

# Learn N Play Preschool and Stepping Stones Playgroup

## Schools involved

Learn N Play

Stepping Stones Playgroup



Lisa and Stephanie are both based in Letterkenny, Learn N Play is a community pre-school central to Letterkenny town and Stepping Stones Playgroup is a community-based pre-school setting, located in St. Johnston, Co. Donegal. Both pre-schools provide daily sessions for children participating in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme. Both pre-schools participated in the 'sharing from the start' Shared Education programme for 5 years with different partners and are now on their second year with each other on the PEACEPLUS Aspire programme.

## What Shared Education activities have you organised or taken part in?

Stepping Stones is a rural setting and predominantly Irish, while Learn N Play is more central with a very diverse range of children. Because of this, we believe in a *slow, relational pedagogy* that celebrates our own culture while respecting difference.

We regularly come together as settings to give the children time to become familiar with each other's schools. We support this through the regular use of social stories to help prepare the children.

One activity we run every year is a Celebration of Culture and Diversity, where all families are invited to participate. This year, parents provided a wide range of activities, including henna tattoos, face painting, Irish dancing, music and movement, a flag-making creative station, and interactive storytelling with our local library.

We finished with a fashion show, where the children wore their traditional clothes. This created wonderful conversations between children and families who had just met, talking about what they were wearing and why. It linked beautifully with *Aistear*, particularly the themes of identity and belonging, and our shared learning outcomes.

## **How have these activities benefitted the educators and children?**

The activities have really benefitted the children in recognising both their differences and similarities. They are celebrating their own culture while also becoming curious about others.

We see lovely conversations happening, about what they wear, why we dress differently, henna tattoos, and traditional dancing. These shared experiences help build a strong sense of identity and belonging.

They have also created real collaboration between educators and parents. We use these sessions as an opportunity to bring everyone together as equal partners in the children's learning journey.

We often think about how it feels for a child to come in wearing their traditional clothes, how proud they must feel seeing others do the same, and being able to share their story while others ask questions.

We are very lucky to have a diverse staff team with a lot of knowledge and understanding of different cultures. Equality and diversity are at the core of what we believe in.

We are now really starting to see friendships build, with children naturally drawn to each other. Sessions are planned using the voices of the children, their families, and the educators, and we reflect together to build on the children's interests and inquiries.

We have also learned so much from each other's settings, right down to how each operates, for example, sharing ideas around lunchtime routines. This has benefitted us both greatly.

## **What have been the challenges?**

For our AIMS children, we are very mindful of transitions and sensory needs. Things like larger groups, travelling on the bus, or changes in routine can sometimes be challenging.

To support this, we plan activities based on the children's interests to help create smoother transitions.

There can also be challenges around logistics, such as organising morning and afternoon sessions that suit working families, but with good planning, we continue to work through these.

## **Let's hear from the children**

The children's voices really highlight the experience:

"Ruby has the same name as Ruby in our school."

"Why do the children all dress the same?" (noticing the uniform)

Ava and Elle loved the fashion show and even did a double loop. They also really enjoyed having a picnic on the floor with their new friends.

Julian, who loves space, spent lots of time at the flag station drawing planets.

Yegor was delighted to meet another child who speaks the same language and was excited to connect and chat.

## **How has your partnership engaged with your local community and what has been the impact?**

We engage with our local community through outings and by involving people in what we do, our bus driver, local farmers bringing in tractors, and visits to outdoor spaces such as Glebe Park.

We also share our work through online posts, and using music and by delivering presentations to other educators, including at ATU, where we highlight our participation in Shared Education and the benefits it brings to our settings and families.

## **Top tips for others**

Look at your core values and consider what parents and the community can bring to your shared sessions.

Take time to get to know your partner setting, the educators and the children.

We feel very lucky with our partnership. We complement each other and are very much on the same wavelength.

We genuinely enjoy it and would highly recommend it.

## **Project details**

Type of Project

ASPIRE

Academic Year

2025-26