

Inspection of Stepping Stones Preschool

Teachers Way, Hardley, Southampton SO45 2QG

Inspection date: 11 July 2025

Overall effectiveness	Good
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The quality of education	Good
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Behaviour and attitudes	Good
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Personal development	Good
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Leadership and management	Good
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Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good
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What is it like to attend this early years setting?

The provision is good

Staff give children a warm welcome as they arrive at the pre-school. Children happily wave goodbye as they confidently leave their parents and settle quickly. Staff know the children extremely well. They prioritise building strong relationships with them and their families. This helps children to feel safe and develop a sense of belonging.

Staff take account of what interests the children and organise the environment in a way that supports their needs and next steps in development. For example, children enjoy digging in the sand for treasure. Staff hide different objects for them to find, such as gems and coins, which they count together. Furthermore, staff provide children with many opportunities to develop their creativity, such as building structures with different resources, painting and drawing. This helps children to make progress and develop a positive attitude to learning.

Staff create a calm atmosphere, which supports children to be happily engaged and highly focused throughout the day. They demonstrate the positive and respectful behaviour that they expect of children. For instance, staff use positive language, give consistent praise and teach children to say 'please' and 'thank you'. Children behave extremely well and treat each other with kindness. For example, they play with the dolls together and take turns to use the buggy. This approach contributes positively to the way children behave.

What does the early years setting do well and what does it need to do better?

- Leaders and staff are passionate about their roles. Leaders ensure effective, regular staff supervision sessions are in place and support staff's well-being. Staff have access to targeted training, which supports their professional development.
- Leaders and staff support children with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) well. They make timely referrals and work closely with parents and other professionals. Staff establish targeted plans, so children receive early intervention. Leaders use additional funding that children are entitled to effectively. For example, they have invested in a communication programme to support children's speech and language development. This has a positive impact on helping children to reach their potential.
- Leaders have begun to develop a new curriculum that, overall, is well designed to promote children's progress from their starting points. They understand that they need to embed the new curriculum and provide staff with further support to understand the curriculum's intentions. For instance, although staff plan activities for children that are enjoyable, they are not always finely tuned in line with the curriculum's intentions. This does not consistently support or build on

what children already know and can do.

- Leaders and staff support children's communication and language skills effectively. They use singing, action rhymes and stories as part of everyday practice. Staff engage children in meaningful conversations, asking questions to encourage discussion and a deeper level of understanding. For example, children take part in sensory activities, where they learn how to use words to describe what they are seeing, feeling and smelling. This helps children to become confident communicators.
- Staff provide children with opportunities to make choices as part of the daily routine. For instance, children vote to decide which story they want to listen to. They excitedly count how many votes each book has and understand which one has had the most. However, staff do not always fully consider how some parts of the daily routine impact on children's learning. For example, although children relish the responsibility of putting their photo on the snack board to indicate if they would like snack later, the timing of this disrupts some children's concentration and engagement.
- Staff support children's physical development well. For instance, children gain good physical skills as they ride bicycles and climb in the garden. Furthermore, children delight as they take part in yoga sessions. They move their bodies in a variety of ways and are keen to show adults the yoga positions they have learned.
- Staff teach children about being healthy and promote children's independence skills well. For example, staff support children to pour their own drinks and spread butter on their toast at snack time. Furthermore, children grow fruit and vegetables and enjoy trying these healthy foods. Children learn about the importance of good oral health, such as brushing their teeth, which they do after lunch. This supports children's health and well-being.
- Leaders and staff establish positive relationships with parents. They gather detailed information from parents when children first start. This helps staff to identify clear starting points for learning. Staff share information with parents about children's progress and ideas to further their learning at home.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

There is an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts children's interests first.

What does the setting need to do to improve?

To further improve the quality of the early years provision, the provider should:

- embed the new curriculum, strengthening staff's understanding of the curriculum intent, so that their teaching is more consistently focused on what

they want children to learn

- strengthen the daily routine so disruptions to children's play and learning are minimised.

Setting details

Unique reference number	EY297420
Local authority	Hampshire
Inspection number	10398811
Type of provision	Childcare on non-domestic premises
Registers	Early Years Register, Compulsory Childcare Register, Voluntary Childcare Register
Day care type	Full day care
Age range of children at time of inspection	2 to 4
Total number of places	24
Number of children on roll	26
Name of registered person	Stepping Stones Pre-School (Hardley) Committee
Registered person unique reference number	RP519762
Telephone number	02380897025
Date of previous inspection	11 November 2019

Information about this early years setting

Stepping Stones Preschool registered in 2005 and operates from a classroom in Manor Church of England Infant School, Holbury, Southampton. The pre-school is open from 9am to 3.30pm, Monday to Friday, term time only. The provider employs five members of staff, all of whom have relevant early years qualifications at level 3 or above. The pre-school receives funding to provide early education for two-, three- and four-year-old children.

Information about this inspection

Inspector

Nicole Atkinson

Inspection activities

- The deputy manager, manager and inspector completed a learning walk together of all areas of the pre-school and discussed the early years curriculum.
- Children told the inspector about their friends and what they like to do when they are at pre-school.
- The inspector talked to staff at appropriate times during the inspection and took account of their views.
- The inspector spoke with the nominated individual about the leadership and management of the setting.
- Staff spoke to the inspector about how they support children with SEND.
- The inspector observed the quality of education being provided, indoors and outdoors, and assessed the impact that this was having on children's learning.
- The inspector and the deputy manager carried out a joint observation of an activity.
- Parents shared their views of the setting with the inspector.
- The inspector looked at relevant documentation and reviewed evidence of the suitability of staff working in the pre-school.

We carried out this inspection under sections 49 and 50 of the Childcare Act 2006 on the quality and standards of provision that is registered on the Early Years Register. The registered person must ensure that this provision complies with the statutory framework for children's learning, development and care, known as the early years foundation stage.

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