The inspection of educational provision for children before compulsory school age

Nursery report on: Stepping Stones Day Nursery

Registered Nursery Education Inspector: Shirley Taylor
Date of inspection: 26/27 January 2009
Contract number: T/058/08N

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Report on the inspection of nursery settings in the non-maintained sector

Name of nursery: Stepping Stones Day Nursery
Address:  18 Bush Row
          Haverfordwest
          Pembrokeshire
Post code: SA61 1RJ
Telephone: 01437 760301
Person responsible for day-to-day management: Mrs G Tithecott
Position: Proprietor/Manager

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grade 1</td>
<td>good with outstanding features</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grade 3</td>
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</tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 5</td>
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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 housed in a converted building, situated on St Thomas’ Green in the market town of Haverfordwest. This popular nursery offers full day care and education, through the medium of English, for up to 46 children ranging from birth to school age. The setting is open between 8.00am to 5.30pm for 51 weeks of the year. The nursery’s day is split into morning and afternoon sessions and children can attend on a full-time or part-time basis. Stepping Stones operates a pick-up and drop-off service for children who attend school on a part-time basis. In addition, arrangements can also be made for collecting children for the Stepping Stones After-School Club, catering for children between four and 12 years old.

The registered nursery is privately owned, and the proprietor, namely Mrs Glenys Tithecott established the business in 1996. Stepping Stones accepts children from the town itself as well as from a few of the surrounding villages. The setting primarily serves Mount Airey, Mary Immaculate and Glan Cleddau Primary Schools. It is registered to accommodate up to 14 babies and 32 children from two to five years of age. At present, there are 14 children between three and four years old and one four year old, attending the nursery during the week. Two children are currently in receipt of funded educational provision. Nearly all children come from families where English is spoken as the first language of the home.

The area is described as being neither particularly prosperous nor economically disadvantaged and children who attend the nursery come from a range of socio-economic backgrounds. The nursery has arrangements and procedures in place for receiving children with additional learning needs.

The day nursery’s accommodation includes a baby room and sleeping room situated at the rear of the ground floor. Indoor activities for the two to four year olds are held in a large, bright and airy room at the front of the nursery. Children also have access to other rooms based on the ground floor, including a small reading room and a separate area for conducting ‘messy-play’ activities. The nursery has a well-equipped kitchen and eating area, cloakroom and appropriate toilet facilities. On the first floor, there is a staff room and an activity room for the after school club. Regular and effective use is made of the fenced playground area situated at the rear and to the side of the building. Recently the nursery has enhanced its outdoor provision through installing an all-weather play surface and purchasing new and exciting play apparatus. Adequate storage facilities are available for both outdoor and indoor equipment and resources.

Members of staff are well-qualified early years practitioners, and between them have a wealth of experience of working with young children. The level of care and the attention given to ensure the well-being of each child is outstanding. The proprietor and staff welcome the support and guidance offered by link officers representing Pembrokeshire’s Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership as well as the local authority’s Foundation Phase Welsh language link teacher.

Stepping Stones was recently inspected by Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales (January 2009). The nursery received its last Estyn inspection in December 2001.
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 of the 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>Seven areas of learning</th>
<th>Grade for under-fives</th>
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<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>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mathematical development</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Welsh language development</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Knowledge and understanding of the world</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Physical development</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Creative development</td>
<td>3</td>
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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>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quality of provision for children’s spiritual, moral, social and cultural development</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Quality of planning for children’s learning</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Quality of teaching</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Quality of assessment and recording of children’s progress, and reports for parents and carers</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Quality of the relationships with parents, carers and the community</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>The contribution made by the setting to children’s well-being</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Quality of the leadership and management of the setting</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>The progress made by the setting in implementing the key issues for action identified in the last inspection report</td>
<td>2</td>
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### 3.0 The standards achieved by children in the seven areas of learning

Standards achieved by 3-4 year-olds and standards achieved by 4-5 year-olds

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

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Good features</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Children’s standards in personal and social development, well-being and cultural diversity are good and there are no important shortcomings.</td>
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</table>

**Good features**

Children are happy, eager and confident when entering each session. Due to the nature of the setting, many of the children have attended the nursery since they were babies, and as such, have formed close relationships with other children and adults working within the nursery. Children who attend half-day sessions in local schools adapt easily as they move from one setting to the next. All children are courteous and welcoming. They cooperate well with their peers, including the younger children who attend the nursery. Children are developing a positive self-image and feel secure within the setting. They display care and respect towards each other and towards the setting’s practitioners. Children show an increasing ability to wait their turn and demonstrate a good level of self-control. Their awareness of personal hygiene and safety is developing well. Children understand the importance of washing their hands after visiting the toilet and before eating their daily snacks. They recognise that there is appropriate behaviour for different situations, such as when offering a prayer before eating or when listening to a story. Children have a developing awareness that all living things should be treated with care and respect. They respond positively to a range of new cultural experiences and are aware of some of the traditions associated with Chinese and Indian culture. Children’s awareness of the traditions and celebrations relating to Wales is developing well and they respond enthusiastically to new language experiences. They have an increasing knowledge of Welsh vocabulary and phrases and can talk about the tradition of giving ‘Calennig’ and the significance of celebrating the life of St Dwynwen. The majority of children succeed in concentrating for lengthening periods of time, such as when engaged in specific focused activities, for example preparing masks and hats as part of their Chinese New Year celebrations.

**Shortcomings**

There are no important shortcomings but children are sometimes too reliant on adult direction, which hinders them in becoming independent learners.
3.2 Language, literacy and communication skills

Children’s standards in language, literacy and communication skills are good with no important shortcomings.

**Good features**
Children listen attentively during story time and can listen to, and follow instructions well. Overall, their communication skills are developing well and they willingly converse with practitioners and adults visiting the setting. They are prepared to ask questions, share experiences and offer their own ideas. Children can recall a wide range of songs and nursery rhymes and use clear pronunciation when performing the songs. They display enjoyment when browsing through books and have a sound understanding that picture and print carry meaning. When listening to stories, they are able to recall and refer to the main characters and sequence of events. They recognise their names and have an increasing awareness of the sounds and form of various letters of the alphabet. Children enjoy participating in mark-making activities including using the nursery’s large whiteboard. They use a range of implements in a variety of media, such as using paint brushes and water on patio slabs. Following their activities relating to the work of the postman, children are beginning to understand that they can ‘write’ and send messages in the form of a letter. Many of the children are attempting to write their names independently.

**Shortcomings**
There are no important shortcomings but children’s understanding of some of the functions of writing is underdeveloped.

3.3 Mathematical development

Children’s standards in mathematical development are good with no important shortcomings.

**Good features**
Children can sort, order and classify a variety of familiar objects according to size, number and colour, including teddy bears and post boxes. They can recall and perform a range of number rhymes, such as the rhyme ‘Five currant buns.’ The majority of children can join in rote counting to 10 with a minority being able to count beyond 10. Their ability to recognise and name numbers from 1 to 5 is developing well. They recognise that some numbers have personal significance, such as when discussing their house numbers. Children begin to understand the concept of ‘one more’ as well as ‘one less’. They successfully promote their number skills through participating in a range of practical situations including when playing with skittles or participating in cooking activities. Children develop their understanding of concepts, such as long/short, heavy/light, full/empty, big/small as they play in the sand and water troughs. The majority of children can name and describe basic two-dimensional shapes with confidence. They can follow and recreate simple repetitive patterns according to colour and shape, such as when creating their fruit kebabs. Children begin to understand the purpose of money, for example during role-play in the setting’s ‘post office’.

**Shortcomings**
There are no important shortcomings.
3.4 Welsh language development

Children’s standards in Welsh language development are good with no important shortcomings.

**Good features**

Children can follow stories read to them and display an interest in their content. All children respond to simple commands and can repeat basic words and phrases. The majority count confidently to ten, name the basic colours and days of the week in Welsh. During large group time, many children are able to respond to simple questions about the weather. They all enjoy singing traditional rhymes and songs, including ‘Mi wela Jac y Do’ and ‘Mynd ar y cefyl clipi-di-clop’. Children have an increasing awareness of some of the celebrations relating to Welsh culture, for example, St Dwynwen’s Day and can talk about the tradition of carving and presenting a lovespoon. Written captions are displayed in Welsh and practitioners use the language on an informal basis throughout each session. Children handle books with respect, and willingly choose and browse through the Welsh books displayed in the reading room.

**Shortcomings**

There are no significant shortcomings.

3.5 Knowledge and understanding of the world

Children’s standards in knowledge and understanding of the world have good features that outweigh shortcomings.

**Good features**

Children’s recognition of basic weather conditions as well as some of the features associated with the four seasons is good. They understand the type of clothes to wear when the weather is warm/cold/wet. Children’s understanding of the passage of time is developing well and they are able to refer to their daily routines both at home and at the setting. Their ability to recognise some types of workers through the features of their work is developing appropriately, including the role of the postman, crossing patrol officer and dentist. Children recognise that animals are associated with specific habitats and can identify and sort animals that live on the farm, jungle and under the sea. Their observational skills are developing appropriately as they use magnifying glasses to look at mini beasts and binoculars to look for birds when playing in the nursery’s outdoor area. During their walking activities, children develop an increasing knowledge and understanding of the features relating to their local environment. They can confidently discuss the names and uses of the main external parts of their bodies. Following practical activities such as preparing and baking bread and biscuits, children develop an understanding that some ingredients change when combined, heated or cooled.

**Shortcomings**

Children’s problem-solving and decision-making skills are underdeveloped. Their ability to investigate and experiment both indoors and in the outdoor environment is insufficiently developed.
3.6 Physical development

Children’s standards in physical development are good with no important shortcomings.

**Good features**
Children demonstrate their ability to handle small equipment with increasing dexterity, such as when completing jigsaws and lacing cards. They use marking tools and equipment with increasing competence, for example when modelling and shaping dough. Their scissor handling skills are well developed. This is evident during the preparation of their ox masks in celebration of the Chinese Year of the Ox. Children handle resources such as building blocks well, and can join and separate them without any difficulty. They make good use of space when participating in their physical activities in the outdoor area. Children are aware of the importance of keeping themselves safe both indoors and in the outdoor environment. They display appropriate control when practising their movement skills and do so with increasing balance and co-ordination, such as when crossing the large apparatus and using the climbing frame sited in the outdoor area. Children respond well to instructions and can follow rules for simple games, for example when playing with the setting’s skittles. Children can steer and control a range of wheeled toys confidently.

**Shortcomings**
There are no important shortcomings.

3.7 Creative development

Children’s standards in creative development have good features that outweigh shortcomings.

**Good features**
Children display enjoyment when performing their repertoire of songs. The majority sing tunefully and with clear pronunciation. They can play a range of percussion instruments to produce different sounds. Children understand that instruments can be grouped into beaters and shakers and are able to follow simple instructions when accompanying different musical pieces, including music associated with different cultures, such as Australia and China. Children enjoy participating in role-play, such as using colourful materials to emulate the movements of a ‘Chinese Dragon’. Children’s ability to use different techniques, for example printing, sticking, spatter and sponge painting is developing well. This is evident in the work displayed on the walls of the nursery, including the snowmen, ox masks and decorated lovespoons.

**Shortcomings**
Children’s ability to explore, experiment and express themselves creatively using a range of colours and materials in order to produce their own images and objects is underdeveloped.
4.0 The quality of educational provision
The quality of educational provision for 3-4 year-olds and for 4-5 year-olds

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

The quality of provision for children’s spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good with no important shortcomings.

Good features
Stepping Stones day nursery’s work is based on clear principles and values. Every child attending the nursery is treated with respect, care and affection. The proprietor and staff are committed to making every child feel special. Praising children for their efforts and achievements is a noteworthy feature of the nursery’s provision. Good manners and values such as honesty, fairness and knowing the difference between right and wrong are promoted throughout the setting’s day-to-day life. Snack time and lunchtime are pleasant events, offering children further opportunities to develop their social skills. Children’s understanding of the world around them is enriched through regular use of the nursery’s outdoor environment and visits to places of interest both in the local area and further afield, such as their excursion to the Gwili Railway. The nursery encourages children to respect diversity, and to learn about some of the traditions associated with other cultures. For example, when celebrating the Chinese New Year, children are offered opportunities to listen to stories, handle artefacts and enjoy traditional music. Children are introduced to the culture and traditions of Wales through song, dance, stories and celebrations. Welsh vocabulary is displayed throughout the nursery and the use of incidental Welsh during the day enhances its provision for promoting children’s cultural development.

Shortcomings
There are no important shortcomings.

4.2 The quality of planning for children’s learning

The quality of planning is good with no important shortcomings.

Good features
The learning programme is based on a range of themes that encompass a two year cycle. Medium-term planning ensures that the present theme, ‘People who help us’ provides a balance of experiences across the seven areas of learning in both the indoor and outdoor environment. Short-term planning targets specific skills and provides the focus for set tasks with adult input. The nursery utilises the local authority’s skill based continuum in order to ensure that its provision offers continuity and progression for all ages and stages of development. A range of continuous activities are planned each day. Equality of access and opportunities are offered for all children. Evaluations of the focused activities are recorded succinctly on the setting’s planning sheets providing useful information for influencing future planning. The work is planned appropriately around the setting’s resources. Children are encouraged to offer ideas when undertaking a new theme.

Shortcomings
There are no important shortcomings but planning for developing children’s creative development includes too many activities directed by adults.
4.3 The quality of teaching

The quality of teaching is good with no important shortcomings.

Good features
Practitioners work together well and succeed in establishing a close working relationship with the children in their care. They are well qualified and have a developing awareness of the Foundation Phase curriculum. They successfully create a happy, and positive learning environment in which children feel totally safe and secure. Staff communicate effectively with the children during small group activities and use appropriate questioning techniques to encourage children to talk about their work. Each child is treated with care and respect and is offered constant praise and encouragement. Practitioners offer effective strategies in order to avert any form of stereotyping. Overall, the sessions are managed well in order to ensure that children’s knowledge and understanding as well as their skills are developed in all areas of learning. Opportunities are offered, in each session, for children to enjoy free play and to make their own choices. Effective use is made of the nursery’s indoor and outdoor resources. A close working relationship has been established with the link teachers representing Pembrokeshire’s Early Years and Childcare Partnership as well as the Welsh language, Foundation Phase link teacher. They offer guidance and practical help and the setting’s proprietor and practitioners recognise that their support broadens and enriches the provision offered.

Shortcomings
There are no important shortcomings but occasionally, over-direction by adults inhibits children’s ability to become independent and creative learners.

4.4 The quality of assessment and recording of children’s progress and reports to parents and carers

The quality of assessment and recording of children’s progress and reports to parents and carers is good with no important shortcomings.

Good features
Practitioners know their children well. Children are observed when participating in their daily activities and staff regularly discuss and record any significant developments. Assessment and discussions amongst the staff are used to influence planning and improve learning. During focused activities, key workers are allocated to work alongside a particular group of children, as a result they have a sound awareness of each child’s needs and ability. Observation notes are kept by each group’s key worker and these are referred to when updating an individual’s record of progress booklet. This includes comments across the seven areas of learning. Parents and carers appreciate the daily opportunities they have to conduct informal discussions with the nursery’s proprietor/manager and members of staff. Parents receive an annual written report on their child’s progress.

Shortcomings
There are no important shortcomings but the nursery is aware that its current reporting format to parents, has not been modified to reflect the seven areas of learning.
4.5 The quality of relationships with parents, carers and the community

The quality of relationships with parents, carers and the community is good with no important shortcomings.

Good features
During informal discussions held between the inspector, parents and carers, reference was made to the caring, secure and happy environment created by the proprietor and staff. Parents also spoke of the approachable nature of the staff and to their willingness to discuss matters of any concern at any time. These positive opinions were confirmed in the pre-inspection questionnaires. The nursery’s settling-in procedures are well established. A prospectus, containing useful information is distributed to parents when their child first enters the nursery. Parents of children of pre-school age receive information on the learning programme as well as advice on how they can work with the staff to further enhance their child’s all-round development. Parents receive regular newsletters and information is also posted on the nursery’s notice board. Close links have been well-established between the nursery and the local schools and daily contact is maintained through the service it provides of transporting children to and from each setting. Children are offered regular opportunities to visit places in the local vicinity, including the local library and walking around the ‘Parade’.

Shortcomings
There are no important shortcomings.

4.6 The extent to which the setting contributes to children’s well-being

The extent to which the setting contributes to children’s well-being is good with outstanding features.

Good and outstanding features
The policies and procedures the nursery has in place to ensure that each child receives the highest level of supportive care throughout their time at the nursery is an outstanding feature of its provision. The nursery successfully promotes children’s well-being within an ethos of inclusion. The proprietor/manager is the designated person for Child Protection and the rest of the practitioners are aware of the appropriate procedures. Staff regularly attend courses on first aid and basic food hygiene courses. The nursery’s provision offers children opportunities to develop their knowledge and understanding on matters associated with healthy eating. During each session, children are served a range of healthy snacks and offered water or milk to drink. The setting’s practitioners promote personal hygiene amongst the children and ensure that they dress appropriately when experiencing the outdoor environment in all weather conditions. The practice of preparing risk assessments, including those for all off-site activities is well established. The learning programme also provides opportunities for children to learn about their personal safety, including issues relating to road safety.

Shortcomings
There are no important shortcomings.
4.7 The quality of the leadership and management of the setting

The quality of the leadership and management of the setting is good with no important shortcomings.

**Good features**
Overall, practitioners work well as a team and this results in a purposeful, organised and caring environment that caters well for children’s differing needs. The proprietor/manager is actively involved in ensuring that the nursery operates effectively and efficiently. The setting has a range of well-documented policies and procedures that are regularly reviewed. The manager and practitioners meet on a regular basis and annual appraisals are conducted in order to help promote their professional development. Staff utilise their training opportunities and the sound advice and input they receive from the local authority’s link teachers to improve their practice within the nursery. Recently, the setting has begun to undertake the practice of self-evaluating its provision in order to identify ‘the way forward’. For example, the nursery identified the need to develop its outdoor area and purchased an all-weather surface, large outdoor apparatus and equipment in order to enhance its outdoor provision across the seven areas of learning. The nursery's resources are managed well.

**Shortcomings**
There are no important shortcomings but, at present, the setting's self-evaluation procedures do not always focus on standards achieved by the children.

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

Overall, the nursery has made good progress in addressing key issues from the last inspection.

5.0 Recommendations

The setting needs to:
- address the shortcomings identified in the areas of learning;
- ensure that practitioners use effective teaching strategies that encourage children to develop as creative and independent learners; and
- continue the good practice of developing its self-evaluation strategies with more focus on the standards achieved by the children.
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.