

PRE-SCHOOL INSPECTION



Education and Training
Inspectorate

Holy Cross Pre-School
Playgroup, Belfast

Report of an Inspection
in November 2010

STATISTICAL INFORMATION

Name of pre-school centre:	Holy Cross Pre-School Playgroup
Address:	3, Flax Street BELFAST BT14 7EJ
Management Type:	Voluntary

Date of inspection:	18 November 2010
Date of previous inspection:	15 January 2004

1. Details of Children

Total number of children:	am session	pm session
• attending the pre-school centre	20	-
• in their immediate pre-school year	16	-
• funded by Department of Education (DE)	16	-
• 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	3	-
• 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	83%	-

* Calculated from the date when the intake was complete

2. Details of Staff

Number of:	Full-time	Part-time
Staff, including leader	0	5
Staff holding recognised childcare qualifications	0	5
New appointments within previous 12 months	0	1

Number of: ***	
Students	1
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
4 hours	-	190

4. Parental Questionnaires

Number issued to parents:	16
Percentage returned:	25%
Number of written comments:	1

HOLY CROSS PRE-SCHOOL PLAYGROUP, BELFAST, BT14 7EJ (1AB-0006)

1. Holy Cross Pre-School Playgroup is accommodated in a self-contained community building in the Ardoyne area of Belfast. The staff use a large hall in the adjoining building to provide physical play sessions. Since the last inspection in 2004, a new cohort of staff has been appointed; in addition the children attend for a morning session of four hours, which includes a lunch break.

2. In most of the areas inspected the quality of education provided in this playgroup is satisfactory; the strengths outweigh areas for improvement in the provision. The inspection has identified areas for improvement in standards, learning and teaching, leadership and management which need to be addressed if the needs of all the children are to be met more effectively. The Education and Training Inspectorate (Inspectorate) will return to the playgroup within six weeks to ensure that the child protection issues have been addressed. Thereafter the Inspectorate will monitor and report on the playgroup's progress in addressing the areas for improvement over a 12-24 month period.

CHILDREN'S ACHIEVEMENTS

3. Most of the children engage purposefully at a range of activities for extended periods of time. They persevere and complete tasks, often with adult support. The children are respectful towards the staff, one another and their environment. A majority of the children can play collaboratively and a few can also use materials imaginatively and creatively. A significant minority of children, some of whom have started more recently, still require adult support to make choices and engage fully in the prepared activities. When the activities were too difficult or required the children to sit for a lengthy period in a large group, their motivation and engagement was less focused.

4. A majority of the children use effectively small tools such as brushes and pencils; those at an earlier stage of development found some of the materials too challenging. The staff need to ensure there is a wider range of tools and construction materials which meet the needs of all of the children. The children explore a wide range of art materials independently, a few make simple models and early representations. The boys showed particular interest in investigating the real and natural materials in the playroom; the provision of such materials and resources should be developed further to extend the children's play.

5. The children display good listening skills: they can follow simple instructions in small and larger group activities. Many of the children show an interest in books, stories and early mark making; most join in with songs and rhymes during group sessions and daily routines. A significant number of the children display immaturity or delays in their speech and communication. The staff are aware of these needs; they now need to plan, in collaboration with the parents and local SureStart, how they can support these children more effectively.

THE PROVISION FOR LEARNING

6. The staff demonstrate a caring and supportive approach in their work with the children. During the inspection, many good examples were observed when most of the adults extended effectively the children's language and learning as they engaged in activities. During the inspection there was at times a very high ratio of one adult to four children; the deployment of staff should be reviewed to ensure that staff are used as effectively as possible in the organisation of the playgroup's daily routines and to ensure the children have sufficient opportunities to play independently. The latter part of the session was overly directed by the adults and constrained the level of engagement and decision-making by the children.

7. The parents are provided with information about the centre and their children's progress. There are some appropriate links with other agencies which should be strengthened further to help support the parent's contribution to their children's learning.

8. The staff team has useful short-term planning which identifies the resources and learning to be promoted; they plan a broad programme with a range of enjoyable experiences for the children. More attention should now be given to ensuring there is planned progression in all the areas of learning, and informed by the staff's observations and evaluations of the children's stages of development. In addition, the planning for physical play should be developed to give the children richer and more extended opportunities.

9. The provision for pastoral care within the playgroup is very good; especially notable is the children's very good behaviour and their settled play.

10. The playgroup's arrangements for safeguarding children are unsatisfactory and do not adequately reflect the guidance issued by the relevant Department. In particular the staff need to:

- update their training to ensure they have a full understanding of the child protection procedures and practices;
- ensure the policies and procedures reflect the practice; and
- share the updated policies with the parents.

11. The playgroup gives good attention to promoting healthy eating and has satisfactory provision for physical activity; for example the children have healthy daily snacks, and they have regular sessions for physical play.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

12. The playgroup leader and staff have recently transferred from working within the non-funded afternoon session; they are at an early stage in developing their new roles. It is important that the early years specialist (EYS), management committee and the playgroup leader work collaboratively to provide appropriate support, training and a strategic overview to develop the work of the centre and improve the quality further. There has been an absence of adequate EYS support from the Early Years Organisation in recent months.

13. The key strengths in this pre-school centre include:

- the very positive ethos based on caring and respectful relationships between the staff and the children;
- the children's settled and purposeful play and very good behaviour;
- the wide range of activities and experiences which provide good or very good experiences in most areas of the pre-school curriculum;
- the effective promotion of the children's personal, social and emotional development, interest in the arts and early mathematical language; and
- the supportive staff and the many examples of effective interaction during the play session.

14. The priorities identified for improvement are:

- the arrangements for child protection;
- the organisation of the latter part of the session;
- the development of the planning and assessment methods; and
- the collaborative leadership and management of the centre to ensure high quality provision.

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QUESTIONNAIRES

- The arrangements for the inspection of pastoral care and child protection included the opportunity for the parents and the staff to complete a confidential questionnaire prior to the inspection. Four of the parents responded to the questionnaire and one made an additional written comment. Although this was a low return of responses, those who did respond were very positive about the work of the staff and the centre. The responses from the management group and the staff questionnaires were also positive about the work of the playgroup. All of the responses have been shared with the staff and management of the pre-school centre.

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