

PRE-SCHOOL INSPECTION



Education and Training
Inspectorate

Round Tower Community
Playgroup, Antrim

Report of an Inspection
in December 2011



STATISTICAL INFORMATION

Name of playgroup centre:	Round Tower Community Playgroup
Address:	Round Tower Controlled Primary School Durnish Road Springfarm ANTRIM BT41 2TH
Management Type:	Voluntary

Date of inspection:	1 December 2011
Date of previous inspection:	11 November 2008

1. Details of Children

Total number of children:	am session	pm session
attending the playgroup centre	26	11
in their immediate playgroup year	26	11
funded by Department of Education (DE)	26	11
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	11	***
who left in previous school year to attend reception provision within a primary school	***	***
Attendance:		
attendance** of funded children for the previous school year	85%	

* Special Educational Needs = fewer than five

** Calculated from the date when the intake was complete

*** Fewer than 5

2. Details of Staff

Number of:	Full-time	Part-time
Staff, including leader	5	0
Staff holding recognised childcare qualifications	5	0
New appointments within previous 12 months	2	0

Number of: ****	
Students	1
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	185

4. Parental Questionnaires

Number issued to parents:	37
Percentage returned	54.05%
Number of written comments:	7

ROUND TOWER COMMUNITY PLAYGROUP, ANTRIM, BT41 2TH (3BB-0536)

1. Round Tower Community Playgroup operates within Round Tower Primary School. Since the last inspection three new members of staff have been appointed, including a new Deputy Leader. Due to the increased demand for pre-school places within the area the playgroup now offers two part-time sessions.

2. In almost all of the areas inspected, the quality of education provided by this playgroup is inadequate; the areas for improvement outweigh the strengths in the provision. The inspection has identified significant areas for improvement in standards, learning and teaching, leadership and management, which need to be addressed urgently if the playgroup is to meet effectively the needs of all of the children.

CHILDREN'S ACHIEVEMENTS

3. The children appear happy and generally settled and the majority of them make independent choices and are familiar with the daily routines. The children's ages and stages of development are wide ranging and the majority of children are still at the exploratory and experimental stage in their play. Almost all of the children who attend the morning session, are in their second year at the playgroup. Just under one-third of the children attending both sessions are newcomer children. The children are familiar with their surroundings. Approximately half of the children still have limited attention spans, are dependent on adults for support with the development of their social skills, in resolving conflicts, and playing appropriately with the materials and each other.

4. During the inspection, in the best practice, a significant minority of the children played collaboratively and there were examples of purposeful play in the sand, water, and in the craft area. The addition of ice cubes in the water play and more focused discussion from the staff attracted great interest from many of the children which resulted in more sustained play. The children enjoy using the art materials; the staff should encourage the more able children to develop and progress their art work to the representational stage without resorting to using templates. They showed an interest in the variety of torches and tape measures, which had been set out on display but the children's play with these resources lacked extension and challenge.

5. The children's language skills ranged from those that are developing appropriately to under-developed. Generally, the children are able to engage in conversations and talk about their play and there were a few occasions when the staff engaged in discussions with the children using open ended questions to extend their interest in the activity and develop their language. A significant minority of children still require adult support and attention in order to encourage their use of clearer and longer phrases and sentences. The children's listening skills are not developed sufficiently and group or story sessions for the whole class groups are not matched closely enough to the language needs and interests of all of the children. The staff have identified appropriately the need to introduce two story groups and have just begun to focus more closely on improving the standards of their language, listening, and social skills.

THE PROVISION FOR LEARNING

6. The staff give much thought to creating a purposeful and inviting learning environment for the children. A review of the use of the playroom space has resulted in the children now benefiting from distinct areas of play. The staff report that they receive good support from the primary school and the playgroup is timetabled to use the large hall for

physical play. They have created an appropriate, enclosed area for outdoor play; this area also needs further development to facilitate development and progression in the children's physical play experiences throughout the year.

7. The pre-school programme offers satisfactory opportunities for learning across the curriculum. The learning potential is too often under-developed to meet the children's individual needs, particularly those children returning to the playgroup for a second year. The staff need to monitor carefully the range of resources being introduced at this time of the year and encourage the children to use and respect the equipment and resources appropriately at all times.

8. The staff are aware that many of the children require further support to develop their communication, language and social skills. Children, who require additional support with aspects of their learning, have been identified and individual plans have been drawn up which outline key words to be introduced and reinforced. The staff now need to focus more closely on how they will support these children through the normal play activities as well as providing more time focusing on language with a member of staff.

9. The staff meet informally to plan the programme, which records the resources and activities but does not include clear strategies for individuals or groups or identify what they want the children to learn. A new system to monitor and record the children's progress and development has recently been introduced; however, it is not clearly linked into the planning or does not highlight what further action the staff need to take. The staff need to formalise their planning and assessment time in order to raise their understanding of the programme, identify clear strategies for promoting purposeful and sustained play, to monitor the children's progress and highlight how the learning inherent in the activities will be developed.

10. The provision for pastoral care within the playgroup is satisfactory. The staff treat the children with care and provide a welcoming environment which is helping the children to enjoy coming to playgroup each day.

11. The playgroup has satisfactory arrangements in place for safeguarding children. These arrangements broadly reflect the guidance issued by the Department of Education.

12. The playgroup gives satisfactory attention to promoting healthy eating and physical activity; for example, the opportunity for the children to receive a healthy snack, and the regular opportunities for energetic play.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

13. The leader has been in post for 12 years and a deputy leader was appointed in September 2011; therefore a new staff team is in place. Currently there are very informal arrangements in place to plan the programme and assess the children's progress. The planning is not good enough to promote the children's language and learning. The timetable needs to be reorganised in order to formalise arrangements for the staff to meet together to discuss, develop the programme more effectively and improve the understanding and expertise of all of the staff in relation to the pre-school curriculum.

14. The staff in the playgroup are in the process of drawing up a new Development Plan which will need to focus on the areas identified from the inspection. The independent early years specialist (EYS) has provided good support to the staff during her monthly visits and has provided clear action points and relevant advice.

15. The key strengths in this playgroup include:

- the first part of the session when the children are more fully involved and the staff are interacting with individual and groups of children;
- the caring nature of the staff who show an interest in the children's well-being;
- the continuing early year's specialist support in highlighting relevant areas for development, including the recent improvement to the overall learning environment; and
- the friendly children who enjoy their experiences at playgroup.

16. The areas for improvement include the need for:

- the staff to outline how the children's learning will develop systematically, to ensure that differing needs are met effectively, and to facilitate the provision of evidence of adequate challenge and progression over time;
- the staff to improve their understanding in how to promote the children's language and learning, and in particular, how to extend the children's level of concentration through the play activities; and
- the leadership, at all levels, to focus more clearly on providing and evaluating quality learning experiences.

17. In almost all of the areas inspected, the quality of education provided by this playgroup is inadequate; the areas for improvement outweigh the strengths in the provision. The inspection has identified significant areas for improvement in standards, learning and teaching, leadership and management, which need to be addressed urgently if the playgroup is to meet effectively the needs of all of the children.

HEALTH AND SAFETY

- The position of the pool table in the playroom prevents the staff from using this section of the room in case the children fall against the table.

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. Twenty of the parents responded to the questionnaire and seven made additional written comments.

The responses from the parental questionnaire were very positive and indicated a high level of satisfaction with many aspects of the playgroup's work; in particular the parents praised the committed and dedicated staff, the happy and settled children who are making progress with aspects of their development. The only concern raised was the need for the children to have to leave the playroom to use the toilet facilities.

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

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