

# PRE-SCHOOL INSPECTION



Education and Training  
Inspectorate

High Kirk Community  
Playgroup, Ballymena

Report of an Inspection  
in March 2010

## STATISTICAL INFORMATION

<b>Name of pre-school centre:</b>	High Kirk Community Playgroup
<b>Address:</b>	65-71 Thomas Street BALLYMENA Co Antrim BT43 6AZ
<b>Management Type:</b>	Voluntary

<b>Date of inspection:</b>	11 March 2010
<b>Date of previous inspection:</b>	27 May 2002

### 1. Details of Children

<b>Total number of children:</b>	<b>am session</b>	<b>pm session</b>
• attending the pre-school centre	26	-
• in their immediate pre-school year	17	-
• funded by Department of Education (DE)	17	-
• qualifying under DE admission criteria 1 & 2	0	-
• with a statement of special educational needs	0	-
• without a statement but receiving therapy or support from other professionals for special educational needs	5	-
• with English as an additional language	0	-
• who left in previous school year to attend reception provision within a primary school	0	-
<b>Attendance:</b>		
• attendance* of funded children for the previous school year	60%	-

\* Calculated from the date when the intake was complete

## 2. Details of Staff

Number of:	Full-time	Part-time
Staff, including leader	0	4
Staff holding recognised childcare qualifications	0	4
New appointments within previous 12 months	0	0

<b>Number of: **</b>	
Students	0
Trainees	1

\*\* 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:	26
Percentage returned:	62%
Number of written comments:	7

**HIGH KIRK COMMUNITY PLAYGROUP, BALLYMENA, CO ANTRIM, BT43 6AZ  
(3AB-0363)**

1. High Kirk Community Playgroup is situated within the premises of High Kirk Presbyterian Church Hall on Thomas Street, Ballymena. Since the last inspection there has been a total change in the staffing. The leader has been in post for six years.

2. 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. A majority (62%) of the parents responded to the questionnaire and nine made additional written comments. The responses from the parental questionnaire indicated that almost all the parents regard the centre very highly and appreciate:

- the quality of the support provided for their children;
- the progress made in the development of the children's personal, social and emotional development, their language and physical skills; and
- the care and thought given to preparing the environment each day for the children.

All of the responses from the management committee and the staff questionnaires were very positive and indicated a high level of satisfaction with the work of the centre. The management group commented on the dedication and commitment of the staff in their continual efforts to improve the quality of the provision for the children and their families. All of the responses have been shared with the staff and management of the pre-school centre.

3. The quality of the arrangements for pastoral care within the pre-school are comprehensive and very good. Among the strengths are the very positive working relationships at all levels, the friendly and welcoming atmosphere built on mutual respect, and the high concern shown by the staff for the welfare of the children.

4. The pre-school has very good comprehensive arrangements in place for safeguarding children. These arrangements reflect the guidance issued by the relevant Department.

5. The pre-school gives good attention to promoting healthy eating, for example, fruit is provided on a daily basis and there are regular opportunities provided for physical activity.

6. The majority of the children make independent choices, are settled, appear happy and are generally confident to ask for help and support. A minority of the children engaged in solitary or parallel play and were observed settling to sustained periods of concentrated play. Small groups of children are beginning to engage in collaborative and imaginative play and spend a lengthy period of time involved in completing a task. A small number of the younger or less mature children have limited attention spans and are still very dependent on the adults for support and guidance in developing their skills, selecting and persevering with their chosen task. The different types of play observed reflect the very wide range in the stages of development and needs which is represented within this group of children.

7. The children can talk about aspects of the planned topics and themes. Many of the children are showing some independence in their personal hygiene; they are familiar with the daily routines and their social skills are developing appropriately. The more mature children now need to be challenged further to improve their levels of concentration and for their learning to be extended further.

8. The staff are aware that a significant number of the children require further support to develop their language and communication skills. They have developed effective links with the local SureStart project, whose speech and language therapist is helping to provide support for a number of children both within the centre and in the children's own homes. The staff engage in highly skilful discussion with the children; they naturally extend and enrich the children's conversations around the play experiences and the children's interests.

9. The staff work hard each day to develop an attractive learning environment both indoors and outdoors. The daily timetable includes a valuable period of extended play and daily opportunities for enthusiastic and enjoyable story, rhyme and physical play sessions. Transitions between the different routines and activities are managed effectively, the day flows smoothly and all of the time is used effectively for learning.

10. The staff have introduced a sound system for planning a comprehensive and balanced programme for the children. The programme is regularly evaluated, and the children's responses are clearly reflected in a broad range of suitable topics and themes. The staff have adopted a systematic approach to recording accurately and clearly the children's responses to the planned activities. The staff are aware that many of the children require focused support to develop their language, social and communication skills and this is clearly evident in the high quality of their interactions with the children.

11. The staff are a hard-working team who are clearly committed to continuous improvement. They have worked hard to bring about the significant improvements over the last four years. The early years specialist has provided good support and guidance which is valued by the staff.

**12. The key strengths in this pre-school centre include:**

- the generally settled and happy children who are familiar and secure in their routines and environment;
- the high quality of the adult involvement and engagement in the children's play;
- the progress made by the children in their communication and language skills and use of mathematical language and thinking;
- the significant developments made to improve the quality of the provision in recent years;
- the very good links being developed with other agencies; and
- the effective leadership supported by a hard-working and committed staff and the developing team approach to improvement.

**13. The priority identified for further development includes the need to:**

- ensure that the pre-school programme is further developed in order to challenge and extend the experiences of the more able children.

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

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