

# PRE-SCHOOL INSPECTION



Education and Training  
Inspectorate

Little Acorns Playgroup,  
Coleraine

Report of an Inspection  
in June 2012

## STATISTICAL INFORMATION

<b>Name of playgroup centre:</b>	Little Acorns Playgroup
<b>Address:</b>	The Link 120 Castleroe Road COLERAINE Co Londonderry BT51 3RN
<b>Management Type:</b>	Voluntary
<b>Date of inspection:</b>	14 June 2012
<b>Date of previous inspection:</b>	14 November 2005

### 1. Details of Children

	<b>am session</b>	<b>pm session</b>
<b>Total number of children:</b>		
attending the playgroup centre	12	-
in their immediate playgroup year	12	-
funded by Department of Education (DE)	12	-
qualifying under DE admission criteria 1 & 2	*	-
with a statement of special educational needs	*	-
without a statement but receiving therapy or support from other professionals for special educational needs	*	-
with English as an additional language	*	-
who left in previous school year to attend reception provision within a primary school	*	-
<b>Attendance:</b>		
attendance** of funded children for the previous school year	94%	-

\* = fewer than five

\*\* Calculated from the date when the intake was complete

## 2. Details of Staff

<b>Number of:</b>	<b>Full-time</b>	<b>Part-time</b>
Staff, including leader	0	2
Staff holding recognised childcare qualifications	0	2
New appointments within previous 12 months	0	0

<b>Number of: ***</b>	
Students	0
Trainees	0

\*\*\* Total placements since September of current year

## 3. Details of Sessions

<b>Duration of morning session</b>	<b>Duration of afternoon session</b>	<b>Number of days open in previous year</b>
3 hours	-	195

## 4. Parental Questionnaires

Number issued to parents:	12
Percentage returned	65%
Number of written comments:	5

## **LITTLE ACORNS PLAYGROUP, COLERAINE, CO LONDONDERRY, BT51 3RN (3BB-0488)**

1. Little Acorns Playgroup is situated in a rural location; it is accommodated in a mobile within its own grounds adjoining Castleroe Primary School, Coleraine. The inspection focused on the funded session which operates in the morning for pre-school aged children.

2. In the areas inspected, the quality of education provided by this playgroup is good. The playgroup has important strengths in most of its educational and pastoral provision. The inspection has identified areas for improvement which the organisation has demonstrated the capacity to address. The Education and Training Inspectorate will monitor the playgroup's progress on the areas for improvement.

### **CHILDREN'S ACHIEVEMENTS**

3. The children generally settle quickly and the majority spend concentrated periods of time enjoying the wide range of activities available. The children demonstrate independence as they select and use their own choice of resources; they are making good progress in managing the recently introduced snack routine. A small number of children still require adult support to encourage them to share toys and engage fully with other children. The children's behaviour is very good.

4. Most of the children can talk confidently about their play and experiences with the adults. They listen well and participate fully in whole group activities involving stories, songs and music. While a good range of books and mark making materials are available these were not observed being used by the children during the inspection. The staff need to place greater emphasis on the children's use of books and mark making as an integral part of the play.

5. The children benefit from the opportunities to develop their own creative ideas using a range of materials; many produce representational work of a good quality. The majority of children enjoy exploring the wide range of resources in the role play areas and can play collaboratively with adult support. Many of the children show an understanding of early mathematical concepts and language associated with space, number and shape. The wide range of relevant topics and stimulating resources enhance the children's interest in the natural world. They use their senses to explore and investigate materials such as shells and shaving foam.

6. The children are generally developing their fine motor skills effectively and most participate in the physical play opportunities outdoors. The planning and management of the outdoor play needs to focus on progressively challenging opportunities for safe, energetic physical play.

### **PROVISION FOR LEARNING**

7. The staff create a very well organised, stimulating and attractive learning environment with distinct areas for play. The displays of the children's own work and the inclusion of many natural and real items enhances the environment.

8. The high quality of the staff's interaction with the children is a key strength of the playgroup. The staff are effective in promoting the children's language, thinking and learning as they engage in sustained conversations with them. The whole class group sessions are managed well. A small number of children would benefit from more targeted support to develop specific aspects of their learning and development.

9. The staff, working closely with their new independent early years specialist (EYS), are making steady progress in developing their short term written planning which is implemented by all of the staff. They have identified the need to continue this work to enhance the planning for learning in outdoor play, ensure progression in learning and reflect the children's stages of development more fully.

10. The staff know their children well and make relevant observations which inform profiles of the children's achievements. The staff are at the early stages of making assessments of progress which link and inform the planning process. The staff recognise the need for additional training, advice and guidance on how best to plan for and support children with additional needs.

11. There are very good relationships with the parents who are supportive of the work in the playgroup. They are kept informed about the work of the playgroup and their child's progress through a range of relevant meetings and information sheets. There are good pastoral links to the primary school to which the majority of the children transfer.

12. The quality of the arrangements for pastoral care in the playgroup is very good. The staff provide a safe, secure and happy environment for the children based on caring and supportive relationships.

13. On the basis of the evidence available at the time of the inspection, the playgroup has comprehensive arrangements in place for safeguarding children. These arrangements reflect the guidance issued by the relevant Department.

14. The playgroup gives good attention to promoting healthy eating and physical activity, for example, through a healthy break and regular outdoor play, which encourages the children to adopt a healthy lifestyle.

## LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

15. The playgroup leader is well organised and committed to developing the provision in the best interest of the children; the staff work very closely as a team. The progress within the group has been impeded by advice and support provided by their former, independent early years specialist (EYS) which was not fully in line with the pre-school curricular guidance document. Their recently appointed independent early years specialist (EYS) has made a good start in supporting relevant changes within the playgroup.

16. The staff are reflective in their practice and have developed a useful overview of developments to date. The leader, EYS and management committee should strengthen their communication channels and develop a stronger team approach to self-evaluation and continuous improvement which is clearly focused on quality provision in line with the pre-school guidance.

### **17. The key strengths in this playgroup are:**

- the very positive ethos and happy family atmosphere based on caring relationships between the staff and the children;
- the attractive, well resourced and stimulating learning environment;
- the broad range of interesting activities and experiences which provide good opportunities to learn in all areas of the pre-school curriculum;

- the high quality of the staff interactions with the children which promote effectively the children's language and learning;
- the effective management of the enjoyable whole group sessions based around stories, songs and music, and
- the promotion of the children's oral language and their interest in the natural environment.

**18. The inspection identified areas for improvement. The following are the most important areas that need attention:**

- the continuation of improvement to the planning process to ensure appropriate progression in all aspects of learning, both indoors and outdoors; and
- the need to use the assessment information gathered to ensure that the planned programme and adult support is tailored closely to the full range of children's needs and abilities.

19. In the areas inspected, the quality of education provided by this playgroup is good. The playgroup has strengths in most of its educational and pastoral provision. The inspection has identified areas for improvement which the playgroup has the capacity to address. The Education and Training Inspectorate will monitor the playgroup's progress on the areas for improvement.

**QUESTIONNAIRES**

The arrangements for the inspection of pastoral care and child protection included the opportunity for the parents, the management group and the staff to complete a confidential questionnaire prior to the inspection. The responses from the parents all indicated a very high level of satisfaction with the educational and pastoral provision. In particular they reported their appreciation of the friendly environment, the hard work of the staff and the very good progress being made by their children.

The responses from the management group indicated a high level of confidence in the staff and the work of the playgroup. The staff returns indicated a strong sense of team work among the staff in implementing a programme which meets the all round development of each child. All of the key messages from the responses have been shared with the staff and management of the playgroup.

**HEALTH AND SAFETY**

The staff and management committee need to carry out a risk assessment of the outdoor area. The current level of fencing and free access to the side and back of the area presents challenges staff supervision during outdoor play.

The use of wheeled toys on the sloping path should be reviewed.

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