

PRE-SCHOOL INSPECTION



Education and Training
Inspectorate

Convent of Mercy Nursery
School, Downpatrick

Report of an Inspection
in March 2010

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*The Education and Training Inspectorate -
Promoting Improvement*

Providing Inspection Services for

Department of Education
Department for Employment and Learning
Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE



CUSTOMER SERVICE EXCELLENCE

**STATISTICAL INFORMATION ON CONVENT OF MERCY NURSERY SCHOOL,
DOWNPATRICK**

1. Details of Children

Number of children:	Class 1	Class 2
Attending full-time	25	26
Attending part-time	0	0
Under 3 years of age*	0	0
With statement of special educational needs	0	0
Without a statement but receiving therapy or support from other professionals for special educational needs	6	8
At CoP stages 3 or 4**	4	4
At CoP stages 1 or 2**	2	4
With English as an additional language	0	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.

Percentage qualifying under DE admission criteria 1 or 2.	32.7%
Average attendance for the previous year.	88.4%

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)	3	0
Nursery Assistants (non-qualified)	0	0

Number of: ***	
Students	8
Trainees	1

*** Total placements since September of current year

4. Parental Questionnaires

Number issued	51
Percentage returned	41.2%
Number of written comments	10

**CONVENT OF MERCY NURSERY SCHOOL, DOWNPATRICK CO DOWN, BT30 6NF
(413-6212)**

INSPECTED: 24 MARCH 2010

1. The Convent of Mercy Nursery School is situated in the centre of Downpatrick; the children come from the surrounding area. Since the last inspection, a new Principal and assistant teacher have been appointed.

2. The arrangements for the inspection of pastoral care and child protection included the opportunity for the parents, the Board of Governors and the staff to complete a confidential questionnaire prior to the inspection. Twenty-one of the parents responded to the questionnaire and ten made additional written comments. The responses from the parental questionnaires indicated a very high level of satisfaction with the provision; in particular, they appreciated the caring, friendly and dedicated staff. The four responses from the staff were positive about their work with the children and parents. The seven responses from the management committee also endorsed the work of the nursery school. A summary of the responses has been shared with the staff and management of the nursery.

3. The quality of the arrangements for pastoral care in the nursery is good. The children appear happy and content; they are at ease with the staff.

4. The nursery has very good, comprehensive arrangements in place for safeguarding children. These arrangements reflect the guidance issued from the Department of Education.

5. The nursery gives very good attention to promoting healthy eating and physical activity through, for example, the regular provision of a fruit break, the involvement in a dental scheme and regular opportunities provided for outdoor physical activity.

6. Nearly all of the children are showing independence in their personal hygiene; they are familiar with the daily routines and their social skills are developing appropriately. They generally show care for one another and play co-operatively. Most of the children choose and use equipment with confidence and independence. During the inspection, small groups of children, often supported by adults, demonstrated sustained periods of concentrated play as they explored the various resources and activities provided. Throughout the inspection, however, it was noted that a small number of children found it difficult to settle to the activities provided; more often than not the origins of this restlessness lay in the activities provided lacking interest, or providing insufficient challenge for their stage of maturity, or in the absence of appropriate intervention from an adult.

7. Almost all of the children are beginning to make simple representations of people and objects in their environment and are able to use a range of tools, for a variety of activities. The majority of the children, however, remain at the exploratory and experimental stage of using the creative materials; increased opportunities need to be provided for the children to explore independently, and use more imaginatively, a wider range of creative materials. The staff make good use of songs, rhymes and planned activities to support the children's understanding of early mathematical concepts.

8. Most of the children can discuss, using a good range of suitable vocabulary, their ideas and experiences with the staff and with one another. Although the majority of the children listened attentively during large group story sessions, a minority were not fully engaged; these children would benefit from the opportunity to take part in small group story sessions which more appropriately match their stage of development. The staff display reference books across all the areas of play to provide new ideas and extend the children's

vocabulary; during the inspection, children were observed browsing in these and other books available in the designated book areas. The children are introduced to script through captions on their work and labels around the room. Nearly all of the children show an interest in mark making as they explore materials and writing tools provided in different areas of play.

9 The staff have worked hard to create an attractive learning environment which is enhanced with examples of the children's art work and photographs. The outdoor play area has been very well-developed to provide discrete areas for physical and imaginative play; unfortunately, due to inclement weather, the children's access to these areas was significantly curtailed during the inspection.

10. The staff have produced useful planning which provides a broad programme of activities for the children. In the best practice, the staff are aware of the learning potential within the materials and the planned activities and their interactions are well matched to the children's varying stages of development. The recently introduced changes to the planning and assessment methods need to be further developed and embedded within the daily practice to ensure that all staff use more effective strategies to engage with the children and extend the children's language and learning. The school has introduced some effective methods to engage parents with their children's learning at home, including the use of story sacks and curricular guidance leaflets.

11. Aspects of the organisation of the daily timetable and the use of the different play areas should be reviewed to ensure that all time and space is used more effectively to promote learning. Where the staff have less effective daily routines, some of the children tend to become restless.

12. The Principal, who is in her fourth year in post, demonstrates enthusiasm and commitment to the work of the nursery school; under her leadership, the staff have embarked on the formal process of self-evaluation. A school development plan has also been drawn up which outlines some useful targets. The next stage of this process should involve fully all members of staff and focus firmly on the issues raised during the inspection.

13. The key strengths of the nursery include the:

- generally contented and settled children;
- good accommodation and attractive learning environment;
- well-developed outdoor play areas;
- the satisfactory to good opportunities for learning in all areas of the pre-school curriculum; and
- caring and committed staff and their developing team approach.

14. The priorities for improvement include the development of:

- more consistently good practice across the two classes especially in relation to the staff's interaction with the children, the management of the daily routines and the provision of activities that match the stage of maturity of the individual children.

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

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