

PRE-SCHOOL INSPECTION



Education and Training
Inspectorate

Playaway Playgroup,
Islandmagee, Larne

Report of an Inspection
in January 2012

STATISTICAL INFORMATION

Name of playgroup centre:	Playaway Playgroup
Address:	Islandmagee Community Centre Middle Road Islandmagee LARNE Co Antrim BT40 3BW
Management Type:	Voluntary

Date of inspection:	25 January 2012
Date of previous inspection:	N/A

1. Details of Children

Total number of children:	am session	pm session
attending the playgroup centre	26	-
in their immediate playgroup year	15	-
funded by Department of Education (DE)	15	-
qualifying under DE admission criteria 1 & 2	15	-
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	*	-
who left in previous school year to attend reception provision within a primary school	10	-
Attendance:		
attendance** of funded children for the previous school year	98%	-

* Fewer than 5

** Calculated from the date when the intake was complete

2. Details of Staff

Number of:	Full-time	Part-time
Staff, including leader	0	5
Staff holding recognised childcare qualifications	4	0
New appointments within previous 12 months	0	1

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
3hours	-	188

4. Parental Questionnaires

Number issued to parents:	26
Percentage returned	53.9%
Number of written comments:	8

**PLAYAWAY PLAYGROUP, ISLANDMAGEE, LARNE, CO ANTRIM, BT40 3BW
(3CA-0576)**

1. Playaway Playgroup operates within the community centre in Islandmagee which accommodates a number of other organisations. The children have access to a small enclosed outdoor play area. The leader and three assistants have been in post since the centre joined the Pre-School Expansion Programme in September 2010. An additional assistant took up post in 2011, prior to the inspection.

2. In most of the areas inspected, the quality of education provided in this playgroup 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 will monitor and report on the playgroup's progress in addressing the areas for improvement over a 12-24 month period.

CHILDREN'S ACHIEVEMENTS

3. The children appear happy and the majority of them make independent choices and are familiar with the daily routines. They settle quickly to their chosen learning activities and many of them demonstrate good levels of engagement, concentration and perseverance. They are developing turn-taking and self-management skills. Approximately a quarter of the children have limited attention spans, are dependent on the adults for support in relation to aspects of their social skills, resolving conflicts, taking turns and playing appropriately with the materials. Small groups of more mature children engage in collaborative and creative play, particularly in the imaginative play areas, in the dough play creating a variety of star-shaped buns, playing purposefully in the craft, sand and water areas. The different types of play observed by the children reflect the wide range of needs and the stages of development represented by the children within the group.

4. During the inspection, there were good opportunities for children to enjoy stories and rhymes in small groups and also as part of regular adult-led activities. A small number of children also enjoyed browsing through books independently in the book corner. The staff are aware of those children who require adult support to develop their language, communication and social skills. The staff need to promote more opportunities for the children to display an interest in marking, early writing and labelling their work independently. The majority of children engage well in discussions with the staff and speak with developing fluency and clarity.

THE PROVISION FOR LEARNING

5. The staff work hard on a daily basis to create an attractive learning environment for the children. A review of the use of space of the playroom has resulted in the children benefiting from distinct areas of play. Greater attention is now given to promoting displays of the children's work around the playroom and creating some inviting display areas which highlight the monthly topic, the children's experiences and interests. The daily timetable is well-organised to provide a good balance of free play and activities organised by the staff. The staff need to develop further the organisation of snack, tidy up time and group activities in order to maximise the children's learning opportunities and experiences.

6. The quality of the staff interactions with the children was always good and on occasion very good. In the best practice, the staff used all opportunities for learning effectively and employed good questioning to encourage the children to think and extend their vocabulary. All staff were successful in promoting a sense of enjoyment in learning.

7. The staff have made a valuable start in developing the written planning. It identifies relevant themes and topics and highlights aspects of the learning to be promoted through the play areas. The staff now need to evaluate the daily sessions and indicate the minor changes to be made to the planning in response to the needs and interests of the children to help guide the staff to develop the children's learning. The staff have begun to use their observations of the children well to identify early any additional learning or behavioural needs that the children may have and monitor their progress. It will be important for the staff to identify the learning opportunities across all the areas of pre-school curriculum, both indoors and outdoors, and to add to, organise and use more effectively the resources currently available.

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

- Careful attention is given to promoting the children's personal, social and emotional development. The children are able to make independent choices and can access the resources they need. Instances of disagreement between the children are handled promptly and calmly and time is taken to help the children understand the effect their actions have on others. A good start has been made to the implementation of appropriate strategies to deal with instances of the children's challenging behaviour; this work now needs to be continued and reflected consistently in the day to day practice by all of the staff.
- The staff have introduced appropriate themes and topics to develop the children's understanding of the world around us. During the inspection, the staff successfully promoted the children's interest in nature through the close observation of a worm discovered in the outdoor play area.
- The range of creative activities provide the children with opportunities to experiment and children's paintings and art work are displayed attractively around the playroom. The range of creative opportunities is currently limited.
- There are good opportunities and resources provided for the children to develop their manipulative skills. While the children have daily opportunities for some energetic play activities outdoors, the staff need to develop further the programme for the outdoor area in order to ensure that the children have appropriate opportunities for physical and energetic play experiences.
- The children participate well in songs and rhymes which reinforce their counting skills. They are familiar with basic shapes; however there were missed opportunities for staff to develop further the children's knowledge and use of early mathematical language as an integral part of the play experiences.

9. The centre has developed good links with the parents and provides two written reports and two parent meetings each year to inform parents of their child's progress. The centre uses a monthly newsletter to inform parents about events in the playgroup. The current newsletter does not provide sufficient detailed information about how parents can support their children's learning at home. The centre has good links with the local primary school.

10. The quality of the arrangements for pastoral care in the centre is good. This is evidenced through the happy children, the welcoming ethos and the very good working relationships at all levels. The staff demonstrate a strong commitment to both the care and well-being of the children.

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

- the staff need to review and update the Code of Conduct for staff including the arrangements for the personal care of the children.

12. 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 for the children to play outdoors.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

13. The current pre-school leader is also the independent early years specialist (EYS) for the playgroup. She is enthusiastic, motivated and has worked hard over the last year to develop aspects of the provision for the children, since joining the Pre-school Expansion Programme. She will be leaving the centre at the end of January and new leadership and management arrangements are planned. It will be important for the leadership and management at all levels to ensure that the quality of the provision continues to improve.

14. The staff have made a useful start to self-evaluation through the development of action plans which target appropriate areas for improvement. The management group need to ensure that the playgroup is provided with effective and consistent support from an EYS in order to bring about the necessary improvement.

15. The key strengths of the centre include:

- the children who settle quickly to their chosen learning activities and the instances of purposeful involvement;
- the welcoming, caring ethos and the quality of relationships at all levels and the satisfactory opportunities for learning in all areas of the preschool curriculum;
- the recent improvements made to the learning environment; and
- the hard-working and dedicated staff and their openness to continue to improve their provision.

16. The areas for improvement include the need:

- to develop further the organisation of the daily timetable to ensure that routines and activities are well managed and make most use of all available time to promote the children's development;
- for development of the planning and assessment methods in order to ensure that the activities progress appropriately throughout the year and the staff have a shared understanding of the learning to be developed; and

- for the leadership at all levels to ensure the quality of the provision continues to improve.

17. In most of the areas inspected the quality of education provided in this playgroup 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 will monitor and report on the playgroup's progress in addressing the areas for improvement over a 12-24month 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. Almost all of the parents 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 were also very positive. Key messages from the responses and the very few concerns raised have been shared with the staff and management of the pre-school centre.

© CROWN COPYRIGHT 2012

This report may be reproduced in whole or in part, except for commercial purposes or in connection with a prospectus or advertisement, provided that the source and date thereof are stated.

Copies of this report are available on the ETI website: www.etini.gov.uk

