

# PRE-SCHOOL INSPECTION



Education and Training  
Inspectorate

Stepping Stones Playgroup,  
Ballymena

Report of an Inspection  
in February 2013



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

CUSTOMER  
SERVICE  
EXCELLENCE



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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%

In assessing the various features of the provision, Inspectors relate their evaluations to six descriptors as set out below:

DESCRIPTOR
Outstanding
Very Good
Good
Satisfactory
Inadequate
Unsatisfactory

## STATISTICAL INFORMATION

<b>Name of pre-school setting:</b>	Stepping Stones Playgroup
<b>Address:</b>	32 Ballynafie Road Ahoghill BALLYMENA Co Antrim BT42 1LF
<b>Management Type:</b>	Voluntary

<b>Date of inspection:</b>	27 February 2013
<b>Date of previous inspection:</b>	November 2005

### 1. Details of Children

<b>Total number of children:</b>	<b>am session</b>	<b>pm session</b>
attending the pre-school setting	18	13
in their immediate pre-school year	18	
funded by Department of Education (DE)	18	
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	1	
with English as an additional language	0	
who left in previous school year to attend reception provision within a primary school	0	
<b>Attendance:</b>		
attendance** of funded children for the previous school year	88%	

\* Special Educational Needs = fewer than five

\*\* Calculated from the date when the intake was complete

## 2. Details of Staff

<b>Number of:</b>	<b>Full-time</b>	<b>Part-time</b>
Staff, including leader	0	5
Number of staff holding a recognised child care qualification	0	3
Number of staff holding a recognised teaching qualification	0	0
New appointments within previous 12 months	0	0

<b>Number of: ***</b>	
Students	3
Trainees	0

\*\*\* Total placements since September of current year

## 3. Details of Sessions

<b>Duration of morning session</b>	<b>Duration of afternoon session</b>	<b>Number of days open in previous year</b>
3 hours	1 hour 50 mins	188

## 4. Parental Questionnaires

Number issued to parents:	19
Percentage returned	37%
Number of written comments:	6

## 1. Introduction

Stepping Stones Playgroup is situated in surplus classroom accommodation at St Paul's primary school in the outskirts of Ahoghill; it serves the needs of the children and the parents in the local and surrounding rural communities for pre-school education. The leader was appointed in December 2011.

## 2. Inspection methods and evidence base

The inspection evaluations are based on evidence gained from in-class observations and from a range of documentation provided by the playgroup.

The views of the parents and staff were sought through a confidential questionnaire prior to the inspection. Nineteen questionnaires were issued to the parents and seven were returned six with written comments. Five of the staff and three members of the management group also returned questionnaires with written comments. All of the questionnaires indicated very high levels of satisfaction with all aspects of the work of the playgroup. The only concern raised and shared with the leader and the chair of the management committee was regarding the difficulty for staff accessing relevant training for child protection, first aid and planning.

## 3. Overall finding of the inspection

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 area for improvement.

Summary of key findings

Children's Achievements Quality of Provision Leadership and management	Very Good Good Good
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## KEY FINDINGS OF THE INSPECTION

### 4. Children's achievements

**The quality of the children's achievements is very good.**

- The children are well-settled, they appear happy and engage in purposeful and productive play. They make good use of the attractive learning environment, choose activities freely and display good self-management skills. Almost all of the children show very good levels of independence and co-operate well with one another. The children respond positively to the adults' high expectations for good behaviour.
- The majority of the children are confident in talking with the adults in the playroom and they communicate well with one another during their activities. They listen well to the adults during play and in the story sessions; they turn readily to books and are confident to identify and label their work.

- The children enjoy exploring and experimenting for example, as cooks and builders and often play collaboratively in an imaginative manner. Many of the children are confident in the use they make of the range of art materials on offer and use them creatively to explore patterns, build simple models and produce detailed figurative drawings.

## **5. Provision for learning**

### **The quality of the provision for learning is good.**

- The provision for pastoral care within the playgroup is good. Among the strengths are the very good working relationships between the staff and the children, the responsiveness to children's needs by offering choices to them in their play, the clear lines of communication established with the parents and the outside agencies, and the good pastoral links developed with the local primary school.
- During the inspection, the quality of staff interaction with the children is consistently of a high standard, particularly when they extend the children's observational, problem solving and decision making skills.
- The staff work hard to create a bright, well organised and stimulating learning environment for the children. The children's work is attractively displayed around the playroom.
- A good start has been made to developing a systematic approach to observing the children at play and recording their responses. The staff will need to develop further the links between the observation and assessment of what the children know and can do, and the subsequent planning in order to ensure progression matched to the children's individual needs.
- The daily timetable provides a valuable session of extended play along with appropriate time for story, rhymes and physical play experiences. The children have many good opportunities to develop their problem solving skills, and acquire important social skills in an informal atmosphere.
- The staff give good attention to promoting healthy eating, for example, through the provision of a healthy snack and daily opportunities for outdoor, energetic play activities.

## **6. Leadership and management**

### **The quality of leadership and management is good.**

- The parents are kept well informed through monthly newsletters and the relevant reports on their child's progress.
- The leader has been in post for 1 year and she has established a culture of reflection and review for the development of the provision that is evident within the staff's practice. She has implemented a wide range of policies and procedures and an appropriate pre-school programme for the children. The

playgroup has a detailed, well focused development plan and associated action plans that identify a cycle of continuous improvement which benefits the children's learning experiences. The management committee, leader, staff and the parents work collaboratively to ensure a good quality of pre-school provision is provided for the children.

- All members of staff have been appointed since the last inspection, they work effectively as a new team. The playgroup receive good quality professional advice from the early years specialist from the Early Years Organisation.
- 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 w reflect the guidance issued by the relevant Department.

## CONCLUSION

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 area for improvement includes the need to:

- develop further the links between the observation and assessment of what the children know and can do, and the subsequent planning in order to ensure progression for all of the children's individual needs.

The Education and Training Inspectorate will monitor the progress on the area identified for improvement.



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