

Trustees' annual report for period 1 September 2024 to 31 August 2025
Charity name: St Peter's Playgroup Charity registration number: 1167833



Names of trustees who manage the charity

Trustee name	Office	Report agreed
Mrs Vivien Farrell	Trustee / Treasurer	Agreed by email
Mrs Brenda Harris	Trustee	Agreed by email
Mrs Anne Herbert	Trustee	Agreed by email
Mr Richard Harris	Trustee	Agreed by email

Summary of the purposes of the charity

Regarding the purpose of St Peter's Playgroup, the Trustees fully endorse the following as stated in the governing document:

“For the public benefit to enhance the development and education of children primarily under statutory school age by encouraging parents / carers to understand and provide for the needs of their children through community groups and by:

- (a) offering appropriate play, education and care facilities, family learning and extended hours groups, together with the right of parents to take responsibility for and to become involved in the activities of such groups, ensuring that such groups offer opportunities for all children irrespective of their race, culture, religion, means or ability
- (b) encouraging the study of the needs of such children and their families and promoting public interest in and recognition of such needs in the local area.”

Principles, objectives and ethos of St Peter's Playgroup

St Peter's Playgroup is a preschool originally established in 1983 by parishioners of the Church of the Sacred Heart Sittingbourne and was in fact a parish group before becoming independent then taking charitable status. The main objective of playgroup is that children from the local community should come and enjoy themselves whilst learning irrespective of background or financial means. The trustees are proud of the fact that playgroup always meets this objective. St Peter's Playgroup has always endeavoured to have the lowest fees (for those not eligible for government funding) in the local area.

Access has always been offered to any child in the local community irrespective of race, culture, religion, means or ability. The playgroup management, trustees, staff and volunteers are proud of playgroup's record of helping parents / carers to successfully prepare their children for transfer to primary school reception class.

St Peter's Playgroup delivers education and support as specified by the National Foundation Stage Curriculum. Playgroup is fortunate to have highly qualified and experienced staff who enable this commitment to be met.

Parents / Carers are supported throughout the process by being kept up to date with the achievements / progress of their child. If necessary, any area of concern regarding progress or welfare is reviewed with them and when appropriate, guidance is given regarding where and how further support can be provided.

The trustees are pleased to report that all feedback received from parents / carers has been positive and that there is frequent repeat business with siblings coming to playgroup. There is a good relationship with primary schools who have also made positive comments regarding the readiness of children for reception class.

All staff, volunteers and trustees have had appropriate data barring service (DBS) checks that are kept up to date. The staff that look after the children receive appropriate training as required. There is also appropriate safeguarding, data protection and management policies in place.

The trustees are proud of the fact that no child has ever been refused enrolment to St Peter's Playgroup on any grounds including special needs or financial difficulties. A concession that playgroup makes to parents / carers with children that are two years old, is that, unlike many preschool settings no fee is charged if the child cannot attend their usual session. The manager also has the discretion to take a flexible approach where a family is in obvious financial difficulty. Such circumstances are reported verbally to the trustees however the identity of those involved is never disclosed.

Summary of the main activities and achievements

Overview of service delivered

There has been a full programme of activities for the children. The staff have worked hard and the records show that every child has made progress towards achieving their potential. The aims of playgroup are to help children develop in a number of areas as set out in the national foundation stage curriculum. We are pleased to report that every child has made progress with what they can do whilst developing from an individual to being able to take part in group activities. Most importantly they all do this whilst playing and having fun. We have qualified, experienced and professional staff who are good at both putting individual childcare plans into operation and identifying areas where help may be needed. The staff and the parents / carers are to be thanked for their patience and support.

We are pleased to report that playgroup has still been able to accommodate children with Special Educational Needs (SEN) despite the fact that "One to One" funding is no longer available. The staff are to be congratulated and thanked for their work in supporting those most in need. The removal of the one-to-one funding for SEN does impact on the number of staff we can employ and therefore limits the number of SEN children that we can help.

Parents / Carers are supported throughout the process by being kept up to date with the achievements / progress of their child. Records are kept of each child's progress that are the property of the parent / carer, this allows them to see how their child is progressing in terms of both ability and maturity. When necessary, any area of concern regarding progress or welfare is reviewed with the parent(s) / carer(s) and when appropriate, guidance is given regarding whether or not further support is needed and how it will be provided.

Parents and Carers wishing their child to enrol with playgroup are invited to visit with the child first to ensure that the setting meets their needs. When first enrolled the child's parent(s) / carer(s) are invited to stay until the child has settled, this usually is a very short time as we find that children settle in quickly.

In September 2025, 14 children transferred successfully to primary school and we have had good feedback that they have settled in quickly and happily with school life.

Staffing update

Two members of staff are updating their qualifications to level 3. One is the young lady who joined us in 2023 for work experience and in 2024 became a member of staff and a mature student.

The part time member of staff recruited last year to help with the preparation of playgroup each morning is still with us and this is somebody we would find very hard to do without. This has become necessary as there is limited time in the morning to prepare the hall for the children.

Issues that have arisen during the year under review

Our staffing levels over the past year have been good although we are operating at the minimal staffing level. Staffing is a major issue in the childcare sector. Fortunately, we have been able to keep staffing at a suitable level throughout the year. On the occasions when due to unexpected circumstances there has been a staff shortage we have been able to call in suitable staff to assist on a part time basis.

The crisis in the childcare sector has been brought about by the government promising free childcare to parents / carers then only paying a proportion of the cost to childcare settings. This results in a shortfall of income therefore staff are underpaid for the responsible work that they do. We are fortunate to have dedicated staff who effectively subsidise the setting. It is therefore unsurprising that the childcare sector is losing staff to better paid positions. Whilst we are lucky to have such dedicated team, we cannot expect this situation to remain long term.

The hall continues to be a problem with the high rent, removal of available storage and having to deal with rubbish and other issues left by other hall users. Discussions have taken place with the parish priest (our landlord) and Kent County Council [see page 8] in an effort to resolve these issues and it is hoped that more storage will be provided.

Finally, the trustees would like to thank the manager Mrs Willson for her tireless efforts to keep playgroup working to such a high standard, maintaining a good relationship with parents and carers and in particular making playgroup a happy and safe place for the children in our care.

Thank you to the staff and our community

St Peter's Playgroup is fortunate to have reliable and conscientious staff and volunteers all of whom give a significant amount of unpaid time to ensure successful outcomes for playgroup activities. These include staff getting in early to prepare the hall, staying after sessions to pack away and in their own time preparing activities for the children. The staff are to be congratulated for their conscientious approach, commitment and innovative ideas that help to provide a rich and stimulating programme of activities for the children. We thank trustees Mrs Vivien Farrell and Mrs Brenda Harris for their support when we have been short-handed for a playgroup session.

The trustees would also like to thank the parents and carers for their positive contribution to group activities without this it would not be possible for playgroup to function effectively. The feedback from parents / carers and their involvement in activities helps playgroup to achieve one of its primary goals of contributing to the local community.

Challenges

The challenges faced by trustees, management and staff of playgroup have been many over the period under review, the need to support those children with special educational needs (SEN) despite the withdrawal of funding for "one to one" assistance and the inadequate government funding rate (for qualifying children) are a major concern as both these issues present long-term risks to the charity's viability. The government claims to be providing free childcare, however this is not the case as staff are underpaid for the work that they do and playgroup relies on unpaid volunteers to carry out many back-office tasks. Additionally, the increasing bureaucratic demands placed on childcare settings to manage the SEN process and the demands of the regulatory systems has added significantly to the effort required to meet commitments. As a result of the above there is a shortage of experienced qualified staff in the childcare industry that may impact significantly on playgroup in the future.

Latest OFSTED inspection

The results of the OFSTED inspections carried out during the calendar year 2022.

The first was carried out on 13 January 2022 and was required following the issues raised by the staff.

The second inspection was carried out on 7 December 2022 and the improvements highlight the excellent work carried out by the new manager and her team with all areas found to be good.

The trustees congratulate all involved in achieving the improvement.

Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) inspection

Inspection of St Peter's Playgroup

The O'Sullivan Centre Sacred Heart Church,

63 West Street, Sittingbourne,

Kent ME10 1AN

Inspection date: 7 December 2022
Overall effectiveness Good
The quality of education Good
Behaviour and attitudes Good
Personal development Good
Leadership and management Good

St Peter's Playgroup Financial Review

Summary of income and expenditure 2024 / 2025

	Income	Total		Expenditure	Total
	Government funding and Fees	£117, 121		Wages	£91,653
	Sponsorship and donations	£3,537		Rent	£11,970
	Milk	£344		Supplies	£3,992
	Sundries / interest	£10		Renewables, Course Fees, Equipment, Insurance, Professional Fees, Loan repayment Marketing etc.	£3,630
	Total Receipts	£121.012		Total Expenditure	£111,245

The Playgroup account ended the year with a balance of £15,888 compared to an end balance of £6,121 in the previous accounting year. However, the 2023 to 2024 year includes a £4,000 interest free loan from trustee Mrs Viven Farrell that was required to meet payroll commitments in December, 2023. It is noted that fees have increased by £28,187 compared to the previous accounting year. This highlights the improvement in enrolments resulting from the proper approach to encouraging two-year-old children to attend playgroup. Another important factor has been the marketing of playgroup by Manager Jenny Willson and her team along with an effective invoice system for direct fee payers.

However, the predicted intake for September 2025 is lower than usual and is a concern. One factor is that due to the numbers of children attending playgroup towards the end of the summer term fewer tours where parents / carers could attend with their child to assess suitability of playgroup were possible as staff were fully occupied looking after the attending children. Additionally, it is understood that new childcare settings will be opening in Sittingbourne that will offer full day care and are close to Sittingbourne station.

Costs have risen in all areas of expenditure and inflation continues to be a major concern along with inadequate government funding.

The cost of the rent for the hall has increased from £11,760 to £11,970 this is an issue as much of playgroup's storage has been taken away and there is also a problem regarding staff having to deal with damage to equipment and rubbish left by other hall users.

A summary of the audited accounts with the independent examiners report (completed by Lyndens Accountants [Kent] Ltd) is provided in Appendix 1.

A statement regarding viability of childcare settings is provided in the "Report Summary and Conclusions" section 4 (page 8) of this report.

Report summary and conclusions

1. Delivery of childcare

The manager Mrs Jennifer Willson and her deputy, working with the team and the trustees, has improved the marketing of playgroup significantly. Additionally, a more effective and cost-conscious regime has been implemented. This is demonstrated by keeping the increase in the cost of wages at a reasonable level despite the rise in the minimum wage. Mrs Willson and the staff are to be thanked and congratulated.

Mrs Willson and her team have welcomed two-year old children and created a friendly and welcoming setting. This has resulted in an improvement in the rate of enrolment. Additionally, she has developed an effective invoice system for fee payers that is operating well.

The manager and staff have developed an excellent Facebook page that is supported by a website and google account entry which combined capture considerable interest of potential customers.

A major issue is the increasing weight of bureaucracy when applying for funding, dealing with the autocratic demands of OFSTED and when applying for special education needs (SEN) support. This can involve dealing with multiple agencies who all seem to want the same information on different forms.

We have been fortunate to obtain a grant, from the Government and Kent County Council for the development of our storage facility. The work included taking out all the old cupboards and replacing it with safe shelving put around 2 sides of the storage room. The work was completed by a qualified carpenter to the satisfaction of playgroup and the landlord in time for us to open for the Autumn term and therefore not lose any session time. A few months later the carpenter returned and finished his work by installing 4 radiator covers in areas where the children played. Before this we had to put furniture in front of the radiators so that children were safe from touching hot surfaces. The covers provide safety and more room for the children to play. The full cost of the work with skip hire was £2,440.

The delivery of childcare by Mrs Willson and her team has been to the highest standards and it is clear that the team has an ethos that puts the children first and there is a clear determination to ensure that they provide a safe environment where children learn through play.

2. Finances

A number of issues are being monitored by treasurer Mrs Farrell including the increasing cost of wages / staff training as well as the inadequate government funding that has not kept pace with inflation. The government expects childcare settings to make up the difference between the funded rate and a viable rate by charging parents / carers for other services (for example, provision of meals, nappy changing etc.). There is of course, a limit to how much income you can raise this way. For example, we have stopped providing a hot lunch and children bring in a packed lunch box as to provide hot lunch was uneconomic. We have never charged for nappy changing as we consider it part of the care we provide for the child. A free breakfast and snacks are offered so children are not hungry. Increasing costs due to inflation impacts on parents / carers ability to pay and playgroup's ability to charge a realistic rate for these services. The loss of "one to one" funding for children with special needs is a major problem as staff costs are so high. This also limited us on the number of tours we could arrange for new children as staff were needed for our SEN children.

The coming financial year will be challenging with increasing costs due to inflation, the inadequate government funding and the increase in the minimum wage being just some of the issues impacting on all aspects of childcare and could result in playgroup ceasing to be able to continue to provide the service to the community that has been available for over 40 years.

Continued on page 8:

Continued from page 7

However, with the current team of committed professionals it is possible that we may overcome these challenges and build again for the future. Much will depend on the number of children who enrol at the start of the academic year (September 2025) as the new joiners are needed to replace those who move on to primary school. The uptake of potential enrolments for September 2025 does not, at the moment, look promising.

There is a proposal that from September 2025 children, in our care aged 2 to school age, will receive, government funded, 30 hours of child care per week for 38 weeks of the year, an increase of 15 hours per week per child, however this is only for parents that are both working and may impact on any benefits they receive.

3. Acknowledgements

The trustees wish to thank the staff and volunteers who did all they could to reduce the financial burden by volunteering their services free of charge for session preparation and back-office activities. Without this support playgroup would not be viable.

Additionally, the trustees would like to thank those who have made donations over the year and trustee Mrs Farrell for an interest free loan of £1500 made on the 9th February 2023 and repaid on the 16th December 2024 [shown in this year's account] and £4,000 to enable wages to be paid in December 2023. Unfortunately, we have not been in a position to repay this loan and it is still outstanding. Where we have been in a position when cash flow has been difficult Mrs Farrell has put in money to keep us afloat but these loans have been repaid as soon as other money [fees etc] have come in. The cash flow problems have worsened as Kent County Council are keeping hold of the money from government longer than in previous years before paying settings. We hope finances will look up in the future. Our ethos is to help the community but we do have to cover our costs and be viable financially.

4. Viability of Playgroup

Following a research project Neil Leitch, CEO of the Early Years Alliance summed up the desperate situation that all childcare settings face and summarised major concerns regarding the funding of childcare. Based on this it can only be concluded that unless H M Government improve the funding system St Peter's Playgroup is unlikely to remain viable.

Mr Leitch stated:

"This research confirms what we already know to be true: that increases in the national minimum wage combined with national insurance rises have placed significant financial pressure on early years providers – pressure that, for the three- and four-year-old offer at least, has not been matched by rises in early years funding. As a result, despite their best efforts, it is becoming increasingly difficult for early years settings to deliver the affordable, flexible service that families need."

"If we are to have any chance of giving all children the best start in life, we need a system where access to places does not depend on income or postcode, and where providers have the financial support they need to deliver the quality care and education that all families deserve. We're clear that the time for government action on this is now. The stakes have never been higher."

The above statement was taken from an email sent to St Peter's Playgroup on 21 January 2026. His views are based on the latest information provided by the Institute of Fiscal Studies (IFS).

Appendix 1


St Peter's Playgroup Financial Summary and

Independent Examiners report

Financial Year

1 September 2024 to 31 August 2025

Charity name: St Peter's Playgroup Charity registration number: 1167833

	CHARITY COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND AND WALES	Charity Name	No (if any)	CC16a
		St. Peter's Playgroup	1167833	
Receipts and payments accounts				
For the period from	Period start date	To	Period end date	
	01/09/2024		31/08/2025	

Section A Receipts and payments

	Unrestricted funds to the nearest £	Restricted funds to the nearest £	Endowment funds to the nearest £	Total funds to the nearest £	Last year to the nearest £
A1 Receipts					
Fees	117,121	-	-	117,121	88,934
HMS Milk	344	-	-	344	221
Special Needs Support	-	-	-	-	-
Sponsorship and Donations	3,537	-	-	3,537	850
Teas and Raffles	-	-	-	-	-
Sundries	10	-	-	10	-
Interest	-	-	-	-	14
Loan Received	-	-	-	-	4,000
Sub total (Gross income for AR)	121,012	-	-	121,012	94,019
A2 Asset and investment sales, (see table).					
	-	-	-	-	-
	-	-	-	-	-
Sub total	-	-	-	-	-
Total receipts	121,012	-	-	121,012	94,019
A3 Payments					
Wages	91,653	-	-	91,653	72,340
Rent	11,970	-	-	11,970	11,760
Supplies	3,992	-	-	3,992	3,025
Insurance	688	-	-	688	723
Course Fees	219	-	-	219	239
Renewables	-	-	-	-	-
Sundries	2,365	-	-	2,365	472
PPS and Advertising	36	-	-	36	-
Legal and Professional	322	-	-	322	1,196
Sub total	111,245	-	-	111,245	89,754
A4 Asset and investment purchases, (see table)					
	-	-	-	-	-
	-	-	-	-	-
Sub total	-	-	-	-	-
Total payments	111,245	-	-	111,245	89,754
Net of receipts/(payments)	9,767	-	-	9,767	4,265
A5 Transfers between funds	-	-	-	-	-
A6 Cash funds last year end	6,121	-	-	6,121	1,856
Cash funds this year end	15,888	-	-	15,888	6,121

Charity name: St Peter's Playgroup Charity registration number: 1167833

Section B Statement of assets and liabilities at the end of the period				
Categories	Details	Unrestricted funds to nearest £	Restricted funds to nearest £	Endowment funds to nearest £
B1 Cash funds	Bank	15,888	-	-
	Petty Cash	-	-	-
	Debtors	-	-	-
	Creditors	-	-	-
	Total cash funds	15,888	-	-
	(agree balances with receipts and payments account(s))	OK	OK	OK
B2 Other monetary assets	Details	Unrestricted funds to nearest £	Restricted funds to nearest £	Endowment funds to nearest £
		-	-	-
		-	-	-
		-	-	-
		-	-	-
		-	-	-
B3 Investment assets	Details	Fund to which asset belongs	Cost (optional)	Current value (optional)
			-	-
			-	-
			-	-
			-	-
B4 Assets retained for the charity's own use	Details	Fund to which asset belongs	Cost (optional)	Current value (optional)
			-	-
			-	-
			-	-
			-	-
			-	-
			-	-
			-	-
B5 Liabilities	Details	Fund to which liability relates	Amount due (optional)	When due (optional)
	Independent Examiners Fee Accrual		240	
	Trustee Loan		2,500	
			-	
			-	
Signed by one or two trustees on behalf of all the trustees	Signature	Print Name	Date of approval	
	Unien M Farrell	UNIENS M FARRELL	20.1.2026	

Charity name: St Peter's Playgroup Charity registration number: 1167833


**CHARITY COMMISSION
FOR ENGLAND AND WALES**
**Independent examiner's
report on the accounts**

Section A

Independent Examiner's Report

**Report to the trustees/
members of**

 Charity Name
St Peter's Playgroup

**On accounts for the year
ended**
31st August 2025
**Charity no
(if any)**

1167833

Set out on pages

1-2

(remember to include the page numbers of additional sheets)

I report to the trustees on my examination of the accounts of the above charity ("the Trust") for the year ended 31/08/2020.

**Responsibilities and
basis of report**

As the charity trustees of the Trust, you are responsible for the preparation of the accounts in accordance with the requirements of the Charities Act 2011 ("the Act").

I report in respect of my examination of the Trust's accounts carried out under section 145 of the 2011 Act and in carrying out my examination, I have followed the applicable Directions given by the Charity Commission under section 145(5)(b) of the Act.

**Independent
examiner's statement**

I have completed my examination. I confirm that no material matters have come to my attention (other than that disclosed below *) in connection with the examination which gives me cause to believe that in, any material respect:

- accounting records were not kept in accordance with section 130 of the Act or
- the accounts do not accord with the accounting records

I have no concerns and have come across no other matters in connection with the examination to which attention should be drawn in order to enable a proper understanding of the accounts to be reached.

* Please delete the words in the brackets if they do not apply.

Signed:

Date:

05/11/2025

Name:

Jane Henning

**Relevant professional
qualification(s) or body
(if any):**

 INDENS
accountants
53 WEST STREET

Address:

 SITTINGBOURNE
KENT, ME10 1AN
TEL: 01795 4225

Section B

Disclosure

Only complete if the examiner needs to highlight matters of concern (see CC32, Independent examination of charity accounts: directions and guidance for examiners).

Give here brief details of any items that the examiner wishes to disclose.