

PRE-SCHOOL INSPECTION



Education and Training
Inspectorate

First Steps Playgroup, Belfast

Report of an inspection in
October 2015

eti

*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

CUSTOMER
SERVICE
EXCELLENCE



Quantitative terms used by the Education and Training Inspectorate

In this report, proportions may be described as percentages, common fractions and in more general quantitative terms. Where more general terms are used, they should be interpreted as follows:

Almost/nearly all	-	more than 90%
Most	-	75%-90%
A majority	-	50%-74%
A significant minority	-	30%-49%
A minority	-	10%-29%
Very few/a small number	-	less than 10%

Performance levels

The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) use the following performance levels when reporting on Achievement and standards, on Provision for learning and on Leadership and management:

Outstanding
Very good
Good
Important area(s) for improvement
Requires significant improvement
Requires urgent improvement

Overall effectiveness

The ETI use one of the following inspection outcomes when evaluating the overall effectiveness of the school:

The nursery school / playgroup has a high level of capacity for sustained improvement in the interest of all the learners. The ETI will continue to monitor how the nursery school / playgroup sustains improvement.
The nursery school /playgroup demonstrates the capacity to identify and bring about improvement in the interest of all the learners. The ETI will continue to monitor how the nursery school/ playgroup sustains improvement.
The nursery school/ playgroup needs to address (an) important area(s) for improvement in the interest of all the learners. The ETI will monitor and report on the nursery school's/ playgroup's progress in addressing the area(s) for improvement. There will be a formal follow-up inspection.
The nursery school / playgroup needs to address urgently the significant areas for improvement identified in the interest of all learners. It requires external support to do so. The ETI will monitor and report on the nursery school's / playgroup's progress in addressing the areas for improvement. There will be a formal follow-up inspection.

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1. Inspection method and evidence base

The key questions and quality indicators which guide inspection and self-evaluation of pre-school settings, which were applied to this inspection, are available in the ETI publication *Together Towards Improvement: a process for self-evaluation at:* [Together Towards Improvement Pre-school | Education and Training Inspectorate](#)

Inspectors observed learning and teaching through play, the children's achievements and standards, scrutinised relevant documentation, and held formal and informal discussions with children, and staff with specific responsibilities.

The arrangements for this inspection included:

- a discussion with the staff;
- a meeting with those involved with leadership and management including the management group; and
- the opportunity for the parents and staff to complete a confidential questionnaire.

Thirty-three percent of parents and all of the staff responded to the questionnaires. The responses to the parental questionnaires indicated very high levels of satisfaction with all aspects of the life and work of the playgroup. In particular, the parents highlighted the support given by the staff to the children and the progress their children have made in settling into the playgroup. The staff responses were wholly positive. The ETI has reported to the leader and a representative of the management committee the main messages emerging from the questionnaires; no issues were raised.

2. Focus of inspection

The inspection focused on:

- the children's achievements and standards;
- the quality of provision for learning; and
- the quality of leadership and management.

3. Context

First Steps Playgroup is situated within the Horn Drive Community Centre in West Belfast. The playgroup has a dedicated room and the use of a large hall space within the community centre; a small outdoor play area is available. The playgroup is developing its provision for shared education through fostering good working relationships among the parents and local community.

4. Overall findings of the inspection

Overall effectiveness	Important areas for improvement
Achievements and standards	Important areas for improvement
Provision for learning	Important areas for improvement
Leadership and management	Important areas for improvement

Key findings of the inspection

5. Achievements and standards

- The children are well-settled for the time of year and most of the children can engage in sustained, purposeful play within the playroom. A small number of the children are beginning to play collaboratively; however, a few still require adult support and encouragement to engage fully and safely in the range of activities on offer in the playroom and during physical play in the hall.
- A majority of the children communicate confidently both with the adults and with each other. A small number of them are showing a very good interest in books and storytelling. The children enjoy listening to stories in small groups during the session; however, there is a need for staff to ensure that all children can benefit from a whole-class story and rhyme session daily.
- The children can access the resources independently and the majority of them are beginning to identify their own name to label their own creative work. A small number of children can produce more detailed representative pictures and paintings. During the inspection, the children were observed responding to positional language and engaging in matching and measuring activities.

6. Provision for learning

- The staff provide an attractive learning environment and good use is made of all available space in the playroom. All of the adults engage regularly and appropriately with the children and, on occasions, use effective questioning to develop the children's thinking and to extend their vocabulary. The staff need to develop further their interactions with the children and exploit more fully the learning within the activities.
- The staff make regular observations of the children to assess their progress and set suitable targets for their future learning. The staff need to plan more effectively the range of approaches, resources and strategies they use to support the children in meeting their targets.
- The current routines within the playgroup do not provide the children with sufficient guidance to regulate their behaviour and develop their independence and self-management skills. The staff need to establish calmer and controlled set routines, particularly for snack time and for transition times, in order to support more effectively the children's learning and the development of their social, emotional and behavioural skills.
- The staff have identified the need to develop the planning and provision for physical play. The current arrangements do not provide the children with sufficient opportunities to ensure progression in their physical skills. The staff interactions within this session are mostly supervisory in nature, in order to ensure that the children engage safely with the equipment and the opportunities for learning are then limited.
- The staff have benefitted from their recent involvement and training in inclusion and special educational needs. They are confident in identifying early the children with additional learning needs and respond effectively to challenging behaviour. The staff now need to use the strategies, in a preventative way, before the behaviour escalates, in order to help the children to begin to regulate their own behaviour.

- There is a welcoming, family ethos in the playgroup. The staff treat the children with care and respect and there are very good working relationships between the staff and the children. They are secure and relaxed with the adults and turn easily to them for care and support.
- The playgroup has areas for improvement in its programme for healthy eating and physical activity. The areas for improvement include the need to review the snack and physical play routines for the children.

7. Leadership and management

- The leadership and management are highly committed to the continuous improvement of the playgroup. The leader of the playgroup has changed recently and the new leader has co-ordinator roles for the playgroup and a programme for two-year-olds. The development plan for the group has been agreed in consultation with the staff and the chair of the management committee. It identifies some appropriate areas for development with associated action plans to guide their progress.
- The playgroup has recently had a change in personnel of their early years specialist (EYS) through the Early Years Organisation. It will be important for the staff, with the support of their EYS, to develop further the use of self-evaluation, in order to monitor and evaluate the progress made on the areas for improvement and the impact on the children's learning.
- The playgroup has good links with the parents and the local community. There are effective working relationships with the local Surestart and a number of local nursery schools to provide information and support for the parents on education and health issues. The parents are kept well informed about their children's progress with regular opportunities for formal and informal contact. The monthly newsletter provides the parents with good information on the topics and activities planned for the children.
- The playgroup has comprehensive arrangements in place for safeguarding children. These arrangements reflect the guidance issued by the relevant departments.

8. Overall effectiveness

The playgroup needs to address important areas for improvement in the interest of all the learners. The ETI will monitor and report on the playgroup's progress in addressing the areas for improvement which include the need to:

- improve the organisation of the transitional times between routines and activities in order to maximise fully the children's learning opportunities and experiences;
- improve the planning and provision for physical play; and
- develop further the procedures for self-evaluation to promote improvement and to include the strategic evaluation of the quality of provision for learning.

There will be a formal follow-up inspection.

STATISTICAL INFORMATION ON FIRST STEPS PLAYGROUP, BELFAST

1. Details of children

Number of children:	Class 1
Attending full-time	15
Attending part-time	-
Under 3 years of age*	-
Funded by Department of Education	15
With statement of special educational needs	-
Without a statement but receiving therapy or support from other professionals for special educational needs	-
At CoP stages 3 or 4**	-
At CoP stages 1 or 2**	-
With English as an additional language	-
Who left in previous school year to attend reception provision within a primary school	-

* 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.	9
Average attendance for the previous year.	87%
Number of days open in previous school year	187

2. Duration of sessions

Full-time	Part-time: am	Part-time: pm
9.15 am - 1.15 pm	-	-

3. Details of staff

Number of:	Full-Time	Part-Time
Staff including, Teachers/Leaders	1	1
Number of staff holding a recognised child care qualification	1	1
Number of staff holding a recognised teaching qualification	-	-
New appointments within the previous 12 months	-	-

Number of: ***	
Students	-
Trainees	-

*** Total placements since September of current year

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