

PRE-SCHOOL INSPECTION



Education and Training
Inspectorate

Mount St Nicholas Playgroup,
Carrickfergus

Report of an Inspection
in October 2011



STATISTICAL INFORMATION

Name of playgroup centre:	Mount St Nicholas Playgroup
Address:	St Nicholas Primary School 8 Minorca Place CARRICKFERGUS Co Antrim BT38 8AU
Management Type:	Voluntary
Date of inspection:	13 October 2011
Date of previous inspection:	11 November 2004

1. Details of Children

	am session	pm session
Total number of children:		
attending the playgroup centre	20	-
in their immediate playgroup year	20	-
funded by Department of Education (DE)	20	-
qualifying under DE admission criteria 1 & 2	5	-
with a statement of special educational needs	*	-
without a statement but receiving therapy or support from other professionals for special educational needs	*	-
with English as an additional language	5	-
who left in previous school year to attend reception provision within a primary school	0	-
Attendance:		
attendance** of funded children for the previous school year	84%	-

* special educational needs = fewer than five

** Calculated from the date when the intake was complete

2. Details of Staff

Number of:	Full-time	Part-time
Staff, including leader	3	0
Staff holding recognised childcare qualifications	3	0
New appointments within previous 12 months	1	0

Number of: ***	
Students	2
Trainees	0

*** Total placements since September of current year

3. Details of Sessions

Duration of morning session	Duration of afternoon session	Number of days open in previous year
3 hours	-	188

4. Parental Questionnaires

Number issued to parents:	20
Percentage returned	35%
Number of written comments:	2

MOUNT ST NICHOLAS PLAYGROUP, CARRICKFERGUS, CO ANTRIM, BT38 8AU (3BB-0087)

1. Mount St Nicholas Playgroup is situated within St Nicholas' Primary School. Since the last inspection, a new assistant has been appointed but has not yet taken up post. A new management committee has been formed.

2. In the areas inspected, the quality of education provided by this centre is very good; the quality of pastoral care is also very good. The organisation is meeting very effectively the educational and pastoral needs of the children; and has demonstrated its capacity for sustained self-improvement.

CHILDREN'S ACHIEVEMENTS

3. There is a settled, caring atmosphere in the centre. The children respond positively to the staff's clear expectations and display very good behaviour; they are eager to make full use of the attractive and stimulating playroom to extend their learning. They are beginning to share, take turns, follow and lead in the play activities and to persevere with tasks. The children clearly enjoy the very good opportunities for development in all areas of the curriculum and often engage in concentrated and productive play. The children's own art work is celebrated through attractive displays around the playroom.

4. The staff have worked hard to create a language-rich environment which promotes effectively the children's language development. Themed books enhance areas of play and the children frequently browse through these. The children have a range of opportunities to mark make and experiment with early writing. There are regular informal story, rhyme and music sessions with individuals and small groups. The majority of the children can talk about their experiences and express their thoughts and ideas confidently.

THE PROVISION FOR LEARNING

5. The quality of the interaction between the staff and the children is consistently very good and on occasions excellent. The staff often engage the children in purposeful discussions and develop their language through skilful questioning. The organisation of the daily timetable provides lengthy periods of free play and the necessary routines, such as snack and tidy up time, promote independence and confidence in the children.

6. The staff have developed an appropriate method of planning which outlines variety, challenge and progression in the programme. Reflective evaluations are based on the children's responses and the staff are beginning to use these to inform future learning. The staff know the children well and work very effectively as a team to ensure that the individual needs of all the children are met.

7. The parents are encouraged to become involved in the education of their child, and in the life of the centre, through a variety of ways, for example: meetings, newsletters, a useful parents' pack and the centre's website. Parents are welcome at the many multicultural celebrations organised by the staff. Very good links have been established with the local community, including the primary schools to which the children will transfer, and in particular with the Foundation Stage staff of St Nicholas' Primary School. The staff are developing links with a pre-school in Japan through the "Hands Across the World Project".

8. The quality of the arrangements for pastoral care in the centre is very good. Appropriate policies and procedures are in place to guide the staff in this aspect of their work.

9. The centre has very good comprehensive arrangements in place for safeguarding children. These arrangements reflect the guidance issued by the relevant Department.

10. The centre gives very good attention to promoting healthy eating and physical activity which encourage the children to adopt healthy lifestyles. The staff have been developing the outdoor play area and the children clearly enjoy the wide range of activities and experiences on offer.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

11. The leader is enthusiastic and is a very good role model for the staff. She works closely with the staff who have a shared understanding of the aims of the centre. Their hard work and commitment to the development of the children contributes to the overall effectiveness of the centre.

12. The process of self-evaluation is well embedded and there is evidence that it has led to improvements in the quality of the provision. Appropriate priorities, for this school year are clearly stated in the centre's development plan. The early years specialist (EYS) from the Early Years Organisation (EYO) provides very good support and advice to the centre.

13. The key strengths of the centre include:

- the caring and inclusive ethos and the very good behaviour of the children, who display a very positive attitude to their learning;
- the development of the children's learning in all areas of the pre-school curriculum;
- the quality of the interactions between the staff and the children, which were consistently very good and, at times, excellent;
- the bright, attractive and stimulating learning environment;
- the appropriate methods of planning and assessment, and
- the hard-working and committed leader and staff who provide a broad and balanced curriculum.

14. In the areas inspected, the quality of education provided by this centre is very good; the quality of pastoral care is also very good. The organisation is meeting very effectively the educational and pastoral needs of the children; and has demonstrated its capacity for sustained self-improvement.

QUESTIONNAIRES

The arrangements for the inspection of pastoral care and child protection included the opportunity for the parents and the staff to complete a confidential questionnaire prior to the inspection. Seven of the parents responded to the questionnaire and a small number made additional written comments. The responses from the parental questionnaire were very positive and indicated a high level of satisfaction with all aspects of the centre's work. The responses from the management group and the staff questionnaires were also very positive. All of the responses have been shared with the staff and the representatives of the management committee.

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