

PRE-SCHOOL INSPECTION



Education and Training
Inspectorate

The Country Playgroup,
Ballymena

Report of an Inspection in
December 2013

eti

*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

CUSTOMER
SERVICE
EXCELLENCE



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 and staff to complete a confidential questionnaire.

Questionnaire	Number issued	Number returned	Percentage returned	Number with comments
Parents	34	26	76%	11
Staff	*	*	*	*
Management	*	*	*	*

* fewer than 5

The parental responses indicated very high levels of satisfaction with all aspects of the educational and pastoral provision provided by the playgroup. In particular, they reported on the staff focus on developing each individual child, the effective leadership, and the caring and supportive staff team. The responses from the staff indicated a strong sense of team work, enjoyment of their work and the good opportunities for ongoing staff development.

2. Context

The Country Playgroup is situated in a rural location between Ballymena and Kells. The playgroup operates one part time morning session and one part time afternoon session. Almost all of the children are in their immediate pre-school year; a small number of younger children attend the afternoon session. The children who attend the playgroup travel from a wide catchment area.

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.

4. Overall finding

Overall Performance Level	Very good
Achievements and Standards	Very good
Provision	Very good
Leadership and Management	Very good

Key findings of the inspection

5. Achievements and standards

- Most of the children concentrate well and spend sustained periods persevering with and completing activities; they are interested and well motivated in their learning. They almost all collaborate, share and take turns with each other during their play and are developing very well their social skills. The small number of children who are less confident and engaged are well supported by the staff and are making good progress in these aspects of their development.
- Most of the children use a wide range of vocabulary to express their thoughts, questions and ideas to staff and each other. Both girls and boys are very interested in mark making and early writing using the wide range of materials available indoors and outdoors. They enjoy books and stories through the session and participate well during well managed story and rhyme group sessions. Many of the children show an awareness of counting, shape, colour and sequence through their play and the daily routines.
- The children make very good progress in the development of their fine motor skills and use of tools such as scissors and brushes; they move confidently to run, climb, dig and balance when outdoors. The children use a wide range of materials creatively and with imagination to explore pattern, texture and shape and many are beginning to make simple representations and models.
- The children have a high degree of interest in and curiosity about their local rural environment. They enjoy exploring and experimenting with the good range of natural materials incorporated throughout the playgroup.

6. Provision

- The playgroup is set out in two playrooms and three distinct outdoor spaces. The staff manage the areas well to provide a good range of stimulating and well resourced areas for play. The good learning environment is enhanced further by the effective incorporation of natural materials, photographs and the children's artwork.
- The staff listen carefully to the children and respect their ideas. They are all skilful in providing sensitive support and promoting the children's thinking, language and learning as they engage with them during their play and in group sessions.

- The well planned programme is broad and balanced providing good to very good opportunities for learning in all six areas of the pre-school curriculum. The staff are developing the planning further to increasingly reflect the children's own interests and ideas. The assessment methods are used very effectively to record progress and identify areas for support and development for individual children.
- The playgroup provides the children with excellent pastoral care and support. There is an inclusive ethos in which every child is valued, cared for and developed.
- The playgroup promotes a healthy lifestyle through the healthy break, promoting dental care and providing regular opportunities for energetic physical activity outdoors.

7. Leadership and management

- The leader, who is also the proprietor and the playgroups early year's specialist, is highly motivated and very effective in managing the playgroup. She provides excellent leadership promotes a reflective culture, and provides ongoing staff development based on identified priorities for development to ensure continuous improvement among her whole staff team.
- There are very effective links with parents, other agencies and a number of local schools to which the children will transfer.
- 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 Department.

8. Conclusion

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

STATISTICAL INFORMATION

Name of pre-school setting:	The Country Playgroup
Address:	59 Ballycowan Road BALLYMENA Co Antrim BT42 3DW
Management Type:	Private

Date of inspection:	11 December 2013
Date of previous inspection:	March 2006

1. Details of Children

Total number of children:	am session	pm session
attending the pre-school setting	20	25
in their immediate pre-school year	20	14
funded by Department of Education (DE)	20	14
qualifying under DE admission criteria 1 & 2		
with a statement of special educational needs		
without a statement but receiving therapy or support from other professionals for special educational needs	1	2
with English as an additional language		
who left in previous school year to attend reception provision within a primary school		
Attendance:		
attendance** of funded children for the previous school year	93%	

* 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	4	1
Number of staff holding a recognised child care qualification	4	1
Number of staff holding a recognised teaching qualification	1	
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	2½ hours	188

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