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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**



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Education and Training Inspectorate

Report of an Inspection

Stepping Stones Playgroup Maghera

Inspected: March 2009

STATISTICAL INFORMATION

Name of pre-school centre:	Stepping Stones Playgroup
Address:	130 Tirkane Road MAGHERA Co Londonderry BT46 5NH
Management Type:	Voluntary

Date of inspection:	3 March 2009
Date of previous inspection:	5 February 2004

1. Details of Children

Total number of children:	am session	pm session
• attending the pre-school centre	10	-
• in their immediate pre-school year	9	-
• funded by Department of Education	9	-
• 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	0	-
• with English as an additional language	0	-
• 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	69.4%	-

* Calculated from the date when the intake was complete

2. Details of Staff

Number of:	Full-time	Part-time
Staff, including leader	0	2
Staff holding recognised childcare qualifications	0	2
New appointments within previous 12 months	0	0

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	N/A	188

4. Parental Questionnaires

Number issued to parents:	9
Percentage returned:	100%
Number of written comments:	4

**STEPPING STONES PLAYGROUP, MAGHERA, CO LONDONDERRY, BT46 5NH
(3BB-0085)**

1. The pre-school centre is situated within St Brigid's Primary School, Tirkane, a rural area outside Maghera. The centre has access to a range of resources in the primary school, including the use of a large indoor hall and outdoor play spaces. Since the last inspection there have been several staffing changes. A new assistant was appointed in 2005, and the current leader was appointed and took up post in September 2007. A new early years specialist (EYS) was appointed in 2006.

2. The arrangements for the inspection of pastoral care and child protection included the opportunity for the parents, the management group and the staff to complete a confidential questionnaire prior to the inspection. All of the parents responded to the questionnaire and four made additional written comments. The responses from the parental questionnaire indicated that almost all the parents regard the centre very highly and appreciate that the centre is a caring place, the children feel safe and secure and that the centre is well thought of in the community. The responses from the staff questionnaires were very positive. Most of the responses from the management group indicated satisfaction with the work of the centre. Any concerns raised by the parents and by members of the management group have been shared with the staff and management of the centre.

3. The quality of the pastoral care within the centre is satisfactory. The staff are caring and supportive and they greet the children warmly on arrival. The children approach the staff easily and the playroom is bright, spacious and attractively set up for play. At times the children's play became unsettled, particularly during the management of whole-group activities such as story time and physical play.

4. The centre has satisfactory arrangements in place for safeguarding the children. These arrangements broadly reflect the guidance issued by the relevant Department but the following minor area needs to be addressed. The staff and management group should ensure that the written policies for child protection are updated to match the current agreed procedures.

5. The centre gives good attention to promoting healthy eating. The staff have agreed a healthy eating policy and the children are encouraged to discuss healthy choices. The children have regular access to play outdoors. The staff need to develop a more progressive and challenging programme for physical play.

6. The main strengths within the centre's educational and pastoral provision are as follows:

- the staff have worked hard to create an attractive learning environment, with clearly identified areas for play. The children's work is thoughtfully displayed and the centre has an appropriate range of resources which are carefully labelled and easily accessible to the children;

- the staff provide a range of experiences and activities which offer satisfactory opportunities for learning in some areas of the pre-school curriculum. The children's fine motor skills are well developed and many show a good interest in early drawing and mark-making. The children's interest in the world around them is promoted through a range of appropriate themes and topics;
- the written planning is detailed and provides a useful framework for the centre's programme throughout the year. It contains relevant guidance on the learning to be developed and is regularly evaluated and adapted to meet the interest of the children; and
- the staff have developed an appropriate system of recording the children's responses to their play and are beginning to make relevant assessments of the children's progress, which is shared with the parents.

7. The inspection identified areas for improvement. The following are the most important areas that need attention.

- The staff need to review the organisation of the daily routines and improve the management of transitions and large group sessions, including story time, to ensure the children are more engaged and involved.
- The staff need to plan more effectively for physical play, to ensure progression in the development of the children's gross motor skills.
- The staff should continue to improve their skills in promoting more sustained periods of concentrated and purposeful play.

8. The staff work well together as a team and regularly evaluate aspects of the centre's provision. The centre has a development plan which identifies some appropriate priorities for action and improvement. The current focus is on the future sustainability of the centre. The contribution made by the centre's EYS has strengths, including the contribution she has made to the development planning process. However, a few important areas of the centre's work have been identified for improvement. It will be important that staff work closely with the EYS in order to address these key areas for improvement. The centre's EYS needs to provide support and guidance which is more focused on helping the staff develop a deeper understanding of the pre-school curriculum and the ways in which they can meet the needs of those children who require additional support in their learning. The development plan should be amended in light of the inspection findings. Evidence from this inspection indicates that the small number of children enrolled at present impacts negatively on the overall quality of the learning experiences for the children.

9. In most of the areas inspected the quality of education provided in this pre-school centre 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 all the children are to be met more effectively. The Education and Training Inspectorate will monitor and report on the pre-school centre's progress in addressing the areas for improvement.

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