

# PRE-SCHOOL INSPECTION



Education and Training  
Inspectorate

First Steps Playgroup,  
Ballymena

Report of an Inspection  
in November 2010

## STATISTICAL INFORMATION

<b>Name of pre-school centre:</b>	First Steps Playgroup
<b>Address:</b>	St Joseph's Early Years Centre 90 Doury Road BALLYMENA Co Antrim BT43 6JE
<b>Management Type:</b>	Voluntary

<b>Date of inspection:</b>	23 November 2010
<b>Date of previous inspection:</b>	29 January 2004

### 1. Details of Children

<b>Total number of children:</b>	<b>am session</b>	<b>pm session</b>
• attending the pre-school centre	14	-
• in their immediate pre-school year	12	-
• funded by Department of Education (DE)	12	-
• qualifying under DE admission criteria 1 & 2	12	-
• with a statement of special educational needs	0	-
• without a statement but receiving therapy or support from other professionals for special educational needs	2	-
• with English as an additional language	1	-
• who left in previous school year to attend reception provision within a primary school	0	-
<b>Attendance:</b>		
• attendance* of funded children for the previous school year	95.03%	-

\* Calculated from the date when the intake was complete

## 2. Details of Staff

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

<b>Number of: **</b>	
Students	0
Trainees	0

\*\* Total placements since September of current year

## 3. Details of Sessions

<b>Duration of morning session</b>	<b>Duration of afternoon session</b>	<b>Number of days open in previous year</b>
2½ hours	-	185

## 4. Parental Questionnaires

Number issued to parents:	12
Percentage returned:	92%
Number of written comments:	5

## **FIRST STEPS PLAYGROUP, BALLYMENA, CO ANTRIM, BT43 6JE (3AB-0118)**

1. First Steps Playgroup is situated in St Joseph's Early Years Centre on the Doury Road in Ballymena. The premises accommodate a number of playgroups and the local SureStart Centre. Since the last inspection in 2004 the playgroup has moved into the new premises and a new assistant has been appointed.

2. In the areas inspected, the quality of education provided by the playgroup is good. The playgroup has important strengths in most of its educational and pastoral provision. The inspection has identified areas for improvement which the playgroup has demonstrated the capacity to address. The Education and Training Inspectorate (Inspectorate) will monitor the playgroup's progress on the areas for improvement.

### **CHILDREN'S ACHIEVEMENTS**

3. The children are well settled, they respond willingly to the adults, and their behaviour is very good. All of the children are showing independence in their personal hygiene, sorting their work into their personal trays and self-registering at snack time. The majority of the children were playing independently and co-operatively in groups modelling and decorating buns in dough, painting and drawing realistic and detailed representations, making dinner in the home area and fixing and measuring equipment in the playroom using the builder's equipment and tools. All of the children were purposefully engaged in periods of sustained and concentrated play throughout the session. A minority of children engage in solitary or parallel play and require adult support with sharing, taking turns and developing their attention spans.

4. The development of the children's language and communication skills is a key priority for the playgroup. The planned programme provides very good opportunities to enrich and extend the children's vocabulary through the addition of real and authentic materials in the areas of play. The staff have received training in the Eklan Speech, Language and Communication Programme; they engage in skilful discussion with the children, naturally extending and enriching the children's conversations around their play experiences, the planned theme and their interests. Many of the children can recognise their own name and use appropriate mathematical language. A minority of children are already attempting to write their name and form letters. The majority of the children are developing their vocabulary and are able to express their thoughts and ideas with increasing fluency. The staff are aware of those children who require more focused support in the articulation of their initial sounds and have appropriately requested support from the local SureStart speech and language therapist.

### **THE PROVISION FOR LEARNING**

5. The staff have worked hard to develop their learning environment indoors. The daily timetable includes a beneficial period of extended play and provides regular opportunities for enthusiastic story, rhyme and physical play sessions. The children are already aware of the daily routines, and transitions are developing smoothly. The staff demonstrate a highly skilful approach in promoting, language and learning naturally through the play activities and various routines. They engage the children in valuable discussion about their play and recent experiences and participate sensitively and effectively in many of the activities, initiating the children's interest when appropriate, and extending their play. During the inspection, a child drew a highly detailed picture of a castle and its occupants which resulted

in meaningful conversation about castles, crowns and the ongoing building work to create an outdoor learning environment. Through praise and encouragement the staff support the children's listening skills and promote the children's enjoyment of books, rhymes, early mark making and writing.

6. The staff continue to develop their planning and assessment methods. The planning identifies the relevant and interesting themes and topics and highlights aspects of the learning to be promoted. The staff need to ensure that the activities progress throughout the year and there is a sharper focus on planning for the children's individual abilities, interests and needs which clearly provides evidence of their progress and development.

7. The quality of the arrangements for pastoral care in the playgroup is very good. Among the strengths are the very good relationships established between staff, the staff and the children and with one another, and the promotion of the children's positive behaviour and social skills.

8. The playgroup has very good comprehensive arrangements in place for safeguarding children. These arrangements reflect the guidance issued by the relevant Department.

9. The playgroup gives good attention to promoting healthy eating and physical activity, for example the healthy snacks, the Boost Better Breaks Award, and the efforts by the staff to provide physical play opportunities, both indoors and outdoors, which encourage the children to adopt healthy lifestyles.

#### LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

10. The leader is a good role-model in the playroom and is ably supported by her assistant. The staff are enthusiastic and caring, they know their children well, and are skilful in developing learning through the children's spontaneous play. They work hard to create a stimulating learning environment for the children, and are committed to improving the quality of experiences for the children outdoors. The development plan identifies appropriately, the need to improve the experiences for the children outdoors. The staff now need to develop a more detailed development action plan to include smart targets and realistic timescales of how they intend to improve the children's experiences outdoors.

11. The staff report that they have had three different early years specialists (EYS) within the last three years. The Early Years Organisation (EYO) needs to ensure that this playgroup is provided with stable and consistent support in order to guide and advise the staff more effectively in order to promote continuous improvement within the playgroup.

12. The key strengths of the playgroup include:

- the happy, caring ethos and the well settled children;
- the good progress made to date, by the children in their personal, social and emotional development, communication and language skills, their mathematical language, creative work and their imaginative play;
- the very good quality of the staff interaction and involvement with the children in promoting learning;
- the enthusiastic and committed staff;

- the stimulating and inviting environment which celebrates the children's work and achievement; and
- the organisation of the day and smooth transitions between the different activities.

13. The areas for improvement include:

- the need to develop further the planning and assessment systems in order to ensure that the activities progress throughout the year, there is a sharper focus on planning for the individual abilities, interests and needs and that there is a clear link to the observations of the children's play.

14. In the areas inspected, the quality of education provided by the playgroup is good. The playgroup has important strengths in most of its educational and pastoral provision. The inspection has identified areas for improvement which the playgroup has demonstrated the capacity to address. The Inspectorate will monitor the playgroup's progress on the areas for improvement.

**QUESTIONNAIRES**

- The arrangements for the inspection of pastoral care and child protection included the opportunity for the parents and the staff to complete a confidential questionnaire prior to the inspection. Eleven of the parents responded to the questionnaire and 5 made additional written comments. The responses from the parents were very positive and indicated a high level of satisfaction with nearly all aspects of the centre's work; in particular the parents praised the level of care and dedication of the staff and commented on how their children enjoyed the playgroup. The responses from the management group and the staff questionnaires were also very positive. All of the responses have been shared with the staff and management of the playgroup.

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