and Children Together initiative to involve parents in their children’s learning.
The provider must draw up an action plan within 40 working days, or 45 working days if the plan needs to be translated to or from Welsh, showing how the issues identified above will be addressed. The action plan must be given to all parents/carers with a child at the setting. A copy of the action plan must be sent to the Chair of the Early Years and Childcare Partnership or Children and Young Peoples' Partnership, as appropriate, and to the Local Authority. An evaluation of the action taken will form part of the next inspection.