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CUSTOMER SERVICE EXCELLENCE

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



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Education and Training Inspectorate

Report of an Inspection

First Steps Playgroup Belfast

Inspected: November 2007

STATISTICAL INFORMATION

Name of pre-school centre:	First Steps Playgroup
Address:	Horn Drive Community Centre 44A Horn Drive BELFAST BT11 9GS
Management Type:	Voluntary

Date of inspection:	12 November 2007
Date of previous inspection:	N/A

1. Details of Children

Total number of children:	am session	pm session
• attending the pre-school centre	16	-
• in their immediate pre-school year	9	-
• funded by Department of Education	9	-
• qualifying under DE admission criteria 1 & 2	4	-
• with a statement of SEN*	0	-
• without a statement but receiving therapy or support from other professionals for SEN	0	-
• with English as an additional language	0	-
• who left in previous school year to attend reception provision within a primary school	0	-
Attendance:		
• attendance** of funded children for the previous school year	70%	-

* Special Educational Needs

** Calculated from the date when the intake was complete

2. Details of Staff

Number of:	Full-time	Part-time
Staff, including leader	0	4
Staff holding recognised childcare qualifications	0	4
New appointments within previous 12 months	0	2

Number of: ***	
Students	0
Trainees	1

*** Total placements since September of current year

3. Details of Sessions

Duration of morning session	Duration of afternoon session	Number of days open in previous year
3 hours	-	188

4. Parental Questionnaires

Number issued to parents:	16
Percentage returned:	56.3%
Number of written comments:	2

FIRST STEPS PLAYGROUP, BELFAST, BT11 9GS (1AB-0321)

INTRODUCTION

1. The playgroup operates in a local community centre which is shared with other organisations. The group re-entered the Pre-school Education Expansion Programme in September 2006. Both of the permanent playgroup staff were on periods of extended leave during the inspection. All of the funded pre-school places are in the morning session.
2. The parents, staff and management group were given opportunities to express their views about the centre through the inspection questionnaires. The responses indicated a high level of satisfaction with the provision.
3. The quality of the arrangements for pastoral care and child protection has some strengths. The pre-school centre has some appropriate policies and procedures for child protection. Some minor additions are needed to ensure they are sufficiently comprehensive. These include the need to add strategies for managing challenging behaviour and contact details to the complaints policies. The staff need to update their child protection training as soon as possible.
4. The centre's programme for the promotion of health and well-being has strengths, with a developing commitment to encourage the children to eat healthily and be physically active.

THE QUALITY OF THE EDUCATIONAL PROVISION.

5. The centre has a friendly, supportive atmosphere; the staff are helping the children to develop their social skills. The staff work hard to make the best use of all the available space within the small playroom to create an attractive learning environment with distinct areas for play.
6. The daily timetable provides an appropriate balance between an extended period of freely chosen play and group activities. The story time and physical play session need to be developed further. The snack time is used to develop the children's conversational social skills.
7. The staff support the children's own ideas and at times extend their language and learning. They promote the children's independence and offer them encouragement and praise.
8. The range of activities on offer provides satisfactory opportunities for learning in most areas of the pre-school curriculum.
 - The children are independent and are developing their social skills. Some children require further support to develop their concentration and attention.

- The children have regular opportunities to develop their gross motor skills. The staff use the large community hall and supplement their experiences through monthly visits to a local gymnasium. More needs to be done to ensure the physical play programme is sufficiently energetic and challenging. There are appropriate opportunities for the children to develop fine motor skills through the use of a range of tools.
- The children clearly enjoy the creative area; their art work is displayed around the playroom. A few children are beginning to make simple representations. More opportunities should be planned for the children to be involved in music-making.
- The children demonstrate an interest in books and stories are read on request. There are close links with the local library. The staff develop effectively the children's language through discussion; more emphasis should be placed on developing the children's listening skills.
- The staff promote a wide range of mathematical language and ideas naturally through the play.

9. The staff have had some experience of working with children with additional needs. They have identified appropriately the need for additional training in this area.

10. The staff are developing their links with the parents. They should continue to promote the parents' involvement in their children's education. It is appropriate that the co-ordinator plans to develop links with the expansion of SureStart into the Lenadoon area to support this work.

11. The staff have made a useful start to developing their written planning. They are working with their early years specialist (EYS) to develop the long-term and medium-term planning.

12. The staff are recording relevant observations of the children's progress. They recognise the need to use the information more effectively to inform the planning and the parents.

13. The quality of the accommodation is satisfactory. There is no secure outdoor area; storage space is limited. There is a satisfactory range of resources to implement a basic programme.

14. Links with local primary schools are at an early stage of development.

15. The centre leader needs to work closely with the EYS to write a development plan with associated actions and systematically implement these plans to bring about the necessary improvements identified during the inspection. The EYS offers valuable advice and guidance.

16. The strengths of the centre include:

- the caring and supportive atmosphere;
- the effective use made of all of the available space to create an attractive learning environment within the playroom;
- the promotion of the children's confidence and independence;
- the children's interest in books;
- the children's involvement in the creative area; and
- the staff's sensitive support of the children's own ideas.

17. The inspection has also identified areas for improvement. In addressing the most important of these areas the staff need to:

- place more emphasis on developing the children's language, problem-solving and thinking skills;
- develop the planning to ensure there is sufficient challenge and progression in the children's learning across the six areas of the curriculum; and
- use the assessment information more effectively to meet individual children's needs.

18. The pre-school centre has strengths in many aspects of its educational and pastoral provision. The inspection has identified a few areas for improvement in important areas which need to be addressed to meet effectively the needs of all the children.

The Education and Training Inspectorate will monitor and report on the centre's progress in addressing these areas for improvement.

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