

PRE-SCHOOL INSPECTION



Education and Training
Inspectorate

Mallusk Community Playgroup,
Newtownabbey

Report of an Inspection
in January 2012

STATISTICAL INFORMATION

Name of playgroup centre:	Mallusk Community Playgroup
Temporary Address:	Templepatrick War Memorial Orange Hall 849 Antrim Road TEMPLEPATRICK Co Antrim BT39 0AH
Management Type:	Voluntary

Date of inspection:	11 January 2012
Date of previous inspection:	N/A

1. Details of Children

Total number of children:	am session	pm session
attending the playgroup centre	32	-
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	0	
with English as an additional language	*	-
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	96%	-

* Denotes a number less than 5

** Calculated from the date when the intake was complete

2. Details of Staff

Number of:	Full-time	Part-time
Staff, including leader	1	3
Staff holding recognised childcare qualifications	0	4
New appointments within previous 12 months	0	0

Number of: ***	
Students	3
Trainees	0

*** Total placements since September of current year

3. Details of Sessions

Duration of morning session	Duration of afternoon session	Number of days open in previous year
4 hours	N/A	175

4. Parental Questionnaires

Number issued to parents:	26
Percentage returned	23%
Number of written comments:	*

REPORT ON THE INSPECTION OF MALLUSK COMMUNITY PLAYGROUP, NEWTOWNABBEY, CO ANTRIM, BT36 4QD (3AB-0575)

1. Mallusk Community Playgroup operates one part-time funded pre-school session. The parents pay a small contribution towards extended hours which includes payment towards a packed lunch. A majority of the children are in their immediate pre-school year and the remainder will have two years of pre-school education. At the time of the inspection, the group had recently moved to temporary premises and were operating with reduced resources as a result of flooding in their previous accommodation.

2. 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 (Inspectorate) will monitor the playgroup's progress in the areas for improvement.

CHILDREN'S ACHIEVEMENTS

3. The children settle quickly to activities and most spend sustained periods of time engaging in productive play in a wide range of activities. Those children who are at an earlier stage of development are well supported as they explore the environment. The children demonstrate very good levels of independence as they select and use their own resources and manage very effectively their own snack routine. The children are developing very good social skills as they co-operate with the staff and develop friendships with one another.

4. A majority of the children communicate freely and confidently to express their ideas and talk about their experiences. A significant minority have speech immaturities which generally reflect their age and stage of development. The children enjoy listening to stories and many show a high level of interest in browsing through the very good range of books available during the play session. They make very good use of the opportunities for mark making and a few children show a keen interest in emergent writing within meaningful play situations.

5. The emphasis on supporting the children's own creativity and imagination is a particular strength within the centre. The children are enthusiastic in their use of a wide range of creative materials to make models, draw and paint in a range of play contexts. Many of the children take on imaginative character roles; they initiate and develop their ideas in the stimulating role play areas.

6. A majority of the children show an awareness of basic mathematical concepts and a few are beginning to use appropriate mathematical language as they count, sort and make comparisons. They enjoy making constructions from junk and commercial materials, both individually and as a group. Most of the children are curious and interested in exploring materials and taking care of the playgroup environment. The staff develop appropriate themes and topics to enhance the children's awareness of the world around them.

7. The children are developing appropriately their skills to use a range of tools and equipment with confidence and dexterity. They enjoy the regular opportunities to engage in more energetic physical play in their current accommodation.

PROVISION FOR LEARNING

8. The staff have worked tirelessly in recent weeks to make a smooth transition to new premises and create a stimulating and attractive learning environment. It is thoughtfully presented to promote distinct areas for learning which are well resourced and support the children's independent choice and decision making.

9. The staff demonstrate a very good understanding of the pre-school curriculum and the needs of the children. The quality of the staff interaction with the children is a key strength; they are all sensitive and supportive in their work with the children and promote settled and productive play. They value the children's own ideas and build on them very effectively to exploit the learning potential of activities and extend their thinking, language and learning. During the inspection, there were many very good and excellent examples of interaction by all of the staff with the children.

10. The written planning is developing well and provides guidance for a broad and balanced pre-school curriculum which is implemented effectively by all of the staff. The staff incorporate suitable themes and topics and effectively include the children's own plans and ideas as an integral part of this work. The staff are working towards the further development of their plans to ensure that their observations of the children's progress link more closely to the planned programme. There is a suitable system in place to record the children's progress and achievements and report these to parents. It is important for staff to complete systematically this important aspect of their work.

11. There are good supportive working relationships with the parents; their opinions are sought and valued. Information is conveyed through notice boards, regular newsletters and meetings. This good practice should be built on further to foster the partnership between the parents and the work of the playgroup in supporting their children's learning and development. The staff are in the early stages of developing links with the local primary schools to which the children will transfer.

12. The quality of pastoral care is very good. There is an inclusive, welcoming atmosphere in which every child is valued and supported.

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

- the staff all need to update their training as soon as places become available;
- the relevant members of the management committee also need to complete their training as soon as places become available.

14. The playgroup gives good attention to promoting a healthy lifestyle. The children have regular access to the enclosed outdoor area and are provided with a healthy break-time snack.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

15. The playgroup leader and staff team have very effectively managed the relocation of the playgroup to temporary new premises. The leader is well organised, has a good understanding of pre-school education and is an effective role model in her own work with the children. The staff work effectively as a team and are all aware of their roles and responsibilities.

16. The current Early Years Specialist from the Early Years Organisation is providing good quality support, well-focused support and guidance which is valued by the staff.

17. A culture of reflection and commitment to continuous improvement is evident among the staff team. The playgroup has a development plan and associated action plans with some appropriate priorities for future improvement. These should now be amended to incorporate the areas for development identified through the inspection findings.

18. The key strengths of this playgroup include:

- the child-centred and inclusive ethos which supports very effectively the development of the children's confidence and self-esteem;
- the rich and stimulating pre-school programme which provides good to very good opportunities to learn in most areas of the pre-school curriculum;
- the very good quality of staff interactions with the children which promote effectively the children's language, learning and development;
- the children's very high levels of motivation and engagement in their learning;
- the children's interest in books, mark making, creative and imaginative play; and
- the effective leadership and management of the playgroup leader and the dedicated staff team.

19. The areas for improvement include:

- the further development of the planning to ensure progression in learning across all areas of the pre-school curriculum; and
- the further development of the assessment methods to reflect more comprehensively all aspects of the children's development and ensure the planned programme is tailored to meet the needs of all of the children.

20. 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 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. Six of the parents responded to the questionnaire and a small number made additional written comments. The responses from the parental questionnaire indicated a very high level of satisfaction with all aspects of the provision and noted, in particular, the staff, the quality of the pre-school programme and the effective settling in of the new children.

The responses from the management group indicated confidence in the quality of the provision and the work of the staff and commended the staff for their management of the transition to new premises. The staff returns indicated increasing confidence in the progress being made.

All of the key messages from the responses have been shared with the staff and management of the playgroup.

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