

PRE-SCHOOL INSPECTION



Education and Training
Inspectorate

Stepping Stones Playgroup,
Ballymoney, County Antrim

Report of an Inspection in
April 2016



The Education and Training Inspectorate
Promoting Improvement

Providing inspection services for:

Department of Education
Department for the Economy
Department for Communities

CUSTOMER
SERVICE
EXCELLENCE



Quantitative terms used by the Education and Training Inspectorate

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 Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) use the following performance levels when reporting on Achievement and standards, on Provision for learning and on Leadership and management:

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

Overall effectiveness

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

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

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1. Inspection method and evidence base

The key questions and quality indicators which guide inspection and self-evaluation of pre-school settings, which were applied to this inspection, are available in the ETI publication *Together Towards Improvement: a process for self-evaluation* at: [Together Towards Improvement Pre-school | Education and Training Inspectorate](#)

Inspectors observed learning and teaching through play, the children's achievements and standards, scrutinised relevant documentation, and held formal and informal discussions with children, and 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 confidential questionnaires.

A significant minority of the parents and all of the staff responded to the confidential questionnaires. The parental responses included positive written comments praising the staff and the quality of the provision. The staff responses were also wholly positive. The findings from the questionnaires were shared with the representatives from the management committee and the staff.

2. Focus of inspection

In order to promote improvement in the interest of all children, the purpose of inspection is, through effective linking of internal and external approaches, to evaluate the:

- children's achievements and standards;
- quality of provision for learning; and
- quality of leadership and management.

3. Context

Stepping Stones Playgroup is situated in Castle Community Centre in Ballymoney and shares some of the facilities used for physical play with other groups.

4. Overall findings of the inspection

Overall effectiveness	Capacity to identify and bring about improvement
Achievements and standards	Very good
Provision for learning	Very good
Leadership and management	Very good

5. Achievements and standards

- The children are very well settled and spend lengthy periods in self-chosen, focused and purposeful play. Almost all demonstrate independence and are at ease with the staff and visitors to the playgroup. They talk confidently about their work and experiences and show a good regard for the needs and opinions of others and respect for their environment. They persevere with and complete tasks, and can produce representational work of a high standard.
- The indoor and outdoor learning environment provides very good opportunities for the children to develop a range of skills including their physical, investigative, pre-reading and writing skills. They enjoy listening to stories, joining in rhymes and songs and can make good attempts at early mark-making.
- The children are keen to explore the activities on offer and can work well independently, in pairs and in groups. In the imaginative role-play areas, they have valuable opportunities to act out real-life scenarios that build on their own personal experiences and learning.

6. Provision for learning

- The quality of pastoral care is very good. The staff work hard to create a friendly and caring ethos in the playgroup and present the indoor learning environment attractively making good use of the children's art work in colourful displays. The staff promote learning and teaching effectively across all areas of the pre-school curriculum.
- The quality of the interaction between the staff and the children is of a high quality. The staff join with the children in their play and build on their responses to enhance learning; the staff need to maintain the balance between focusing on a planned group activity, at a particular time, and meeting the request of an individual child. The staff note regularly the children's ideas, interests and responses and share the information with the parents throughout the year. There are good links between the staff's observations and the planning of the programme. The written planning is comprehensive and guides the staff well in their work with the children.
- The organisation of the day provides variety in the experiences for the children and promotes their independence and social skills. There is a good balance between free play and activities organised by the staff. The staff need to review aspects of the small group time at the end of the day to ensure all the activities provided at this time are well suited to the needs and interests of the children.
- The children in the group who require additional support with aspects of their learning are identified at an early stage. The staff have identified appropriately this aspect of the provision as an area for further development and measures are currently in place for staff to avail of specialist training.
- The playgroup gives outstanding attention to promoting healthy eating and physical activity. The daily programme includes a healthy snack and an appropriate period for energetic physical play.

7. Leadership and management

- The staff work very well as a team and have identified appropriate areas for development to enhance the provision for all of the children. A good start has been made to the process of self-evaluation.
- Effective links have been established with the parents and the local primary schools for the benefit of the children.
- The playgroup employs the services of an independent early years specialist to support the staff in their work. Both parties reported very good working relationships. The staff and early years specialist need to continue to develop areas of the provision for the children in the group who require additional support with aspects of their learning.
- During the last academic year, the playgroup received Extended Services Funding from the Department of Education. The funding has been used very effectively to develop staff capacity, to engage the parents in their children's learning and to provide additional resources for extension activities at home.
- On the basis of the evidence available at the time of the inspection, the playgroup has comprehensive arrangements in place for safeguarding children. These arrangements reflect the guidance issued by the relevant Departments.

8. Overall effectiveness

Stepping Stones Playgroup demonstrates the capacity to identify and bring about improvement in the interest of all the learners. The ETI will monitor how the playgroup sustains improvement, in particular, the need to:

- continue to develop areas of the provision for the children in the group who require additional support with aspects of their learning.

STATISTICAL INFORMATION ON STEPPING STONES PLAYGROUP, BALLYMONEY

1. Details of children

Number of children:	Class 1
Attending full-time	23
Attending part-time	23
Under 3 years of age*	0
Funded by Department of Education	23
With statement of special educational needs	0
Without a statement but receiving therapy or support from other professionals for special educational needs	2
At CoP stages 3 or 4**	
At CoP stages 1 or 2**	3
With English as an additional language	1
Who left in previous school year to attend reception provision within a primary school	0

* On 1 July.

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

Percentage qualifying under DE admission criteria 1 or 2.	
Average attendance for the previous year.	%
Number of days open in previous school year	

2. Duration of sessions

Full-time	Part-time: am	Part-time: pm
-	09.00-11.30	

3. Details of staff

Number of:	Full-time	Part-time
Staff including, Teachers/Leaders	3	
Number of staff holding a recognised child care qualification	3	
Number of staff holding a recognised teaching qualification	0	
New appointments within the previous 12 months	0	

Number of: ***	
Students	
Trainees	

*** Total placements since September of current year

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