

PRE-SCHOOL INSPECTION



Education and Training
Inspectorate

First Steps Playgroup,
Ballymena, County Antrim

Voluntary playgroup

Report of an Inspection in
October 2017



The Education and Training Inspectorate
Promoting Improvement

Providing inspection services for:

Department of Education
Department for the Economy
and other commissioning Departments

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1. Context

First Steps Playgroup is situated in St Joseph's Early Years Centre on the Doury Road in Ballymena. The premises accommodate a number of playgroups and the local SureStart Centre. Since the last inspection, the number of children has fallen to 13 and the number of staff has also reduced accordingly. Over one-third of the children's first language is other than English and a small number previously attended the SureStart programme.

Number of children:	Class 1
Attending part-time	13
Under 3 years of age*	0
Funded by Department of Education	13
With statement of special educational needs	0
Without a statement but receiving therapy or support from other professionals for special educational needs	#
With English as an additional language	5

Average percentage attendance for the previous year.	87%
Number of days open in previous school year	190

Source: data provided by the setting.

* On 1 July.

** The stages refer to those set out in the Code of Practice for the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs.

fewer than 5

2. Views of parents and staff

All of the staff responded to the confidential questionnaire. The responses were very positive about all aspects of the life and work of the playgroup. The written comments commended the staff's commitment to meeting the children's individual needs through, for example, relevant continuing professional development.

3. Focus of the inspection

In order to promote improvement in the interest of all learners, the inspection linked internal and external approaches to evaluate the:

- outcomes for the children;
- quality of provision for learning; and
- leadership and management.

4. Overall findings of the inspection

Overall effectiveness	Capacity to identify and bring about sustained improvement
Outcomes for learners	Very good
Quality of provision	Good
Leadership and management	Good

5. Outcomes for learners

- The children are settled and secure; they play co-operatively and purposefully for sustained periods. They respond enthusiastically to the high expectations of the staff and the regular daily routines, selecting and sharing thoughtfully the equipment and resources they need. The children are friendly and polite; most approach one another and adults with ease.
- The children are developing well their understanding of number, measures and sorting in meaningful contexts. They listen attentively to stories and most ask and answer relevant questions in relation to their engaging activities. The children's simple investigative and construction tasks and their representational artwork help them to build their understanding of the world around them. They use confidently and safely a wide range of authentic measuring and observing equipment both indoors and outdoors and access what they need independently using the various helpful prompts and labels in the play areas.
- All of the children, including those who require additional support with aspects of their learning, are making very good progress in all aspects of the pre-school curriculum.

6. Quality of provision

- Both indoors and outdoors, the staff present a stimulating learning environment, making creative use of the available space and introducing additional resources to extend the children's learning experiences and provide them with interesting challenges.
- The staff interactions with the children, including those whose first language is other than English, promote and extend the children's thinking skills, problem-solving and language development. The staff use mathematical language skilfully in meaningful contexts and prompt the children to explore and explain the meaning of new words and ideas as they arise during play. They often make good use of spontaneous opportunities for the children to build their learning further.
- The children who require additional support are identified appropriately; the staff support the children's individual needs sensitively and as a result, all of the children are included fully in the various activities.
- While the planning provides relevant guidance, the limited written observations and assessments do not match the high quality of the staff's practical work with the children or inform adequately the future planning. The staff understand the need to improve this important aspect of their work.
- Based on the evidence available at the time of the inspection, the playgroup's approach to care and welfare impacts positively on the children's learning and well-being. The staff value and encourage the children's efforts and suggestions within a relaxed and positive learning environment.

7. Leadership and management

- The dedicated and experienced leader has a very practical and child-centred approach to improving the provision; she is supported appropriately by the skilful staff team and management committee.
- The development planning has brought about a range of important improvements in the provision. The staff are not reflecting well enough on the guidance from the early years' specialist. They need to refine how they evaluate the impact of the improvement work on the quality of the provision and the standards which the children attain.
- There are effective links and helpful communication with the parents who are supportive of the work of the playgroup. Good use is made of visitors to the setting to enrich the children's learning.

8. Safeguarding

- Based on the evidence available at the time of the inspection, the arrangements for safeguarding children reflect the guidance from the relevant Departments.

9. Overall effectiveness

First Steps Playgroup demonstrates the capacity to identify and bring about sustained improvement in the interest of all the learners.

There is an area for improvement that the playgroup has demonstrated the capacity to address which is to improve the processes for observing and assessing the children's learning and use this information more systematically to inform the planning.

The ETI will monitor how the playgroup sustains improvement.

Inspection methodology and evidence base

The ETI's Inspection and Self-Evaluation Framework is available on the ETI website <https://www.etini.gov.uk/publications/inspection-and-self-evaluation-framework-isef-effective-practice-and-self-evaluation>.

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

The arrangements for this inspection included:

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

Reporting terms used by the Education and Training Inspectorate

Quantitative terms

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

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