

PRE-SCHOOL INSPECTION



Education and Training
Inspectorate

St Malachy's Pre-School
Playgroup, Coleraine

Report of an Inspection
in February 2010

STATISTICAL INFORMATION

Name of pre-school centre:	St Malachy's Pre-school Playgroup
Address:	Pastoral Centre Nursery Avenue COLERAINE Co Londonderry BT52 1LR
Management Type:	Voluntary

Date of inspection:	25 February 2010
Date of previous inspection:	2 February 2004

1. Details of Children

Total number of children:	am session	pm session
• attending the pre-school centre	24	-
• in their immediate pre-school year	20	-
• funded by Department of Education (DE)	19	-
• 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	0	-
• with English as an additional language	2	-
• 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	94%	-

* Calculated from the date when the intake was complete

2. Details of Staff

Number of:	Full-time	Part-time
Staff, including leader	3	2
Staff holding recognised childcare qualifications	3	1
New appointments within previous 12 months	0	1

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	-	190

4. Parental Questionnaires

Number issued to parents:	20
Percentage returned:	75%
Number of written comments:	9

**ST MALACHY'S PRE-SCHOOL PLAYGROUP, COLERAINE, CO LONDONDERRY,
BT52 1LR (3AB-0096)**

1. St Malachy's Pre-school Playgroup is situated in the Pastoral Centre, in St Malachy's Parish, Coleraine. The children who attend the playgroup come from the surrounding area. The staff have recently designed and developed an attractive outdoor play area.

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. Most (75%) 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 playgroup very highly and appreciate:

- the high concern shown by the staff for the welfare of the children;
- the friendly, and approachable staff; and
- the interesting programme provided 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 playgroup. The management committee commented on the dedication and commitment of the staff and the efforts made to improve the quality of the provision for the children and to raise the profile of the centre in the local area. All of the responses have been shared with the staff and management committee of the pre-school centre.

3. The provision for pastoral care within the playgroup is very good. Among the strengths are, the very positive working relationships at all levels, the staff's commitment to the care and well-being of the children and the friendly and welcoming atmosphere that permeates the centre.

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

5. The playgroup gives good attention to promoting healthy eating. The children have access to a healthy snack and have daily opportunities for a broad range of physical play experiences in the outdoor area.

6. The majority of the children are settled, cheerful and enjoy making independent choices. The different types of play observed reflect the very wide range in the stages of development represented within this group of children; a significant minority engage for most of the time in solitary or parallel play. Small groups of more mature children are beginning to engage in collaborative and imaginative play, particularly where there is a clear purpose to the selection and arrangement of the resources available. A few children have limited attention spans and are still dependent on the adults for support and guidance in selecting an area of play. Many of the children are keen to draw from observation, with good attention to detail and realistic representation and are able to engage in conversations and to talk about their play.

7. The staff have worked hard in recent years to develop an attractive learning environment both indoors and outdoors. The daily timetable includes an appropriate period of extended play and provides opportunities for an enjoyable snack, story time and energetic physical play sessions. The management and variety of experiences provided for the

children's physical play sessions was very good. The staff need to review the organisation of the transitional times between routines and activities in order to maximise the children's learning opportunities and experiences.

8. The staff engage the children in purposeful discussion and developmental conversations around the children's interests and home experiences. Through praise and encouragement they support the children's listening skills and promote their enjoyment in books. The children listen attentively and join in enthusiastically during group story sessions and there are many good opportunities for them to engage in early mark making and writing. The staff are aware of those children who require adult support to develop their language and communication skills. During the inspection the staff were observed skilfully promoting the children's thinking and observational skills.

9. The staff are making good progress in planning and evaluating a broad pre-school programme and in adopting a systematic approach to recording the children's responses to the planned activities. The staff are aware that many of the children require further support to develop their language and communication skills and they have therefore recently introduced a strong focus, within their plans, to promote further the children's language and communication skills. Children who require additional support have been identified and the staff have established good links with relevant agencies and professionals; good links have been developed, for example, with the SureStart speech and language therapist who is planning to provide support for a number of children within the centre. The staff now need to link more clearly into their future plans, their observations of the children's responses to their play, to ensure there is sufficient challenge and progression for all the children.

10. The staff are an established hard-working team and are committed to continuous improvement. They have worked hard over recent years to improve the layout and range of activities within the playroom and in their recently developed outdoor play area. The development plan identifies appropriate priorities for improvement including the improvement of the outdoor experiences for the children. The staff report that they have had limited focused support from their early years specialist. The Early Years Organisation needs to ensure that this playgroup is provided with more effective and consistent support in order to bring about the necessary improvement.

11. The key strengths in this playgroup include:

- the generally contented and settled children;
- the very good relationships developed at all levels;
- the progress being made by the children, in particular, the detailed and realistic representation in their art work, their developing language, communication and physical skills;
- the improvements made to the learning environment both indoors and outdoors;
- the staff's enthusiastic team approach; and
- the very well established links developed with the parents, the SureStart staff, the primary school and other agencies within the community.

12. The priorities identified for further development include the need to:

- ensure that the information gained through the observations of the children's work is linked clearly to the future planning; and
- improve the organisation of the transitional times between routines and activities in order to maximise the children's learning opportunities and experiences fully.

13. In the areas inspected the quality of education provided by the playgroup is good. The playgroup has important strengths in most of its educational and pastoral provision. The inspection has identified areas for improvement which the playgroup has demonstrated the capacity to address. The Education and Training Inspectorate will monitor the playgroup's progress on the areas for improvement.

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