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*The Education and Training Inspectorate -
Promoting Improvement*



Providing Inspection Services for
Department of Education
Department for Employment and Learning
Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure

Education and Training Inspectorate

Report of a Follow-up Inspection

**Little Starfish Playgroup
Ballywalter, Newtownards**

June 2010

FOLLOW-UP TO THE INSPECTION OF LITTLE STARFISH PLAYGROUP, BALLYWALTER, NEWTOWNARDS, CO DOWN, BT22 2PQ (4AB-0432)

The inspection of Little Starfish Playgroup in February 2008 highlighted strengths in the friendly, caring atmosphere, the good working relationships at all levels, the good efforts made to meet the needs of those children who require additional support with aspects of their learning and the hard-working staff who co-operate effectively in the day-to-day running of the centre and display commitment to the children.

The inspection identified the need for improvement in the following key areas:

- to develop further the planning and assessment methods to meet the needs of all of the children, in order to identify the learning to be promoted and to guide the staff more effectively in their day-to-day work with the children and to ensure that their experiences progress steadily over the year;
- to ensure that the quality of the staff's interaction with the children is consistently of a high standard; and
- review the organisation of the latter part of the day in order to ensure that all the time is used effectively to promote learning.

In the interval since the inspection, the following action which affects the work of the centre has taken place:

- a temporary leader was appointed in September 2009; in January 2010 she was appointed as the permanent leader; and
- a new early years specialist (EYS) from the Early Years Organisation (EYO) is supporting the staff in their work.

The Education and Training Inspectorate (Inspectorate) carried out one monitoring visit and a follow-up inspection on 10 June 2010.

The action plan produced by the playgroup in response to the inspection findings was of a good quality.

The centre's development plan is of a good quality and is supported by appropriate action plans. Very good progress has been made in most of the areas for improvement identified during the original inspection. The playgroup has demonstrated the capacity to address a few remaining minor areas for improvement.

The following are the most important improvements since the original inspection:

- there have been a number of changes in staffing, including the appointment of a new permanent leader in January 2010;
- the new leader has worked very hard with the staff to address the areas identified for improvement; since taking up her post she has brought about many important improvements in the centre's provision;

- a new format of detailed long-, medium- and short-term planning has been developed; the planning highlights more effectively the learning to be promoted in all the areas of the pre-school programme and guides the staff more effectively in their day-to-day work with the children;
- the written planning highlights the many interesting activities provided for the children throughout the year and shows progression in the opportunities for their learning;
- on the day of the inspection the quality of the staff's involvement with the children was more consistently of a high standard; the development of early mathematical language and concepts are particular strengths; and
- the organisation of the day provides a lengthy period of free play which provides good opportunities for the children to develop their play.

The promotion of a self-evaluative culture throughout the follow-up inspection period contributed significantly to the improvement made, and helped the pre-school centre identify appropriately its priorities for future development. The inspection confirms that, through effective self-evaluation, the pre-school centre demonstrated clear evidence of improvement. Accordingly, the Inspectorate recommends that the processes for self-evaluation now in place are maintained.

The follow-up inspection identified areas for improvement. The following is the most important area that needs attention.

- Continue to develop the methods of assessment and use the information to inform the planning.

In the areas inspected, the quality of education provided by this playgroup is now 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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