

PRE-SCHOOL INSPECTION



Education and Training
Inspectorate

Stepping Stones Pre-School
Centre, Maghera

Report of an Inspection in
January 2014



Providing Inspection Services for

Department of Education
Department for Employment and Learning
Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure



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 Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) use the following performance levels in reports:

DESCRIPTOR
Outstanding
Very Good
Good
Satisfactory
Inadequate
Unsatisfactory

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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 centres, which were applied to this inspection, are available in the ETI's publication *Together Towards Improvement: a process for self evaluation* at: [Together Towards Improvement Pre-school | Education and Training Inspectorate](#)

Inspectors observed teaching and learning 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 discussion with the staff;
- a meeting with those involved with leadership and management; and
- the opportunity for the parents, staff and members of the management group to complete a confidential questionnaire.

Questionnaire	Number issued	Number returned	Percentage returned	Number with comments
Parents	13	8	61% ¹	*
Staff		*	*	*
Management	*	*	*	*

* fewer than 5

The responses made in the confidential questionnaire were highly positive about all aspects of the educational and pastoral provision provided by the playgroup. In particular the parents reported their appreciation of the good level of care and learning provided by the playgroup staff.

2. Context

Stepping Stones Community Playgroup is accommodated in a classroom within St Brigids Primary School. Almost all of the children are in their pre-school year and come from the local surrounding area. A new assistant was appointed and took up post in September 2013.

3. Focus of inspection

The inspection focused on:

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

¹ The ETI is trialling a new range of methods to collect the views of parents/carers and, as a result, the percentage of questionnaires returned may be low.

4. Overall finding

Overall Performance Level	Satisfactory
Achievements and Standards	Satisfactory
Provision	Good
Leadership and Management	Satisfactory

Key findings of the inspection

5. Achievements and standards

- Almost all of the children are well settled, can manage their own personal care and co-operate well with the daily routines. The children manage their snack routine independently and are often helpful to each other. A majority of the children engage for short sustained periods of play during which they collaborate well at activities and are well motivated in their learning. The staff need to support more effectively all of the children in settling to purposeful and productive learning through play for longer sustained periods of time.
- A majority of the children talk clearly and enthusiastically about their activities and experiences. They are interested in early experimental writing and enjoy books and stories. The children would benefit from a more consistent approach to the promotion of oral language and to incorporating daily songs, music and rhyme, into both indoor and outdoor routines.
- Most of the children use a range of tools such as pencils and brushes with increasing confidence. They are interested in exploring and investigating the natural materials available in the sand and water tray and the real vegetables in the home play. This interest should be built on further by providing more opportunities for them to explore natural and living things, both indoors and outdoors.
- Many of the children make simple representations in their drawings, paintings and model making. On the day of the inspection, very few children played imaginatively for a sustained period. A majority of the children are beginning to show an interest in, and early understanding of basic mathematical concepts such as number, shape and positional language.

6. Provision

- The staff prepare an attractive learning environment within the playroom with materials presented to support independent choices and the children's own art work displayed prominently around the room. The staff have identified appropriately the need to develop and improve the outdoor learning environment.
- The staff are supportive and caring in their approach with the children. In the best practice observed, the staff model good use of vocabulary, support the children's use of early mathematics, extend their thinking and help them to develop their independence. At times, the organisation of the day and the management of transition periods and outdoor play impacted negatively on the quality of interaction, resulting in less effective learning.

- The detailed short-term planning provides a useful weekly guide for the staff team and is evaluated regularly to record the children's responses. The planned pre-school programme provides good to satisfactory opportunities for learning across the areas of the pre-school curriculum. In order to improve the quality further, the staff with the help of their early years specialist, need to audit and review the planned curriculum to ensure all aspects are being fully implemented. In particular, the World Around Us, music, rhyme and rhythm and learning outdoors need to be further developed.
- The staff have developed a suitable system for recording the children's progress and continue to develop their skill in using this information to inform their short-term planning. Children who require additional support are identified early and staff liaise effectively with the parents to meet their needs.
- The quality of the pastoral care is good. There are good working relationships among the staff team, the children and the parents. The children are well behaved and respectful to staff and each other.
- The children are encouraged to eat a healthy break and have regular opportunities to take part in energetic play outdoors or in the school hall.

7. Leadership and management

- The staff are at the early stages of developing a new team. They attend relevant training and work closely with their early year's specialist to implement new ideas. While the leadership and management have identified a number of relevant priorities for improvement and created action plans, overall the processes for self-evaluation and development planning are at an early stage of development.
- Parents are provided with a good range of information about the playgroup and have opportunities to meet to discuss their children's progress. This should be built on to develop further ways in which parents can be involved in the playgroup and encouraged to support their child's learning. There are good pastoral links with the main feeder primary school.
- On the basis of the evidence available at the time of the inspection, the playgroup has satisfactory arrangements in place for safeguarding children. These arrangements broadly reflect the guidance issued by the relevant Department but the following minor areas need to be addressed:
 - vetting for the chair is not yet completed.

8. Conclusion

In the areas inspected, the quality of education provided by this playgroup is satisfactory; the strengths outweigh areas for improvement in the provision. The inspection has identified areas for improvement in standards, learning and teaching, and leadership and management which need to be addressed if the needs of the children are to be met more effectively.

The key areas for improvement are to:

- review the organisation of the day to extend and improve the opportunities for sustained and productive play both indoors and outdoors; and
- ensure all areas of the pre-school curriculum are of a consistently high quality, in particular the World Around Us, rhyme and rhythm and outdoor play.

Health and safety

- The outdoor area is not secure, requiring high level of supervision by the staff to ensure safety. This impacts negatively on meaningful staff interaction and learning for the children.

STATISTICAL INFORMATION

Name of pre-school setting:	Stepping Stones Pre-School Centre
Address:	130 Tirkane Road MAGHERA Co Londonderry BT46 5NH
Management Type:	Voluntary

Date of inspection:	7 January 2014
Date of previous inspection:	March 2009

1. Details of Children

Total number of children:	am session	pm session
attending the pre-school setting	14	-
in their immediate pre-school year	13	-
funded by Department of Education (DE)	13	-
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	2	-
with English as an additional language	1	-
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	87.5%%	-

* 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	2	
Number of staff holding a recognised child care qualification	2	
Number of staff holding a recognised teaching qualification	0	
New appointments within previous 12 months	1	

Number of: ***	
Students	0
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
2½ hours		188

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