

Stepping Stones Nursery Day Care of Children

110 West King Street
Helensburgh
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Type of inspection:
Unannounced

Completed on:
29 August 2022

Service provided by:
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Service provider number:
SP2019990505

Service no:
CS2019374674

About the service

Stepping Stones Nursery was registered on 11 August 2020 to provide a care service to a maximum of 36 children not yet attending primary school at any one time of whom no more than 12 are aged 2 years to under 3 years.

The services works in partnership with Argyll and Bute Council to offer funded early learning and childcare to children.

The service is based in a large detached two storey villa in a quiet residential road in Helensburgh. The upper floor is used by the youngest children and comprises of two adjoining playrooms, toilets and changing facilities. Older children can freely access the lower level, comprising of two large playrooms, toilets and access to the outdoors.

About the inspection

This was an unannounced inspection which took place on Thursday 28 July, Wednesday 24 August, Thursday 25 August and Monday 29 August 2022. The inspection was carried out by one inspector from the Care Inspectorate. To prepare for the inspection we reviewed information about this service. This included registration information, information submitted by the service and intelligence gathered since registration.

In making our evaluations of the service we:

- spoke with people using the service and two of their families
- spoke with 10 staff and management
- observed practice and daily life
- reviewed documents.

Key messages

- Children's care and learning routines met their individual needs and were delivered with kindness and compassion.
- Children and families were regularly consulted.
- Children enjoyed sociable and pleasant meal and snack time experiences.
- Effective use of planning in the moment to meet children's learning needs.
- Children were having fun and making very good progress in their learning and development.
- The residential setting of the service lent itself well to the warm and homely atmosphere that was appreciated by children and families.
- Thoughtfully resourced outdoor facilities offered children wonderful opportunities for learning through play.
- Parents commented on how well the service had supported them through the Covid-19 pandemic.

From this inspection we evaluated this service as:

In evaluating quality, we use a six point scale where 1 is unsatisfactory and 6 is excellent

How good is our care, play and learning?	5 - Very Good
How good is our setting?	6 - Excellent
How good is our leadership?	5 - Very Good
How good is our staff team?	5 - Very Good

Further details on the particular areas inspected are provided at the end of this report.

How good is our care, play and learning?

5 - Very Good

We found significant strengths in aspects of the care provided and how these supported positive outcomes for children, therefore we evaluated this key question as very good.

1.1 Care and nurture

We focused on how well children were nurtured and supported. Children's care and learning routines met their individual needs and were delivered with kindness and compassion. Staff were warm, affectionate and caring. They recognised the importance of helping to create a relaxed atmosphere to ensure children could get the best out of their day.

Children's personal plans had been updated to a new format at the start of term, which more effectively encouraged children and families in making decisions about their care and development and allowed realistic targets to be set against Getting it right for every child (GIRFEC) wellbeing indicators. Staff used these plans to ensure that they had the most up-to-date information they needed to implement children's individual care routines. Staff knew returning children very well and, in discussion, were able to demonstrate that they had already gained important knowledge about children who were settling in at the time of inspection. Parents agreed with one commenting that "Communication has been excellent. The staff take their time to really listen to requests and information that needs sharing at handover time. We received our child's care plan very quickly and our child is progressing so well with areas needing a little extra support."

The manager and staff offered a comprehensive approach to meeting the needs of those children requiring additional support. Multi-agency child plans were in place to support children.

Children were keen to talk to us about their experiences at the service and to talk to us about their routines. Individual pegs, name tags and baskets were in place to promote a sense of belonging and ownership of their environment and children knew they could put anything that mattered to them in their own tray. One child said, "I put my sparkly clips back in my tray". Children were regularly consulted, and we could see that children's voices were reflected in wall displays and paperwork.

We observed children in both the explorers and adventurers at lunchtime.

Adventurers enjoyed a lunch of soup and sandwiches, or a packed lunch from home, outdoors in the covered area. Children helped to set up the lunch area, telling us "how hard they could work" by setting up furniture while others helped to set the tables with cloths, cutlery and crockery. Children had opportunities for independence through serving their own food and drinks and clearing their dishes. Staff sat with children and shared lunch offering role modelling and initiating pleasant chatting. Lunch was calm, unhurried and sociable. Children told us "I'm dipping my carrots in my soup. It's good" and "I never have jelly at my house. I've had red jelly here before but not orange. It tastes the same."

Explorers ate lunch upstairs in their playroom. The majority of children brought a packed lunch. Lunch was pleasant and calm. Staff offered children assistance where needed and chatted sociably. Staff could have improved children's experiences by remaining at the tables until the end of lunch rather than beginning to tidy before children were finished eating as this was somewhat distracting.

1.3 Play and learning

We focused on children's right to play, have fun, experience joy and the resulting impact this had on their learning and development. Staff were building confidence in recognising the value of play, and seeing the opportunities for developing life skills and learning. Staff worked together to place the needs and interests of children at the centre of their play and learning.

Staff were working well to support children's current interests and curiosities to promote their learning and development through use of 'planning in the moment'. This approach places an emphasis on allowing children the freedom to explore their own interests, which increases their engagement as they are allowed to participate in activities they have chosen themselves. Parents agreed that staff supported their children's interests: "They are a great team. Very good at communicating with us about our kids. They let the kids be kids - play in dirt, sand and water. They learn about the kids' individual interests and will get things in nursery for them (for mine specifically they love Littlest Pet Shop characters and they bought a bunch for them to play with at nursery)."

Staff working with the youngest children recognised individual children's schemas and the importance of their role in supporting these schemas to develop children's learning. Schemas are behaviours that children go through when they are exploring the world and trying to find out how things work.

As a result, children of all ages were progressing well.

During our inspection we observed high levels of engagement throughout the day. Children were very happy, confident and safe. Children were having fun and enjoying their learning and development opportunities. They were well supported to learn independence skills - putting on their outdoor clothes, making choices and leading their own learning. One child told us "I've still got my slippers on. I'm going to put my wellies on and play outside." Staff were becoming skilled in offering interventions and provocations that supported and scaffolded children's learning in a way that was responsive to their observed and expressed interests.

Throughout the inspection children chatted to us about their families, their pets and what they were doing in nursery. One child making a playdough cake advised "I'm making a strawberry cake. Daddy makes lots of cakes at home with lots of chocolate."

Children played very well together. We could see they were happy to share and take turns. Many children were beginning to develop friendships. Parents commented on the importance of these early relationships "A real sense of community and friendship is actively encouraged where the children make friends and grow in confidence. My oldest child started primary school positively and confidently thanks to Stepping Stones and has made lasting friendships along the way."

Staff recognised, supported and took pleasure in children's skills and achievements. This was evident from our observations, their focussed child paperwork and children's individual learning journals. Staff used the local authority developmental milestones to track children's progress in literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing. Parents valued the updates staff shared with them about their children's progress, "I am updated upon drop off and pick up each day of what the kids are doing/have done, how well my child has eaten that day. SeeSaw is frequently updated too with photos and information which is lovely to see/read." Parents told us they were updated "Either via the app or at pick up. They also have their own books that the nursery print pictures into and note down milestones etc which we get home every few months to add things they are doing at home and return to nursery."

How good is our setting?

6 - Excellent

We evaluated this key question as excellent where performance was sector leading with outstandingly high outcomes for children.

We focused on the physical environment in which children were cared for, ensuring that the environment was appropriate with good quality furnishings and equipment.

The service had been reopened for two years and the accommodation had been renovated to a high standard. High standards of health and safety, cleanliness and decor were observed throughout the premises and outdoors. The setting was comfortable, furnished to a high standard and welcoming, with plenty of natural light and ventilation. This gave a strong message to children and their families that they matter.

Sensitive arrangements were in place to ensure children's safety with CCTV and a one way system in place at the entrance to ensure children and families could arrive and leave in a safe and orderly fashion.

Throughout the setting the manager and staff team had cultivated a very warm and homely atmosphere. The residential setting of the service lent itself well to this approach and this was reflected in the way the playrooms had been decorated and set up using interesting furnishings and fittings to ensure a high quality experience for children. Children told us "I go in the front room when the lights are on and the teachers are there."

Parents were highly complimentary about the nursery environment telling us "They have catered to all kids with different wee sections in and out of the nursery (mud kitchen, reading corner etc). The feel you get from the nursery and stuff we knew we had to move our children there for them to grow and thrive", "Staff work tirelessly to ensure a happy, safe, nurturing and stimulating environment but most of all the children LOVE going!" and "I have been blown away by the care, thought and attention to detail that the team put in to creating a lovely environment for the children."

The outdoor facilities had been thoughtfully laid out and resourced to ensure children could experience high quality outdoor play and learning. A large, covered area offered children opportunities for shelter and proved a pleasant area for snack and lunch provision. There was a playhouse with different levels, a small sleep pod to offer opportunities for sleep in the fresh air, a well-resourced mud kitchen and sand and water play. Following consultation with children, a large tree swing had been established and children told us they were enjoying being pushed by a member of staff while they relaxed in the basket swing looking at the clouds. Outdoor play presented opportunities for exploring and using large equipment. We observed children taking turns, sharing, cooperating, negotiating and talking to each other.

Staff discussed a risk benefit approach to learning and were observed supporting children to safely engage in play to push their own boundaries and build self-confidence. Staff actively engaged with children to enable them to direct their play and activities in the way they chose.

Children could freely explore their environments both indoors and outdoors in the knowledge that comprehensive risk assessments were in place and staff understood how to keep them safe.

Arrangements had been put in place to prevent and control the spread of infection within the service to protect staff and children. Nappy changing was carried out in line with best practice guidance and we gave some advice on the storage of potties. Children washed their hands regularly, often supervised by staff. During our inspection we could see that children enjoyed using the electronic timers to wash their hands for 20 seconds. Staff asked children about the need for good hand hygiene and they talked about germs and sore tummies.

While appropriate arrangements were in place to record details of any accidents occurring within the service and to pass this information on to families, we discussed the need to put a similar system in place to record any incidents consistently.

How good is our leadership?

5 - Very Good

We found significant strengths in aspects of the care provided and how these supported positive outcomes for children, therefore we evaluated this key question as very good.

Stepping Stones Nursery had a shared vision for the setting that reflected the aspirations of children, families, partners and the wider community.

The service had been registered with the Care Inspectorate for two years during the Covid-19 pandemic and the subsequent trials this brought about. At times, the constraints and staffing issues caused by Covid-19 had impacted on the implementation of formal self-evaluation processes. Parents commented on how well the service had supported them through the pandemic "Despite all the challenges the pandemic brought about the nursery were reactive and positive, supporting both parents and children with all the changes and worries."

There was a strong ethos of continuous improvement using How good is our early learning and childcare? documentation to focus on the delivery of high quality practice, leading to improved outcomes for children. As a result, we found very good progress had been made in offering high quality care and support tailored towards the needs of children and families. The manager was keen to formalise these structures to ensure a more rigorous approach to self-evaluation and to seek the views of families in a more focused manner to ensure they had their say about outcomes for their children. Parents were clear about how they could have their say in their children's care and about how their views influenced improvement cycles.

The service improvement plan and standards and quality report were underpinned by relevant local and national guidance and legislative frameworks and were useful tools for improvement. They outlined clear points for action, responsibilities and timescales. The priorities were clear, realistic and achievable and should lead to sustained improvement in outcomes for children and families.

Staff told us they felt their views and opinions were valued and respected in relation to improvements across the service. Children were regularly consulted about what they thought about Stepping Stones and their views had impacted on the purchase of new resources and reorganising the outdoor play area.

The manager had been submitting most relevant notifications to the Care Inspectorate in a timely manner. However, we discussed the need for additional notifications and provided a link to the relevant Care Inspectorate document - Records that all registered care services (except childminding) must keep and guidance on notification reporting - outlining these commitments.

How good is our staff team?

5 - Very Good

We found significant strengths in aspects of the care provided and how these supported positive outcomes for children, therefore we evaluated this key question as very good.

The manager recognised the importance of ensuring that the service was appropriately staffed during the day as being essential to the wellbeing of children in the service. Staff told us they felt valued, well supported and appreciated the manager's open-door policy. We observed a strong teamworking ethos and effective channels of communication within the service and with families with parents agreeing "they are a great team" and "a great place with a very professional and considerate team."

Staff were confident in their roles and committed to providing high quality outcomes to children, their families and the local community. They had joined a local initiative to be "plastic free" and maintained a "clothes swap" within the service which was well used by families and allowed children to learn about sustainability.

Keyworking arrangements were in place to promote continuity of care across the day and ensure positive transitions for children and communication with families. Parents commented "I can't speak highly enough of the dedicated team at Stepping Stones, who offer an exceptional standard of care for our precious children."

Arrangements were in place to ensure parents/carers were advised of changes to the staff team through Seesaw. Parents told us they valued the time available to talk to staff about their children at drop off and collection and we observed several lengthy conversations taking place at the gate.

Staff demonstrated an effective approach to teamworking and they communicated well with their colleagues using walkie talkies during the working day. This system meant that they could carry out all necessary tasks with minimum disruption to the children's experiences, especially when a task took them away from their responsibilities. This allowed them to work well together to ensure effective supervision and quality engagement with children across the day.

We could see that a clear calendar of staff meetings in place giving staff opportunities for professional dialogue around local and national best practice guidance, self-evaluation and discussion of practice issues. Staff told us that these meetings were a valuable forum to share information about children's needs and progress.

Staff had worked hard to ensure that the challenges brought about as a result of Covid-19 measures put in place, did not have too great an impact on relationships with families and were looking forward to a renewed focus on family engagement. The challenges this period had brought had impacted on the regularity of opportunities for staff to reflect and receive feedback on their practice. However, each member of staff had a book to record reflection on their practice and continuous professional development undertaken. Staff were encouraged to consider the impact of training sessions undertaken on their professional practice and we suggested that it may also be beneficial to consider and measure the impact of staff training on outcomes for children.

All staff were registered to practice with the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) had undertaken qualifications relevant to their roles and engaged in some continuous professional learning. Throughout our visit, staff treated children with respect and we could see that children had positive relationships with staff. Staff knew children well and responded considerately and patiently to their needs, conversations and questions.

Complaints

There have been no complaints upheld since the service registered. Details of any upheld complaints are published at www.careinspectorate.com

Detailed evaluations

How good is our care, play and learning?	5 - Very Good
1.1 Nurturing care and support	5 - Very Good
1.3 Play and learning	5 - Very Good
How good is our setting?	6 - Excellent
2.2 Children experience high quality facilities	6 - Excellent
How good is our leadership?	5 - Very Good
3.1 Quality assurance and improvement are led well	5 - Very Good
How good is our staff team?	5 - Very Good
4.3 Staff deployment	5 - Very Good

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