

Education and Training Inspectorate PRE-SCHOOL INSPECTION



Stepping Stones Playgroup, Ahoghill, County Antrim

Voluntary playgroup DE Ref No (3BB-0522)

Report of an Inspection in January 2019



The Education and Training Inspectorate
Promoting Improvement

Providing inspection services for:

Department of Education
Department for the Economy
and other commissioning Departments

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1. Context

Stepping Stones Playgroup is located within a hall belonging to St Paul's Parish in Ahoghill; there is no outdoor play space available. The children attending the playgroup come from the village and local surrounding areas. Since the last inspection most of the staff have changed; including the appointment of new leaders and assistants.

Number of children:	Class 1
Attending part-time	24
Under 3 years of age*	5
Funded by Department of Education	19
With statement of special educational needs	#
At CoP stages 3 or 4**	#

Percentage qualifying under DE admission criteria 1 or 2.	79
Average percentage attendance for the previous year.	N/A
Number of days open in previous school year	N/A

Source: data provided by the setting.

* On 1 July.

** The stages refer to those set out in the Code of Practice for the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs.

fewer than 5

N/A not available

2. Views of parents and staff

A minority of the parents and most of the staff responded to the confidential questionnaire. The responses were very positive about all aspects of the life and work of the playgroup. There were no written responses. The staff commented on the happy caring environment provided for the children. The questionnaire responses were shared with the leader and a representative from the management committee.

3. Focus of the inspection

In order to promote improvement in the interest of all learners, the inspection linked internal and external approaches to evaluate the:

- outcomes for the children;
- quality of provision for learning; and
- leadership and management.

4. Overall findings of the inspection

Overall effectiveness	Important areas for improvement
Outcomes for learners	Good
Quality of provision	Important areas for improvement
Leadership and management	Important areas for improvement

5. Outcomes for learners

- Most of the children are well settled and talk confidently about their work with each other and with the adults. Almost all of the children are familiar with the daily routines and choose where they wish to play. Most of the children play collaboratively for sustained periods of time and are confident and motivated learners. They are developing an awareness of their own feelings, behaviour and emotions and they respond well to the positive behaviour strategies used by the staff.
- The children are making good progress across most areas of the pre-school curriculum; their early mark making is progressing well and is integrated naturally into many areas of play. They are beginning to understand that print has meaning and enjoy browsing books. The children listen enthusiastically to stories during the small and large-group story time; where a significant minority contribute confidently by asking and answering open-ended questions.
- Most of the children use confidently the mathematical language associated with number and shape. They have very well-developed fine motor skills and use safely a wide range of equipment including real cutlery, writing implements and authentic tools.
- Nearly all of the children explore and investigate their learning environment with curiosity and use a wide variety of natural materials that reflect their interests and extend their learning. A majority of children re-enact familiar family roles in the home area and develop their own imaginations, and language through role play and conversations. The children take pride in art that they create but do not have an opportunity to self-label their work; their engagement in making and responding to music is underdeveloped.
- The small number of children who require support with aspects of their learning are making progress and are well integrated into the group.

6. Quality of provision

- The staff operate a key worker system to collate observations and make assessments of the children's progress; however, these are not used effectively to inform planning across the six areas of learning for all of the children including those who are in their penultimate pre-school year. There is no planning for physical play.
- While there are individual education plans in place for those children identified as requiring additional support with aspects of their learning the targets and strategies are not defined clearly enough to track and record the progress they are making.
- A bright and stimulating playroom has been created by the staff, with clearly defined areas making good use of the available space. Opportunities are provided for the children to move around freely and to access a good range of commercial, natural and authentic resources to develop further their learning through play. There is insufficient planning and provision for the development of music and gross motor skills.

- All of the staff engage positively with the children; they listen to the children's ideas and most ask appropriate questions to extend their thinking. The staff give the children thinking time to answer questions and follow instructions, to which most of the children respond well.
- Based on the evidence available at the time of the inspection, the pre-school's approach to care and welfare impacts positively on the children's learning. The friendly, caring, ethos provided by the staff fosters a nurturing environment which builds the children's self-esteem.

7. Leadership and management

- The leadership and management of the provision has important areas for improvement. The recently formed staff team have a shared collegial approach; however, they have a limited understanding of using the cycle of self-evaluation systematically which, as a result, is underdeveloped. The development plan has identified some appropriate areas for improvement. The action plan lacks sufficient detail and focus to guide the staff on the specific actions required to fully bring about improvements in the quality of provision and allow them to monitor and evaluate the impact on the quality of the provision and the outcomes for the children.
- The current system for reviewing, updating and ratifying safeguarding policies by the staff and management committee is not effective.
- An importance is placed on the staff's continuing professional development which is impacting positively on the quality of their interactions with the children in developing conversations and thinking skills. The Early Years specialist provides clear guidance and support for improvement.
- There are very good links with the parents and the local community, and positive transition links are developing with some of the local primary schools. The 'Big Bedtime Read' initiative is working well in developing effective home/pre-school links by providing books for parents to use at home to help their children learn; this is further enhanced by an author and librarian visiting the playgroup.

8. Safeguarding

- Based on the evidence available at the time of the inspection, the arrangements for safeguarding children are unsatisfactory.

The areas which must be improved urgently include:

- ensuring that the relevant members of the management committee have completed safeguarding training;
- improving the procedures for recording whether or not there have been any allegations of a safeguarding nature against any members of staff, and storing all sensitive safeguarding information securely; and
- updating all key policies and risk assessments in line with the guidance from the relevant departments.

9. Overall effectiveness

Stepping Stones Playgroup needs to address important areas for improvement in the interest of all the learners.

The areas for improvement are:

- to use observations and assessments of the children's learning to inform planning across the six areas of learning and ensure progression for all of the children including those who are in their penultimate pre-school year;
- to improve the provision and planning for physical development and music;
- to develop self-evaluation and action planning for improvement and monitor and evaluate the impact on the outcomes for children and the quality of provision; and
- to address the unsatisfactory arrangements for safeguarding.

The ETI will monitor and report on the playgroup's progress in addressing the areas for improvement. There will be a formal follow-up inspection in 12 to 18 months.

The ETI will also return to the playgroup within six weeks to monitor and report on progress in addressing the safeguarding issues¹.

¹ The Department of Education will seek assurance from the relevant authority that they are working with the playgroup in relation to the inspection report.

Inspection methodology and evidence base

The ETI's Inspection and Self-Evaluation Framework is available on the ETI website <https://www.etini.gov.uk/publications/inspection-and-self-evaluation-framework-isef-effective-practice-and-self-evaluation>.

Inspectors observed learning and teaching through play, the children's achievements, progression and standards, scrutinised relevant documentation, and held formal and informal discussions with staff with specific responsibilities.

The arrangements for this inspection included:

- a meeting with those involved with leadership and management, including the management group; and
- the opportunity for the parents and staff to complete a confidential questionnaire.

Reporting terms used by the Education and Training Inspectorate

Quantitative terms

In this report, proportions may be described as percentages, common fractions and in more general quantitative terms. Where more general terms are used, they should be interpreted as follows:

Almost/nearly all	-	more than 90%
Most	-	75% - 90%
A majority	-	50% - 74%
A significant minority	-	30% - 49%
A minority	-	10% - 29%
Very few/a small number	-	less than 10%

Performance levels

The ETI use the following performance levels when reporting on outcomes for learners, quality of provision and leadership and management²:

Outstanding
Very good
Good
Important area(s) for improvement
Requires significant improvement
Requires urgent improvement

The ETI use the following levels when reporting on governance:

High degree of confidence
Confidence
Limited confidence

The ETI use the following levels when reporting on safeguarding:

Reflects the guidance
Reflects broadly the guidance
Unsatisfactory

The ETI use the following levels when reporting on care and welfare:

Impacts positively on learning, teaching and outcomes for learners
Does not impact positively enough on learning, teaching and outcomes for learners

² And the overall provision in a subject area or unit, as applicable.

Overall effectiveness

The ETI use one of the following inspection outcomes when evaluating the overall effectiveness of the school:

<p>The school has a high level of capacity for sustained improvement in the interest of all the learners. The ETI will monitor how the school sustains improvement.</p>
<p>The school demonstrates the capacity to identify and bring about improvement in the interest of all the learners. The ETI will monitor how the school sustains improvement.</p>
<p>The school needs to address (an) important area(s) for improvement in the interest of all the learners. The ETI will monitor and report on the school's progress in addressing the area(s) for improvement. There will be a formal follow-up inspection.</p>
<p>The school needs to address urgently the significant areas for improvement identified in the interest of all the learners. It requires external support to do so. The ETI will monitor and report on the school's progress in addressing the areas for improvement. There will be a formal follow-up inspection.</p>

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