

PRE-SCHOOL INSPECTION



Education and Training
Inspectorate

Busy Bee Playgroup,
Maghera

Report of an Inspection
in October 2011

STATISTICAL INFORMATION

Name of pre-school centre:	Busy Bee Playgroup
Address:	The Mobile Unit 1 Maghera Primary School 15 Station Road MAGHERA BT46 5BS
Management Type:	Voluntary

Date of inspection:	13 October 2011
Date of previous inspection:	20 November 2007

1. Details of Children

Total number of children:	am session	pm session
• attending the pre-school centre	24	-
• in their immediate pre-school year	20	-
• funded by Department of Education (DE)	20	-
• qualifying under DE admission criteria 1 & 2	**	-
• with a statement of special educational needs	**	-
• without a statement but receiving therapy or support from other professionals for special educational needs	**	-
• with English as an additional language	**	-
• who left in previous school year to attend reception provision within a primary school	**	-
Attendance:		
• attendance* of funded children for the previous school year	92%	-

* Calculated from the date when the intake was complete

** Figures above all under 5

2. Details of Staff

Number of:	Full-time	Part-time
Staff, including leader	3	0
Staff holding recognised childcare qualifications	3	0
New appointments within previous 12 months	0	0

Number of: ***	
Students	2
Trainees	0

*** 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:	20
Percentage returned:	50%
Number of written comments:	2

BUSY BEE PLAYGROUP, MAGHERA, CO LONDONDERRY, BT46 5BS (3BB-0359)

CONTEXT

1 Busy Bee Playgroup is situated in mobile accommodation in the grounds of Maghera Primary School. Most of the children who attend come from the immediate area; a small number of the children attending are in their penultimate pre-school year and do not receive funding from the Department. The staff has remained the same since the last inspection in November 2007.

2. In almost all of the areas inspected, the quality of education provided by this playgroup is inadequate; the areas for improvement outweigh the strengths in the provision. The inspection has identified significant areas for improvement in standards, provision and leadership and management, which need to be addressed urgently if the playgroup is to meet effectively the needs of all of the children. The Education and Training Inspectorate will monitor and report on the playgroup's progress in addressing the areas for improvement over a 12-18 month period.

CHILDREN'S ACHIEVEMENTS

3. The children's ages and stages of development are wide-ranging. Approximately half of the children are in their second year at the playgroup and are now in their pre-school year; however, a significant minority of them are still not engaging in productive play or learning. The children are familiar with their surroundings, and the majority make independent choices in the play activities. Approximately half of the children were observed working independently and co-operatively for sustained periods of time during the early part of the session, for example, in the house corner. Too often, a majority of the children disengaged, had limited attention spans or lacked perseverance or interest with their chosen task; many were overly dependent on the adults to help them to sustain purposeful play. The staff do not manage the children's behaviour consistently enough to promote more purposeful and sustained play for all of them.

4. There were a few occasions when the staff engaged in purposeful discussion with the children to develop their conversational skills and used open-ended questions which extended the children's interest in the activity. The children are able to engage in conversations, and the majority are able to talk about their play activities. During the inspection, a small group of children were observed enjoying stories read by the staff while a few individual children browsed in the books in the book area. The listening skills of a significant minority of the children, were not sufficiently well developed and the story session for the whole group did not match closely enough to the language needs and interests of all of the children. The organisation of story time and the transition times does not meet the children's needs effectively enough.

THE PROVISION FOR LEARNING

5. The playroom is bright and inviting, with clearly defined areas of play; however, there are insufficient authentic materials. The staff report that they receive good support from the adjacent primary school and the playgroup is timetabled to use the large school hall for physical play. They have created an appropriate, enclosed area for outdoor play; this area also needs further development in how the children's experiences will develop and progress throughout the year. The staff do not have a clear plan for progressing the children's understanding and thinking skills.

6. The pre-school programme offers satisfactory opportunities for learning across the curriculum. The learning potential is too often under-developed to meet the children's individual needs, particularly those children returning to the playgroup for a second year. The planning, which records resources and activities, is not well enough developed to meet the individual needs of all the children effectively and to systematically monitor progress and development. The daily timetable provides an appropriate balance of free play and activities organised by the staff; however the learning from the daily routines and play activities is not used well enough to extend the children's attention, decision-making skills and their sense of responsibility for the care and respect of the play materials and each other.

7. The quality of the pastoral care within the playgroup is satisfactory. The staff provide a welcoming environment which is helping most of the children to enjoy coming to playgroup each day.

8. The playgroup has satisfactory arrangements in place for safeguarding children. These arrangements broadly reflect the guidance issued by the Department of Education; however, the written personal care policy needs to be developed by the staff to ensure that it does not include contradictory advice.

9. The playgroup gives good attention to promoting healthy eating and physical activity, for example, during the inspection, the children enjoyed a healthy snack of fruit, a pancake and milk or water. The children have daily opportunities for physical play outdoors or in the nearby school hall.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

10. The staff team meet at the end of each week to plan the programme. The current planning is not good enough and needs to focus more clearly on improving the quality of the provision to ensure a more sustained, organised and purposeful learning environment for the children, in which achievements are celebrated.

11. There has been insufficient professional development of the skill and expertise of the staff in promoting the children's learning and development over the last year. The staff report that they had very limited support during 2010-2011 from their early years specialist (EYS) employed by the Early Years Organisation. As a result, the playgroup now employs an independent EYS from September 2011, who has provided them with relevant advice and clear action points. The leader, the EYS and the management committee now need to work more collaboratively to ensure that this playgroup is provided with effective and consistent support in order to bring about immediate improvements.

12. The key strengths in this playgroup include:

- the hard-working staff who are committed to the children's welfare and the friendly, welcoming children who have good relationships with the staff and the majority of whom have confidence to ask the staff for help and support;
- the recent focus on establishing a healthy snack which promotes the children's personal, social and emotional development; and
- the valuable links established with the parents and the local primary school.

13. The areas for improvement include:

- the organisation of the daily timetable to ensure that routines and activities are well-managed and make most use of all available time to promote the children's development and learning;
- the staff's understanding of how to promote the learning inherent in the planned programme, and in particular, how to extend the children's levels of concentration and thinking skills through the play activities; and
- the planning, to outline how the children's learning will develop systematically, to ensure that differing needs are met effectively, and to facilitate the provision of evidence of adequate challenge and progression over time.

CONCLUSION

14 In almost all of the areas inspected, the quality of education provided by this playgroup is inadequate; the areas for improvement outweigh the strengths in the provision. The inspection has identified significant areas for improvement in standards, provision and leadership and management, which need to be addressed urgently if the playgroup is to meet effectively the needs of all of the learners.

The Education and Training Inspectorate will monitor and report on the playgroup's progress in addressing the areas for improvement, over a 12-18 month period.

QUESTIONNAIRES

The arrangements for the inspection of pastoral care and child protection included the opportunity for the parents, the management group and the staff to complete confidential questionnaires prior to the inspection. Ten of the parents responded to the questionnaire and two made additional written comments. The responses from the parental questionnaire were very positive and indicated a high level of satisfaction with nearly all aspects of the playgroup's work.

Most of the responses from the management group indicated that they have confidence in, and a high level of satisfaction with, the work of the playgroup. All of the responses have been shared with the staff and management of the playgroup.

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