

PRE-SCHOOL INSPECTION



Education and Training
Inspectorate

Stepping Stones Playgroup,
Newtownabbey, County Antrim

Voluntary pre-school playgroup

Report of an Inspection in
October 2018



The Education and Training Inspectorate
Promoting Improvement

Providing inspection services for:

Department of Education
Department for the Economy
and other commissioning Departments

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1. Context

Stepping Stones Playgroup is a voluntary playgroup located in the upstairs floor of the Church hall set within the grounds of St Gerard's Church on the Antrim Road in Newtownabbey. The children come mainly from the local area. There have been no changes in staff since the last inspection.

Number of children:	Class 1
Attending full-time	17
Attending part-time	6
Funded by Department of Education	17
Without a statement but receiving therapy or support from other professionals for special educational needs	#
With English as an additional language	#

Percentage qualifying under DE admission criteria 1 or 2	73%
Average percentage attendance for the previous year	92.98
Number of days open in previous school year	185

Source: data provided by the setting.

fewer than 5

2. Views of parents and staff

All of the staff completed the confidential questionnaire and the responses, including the written ones, were all very positive. No confidential parental questionnaires were returned.

3. Focus of the inspection

In order to promote improvement in the interest of all learners, the inspection linked internal and external approaches to evaluate the:

- Outcomes for the children;
- Quality of provision for learning; and
- Leadership and management.

4. Overall findings of the inspection

Overall effectiveness	High level of capacity to identify and bring about improvement
Outcomes for learners	Very good
Quality of provision	Very good
Leadership and management	Very good

5. Outcomes for learners

- For the time of the year the children are very well-settled and engage confidently with each other and with the staff. They spend lengthy periods at self-chosen play producing quality outcomes for their stage of development, follow staff instructions, and listen attentively during group story sessions.
- The children's behaviour is exemplary and they respond well to the basic rules of the playgroup. Examples of the art and creative work produced by the children shows close attention to detail and, at times, is representative of people or things in their personal life.
- Some of the children's records to date and evaluations of the staff planning demonstrate the children's ability and willingness to express their own ideas and to engage creatively in aspects of their play. This needs to be reflected better in the range of activities available to the children in, for example, sand, water and gross physical play.

6. Quality of provision

- The staff are building up appropriate information about all aspects of the children's development through their engagement with the parents and observations of the children to date. Their findings regarding the children's progress are reported to the parents both formally and informally throughout the year. The current planning indicates that good account is taken of the individual needs, interests and responses of all the children.
- The staff present a very attractive and well-organised learning environment for the children, and make very good use of all the space available to them within the shared Church premises. There is a wide range of good quality resources with many natural and authentic items incorporated into most of the areas of play.
- The staff have a comprehensive range of methods to identify and support any child who may require assistance with aspects of their learning and development.
- The written planning is detailed and guides the staff very well in their work with the children. The planning identifies clearly the learning potential of the planned activities and takes appropriate account of the individual needs, interests and responses of all the children.
- The quality of the interactions between the staff and the children is consistently of a very high standard. The staff join enthusiastically in the children's play and generate interest and a sense of fun in many of the activities. They skilfully use open-ended questions and reinforce learning through their use of visual resources, to build effectively on the children's personal interests and experiences and promote an awareness of the world around them.
- The organisation of the day is well-structured to provide for lengthy periods of play. There are smooth transitions at key times in the programme and the children are becoming familiar with necessary routines and procedures. Aspects of the organisation of the physical play session in the large hall do not provide the children with sufficient independent choice and time to develop their play.

- Based on the evidence available at the time of the inspection, the pre-school's approach to the care and welfare of the children impacts positively on learning, teaching and outcomes. The children are forming positive relationships with the adults and one another in an atmosphere of care and mutual respect.

7. Leadership and management

- The process of self-evaluation and development planning is well embedded. The staff are reflective in their practice and gather a range of evidence to support their development agenda. They have identified appropriate priorities for improvement and development which inform the current development plan for the playgroup.
- A substitute early years specialist (EYS) from the Early Years Organisation has very recently been allocated to the group. The EYS evidence available at the time of the inspection indicates good levels of support to the staff in many aspects of their work to date. The representative of the management group reports very good working relationships between all parties and strong support in developing a high quality programme for the children and also in the continual professional development of the staff.
- The playgroup is actively involved in Department of Education's Getting Ready to Learn project and the staff work in partnership with the parents to encourage them to play an active role in the education of their children. Effective links have been established with relevant agencies and the main feeder primary school for the benefit of the children.

8. Safeguarding

- Based on the evidence available at the time of the inspection, the arrangements for safeguarding children reflect broadly the guidance from the relevant Departments.

However, the playgroup needs to:

- Ensure that the required process for recording any allegations against staff of a safeguarding nature is signed off annually by the chairperson of the management committee.

9. Overall effectiveness

Stepping Stones Playgroup has a high level of capacity for sustained improvement in the interest of all the learners. The ETI will monitor how the playgroup sustains improvement.

Inspection methodology and evidence base

The ETI's Inspection and Self-Evaluation Framework is available on the ETI website <https://www.etini.gov.uk/publications/inspection-and-self-evaluation-framework-isef-effective-practice-and-self-evaluation>.

Inspectors observed learning and teaching through play, the children's achievements, progression and standards, scrutinised relevant documentation, and held formal and informal discussions with staff with specific responsibilities.

The arrangements for this inspection included:

- a meeting with a representative of the management committee;
- a meeting with the recently appointed early years specialist; and
- the opportunity for the parents and staff to complete a confidential questionnaire.

Reporting terms used by the Education and Training Inspectorate

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 ETI use the following performance levels when reporting on outcomes for learners, quality of provision and leadership and management¹:

Outstanding
Very good
Good
Important area(s) for improvement
Requires significant improvement
Requires urgent improvement

The ETI use the following levels when reporting on governance:

High degree of confidence
Confidence
Limited confidence

The ETI use the following levels when reporting on safeguarding:

Reflects the guidance
Reflects broadly the guidance
Unsatisfactory

The ETI use the following levels when reporting on care and welfare:

Impacts positively on learning, teaching and outcomes for learners
Does not impact positively enough on learning, teaching and outcomes for learners

¹ And the overall provision in a subject area or unit, as applicable.

Overall effectiveness

The ETI use one of the following inspection outcomes when evaluating the overall effectiveness of the school:

<p>The school has a high level of capacity for sustained improvement in the interest of all the learners. The ETI will monitor how the school sustains improvement.</p>
<p>The school demonstrates the capacity to identify and bring about improvement in the interest of all the learners. The ETI will monitor how the school sustains improvement.</p>
<p>The school needs to address (an) important area(s) for improvement in the interest of all the learners. The ETI will monitor and report on the school's progress in addressing the area(s) for improvement. There will be a formal follow-up inspection.</p>
<p>The school needs to address urgently the significant areas for improvement identified in the interest of all the learners. It requires external support to do so. The ETI will monitor and report on the school's progress in addressing the areas for improvement. There will be a formal follow-up inspection.</p>

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