

PRE-SCHOOL INSPECTION



Education and Training
Inspectorate

Rainbow Stop Playgroup,
Markethill

Report of an Inspection
in May 2012

STATISTICAL INFORMATION

Name of playgroup centre:	Rainbow Stop Playgroup
Address:	30B Seaboughan Road Markethill ARMAGH BT60 1SD
Management Type:	Voluntary

Date of inspection:	31 May 2012
Date of previous inspection:	8 October 2007

1. Details of Children

Total number of children:	am session	pm session
attending the playgroup centre	24	21
in their immediate playgroup year	24	12
funded by Department of Education (DE)	24	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	*	*
Attendance:		
attendance** of funded children for the previous school year	97.7%	96.8%

* Denotes figure fewer than five

** Calculated from the date when the intake was complete

2. Details of Staff

Number of:	Full-time	Part-time
Staff, including leader	4	2
Staff holding recognised childcare qualifications	4	2
New appointments within previous 12 months	0	1

Number of: ***	
Students	2
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
2½ hours	2½ hours	184

4. Parental Questionnaires

Number issued to parents:	36
Percentage returned	63%
Number of written comments:	14

RAINBOW STOP PLAYGROUP, MARKETHILL, CO ARMAGH, BT60 1SD (5AB-0209)

1. The Rainbow Stop Playgroup is located in the community recreation grounds on the Seaboughan Road in Markethill. It is accommodated within a spacious mobile unit and has an attractive outdoor play area. At the time of the inspection, there were 45 children enrolled in the playgroup. Twenty-four of the children attend the playgroup in the morning and 21 attend in the afternoon. Nine of the children who attend the afternoon session will have a further year in the playgroup before transferring to primary school; all of these younger children were present on the day of the inspection. In the interim since the last inspection, in 2007, two additional members of staff have been employed and there has been significant development of the outdoor play area to support the children's learning across all aspects of the pre-school curriculum.

2. In most of the areas inspected, the quality of education provided in this pre-school playgroup is good. The playgroup has important strengths in most of its educational and pastoral provision. The inspection has identified two areas for improvement in leadership and teaching which the playgroup has demonstrated the capacity to address. The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) will monitor the playgroup's progress in addressing the areas for improvement.

CHILDREN'S ACHIEVEMENTS

3. Almost all of the children engage enthusiastically in their learning; they are confident, well-motivated and inquisitive about the world in which they live. They demonstrate good observation and self management skills, for example, in their personal care, and in the care of the outdoor environment. Many of them also demonstrate the ability to resolve minor turn-taking issues maturely and independently. The younger children are well settled; they are familiar with the playroom routines, integrate appropriately with their peers and demonstrate independence in their choice of learning activities. Almost all of the older children demonstrate a readiness to start school. During the inspection there were many examples of sustained, purposeful, collaborative play.

4. The adults place a strong emphasis on the development of the children's early 'reading', mark-making and language and communication skills. Most of the children express themselves articulately; they are confident in asking and responding to questions, can recite a wide range of songs and rhymes and many are beginning to develop a good sense of rhythm. They listen purposefully to each other during play and respond enthusiastically during large group story time. The older children have progressed, appropriately, to identifying their own name in print; they use this skill independently in registering for snack and for labelling their artwork and creative models. There is an attractive range of books displayed throughout the playroom; during the inspection, there were many examples of the children engaging in incidental story reading and of them 'reading' for each other. Most of the children integrate early mark-making naturally into all aspects of their play.

PROVISION FOR LEARNING

5. The atmosphere within the playgroup is relaxed and purposeful; there is a stimulating learning environment which fosters the children's sense of enquiry, supports the development of their observation skills and provides them with the opportunity to experiment with a wide range of natural materials. The staff make good use of photographs and wall displays to record the children's learning, to celebrate their achievements and to develop their understanding of print. It will be important for the staff to develop further the use of these displays in order to ensure that they represent the children's most recent experiences.

There is a good balance between free play and adult directed activities; the routines are well-established and the transitions are used effectively to support the children's learning. There is a need for the staff to review the routines for the end of each session to ensure that all of the children remain engaged in their learning.

6. There are very good opportunities for learning in all areas of the pre-school curriculum, both indoors and in the outdoor play area. The children's early mathematical experiences, the development of their understanding of the natural world and the quality of the role play are particular strengths of the provision. During the inspection, the quality of the adult interactions with the children during play was consistently very good; the staff engaged purposefully in the play activities using skilful questioning to extend the children's learning and to promote sustained, well-focused play.

7. The playgroup has developed good links with the parents. The parents are kept informed about the playgroup routines, important dates and events through the parent notice board and the newsletter. There is a need for the newsletter to issue on a more regular basis and for it to include the words of the planned songs and rhymes to enable the parents to support further the children's learning at home. The parents receive well-focused information from the staff about their child's progress and achievements through a progress meeting in both terms 1 and 2 and the written transitional report at the end of term 3.

8. The playgroup has good pastoral links with the main schools to which the children transfer. The transition programme for the children includes the effective use of 'Moving On' photograph booklets which encourage the children to talk about and become familiar with their new learning environment. It will be important for the staff to develop further the curricular links with the primary schools to ensure consistent progression in the children's learning as they enter the more formal phase of their education.

9. The staff work hard at planning to meet the needs and interests of all the children. The planning and assessment procedures have been changed twice in recent times. The current short term planning identifies clearly the planned learning for each activity; it also identifies, broadly, the action to be taken in response to the children's ideas and the planned support for specific children. There is a need for the planning to take place on a more regular basis and for it to be developed further to include well-focused evaluations of the children's levels of engagement and response to the learning activities. The staff also need to develop further the observation and assessment procedures in order to track the children's progress and to better inform the planning for individual children.

10. The quality of the arrangements for pastoral care within the playgroup is very good. This is evidenced through the caring learning environment, through the arrangements for the children's transition to primary school and through the very good working relationships at all levels.

11. The playgroup has satisfactory arrangements in place for safeguarding the children. These arrangements broadly reflect the guidance issued by the relevant Department but there is a need to ensure that all members of staff have a clear understanding of the playgroup's procedures for reporting and recording concerns about child protection and safeguarding and that the parents are provided with specific information about the arrangements for the children's intimate care

12. The playgroup gives very good attention to promoting healthy lifestyles through, for example, the healthy break routines, the dental hygiene practices and the regular opportunities for energetic physical play.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

13. The leader is a very good role model in her work with the children. She is well supported by the skilful, hard-working and committed staff who work well together as a team, each fulfilling their designated roles conscientiously to ensure the smooth and effective day-to-day provision for the children.

14. The staff engage in regular discussion and review of the activities which they provide for the children and change the resources accordingly to meet the children's changing interests and needs. They have, appropriately, identified the need to develop the processes for self-evaluation and development planning in order to ensure the continued development of the playgroup.

15. The early years specialist (EYS) from the Early Years Organisation (EYO) has provided well-focused guidance and support for the staff which has led to improvement in the quality of the learning environment and routines, for example, through the development of the snack routines to promote learning and the use of natural materials to stimulate the children's interests.

16. The key strengths of the playgroup include:

- the relaxed, purposeful atmosphere and the stimulating learning environment;
- the confident, inquisitive and well-motivated children;
- the very good opportunities for learning in all areas of the pre-school curriculum;
- the consistently high quality adult interactions with the children;
- the very good arrangements for the pastoral care of the children; and
- the committed, hard working leader and staff team.

17. The priorities identified for improvement include the need to:

- develop further the planning and assessment procedures and practices in order to track the children's progress and to inform better the planning for individual children; and
- develop the processes for self-evaluation and development planning in order to ensure the continued development of the playgroup.

18. In most of the areas inspected, the quality of education provided in this pre-school playgroup is good. The playgroup has important strengths in most of its educational and pastoral provision. The inspection has identified two areas for improvement in leadership and teaching which the playgroup has demonstrated the capacity to address. The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) will monitor the playgroup's progress in addressing the area for improvement.

QUESTIONNAIRES

The arrangements for the inspection of pastoral care and child protection included the opportunity for the parents, the staff and the management committee to complete a confidential questionnaire prior to the inspection. Twenty-three (63%) of the parents responded to the questionnaire and 14 made an additional written comment. Almost all of the responses from the parental questionnaire were positive and indicated a high level of satisfaction with the provision in the playgroup; in particular, the parents expressed their appreciation of the caring, very helpful staff and of the wide range of learning activities planned for the children. Almost all of 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 playgroup.

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