

PRE-SCHOOL INSPECTION



Education and Training
Inspectorate

Laughterland Early Years,
Toomebridge

Report of an Inspection
in January 2012

STATISTICAL INFORMATION

Name of playgroup centre:	Laughterland Early Years
Address:	Black Park Road TOOMEBRIDGE Co Antrim BT41 3SL
Management Type:	Voluntary
Date of inspection:	26 January 2012
Date of previous inspection:	N/A

1. Details of Children

	am session	pm session
Total number of children:		
attending the playgroup centre	30	-
in their immediate playgroup year	25	-
funded by Department of Education (DE)	24	-
qualifying under DE admission criteria 1 & 2	3	-
with a 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	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	94%	-

* Calculated from the date when the intake was complete

** Denotes a number less than 5

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	0
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	-	183

4. Parental Questionnaires

Number issued to parents:	24
Percentage returned	63%
Number of written comments:	**

LAUGHTERLAND EARLY YEARS, TOOMEBRIDGE, CO ANTRIM, BT41 3SL (3AB-0574)

1. Laughterland Early Years is accommodated in a temporary mobile building adjacent to the Sean O'Leary Gaelic Athletic Club hall on premises belonging to the Newbridge Football Club. The centre has received funded places since September 2010 and the leader and her three assistants were in post prior to this time. The centre has had the support of an independent early year's specialist (EYS) since September 2010.

2. In most of the areas inspected, the quality of education provided in this centre is satisfactory; the strengths outweigh areas for improvement in the provision. The inspection has identified areas for improvement in standards, learning and teaching, and 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 monitor and report on the centre's progress in addressing the areas for improvement over a 12-24 month period.

CHILDREN'S ACHIEVEMENTS

3. The children demonstrate good progress in their overall development in relation to their age and the time of the year. They appear very happy and confident and are familiar with the daily routines. The children are very well-behaved and engage willingly with the adults. The majority of the children were observed playing co-operatively and with purposeful engagement in the small world play, in dough play, in the home corner and other activities.

4. During the inspection, there were good opportunities for the children to access attractive books linked to the theme of winter and cooking. A small number of children enjoyed browsing through books independently and told stories to each other. The children participated enthusiastically in the group story session and displayed very good attention and listening skills. They demonstrated a very good recall of facts about the day, the season and the weather during the morning greeting session. It is important that this activity does not last too long and become too formal for the children's age and stage of development. Most of the children can recognise their name; the staff need to provide them with opportunities to label their work independently and a wider range of opportunities and resources to experiment with mark making.

THE PROVISION FOR LEARNING

5. The staff work hard to create a welcoming and inviting learning environment for the children. There are distinct areas of play and good use is made of all the available space. The children's work is valued and displayed around the room. The staff need to introduce more text and written captions and to make use of photographs to support further the children's language development. The daily routine provides a valuable session of extended play along with an appropriate length of time for story, rhymes and physical play experiences. The snack routine provides good opportunities for the children to develop their independence, engage with the staff in conversations and acquire important social skills in an informal family-style environment. The quality of the staff interactions with the children was always satisfactory and on occasion good. The staff need to develop further their questioning techniques in order to ensure that they extend more effectively the children's learning, language and thinking skills.

6. The centre's educational programme offers satisfactory to good opportunities for learning in all of the areas of the pre-school curriculum. The points which follow illustrate specific aspects of the programme.

- Good attention is given to promoting the children's personal, social and emotional development. The staff use well the daily routines and organisation of the playroom to encourage the children to develop their independence. Minor issues between the children are handled sensitively and with a positive conclusion.
- There are good opportunities for the children to discuss and recognise shapes and colours within the centre and opportunities to encourage the children to count are well used by the staff. Action rhymes and songs are also used well to promote counting and shapes; however, there were missed opportunities for staff to develop further the children's knowledge and use of early mathematical language across all areas of the pre-school curriculum.
- The range of creative opportunities within the centre is limited and during the inspection the planned activities were overly adult directed. Where children had more scope to explore their own ideas, particularly at the play dough, they responded well and displayed good creativity.
- The staff use a good variety of themes and topics to develop the children's understanding of the world around us. During the inspection, through the topic of winter, they were experiencing and observing ice and discussing arctic animals. The children displayed a good understanding of the season of winter during discussions about the weather and winter clothes.
- The children are provided with a wide range of opportunities to develop their manipulative skills across all the areas of learning. The staff should ensure that outdoor play activities provide the children with a choice of activities to promote more effectively their physical development.

7. The staff work well as a team and have made a useful start in developing their planning. They operate a key worker system for observing the children and they are recording and beginning to assess the children's responses and progress. The staff now need to focus more sharply on the learning potential for each activity and link the observations of the children's responses more clearly within the short-term plans, in order to demonstrate evidence of progression and challenge throughout the year for the children. It will be important that the staff's evaluations of the weekly planning focus clearly on the learning that has taken place.

8. The centre has developed good links with the parents and the feeder primary schools within the community. The staff provide three parent meetings and one written report each year to inform parents of their child's progress. The parents also receive a monthly newsletter with information about events in the centre; this now needs to be developed further to provide the parents with more detailed information about how they can support their children's learning at home. The staff have actively sought the opinions of the parents about the settling in process and the initial parent meeting through a questionnaire with a highly positive response.

9. The quality of the arrangements for pastoral care in the centre is good. This is evidenced through the very positive ethos and the happy, family atmosphere within the centre. The staff demonstrate a strong commitment to the care and well-being of the children and there is an atmosphere of mutual respect and very good working relationships at all levels.

10. The playgroup has satisfactory arrangements in place for safeguarding children. These arrangements broadly reflect the guidance issued by the relevant Department but the following areas need to be addressed:

- the written policies for 'Child Protection', 'Positive Behaviour' and 'The Personal Care of Children' need to be reviewed to ensure that they are fully comprehensive; and
- there should be a designated person appointed on the Management Committee with responsibility for child protection who would need to access appropriate child protection training.

11. The centre gives good attention to promoting healthy eating and physical activity, for example, through the provision of a healthy snack and the daily opportunities to play outdoors.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

12. The pre-school leader is enthusiastic, motivated and provides good leadership for the staff. She effectively promotes a collaborative approach and is committed to the continuing professional development of all her hard-working team. The centre has received good support from their EYS.

13. The staff have made a good start in identifying targets for improvement and have developed useful informal methods of self-evaluation. The staff now need, with the support of the management group and the EYS, to develop and introduce a more formalised approach to continuous improvements within the provision through a development plan.

14. The key strengths of the playgroup include:

- the happy, caring ethos based on very good working relationships between the staff, the children and the parents;
- the well-behaved children who engage with great enthusiasm in their learning;
- the broad and balanced programme which provides satisfactory to good opportunities to learn in all areas of the pre-school curriculum; and
- the hard-working and dedicated leader and staff who are developing a collaborative approach to promoting improvement;

15. The areas for improvement include the need to:

- improve the quality of the staff interactions with the children to ensure that they effectively extend the children's learning, language and thinking skills;
- develop further the planning and assessment methods in order to focus more sharply on the learning potential of the activity, link the observations of the children's responses to the future plans more clearly and demonstrate evidence of progression and challenge throughout the year for the children; and
- develop and introduce a more formalised approach to continuous improvements within the provision through a development plan.

In most of the areas inspected, the quality of education provided in this centre is satisfactory; the strengths outweigh areas for improvement in the provision. The inspection has identified areas for improvement in standards, learning and teaching and leadership and management which need to be addressed if the needs of all the children are to be met more effectively. The Inspectorate will monitor and report on the centre's progress in addressing the areas for improvement over a 12-24 month period.

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. Fifteen of the parents (63%) responded to the questionnaire and a small number 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 centre's work; in particular, the parents praised the very caring staff and the happy, welcoming atmosphere. The responses from the management group and the staff questionnaires were also very positive. All of the responses have been shared with the staff and management of the pre-school centre.

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