

PRE-SCHOOL INSPECTION



Education and Training
Inspectorate

First Steps Children's Centre,
Castleberg

Report of an Inspection
in June 2011

STATISTICAL INFORMATION

Name of pre-school centre:	First Steps Children's Centre
Address:	1 Munie Road Killen CASTLEDERG Co Tyrone BT81 7QJ
Management Type:	Voluntary
Date of inspection:	2 June 2011
Date of previous inspection:	27 January 2004

1. Details of Children

Total number of children:	am session	pm session
attending the pre-school centre	25	-
in their immediate pre-school year	25	-
funded by Department of Education (DE)	25	-
qualifying under DE admission criteria 1 & 2	0	-
with a statement of special educational needs	0	-
without a statement but receiving therapy or support from other professionals for special educational needs	2	-
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	91.69%	-

* 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	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
2½ hours	N/A	188

4. Parental Questionnaires

Number issued to parents:	23
Percentage returned:	73.9%
Number of written comments:	8

FIRST STEPS CHILDREN'S CENTRE, CASTLEDERG, CO TYRONE BT81 7QJ (2AB-0293)

1. First Steps Pre-School Playgroup operates in the First Steps Children's Centre which is situated on the Munie Road, Killen, near Castlederg. The playgroup operates one part-time session for pre-school age children who come from the surrounding local and wider rural area.

2. In the areas inspected, the quality of education provided by this playgroup is outstanding; the quality of pastoral care is also outstanding. The playgroup has demonstrated its capacity for sustained self-improvement.

CHILDREN'S ACHIEVEMENTS

3. The children settle quickly and enthusiastically to their chosen activities and are relaxed and happy in their relationships with one another and the adults. The children's behaviour is excellent; they co-operate very well in sharing their resources and toys. All of the children show very good progress in their overall development in relation to their age and the time of the year. They display very good levels of independence and concentration across all of their learning activities and are keen to talk about, and to share with others, what they are doing and what they have made.

4. The staff nurture well the children's developing interest in print and books and the children borrow and take home regularly from the wide range of stimulating fiction and non-fiction books provided to share with their parents. Good quality print based resources, including appropriate labels and captions presented in context, are provided to support and extend the children's learning across all curriculum areas, most notably to secure their interest within their World Around Us (WAU) topics. The children show very good progress in all aspects of their developing language. Many of the children show an interest in mark making, and some are beginning to annotate their drawings with simple representations of their names and other words to communicate meaning.

5. The children engage very well in imaginative play and are confident in choosing and using a range of equipment and tools. They express their creative ideas very well using a range of two- and three-dimensional materials; their art work and models, which are vibrant and advanced in the level of detailed observation they contain, are of a very good quality. The children's creative works are celebrated in attractive personalised art-books and striking displays around the playgroup. The staff use appropriate mathematical language well when participating in the children's free play and organised activities; as a result, many of the children show an interest and early proficiency in counting, sorting, matching and sequencing using the appropriate mathematical language. The children explore and investigate a wide range of early scientific concepts through the provision of natural and man-made resources and show evident curiosity in the world around them.

THE PROVISION FOR LEARNING

6. The relationships between the staff and the children are excellent and there is a very welcoming and positive child-centred atmosphere in the playgroup. All of the staff work very effectively as a team in order to ensure the best learning experiences and outcomes for all of the children. They provide a motivating and methodically planned learning environment, and through good quality interactions with the children, promote and develop effectively the children's language skills, independence and confidence. The children understand and respond very well to their clearly established routines and transitions throughout the day. These routines, such as the buffet break and outdoor physical play, promote well the children's developing social and decision-making skills.

7. The staff know the children and their individual needs very well; they observe, record and assess meticulously the children's learning and progress using a combination of frequently taken photographs and reflective observations. These continuous assessment methods are used effectively to inform future planning and respond appropriately to the individual needs and interests of the children. The carefully constructed and appropriately detailed written planning outlines a broad, balanced and well-linked curriculum for the children, which is designed to engage their interest and extend their knowledge, understanding and skills.

8. All aspects of the communication with the parents are excellent. The playgroup provides the parents with detailed information about pre-school news, events and the curriculum through the very comprehensive newsletter; this also contains advice for parents on how to support their children with aspects of their development and learning. In addition to the informal meetings which occur at the beginning and end of the day, the parents receive detailed written reports about their child's progress on three occasions during the year. The playgroup maintains very good links with the local primary schools, which support and strengthen the arrangements for smooth transitions for the children. The staff have also developed and use very well partnerships with various other agencies and members of the community who support well various aspects of the children's learning needs and experiences.

9. The quality of the arrangements for pastoral care in the playgroup is outstanding. The strengths include the high quality of attention and care given to the emotional well-being and individual progress of all the children and the very effective ways of supporting children who have been identified as requiring additional help with aspects of their development and learning.

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

11. The playgroup gives very good attention to promoting healthy eating, developing early understanding about healthy lifestyles and physical activity, including, for example, through the provision of healthy breaks, and the regular opportunities for the development of the children's physical skills outdoors.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

12. The highly effective and hard-working leader provides excellent leadership and management of the playgroup. The staff and members of the management committee work together very well as a strong team and share their skills and ideas; they are all fully dedicated to securing the best possible outcomes for all of the children and their families.

13. There is wide-ranging evidence of the well-embedded culture of reflection and self-evaluation which supports continuous improvement in all aspects of the playgroup's provision. The development plan, which is reviewed regularly, identifies appropriate priorities and actions for future development. The staff receive support from an early years specialist (EYS) employed by the Early Years Organisation; they report good working relationships with and helpful support from their new EYS.

14. The key strengths of the playgroup include:

- the excellent behaviour of the children who settle quickly and enthusiastically to their chosen activities;
- the very good quality of the broad and balanced programme for learning and wide range of stimulating experiences provided for the children; in particular, within the very well developed World Around Us learning area;
- the very effective use of continuous observation to inform future planning and matching the high quality, connected activities to promote very well the learning, development and progress of all the children;
- the very good links established with the parents, the local community, the local primary schools which the children transfer to and a wide range of agencies and individuals within and beyond the local community; and,
- the highly effective leadership and management of the pre-school playgroup and the team's shared commitment to the ongoing improvement of the playgroup's provision.

15. In the areas inspected, the quality of education provided by this playgroup is outstanding. The quality of pastoral care is also outstanding. The playgroup has demonstrated its capacity for sustained self-improvement.

QUESTIONNAIRES

The arrangements for the inspection of pastoral care and child protection included the opportunity for the parents, the members of the management committee and the staff to complete confidential questionnaires prior to the inspection. Approximately 74% of the parents responded to the questionnaire; all of the replies indicated very high levels of satisfaction with all aspects of the playgroup's care and provision. Eight parents also included a written comment; their written responses show that they appreciate the high levels of dedication and ongoing hard work of the staff in meeting all the pastoral and developmental needs of their children. The responses from the management committee and playgroup staff also fully endorse the work of the playgroup. All of the responses have been shared with the staff and management of the playgroup.

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