

PRE-SCHOOL INSPECTION



Education and Training
Inspectorate

McArthur Nursery School,
Belfast

Report of an Inspection
in October 2011

STATISTICAL INFORMATION ON McARTHUR NURSERY SCHOOL, BELFAST

1. Details of Children

Number of children:	Class 1	Class 2
Attending full-time	26	27
Attending part-time	0	0
Under 3 years of age*	0	0
With statement of special educational needs	0	***
Without a statement but receiving therapy or support from other professionals for special educational needs	***	0
At CoP stages 3 or 4**	***	0
At CoP stages 1 or 2**	7	***
With English as an additional language	***	0

* On 1 July.

** The stages refer to those set out in the Code of Practice for the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs.

*** Denotes a number less than 5.

Percentage qualifying under DE admission criteria 1 or 2.	9%
Average attendance for the previous year.	90.7%

2. Duration of Sessions

Full-time	Part-time: am	Part-time: pm
4½ hours	-	-

3. Details of Staff

Number of:	Full-Time	Part-Time
Teachers	2	0
Nursery Assistants (qualified)	1	1
Nursery Assistants (non-qualified)	1	1

Number of: ****	
Students	2
Trainees	0

**** Total placements since September of current year

4. Parental Questionnaires

Number issued	53
Percentage returned	49%
Number of written comments	10

McARTHUR NURSERY SCHOOL, BELFAST, BT5 4FE (111-0002)
INSPECTED: 20 OCTOBER 2011

1. McArthur Nursery School is situated in East Belfast. The majority of the children attending come from the surrounding area. Since the last inspection, a new Principal, assistant teacher and classroom assistant have been appointed.

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

CHILDREN'S ACHIEVEMENTS

3. The children demonstrate very good progress in their overall development in relation to their age and the time of the year. The children are settled, happy and confident; they are becoming familiar with the daily routines and enjoy making independent choices. They respond well to the adults' guidance and are developing good sharing and turn-taking skills and a small number are beginning to play collaboratively together. During the inspection there were good examples of individuals and small groups of children engaging in sustained purposeful play in the creative area, outdoors, in dough play, in the role-play areas and other activities.

4. During the inspection, there were good opportunities for children to enjoy stories and rhymes in small groups. The children enjoyed browsing through books and 'reading' stories in the role-play area. The staff encourage the children to talk to one another and to develop their listening skills during the whole-group story session by using the 'speaker's chair'. It is important that this activity does not become too formal for the children's age and stage of development. The school has identified a small number of children with speech and language difficulties; the majority of the children, however, speak with developing fluency and clarity. A small number are capable of talking with very good levels of confidence and articulation. There are good opportunities for the children to engage in early mark making; the majority of the children can recognise their name and a few children can write their name independently.

THE PROVISION FOR LEARNING

5. The staff have worked very hard to create a welcoming and inviting learning environment for the children both indoors and outdoors. There are distinct areas of play and good use is made of all the available space. The staff display the children's work and photographs in attractive displays throughout the nursery and have introduced a 'Children's wall' where the children can choose to display their work. The staff provide good opportunities for learning across almost all of the areas of the pre-school curriculum. In the best practice, the adults promote early mathematical language skilfully and with enthusiasm and encourage a sense of awe and wonder in nature through observing the changes in the outdoor play area. The discussions with the children occur in a natural way and promote successfully an excitement for learning without interrupting the children's play. The daily routine provides a valuable session of extended play along with time for story, rhyme and physical play. In the majority of sessions observed, the staff built well on the children's ideas to extend their vocabulary and understanding. The school has identified the need for all staff to monitor and evaluate the quality of interactions with the children in order to disseminate the very good practice. They have also identified appropriately the need to review the current provision for outdoor play in order to provide more opportunities for physical development.

6. The staff work well in a collaborative approach to planning a broad and balanced programme for the children and in recording and assessing the children's responses and progress. They make good use of ongoing observation records to assess the children's learning and target support for their further development. The observation records are attractively presented in individual books and form a detailed record of each child's achievements in their pre-school year which is then passed on to the parents. The staff have high quality Individual Educational Plans (IEPs) for those children who have been identified as requiring additional support with aspects of their learning. The IEPs outline appropriate targets and clear strategies to support the children. During the inspection the staff implemented effectively a range of strategies to give very good support to the children.

7. The nursery has developed good links with the parents and provides one formal written report and two parent meetings each year to inform parents of their child's progress. The nursery uses a text service and a monthly newsletter to inform parents about events in the nursery. The current newsletter does not provide sufficient detailed information, in a reader-friendly format, about how parents can support their children's learning at home. Good use is made of visitors to the nursery and educational trips to enhance the children's educational experiences.

8. The quality of the arrangements for pastoral care in the nursery is very good. This is evidenced through the very happy children, the welcoming family ethos and the very good working relationships at all levels. The staff demonstrate a strong commitment to both the care and well-being of the children and to the promotion of their independence and self-management skills.

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

10. The nursery gives very good attention to promoting healthy lifestyles through healthy eating and physical activity; for example, through the provision of a healthy snack and the daily dental hygiene programme for which they have gained the '1,2,3, Diamond Award' from the Belfast Health Trust.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

11. The Principal has been in post for four years and has a clear vision for improvement in the school. She is hard-working, highly dedicated and provides a very good role model in her own interactions with the children. She is effective in developing the skills of all her staff and deploys them well in utilising their strengths.

12. The School Development Plan (SDP) is currently being updated and the Principal has identified the need to collate and analyse the views of the school community including the parents, staff and governors to better inform the new plan. A good start has been made to establishing rigorous and systematic processes for self-evaluation. These processes should now be used to inform the new SDP with action plans that have more measurable targets which are clearly focused on improvements in learning and teaching.

13. The key strengths of the nursery include:

- the confident, well-behaved children who display good levels of independence and engagement with their learning;
- the welcoming, family ethos and the very good working relationships at all levels;

- the broad and balanced programme which provides good opportunities to learn in almost all areas of the pre-school curriculum;
- the very good support given to the children who require additional support with aspects of their learning;
- the effective team-work of the staff who are developing a collaborative approach to promoting improvement; and
- the leadership of the highly dedicated Principal who is a very good role model in her classroom practice.

14. The area for improvement is the need:

- to develop further the processes for self-evaluation in order to inform the SDP and create action plans that are clearly focused on improvements in learning and teaching.

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

QUESTIONNAIRES

The arrangements for the inspection of pastoral care and child protection included the opportunity for the parents, the Board of Governors (governors) and the staff to complete a confidential questionnaire prior to the inspection. Twenty-six of the parents responded to the questionnaire and ten parents made additional written comments. The responses from the parental questionnaires were very positive and indicated a high level of satisfaction with nearly all aspects of the nursery's work; in particular the parents praised the very caring staff and the happy, welcoming atmosphere in the nursery. The responses from the governors and staff questionnaires were entirely positive. The responses from the questionnaires have been shared with the Principal and governors of the nursery.

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