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Evaluation of the...

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# SureStart Programme for 2-Year-Olds

June 2010



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



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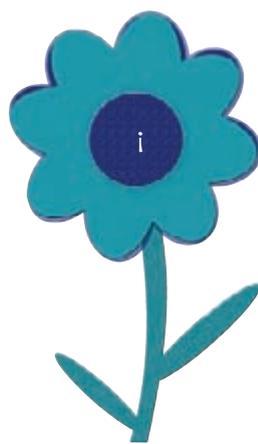
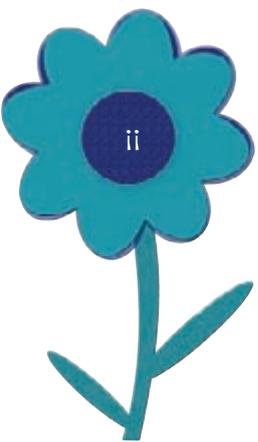


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## INSPECTION EVALUATIONS

The quantitative terms and percentages used throughout this report represent the nine SureStart centres visited as part of the evaluation of the programme for two-year-olds. The quantitative terms used 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%

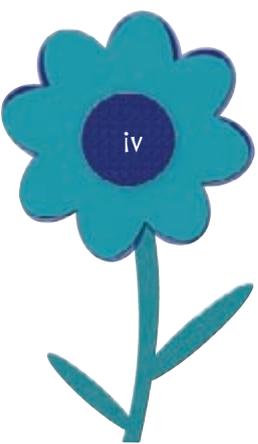
In assessing the various features of provision, inspectors relate their evaluations to six performance level descriptors as set out below:

DESCRIPTOR
Outstanding
Very good
Good
Satisfactory
Inadequate
Unsatisfactory
Glossary of terms

Pre-school - includes (a) nursery schools and nursery classes or units within a primary school, mostly attended by children between 3 and 4 years of age and (b) playgroups and funded provision within day nurseries, attended by children in their pre-school year, prior to starting year 1 in primary school.



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## 1. INTRODUCTION

### Background

1.1 Evidence based on inspection findings indicates that, while the overall provision for pre-school education has many strengths, too many young children commence their pre-school year demonstrating delays and difficulties with aspects of their development and learning. As a consequence, many of these children fall further behind and require additional support in order to help them play 'catch up' with their peers. The evaluation of the provision for pre-school education in the Chief Inspector's report<sup>1</sup> 2006-08 stated that 'while there has been a slight improvement in the quality of the provision made for children with special educational needs in pre-school provision, much remains to be done.' It also highlighted that, 'the continued growth in the numbers of pre-school children with speech and language delay points to the increasing need for speech and language support'. Often early intervention strategies and support within families are required prior to these children starting pre-school.

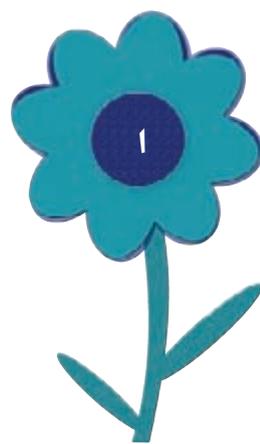
'while there has been a slight improvement in the quality of the provision made for children with special educational needs in pre-school provision, much remains to be done.'

1.2 SureStart has a focus on supporting the healthy development of children in disadvantaged wards by bringing health, education and parenting support services together in a co-ordinated way. Each of the programmes must include a number of core services, including:-

- outreach and home visiting;
- family support;
- primary and community healthcare;
- support for quality play; and
- support for children and parents with a range of needs.

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<sup>1</sup> Chief Inspector's report 2006-08



1.3 There are 32 SureStart programmes across Northern Ireland. The programmes cover a wide geographic area and have a good urban and rural mix. The primary target of SureStart is for children under four years of age and their families, who are living in areas within the 20% most disadvantaged wards. The programme for two-year-olds is an addition to the range of services already provided for these young children and their families. While specific guidelines for criteria are drawn up by DE, each SureStart manager has the flexibility and discretion to set additional criteria within the confines of the guidelines, which is specific to and reflective of local circumstances.

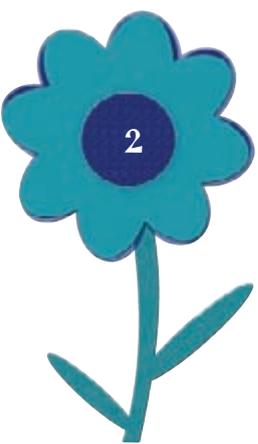
There are **32** SureStart programmes across Northern Ireland.

1.4 Approximately £9.5m was been allocated by DE, in each of 2006-07 and 2007-08, to the Core SureStart programmes. In addition, between 2006-8 extra funding was allocated through the Children and Young People Funding Package, which included £4.75m for the expansion of SureStart, and £2.75m for the programme for two-year-olds. In 2008-09 the total budget for SureStart was increased to £17.2m.

*Further detail on the organisation of SureStart as provided by DE, is attached in Appendix 2.*

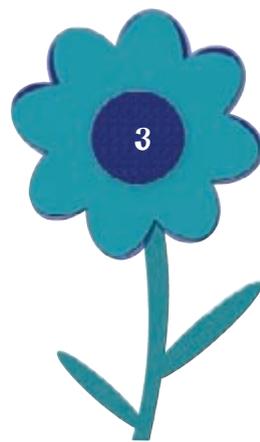
1.5 During the spring of 2008, the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) undertook exploratory visits to 13 SureStart centres, with a particular emphasis on finding out more about the programme for two-year-olds. The focus of these exploratory visits was to develop a more informed understanding of the developing programme for two-year-olds. In particular, the focus included:-

- the evolving programme operating for the staff;
- the experiences planned for the children;
- the developing partnerships with the parents and the professionals from health and other agencies;



- the range of specialised support available and provided; and
- the match between the programme activities, community needs and how this was being managed.

1.6 Following the exploratory visits of 2008, DE commissioned ETI to carry out a more detailed evaluation of the programme for two-year-olds within the SureStart centres. These evaluation visits took place in November 2009, and form the basis of this report. The visits were carried out by three teams comprising of early years specialist inspectors within ETI, three principals of nursery schools who were appointed by ETI as Associate Assessors (AAs,) and two health professionals, employed by the Health and Social Care Trusts (HSCT), with a specialism in speech and language therapy and child protection. The evidence from this evaluation shows that satisfactory to good progress has been made in the early development of the programme. This evaluation identifies several key areas for development which include training and development, the dissemination of existing good practice, access to external specialist advice and support, and more effective collaborative working practices. The Education and Training Inspectorate will monitor and report on the progress in addressing the areas for improvement.



## 2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 During November 2009, nine SureStart centres were visited and a total of 18 programmes were evaluated. The centres involved were randomly selected from the four Childcare partnerships. Two of these centres had participated in the informal exploratory visits in March 2008. Some of the centres were new to the programme while the remainder were well-established.

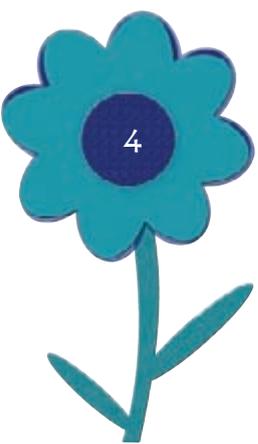
The centres involved were randomly selected from the four Childcare partnerships.

2.2 Prior to the visits, the management teams of the selected centres were each requested to complete a self-evaluation proforma which subsequently provided the agenda for the discussions held with staff during the visits (Appendix 1). During the evaluation visits the team observed on two separate occasions, the practice and experiences planned for the children in each programme, accompanied staff on previously agreed home visits and observed a selection of parent and child sessions. In addition, the team met with groups of parents, SureStart staff, specialist support staff (eg health professionals including speech and language therapists, occupational therapists and physiotherapists), staff from a range of pre-school and primary school settings and representatives from the SureStart management committees. All the stakeholders had the opportunity to put forward their views on the progress made by the children within the developing programmes and on any particular developments or issues arising.

2.3 This report summarises the findings of this evaluation under the following four main headings:-

- Overall Effectiveness;
- Achievements and Outcomes;
- Provision for Learning; and
- Leadership and Management.

2.4 The quantitative terms and percentages used throughout this report represent the nine SureStart centres visited as part of the evaluation of the programme for two-year-olds.



### 3. THE MAIN FINDINGS EMERGING FROM THE EVALUATION VISITS (NOVEMBER 2009)

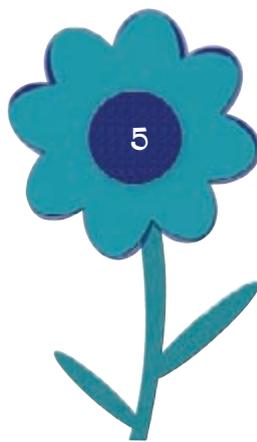
#### Overall Effectiveness

- 3.1 The findings from the nine visits demonstrate that a majority of the provision within the programme for two-year-olds (56%) was good or very good; these centres demonstrated the capacity for continual improvement. Most of these centres met very effectively the educational and pastoral needs of both the children and their families.
- 3.2 The following is a sample of the comments made by the parents in written evaluation returns or during a discussion with team members. Many of the parents spoke openly about the benefits of the programme for two-year-olds and the wider SureStart programmes for both their child and their family as a whole.

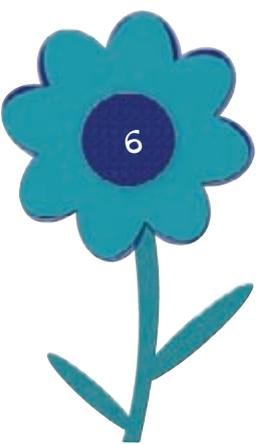
#### CASE STUDY

A group of parents talked about what they had gained from the programme and made the following comments.

- I suffer from bad depression and I feel the few hours that my child has in the centre gives me a bit of space for myself and then I can really appreciate the time we have together.
- I have moved around a lot since the birth of my daughter and when I came to live in this area I knew nobody. I used to walk around the estate and not talk to anyone. I have made a few friends since coming to this centre and at least now when I meet them I have something to talk about.
- We don't have a car so the trips are great – my child would never get to a farm and see real cows and pigs up close!

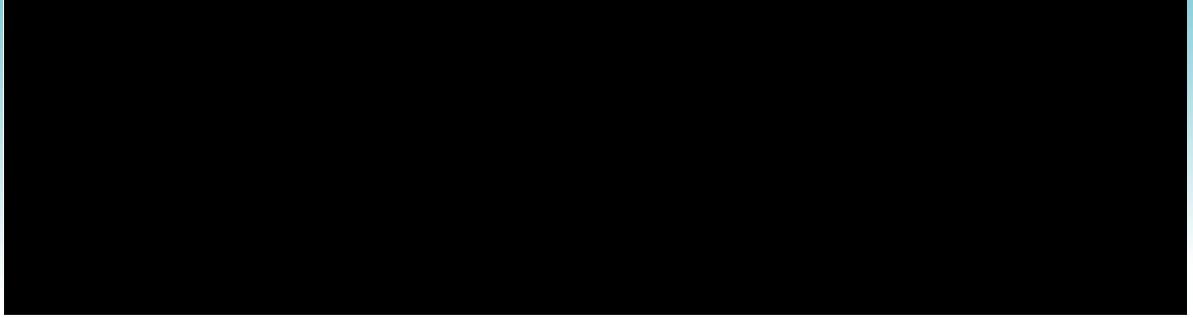


- I used to just shout at my kids because I didn't understand why they got on the way they did – the 'negotiating and problem solving' course was great and taught me how to sort things out with them and they listen to me now!
- My child never got a word in with the older ones in our house but now he has something to talk about everyday and we all listen to him and ask him about what he did at his wee group.
- I could never give her all the things she gets in the group – she loves it.
- The staff are great, if I need any advice or help I just ask them – they even lent me a buggy one time.
- I learned parenting techniques that I was able to share with my husband.
- I have learned so much about being a parent, I wish I had known all this when I had my older two – I would love to be able to go back in time and do it all over again with them.
- I have learned to value me – I'm not just someone's mum or partner.
- I've never finished anything in my life and now I'm looking forward to the next course. I never thought I would have the confidence to talk out in a group but it's great craic and I feel like I have something to add and people listen to me.
- I just love the mix of people, the staff, the other parents and even the grannies that come – you learn so much from talking and listening to them – I would recommend it to everyone.



3.3 A significant minority of the provision within the programme for two-year-olds (44%) was satisfactory although areas for improvement which needed to be addressed were identified.





The main areas for improvement highlighted by the visits related to:-

- the quality of children’s experiences;
- the integration of the professional support;
- the adequacy of the policies and procedures;
- the adequacy of the child protection policies and procedures;
- the organisation of the programme;
- the quality of the physical environment;
- aspects of leadership and management; and
- the quality of the accommodation.

These concerns are explained in greater detail under the relevant sections of the report which follows.

Figure 1 below shows the developing pattern for the overall provision for two-year-old children attending the programmes.

**Figure 1**

### Overall Quality of Provision



## 4. ACHIEVEMENTS AND OUTCOMES

4.1 Under Achievement and Outcomes the team focused on:-

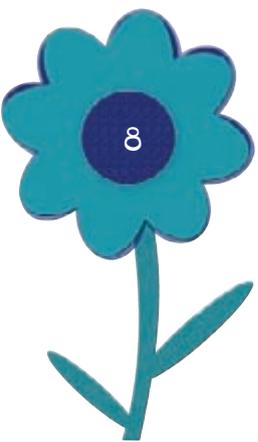
- promoting positive behaviour;
- the quality of the children's experiences;
- the children's achievements;
- the adult/child interactions;
- personal social and emotional development;
- language development;
- physical development; and
- cognitive development.

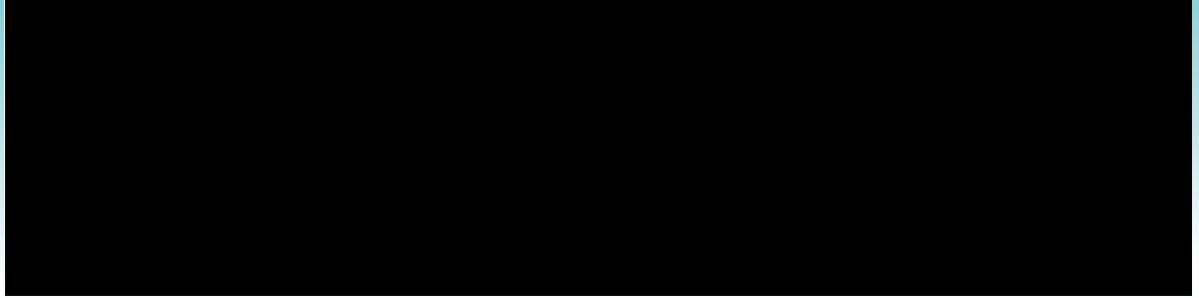
4.2 The promotion of positive behaviour within the majority (56%) of the centres is a strength. The staff had developed good relationships with the children and their families and the children responded positively to the staff's realistic expectations for appropriate behaviour. The children appeared to be happy and at ease in their new surroundings. However, in a significant minority 44% there were areas for further improvement. In these centres the ground rules for appropriate behaviour had not been consistently implemented, the children's level of engagement with their play materials was low and the noise levels were high. (Figure 2, below)

4.3 In a significant minority, (34%) the quality of the children's experiences on offer were very good and on occasions outstanding (11%). The quality of the involvement and engagement between the staff and the children as demonstrated through their conversations was good or very good in a majority of occasions (68%).

In one centre for example the staff promoted the children's language, attention and listening skills naturally throughout the session. They skilfully

The promotion of positive behaviour within the majority (56%) of the centres is a strength.

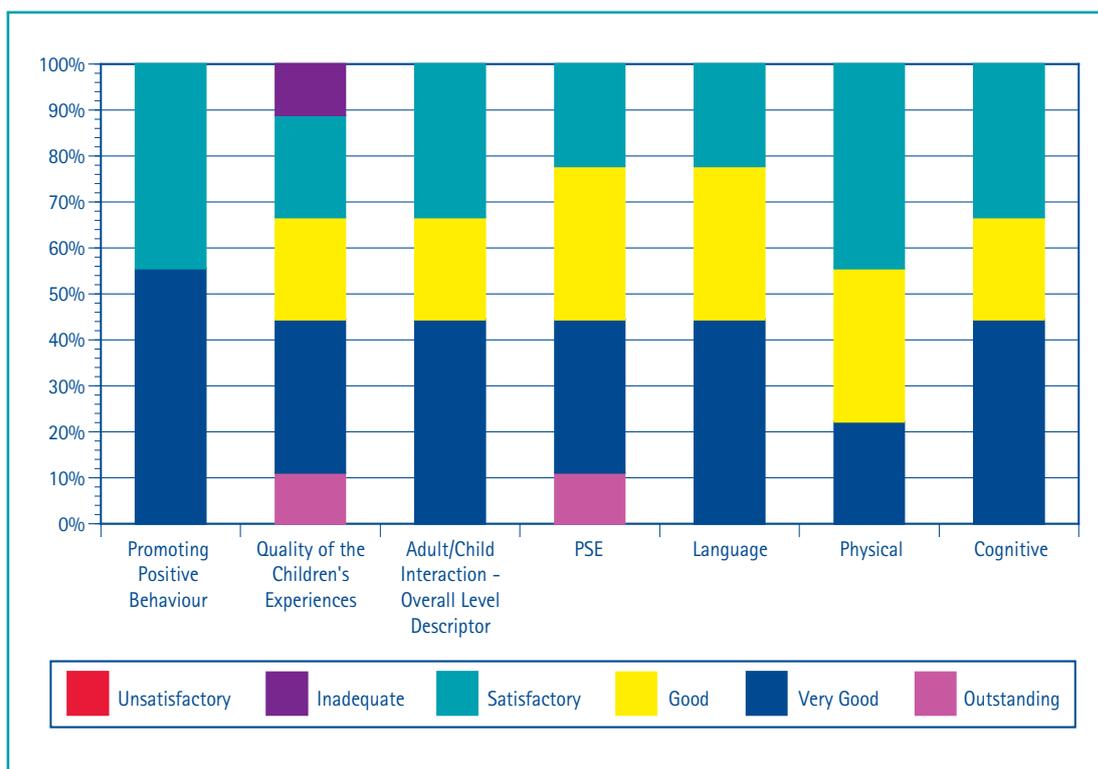




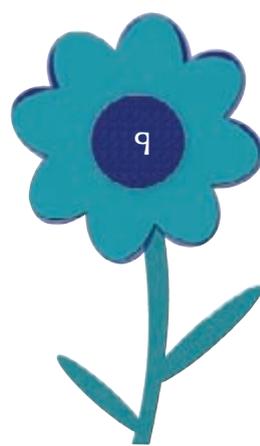
extended the children’s language and thinking, modelled good vocabulary using clear, simple phrases and sentences which were appropriate to the child’s level of understanding. However, in a significant minority (32%), there were notable missed opportunities to develop the children’s language, help them to extend their conversations and thereby maximise their learning. On these occasions staff were hesitant or unaware of how to initiate, sustain or extend the children’s language and learning.

Figure 2

Provision for Achievements and Outcomes

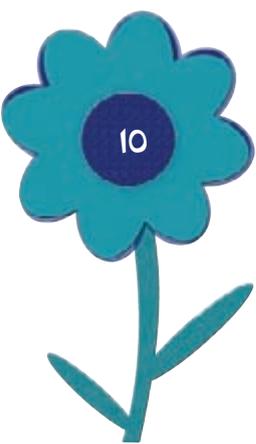


4.4 A high priority was given to developing opportunities for the children’s language development in a significant minority (44%) of the provision. In almost all of the centres visited, the provision ranged from satisfactory to very good. Children showed evidence of a developing vocabulary and increasing fluency when they were beginning to express their thoughts



and ideas. Staff reported that since the commencement of the programme they have observed significant improvements with many of the children's language and communication skills. At the time of the visits, the children were keen to talk about their activities, they were often observed browsing in the book corner and requesting stories to be read and were able to understand and follow simple instructions and routines. In a minority, (21%) of the centres, language was identified as an area for improvement. In these cases, the staff need to develop further their understanding of how to exploit effectively the language and learning opportunities on offer.

- 4.5 There was a big focus on promoting the children's personal, social and emotional development in most centres (79%). The visits took place in November and early in the programme but almost all of the children were well settled. During most of the visits, the children displayed confidence in exploring their environment, participated in many sensory experiences and played with a variety of natural items available in the playroom. These children demonstrated independence in hand washing, attending to their own needs at snack time and were able to choose freely from the range of resources available. Many were beginning to make new friendships with the staff and with one another. The staff also reported success for a minority of the children with potty training. On the few occasions where the children were less settled, the children still required their parent to stay for the duration of the session. For a significant minority of newcomer children, the language was a barrier to the settling-in process; the staff reported the challenges they faced in supporting the newcomer parents understand how to help settle their children into the new environment and wean themselves away appropriately while causing the least distress to their child. The settling-in process was also notably affected by the poor attendance of some of these children.



## CASE STUDY

The staff in one centre were facilitated by the speech and language therapist to identify as early as possible those children who were having difficulties in their communication and language development, and to implement tailored programmes to meet the children's individual needs. The parents were fully engaged in the process, and efforts were made by the staff to encourage those parents who were 'harder to reach'<sup>2</sup> to become involved in their child's therapy. The speech and language therapist was keen to develop a clear care pathway for the children identified with additional needs so that they could be signposted early towards the correct and appropriate services.

- 4.6 In a significant minority, of the centres (34%) the opportunities for physical provision was good and in a minority, (22%) they were very good. In these centres the children had good regular opportunities to improve their co-ordination and balancing skills using a range of suitable equipment, both indoors and outdoors, and at appropriate times during the session. These children were observed climbing and balancing, dressing themselves in a variety of imaginative play clothes, painting and sticking, and in manipulating the play dough. In a significant minority of the centres, the provision for physical play and development (44%) was satisfactory. Accommodation constraints had a negative impact on the lack of opportunities for physical play provision in a number of these centres. However, the staff did their best to provide an alternative physical play programme.
- 4.7 In a majority of the centres (68%), appropriate emphasis was given to promoting the children's cognitive development, 24% were deemed to be good and 44% to be very good. On these occasions, the children were able to play amicably, in a co-operative manner, many were beginning to learn to take turns, and respect the play of other children.

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2 'Harder to reach' - parents who require more persuasive support to participate more fully in the programme.

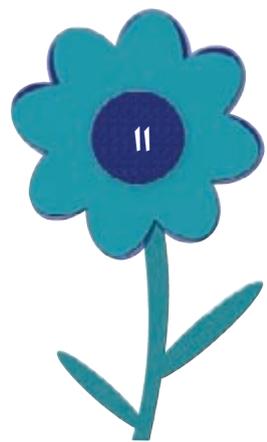
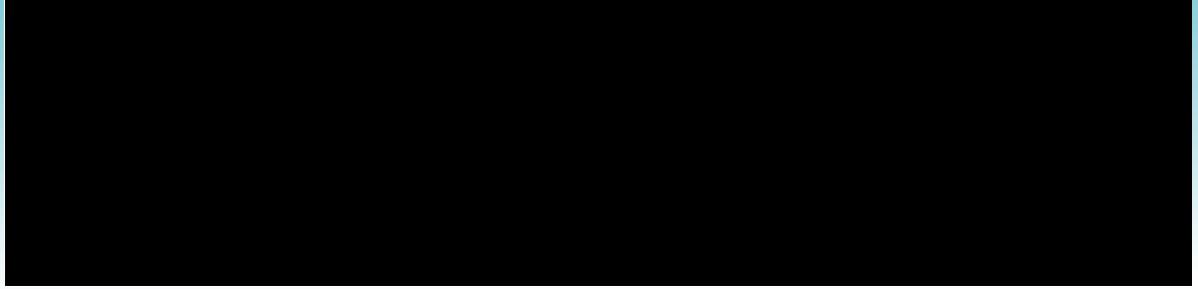


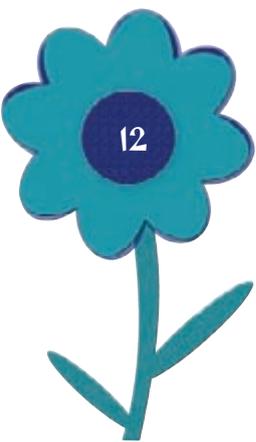
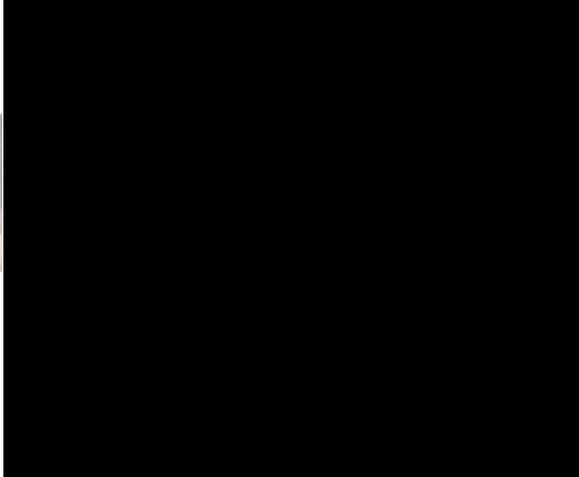
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A majority of the children displayed an interest in their chosen activities and were curious to explore their play environment. A significant minority, of the children asked questions about the play materials available, and were observed beginning to work things out for themselves.

- 4.8 In 32% of the centres the children’s cognitive development was deemed to be satisfactory. In these cases there were missed opportunities to promote the children’s sensory awareness, the staff were unaware of the limited attention span of some of the children, and also the need for them to respond more appropriately to meet the differing needs and interests of these children.

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## 5. PROVISION FOR LEARNING

5.1 Under Provision for Learning the team focused on:-

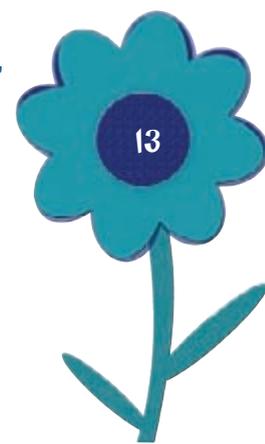
- the ethos;
- the integrated professional support;
- the partnership with parents and carers;
- policies and procedures;
- the adequacy of the child protection policies and procedures;
- the organisation of the programme;
- the physical environment;
- special educational needs:
- newcomer children<sup>3</sup>; and
- links with home/pre-school and primary.

5.2 There was a very positive ethos in almost all of the centres, characterised by a welcoming and friendly atmosphere, a child-centred environment, and good team working relationships. The children appeared happy and their needs were catered for well.

5.3 In a majority, (68%) of the centres the quality of the integrated specialised support ranged from good to outstanding. In the best practice observed, there was evidence of a well-established and effective, integrated partnership between the Health and Social Care Trust (HSCT) and the SureStart team in targeting early identification. The multi-agency approach,

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<sup>3</sup> Newcomer - those children who have English as a second language.



when effective, provides prompt and individualised support, empowering the parents to develop a resilience, and greater confidence to overcome difficult circumstances and provide a better start for their child. In one centre, the sensitive and child-centred approach adopted by the speech therapist, health visitor and play development home worker helped to improve the parents' attitude to health promotion, mental health, and positive parenting as well as as their capacity to help their children learn. In a significant minority, (32%) the opportunities for integrated specialist support were not as well developed as they needed to be. In these circumstances, these links were at a very early stage of development, trusting relationships were not yet well established and communication between all parties was poor.



### CASE STUDY

The staff in one centre reported that their monitoring of the 'Stay and Play' sessions indicated that both the parents and children thoroughly enjoyed the experience. Several of the parents reported an improved bonding with their children, how they enjoyed parenting more and had gained a better understanding of their child's needs and level of ability. This response was also indicated by the engagement of fathers and members of the travelling community. A 'water confidence' class, in the local swimming pool was particularly successful in engaging fathers who felt more confident in attending these activity-led sessions. In one particular centre a male outreach worker was specifically dedicated to support men involved in the care of their children.

- 5.4 The development of a partnership with the parents in most (78%) of the centres ranged from good to outstanding. In these centres the mutually respectful relationships established between the staff and the families



empowered the parents to reflect on and review how they carried out their parenting role. The parents reported how they now enjoy and appreciate more fully the progress and development their children are making and value the time they spend with their children. In these centres the parents were provided with a wide range of valuable opportunities to engage in their children's learning and development. Attendance at the 'Stay and Play' sessions was generally very good. These sessions were relaxed and the parents and the children were fully engaged in the play activities. The parents reported the changes they have observed in their children becoming more sociable, independent and capable of doing more at home.

### CASE STUDY

In one 'Stay and Play'<sup>4</sup> Session a group of mothers, a carer and their children joined in a dough-making session with the staff. The session was planned in advance and very well organised so that no time was wasted from the outset. The leader informed and involved her audience throughout the session, which kept everyone entertained and focused; there was a real sense of fun and enjoyment for all. Each child and adult was given a piece of the dough to play with and while most were happy to remain at the table and enjoy the materials, the others were free to play with the wide range of activities on offer. At the end of the session, the children were each given a small bag of dough to play with at home. Several of the parents remarked that they would make dough with their children in future.

- 5.5 In 22% of the visits the links and partnerships were evaluated as satisfactory. In these centres the parents were not fully engaged or involved in all aspects of the programme. There was a real need to improve the collaboration and involvement of the parents with all of the staff available through SureStart, to ensure better outcomes for the children.

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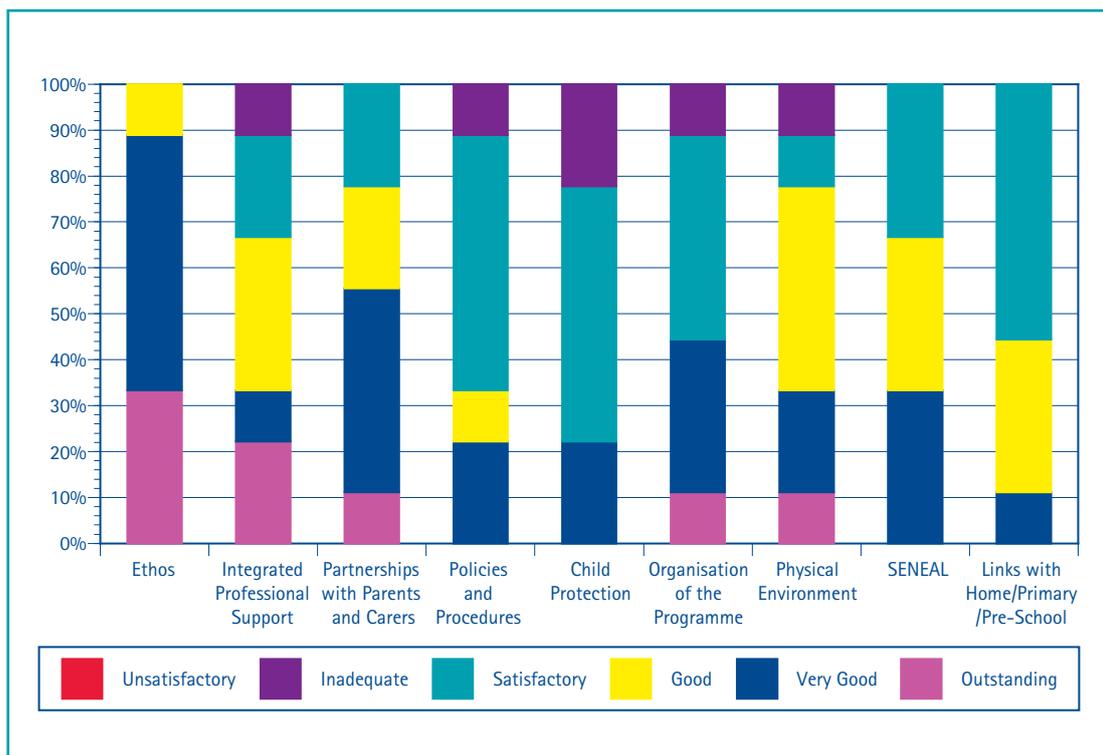
<sup>4</sup> *Stay and Play - parents and children play together supported by the staff.*



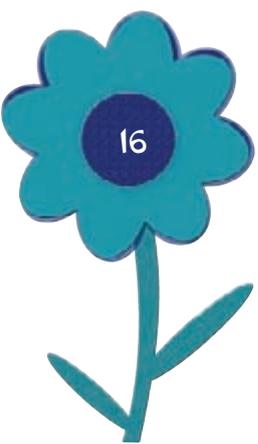
5.6 In a minority (24%) of the centres the policies and procedures in place to guide the day-to-day work of the staff were good or very good. In the majority of centres, (55%) these were satisfactory, with a minority (11%), deemed to be inadequate. The inadequacies were mostly related to the lack of child protection guidance to safeguard the children attending the centre and the staff in their work. The issues relating to these matters have been shared with the appropriate HSCT and the individual SureStart centre to address.

Figure 3

Provision for Learning



5.7 In most centres, (89%) the organisation of the programme provided appropriate time both for free play experiences and more adult-led activities. In a minority, (11%) of cases more attention needs to be given to the overall organisation of the routines, sessions, and the time allocated to the various activities.



- 5.8 The provision for newcomer children and the provision for children with special educational needs was good or very good in a majority (66%) of the centres. Good links had been developed with the family at home, prior to the child starting the programme, and prompt and appropriate support was being provided by the integrated specialist support staff. In a significant minority of cases, (33%) the staff were either not aware of, or had limited understanding of the child's needs with a subsequent delay in early remedial intervention.

#### CASE STUDY

Parent A spoke frankly about how the SureStart programme had benefited both her family and particularly her son who had recently been diagnosed with autism. Prior to starting the programme she felt anxious and concerned about how her son would adapt to his new environment. However, after talking to the various staff who were to be involved with her son in the programme, viewing the setting and attending various sessions, she was very reassured that his needs would be met. Her son settled very well into the programme and made good progress. He subsequently went to primary school where he settled quickly. She also mentioned how the programme had helped her other child who benefited from socialising with the children she met through the SureStart programme.

- 5.9 In one centre high emphasis was given to the delivery by the speech and language therapist of effective training programmes, for example Elklan or Hanen<sup>5</sup> to help children with, or at risk of developing language difficulties. This support was designed to improve the children's communication, language and social skills and to develop the staff's capacity to support the children. In addition, the speech therapist carried out an individualised programme for the child at home where the learning goals were also shared with the parents.

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<sup>5</sup> *Elklan and Hanen - speech and language programmes designed to help young children to communicate.*



## CASE STUDY

The speech and language therapist runs an adapted HANEN language programme called “Talk and Play” for parents who have concerns about their child’s communication and language development.

This programme has many elements of HANEN techniques such as:-

- being family focused;
- using video as a teaching tool; and
- home visits that involve the speech therapist demonstrating how to promote language through everyday opportunities.

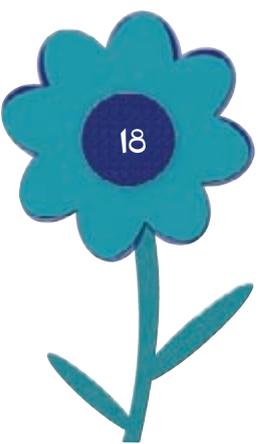
In addition, it is tailored to the unique literacy needs of the parents. It also aims to give the parents the knowledge they require to access local services. The course runs over six weeks with two home visits (parent and child) and four parent group learning sessions.

During the home visit the parent was able to identify strategies she had learned in the “Talk and Play” group sessions that she wished to use to help improve her child’s communication and social language skills. The purpose of the home visit was to review progress and to help the parent refine or adapt the strategies to help her child and to set joint goals for the child’s future.

The parent reported that by using the strategies the child had become more engaged, was imitating words and was using phrases. The parent was able to try new ideas while being videotaped, and to observe the benefit of her efforts. She was able to define clear steps to help her child move to the next stage of development.

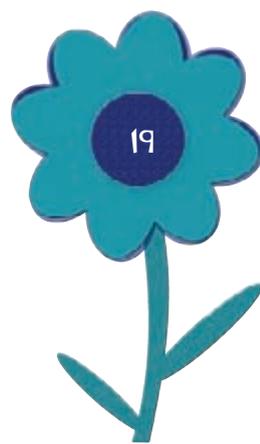
These goals were recorded and given to the parent.

The speech and language therapist observed that the child was communicating more in her home than during her time at the programme for two-year-olds. She encouraged the parent to bring the books and toys she was using at home and this enabled the therapist and the leader to set new goals for the child. The parent reported a high level of satisfaction with the programmes available to her.



5.10 In a significant minority of the centres (44%), the links established between the SureStart centre, the home, the pre-school centres and the primary schools were good or very good. In the best practice, there were good arrangements in place to ensure that the children made a smooth and secure transition to the next stage. The parents in one SureStart centre greatly appreciated the initial home visit and comprehensive Starter Pack, which gave clear information about the programme and provided reassurance and guidance regarding their involvement in supporting their child's development and progress. In one feeder playgroup, the leader reported that the children settled in very quickly to their pre-school year and the parents were very keen to continue to be involved in their child's education. In another centre, the Principal of the local primary school reported, that the children who had previously attended the programme with their parents, had settled more quickly into year one. These parents were subsequently more proactive and involved in school life. A majority (56%) of the centres the links were deemed satisfactory but a few areas were identified for improvement. These areas related to the lack of the exchange of information about the children's progress and development, to enable smooth transitions and continuity in their learning and support.

In the best practice, there were good arrangements in place to ensure that the children made a smooth and secure transition to the next stage.



## 6. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

6.1 Under Leadership and Management the team focused on:-

- leadership and management;
- staff training and development;
- accommodation; and
- resources.

6.2 In most of the centres (78%), the quality of leadership and management provided ranged from good to outstanding. In the outstanding practice, there was an effective leadership and management structure within the centre with a clear shared sense of purpose among the staff involved in the delivery of all of the programmes. Roles and responsibilities were clearly identified and there was a strong sense of collegiality. There was also a developing culture of self-evaluation which recognised the need to continue to ensure consistency in the quality of the provision and outcomes of the programme and to prioritise areas for future development. In a minority of the centres, aspects of the leadership and management were satisfactory (11%) or inadequate (11%). In these centres aspects of the management structure, the written policies, the procedures, planning and the monitoring and evaluation of the programme were at an early stage of development.

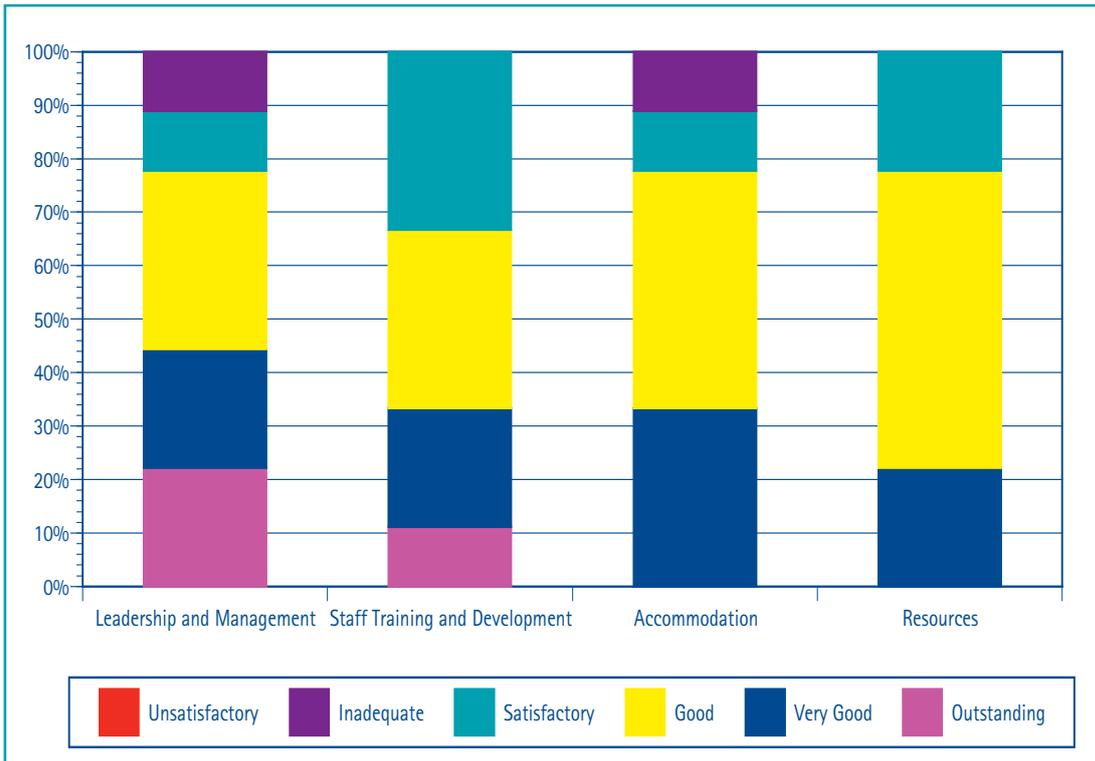
### CASE STUDY

All members of staff were aware of the importance of providing feedback to the parents and used different media to do this, for example, photograph books and displays, personal report journals, newsletters and both formal and informal one-to-one discussions. Equally parents were encouraged to give feedback to the staff about the programmes on offer and the impact these programmes were having on them, their child and the family.



Figure 4

Provision for Leadership and Management



CASE STUDY

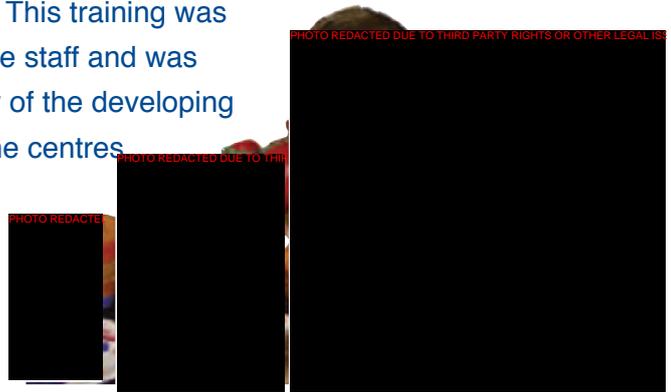
A group of staff talked about what they had gained from the training they had attended.

- ‘This course was very beneficial to me. Highly interesting. I have learnt a lot and opened my mind to a new approach to working with children’
- ‘I feel that this training would have been useful before starting my 2-year-old programme’
- ‘Some of the course was very repetitive and everything we learnt we already do in practice’
- ‘I feel that the course was successful in encouraging us to focus on the 2-year-old child and their specific needs. I feel that the training would be more valuable prior to the opening of a programme.’





6.3 The staff training and development received in a majority of the centres (67%) ranged between good, and outstanding. In the best practice the staff had access to high level training opportunities, and there was evidence of a developing knowledge and understanding of the developmental needs and progress of two-year-old children. This training was disseminated regularly among all of the staff and was having a positive impact on the quality of the developing provision. In a significant minority of the centres (33%) there was a need for all the staff to be provided with opportunities to access appropriate training, to complete fully the courses and to implement more effectively and collaboratively the knowledge, advice and guidance into their day-to-day practice.



### CASE STUDY

The sensory room in one centre was used very well to encourage quieter children to gain confidence in exploring their environment and to engage in conversation about their experiences. In one case, a young boy who appeared timid and withdrawn in the large group setting, was found singing in the peaceful atmosphere of the sensory room; this outcome was significant for the child and the staff at this time. The staff reported that the one-to-one sessions with a parent and child in the sensory room were very relaxing and on occasions, helped to identify at an early stage, children who had some degree of developmental delay. The service was also enhanced by the input from the speech and language therapist and the associated links to the community services.



6.4 The quality of the accommodation varied considerably. In most centres (80%) the quality was good or very good with appropriate indoor and outdoor facilities. Most of the centres (78%) had a good or very good range of resources to provide a suitably varied, challenging and developing programme for two-year-olds. In a minority of centres (22%) the quality of the accommodation was satisfactory (11%) or inadequate (11%). In these cases the staff, made the best use of the facilities available. In a minority of the centres (22%) the resources were satisfactory; there was a lack of natural and authentic items for the children to explore and experience in their play, and a lack of appropriate resources for the development of physical play.



## 7. CONCLUSION

7.1 The SureStart projects seek to deliver a number of core services which are tailored to the specific requirements within a local area. While they are at different stages of development, the SureStart programme for two-year-olds clearly has the potential to add value to pre-school provision and contribute positively to an integrated approach to meeting the needs of young children and their families. The foundations for such provision are already laid within the centres visited. Within many of the SureStart centres effective strategies for early intervention, involving the range of health and education agencies are in place and have the potential to reduce the barriers to learning for these children and their families. Research findings<sup>6</sup> show that early intervention such as those now in place, can in many cases prevent vulnerable children developing needs that require statutory assessment and support.

...the SureStart programme for two-year-olds clearly has the potential to add value to pre-school provision and contribute positively to an integrated approach to meeting the needs of young children and their families.

7.2 The SureStart centres visited demonstrate good examples of effective collaborative working practices between professional support staff. These include social workers, health visitors, play workers, auditory and visual impairment team members, speech and language therapists working together to draw up suitable and appropriate individualised learning programmes. In the best practice these are drawn up with the parents. As a result, the children and their families are able to receive prompt attention and support where appropriate, integrated into the day-to-day work of the programmes. More needs to be done, however, to extend these collaborative working practices and develop further links with the pre-school and primary organisations to which these children will transfer.

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<sup>6</sup> *Effective Pre-school Provision in Northern Ireland, a longitudinal Study funded by the Department of Education, Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, and Social Steering Group, 1988-2004, Stranmillis Press.*



7.3 If standards of provision are to rise, there is a continuing need for the implementation of effective strategic planning, better training, higher levels of qualifications, appropriate accommodation and resources, and effective support and access to specialist support when required. There is a high expectation that DE's Review of Special Educational Needs and Inclusion, its 0-6 Early Years Strategy, and the establishment of the Education and Skills Authority (ESA) will, when implemented, bring coherence to the policies, training and services affecting early years and ensure that children and parents receive the best possible services.

7.4 It is vital that clear, consistent and appropriate structures and processes are put in place to ensure that the children receive high quality experiences; and have a smooth transition from one stage to the next. Collaborative working relationships need to be developed further with the new Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) and the local Health and Social Care Trusts (HSCT), to ensure consistency of service and more effective early intervention for all young children and their families who need it.

In the best practice, there were good arrangements in place to ensure that the children made a smooth and secure transition to the next stage.

7.5 The evidence from this evaluation shows that satisfactory to good progress has been made in the early development of the programme for two-year-olds. This evaluation identifies several key areas for development which include training and development, the dissemination of existing good practice, access to external specialist advice and support, and more effective collaborative working practices. The Education and Training Inspectorate will monitor and report on the progress in addressing the areas for improvement.



## 8. KEY PRIORITIES FOR ACTION

8.1 The following key priorities for action were identified during the evaluation.

- The DE Early Years 0-6 Strategy, when it issues, and associated strategies need to ensure that all centres providing a programme for two-year-olds have access to highly qualified and knowledgeable specialist advice and support across the province in order to enhance further their individual programmes and provision for the children and their parents.
- DE should carry out a scoping study to identify the most appropriate qualifications and experience<sup>7</sup> required by the staff to support and promote good quality provision for the very young child.
- Consistent policies and strategies need to be drafted and implemented by DE to ensure that for each programme, appropriate selection criteria, attendance and management of application procedures are in place, in order to ensure that all the targeted children benefit from a balanced programme that represents differing abilities, interests, and gender.
- Continual training opportunities need to be provided and professional development to enable the staff to develop their capacity to do their job more effectively. This training should be particularly focused on the developmental needs of two-year-olds, the planning and implementation of appropriate programmes, supporting and assessing children's developmental progress, and involving and working with their parents.
- All agencies who support and advise the SureStart providers and those with responsibilities for quality improvement, including DE, DHSSPS, Health and Social Care Trusts (HSCT) and Childcare Partnerships, need to work more collaboratively to provide consistently high quality front-line services to both the children and their families.

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<sup>7</sup> Minimum quality standards.





- Joint action from DE and DHSSPS is required to ensure more effective inter-agency collaboration and strategic planning and improved accountability arrangements to ensure that the accommodation, premises, equipment and resources are at appropriate standards and consistently administered across the province.
- More effective links should be developed, including the sharing of relevant information, and appropriate transition procedures between the child's home, the SureStart centre, and the pre-school provider, in order to ensure appropriate progression and continuity for each child.
- Networking and support arrangements are needed to enable the dissemination of good practice and professional development and also the sharing and discussion of the issues in this evaluation report.

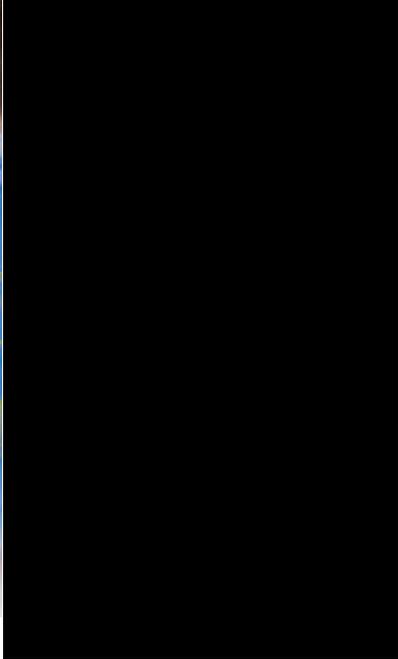


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## SELF-EVALUATION PROFORMA BASED ON THE PROGRAMME FOR TWO-YEAR-OLDS (SEP)

The following questions with additional prompts will be used during your evaluation visit. You may find it useful to reflect on these areas as a team and complete the various sections together.

If you choose to complete the document it would be useful if you could forward it to Inspection Services Branch (ISB) by **Monday 9 November 2009** in preparation for your forth-coming visit.

Please use bullet points.

**1. What steps do you take towards ensuring that the children are happy, safe and secure in your centre?**

How does the centre ensure that the children settle into the programme?

Are there any links across the community and/or, with other agencies to ensure cohesion in helping the children and their families feel more safe and secure within the centre?

What evidence do you have to suggest that the children are happy and engaged in purposeful play?

		Evidence
Strengths:		
Areas of Development		

**2. How do you monitor the children’s progress and development?**

Outline how you observe the children and record appropriate information that is used to inform the future programme?

Is this information shared with the parents/pre-school centres and how do you do this?

Do you have any evidence of improved outcomes eg health, language development?



How does the centre meet the different learning needs and interests of all of the children, for example those children with special educational needs or children for whom staff have initial concerns?

		Evidence
Strengths:		
Areas of Development		

**3. How do you ensure that the programme that you have designed is meeting the needs of the children and their families?**

Give examples of background information received prior to the children starting at your centre.

		Evidence
Strengths:		
Areas of Development		

**4. What arrangements are in place to monitor and evaluate the current provision and the developing programme?**

What changes or adaptations have you made in the interim period?

How have these changes improved the quality of the provision?

What are you noticing with regard to the range of needs and stage of development within the group of children coming into the programme (group dynamics)?

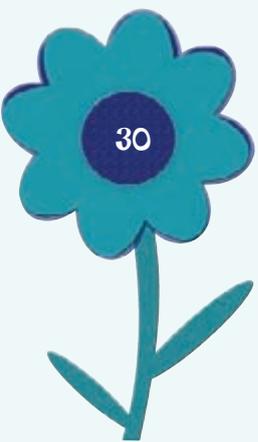
What are the children with specific needs gaining from being with their peers eg positive role models?

Monitoring visits - Staff meetings - Feedback from the staff.

		Evidence
Strengths:		
Areas of Development		

**5. Outline the links/partnerships with other professionals/agencies to support children and their families.**

Which aspects are successful and why? What could be improved?



Are there any links being made for the children and their families after they outgrow the services of SureStart, if so what are they?

What long-term benefits, if any have you noted?

		Evidence
Strengths:		
Areas of Development		

**6. What steps do you take to engage with the more vulnerable (hard to reach) families within the community?**

How do you deal with reluctance, defensiveness, challenging behaviour or anti-social behaviour which may come from the children or within the family organisation or be observed in the community?

How effective are you in dealing with related mental and emotional problems within the family/within the centre?

Do you seek/receive support from any other agencies? How effectively do you feel you work together?

What percentage of 'hard to reach' families are not engaging fully with the programme?

		Evidence
Strengths:		
Areas of Development		

**7. How do you monitor and evaluate the quality of work with the parents?**

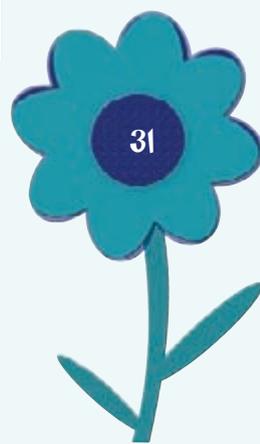
How are parents view sought and acted upon? Give examples.

Are home visits an integral part of the programme? What impact do these visits have?

How are they monitored and evaluated?

In what other ways are the parents involved in the programme?

		Evidence
Strengths:		
Areas of Development		



**8. What influence or impact is the work of the SureStart programme having on home practices, attitudes or values?**

Give examples of any changes reported by the parents?

What information is provided for the parents at different stages of the programme?

How do you know if they are happy with the services you provide? If they are not happy, what steps do you take to overcome or resolve their concerns?

		Evidence
Strengths:		
Areas of Development		

**9. Have you developed any links with the local pre-school/primary schools to which these children will attend?**

Outline any feed-back you have received from local pre-school/primary school staff regarding children who have previously experienced the SureStart programme for two-year-olds, for example changes, patterns or trends in the children's behaviours and skills?

		Evidence
Strengths:		
Areas of Development		

Please provide any further information which you feel is relevant to this evaluation activity. We are particularly interested in any emerging trends in the issues affecting children and families within the local community.



## STATEMENT, FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION, ON THE BACKGROUND TO THE SURESTART PROGRAMME FOR 2-YEAR-OLDS

### Background to the SureStart Programme for 2-Year-Olds

**References to “2-Year-Olds” for the purposes of the SureStart Programme for 2-Year-Olds, is defined as those children in their penultimate pre-school year and includes children aged 2-3.**

1. A Department of Education review of pre-school provision published in 2006 indicated that 14% of pre-school places in statutory Nursery schools/ classes for 3 and 4-year-olds were in fact occupied by children in the age range of age 2-3 years. It was therefore the Department’s intention at that time to review the lower age limit for entry to Nursery School.
2. Research has, however, indicated that young children from vulnerable backgrounds can benefit from more than 1 year’s high quality pre-school education and care. To address this, the Secretary of State’s Children and Young Person’s Package (March 2006) announced funding for a developmental programme for 2-year-olds, which would focus on constructive play in group settings to enhance children’s social and emotional development, build on their communication and language skills and encourage imagination through play.
3. The Programme has natural links to both SureStart and pre-school, and aims to help to create a seamless transition to the pre-school environment. It engages closely with parents and provides a joint care/learning environment, to support parents, and benefit these young children.
4. In February 2007, DE publicly advertised a tender for a suitable partner to develop the Programme and accompanying training for SureStart practitioners, to ensure coherence and consistency in approach. The tender was secured by NIPPA (now Early Years, the Organisation for Young Children) and training commenced later that year. The Programme for



2-Year-Olds is based on frameworks developed for very young children by DfES in England, and international approaches to early years practice.

5. There are currently just under 100 Programme settings now operational within the 32 SureStart Partnerships and 2 affiliated local Projects. DE guidelines stipulate that each setting should offer provision for 12 children per session, for at least 7½ hours per week. The length of each session should not exceed 2½ hours, with a child/adult ratio of 1:4.

### Concept

1. The Birth to Three Matters Framework (Department for Education and Skills [DfES]) and the Early Years Foundation Stage (DfES) provided the underpinning framework for the development of the programme in Northern Ireland. Together, these frameworks identify the developmental support needs of children aged 0-3 years and 0-5 years.
2. The Programme for 2-Year-Olds aims to complement and provide a seamless transition to pre-school and other services for 3-year-olds. The Programme is seen to have the potential to create a lasting link between home and an early years setting, in a manner which recognises each child as individual, values the role of the parent as the first educator and actively encourages the participation of the family in supporting learning and development opportunities. This will help to lead to the development of a strong relationship between families and practitioners, and an increase in parents' confidence which will last through their child's entry into formal education and beyond. The Programme also aims to build upon and complement other services being provided within SureStart, with a focus on three key areas:
  - children's physical, social, emotional and cognitive development with a focus on age appropriate play-based learning and enjoyment;
  - creating a learning and development strategy for staff in relation to the needs of young children and how practitioners can support their development in an appropriate manner;
  - supporting a partnership with parents that builds on knowledge and skills of parents in relation to their own children and focuses on positive play and learning, speech and language development, behaviour management support, child development, emotional well-being and dispositions for learning.



## Framework

The Programme for 2-Year-Olds follows the four themes outlined in the (DfES) Early Years Foundation Stage:-

### ***A Unique Child***

- Every child is a competent learner from birth who can be resilient, capable, confident and self-assured.

### ***Positive Relationships***

- Children learn to be strong and independent from a base of loving and secure relationships with parents and/or a key person.

### ***Enabling Environments***

- The environment plays a key role in supporting and extending children's development and learning.

### ***Learning and Development***

- Children develop and learn in different ways and at different rates and all areas of Learning and Development are equally important and inter-connected.

## Components of the Developmental Programme for 2-Year-Olds

1. The SureStart Programme for 2-Year-Olds focuses on the positive potential of young children and recognises the importance of a play based approach to their development and understanding of the world around them. It is constructed not just with a view to preparation for the next stage for children, but rather as part of the child's natural process. Each Programme setting should include the following:
  - basic trust in the child as an initiator, an explorer and a self learner;
  - an environment for the child that is physically safe, cognitively challenging and emotionally nurturing;
  - time for uninterrupted play;
  - freedom to explore and interact with other infants;
  - active participation of the infant in all caring activities;



- sensitive documentation and observation of the child in order to understand his/her needs;
- consistency and clearly defined limits and expectations in order to develop agency and efficacy in young children.

2. All Programmes should provide:

- opportunities for the development of physical skills, both indoors and outdoors;
- opportunities for language development through rhymes, storytelling, music and dramatic activities;
- opportunities to express initiative, solve problems, express feelings, develop communication skills and have their views listened to and respected;
- opportunities to form social relations with a primary care giver, other children and unfamiliar adults;
- opportunities for exploration and early logic;
- opportunities for artistic and creative development;
- opportunities to make connections within the wider community and the world around them;
- opportunities for children with special or additional needs.

3. Active and respectful partnerships with parents are a core element of the Programme. Parental involvement is crucial at this stage of a child's development. This builds upon the ethos already within the SureStart philosophy. Practitioners consider the benefits of offering families the opportunity to experience aspects of the Programme within a workshop setting and within the home environment. In this way learning for the 2-year-old can be maximised and parents are more likely to remain engaged throughout the Programme.

**Guidance Pack**

A Guidance Pack for SureStart practitioners working with 2-year-olds was prepared, to compliment and extend the training for staff, by Early Years the Organisation for young children.

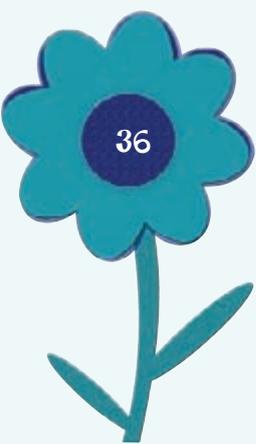




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Evaluation of the...

## SureStart Programme for 2-Year-Olds



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