

PRE-SCHOOL INSPECTION



Education and Training
Inspectorate

Saul Community Playgroup,
Downpatrick

Report of an Inspection
in April 2011



STATISTICAL INFORMATION

Name of pre-school centre:	Saul Community Playgroup
Address:	38 St Patrick's Road Saul DOWNPATRICK Co Down BT30 7JQ
Management Type:	Voluntary

Date of inspection:	11 April 2011
Date of previous inspection:	3 June 2003

1. Details of Children

Total number of children:	am session	pm session
attending the pre-school centre	24	-
in their immediate pre-school year	24	-
funded by Department of Education (DE)	24	-
qualifying under DE admission criteria 1 & 2	0	-
with a statement of special educational needs	0	-
without a statement but receiving therapy or support from other professionals for special educational needs	2	-
with English as an additional language	0	-
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	90.6%	-

* Calculated from the date when the intake was complete

2. Details of Staff

Number of:	Full-time	Part-time
Staff, including leader	2	2
Staff holding recognised childcare qualifications	0	3
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
2½ hours	-	190

4. Parental Questionnaires

Number issued to parents:	24
Percentage returned:	70.83%
Number of written comments:	8

SAUL COMMUNITY PLAYGROUP, DOWNPATRICK, CO DOWN, BT30 7JQ (4BB-0474)

1. The Saul Community Playgroup is accommodated in the former building of St Patrick's Primary School in the Parish of Saul and Ballee; the interior has been refurbished to provide pre-school facilities. Most of the children who attend the playgroup come from the surrounding rural area.

2. In the areas inspected, the quality of education provided by this playgroup is very good. The playgroup is meeting very effectively the educational and pastoral needs of the children; and has demonstrated its capacity for sustained self-improvement.

CHILDREN'S ACHIEVEMENTS

3. During the inspection, almost all of the children engaged in very good imaginative role-play, especially in the optician's surgery and in the construction and farmyard areas; a few children were dependent on the staff for developing an area of play. The children's knowledge of, and interest in, the world around them is developed well through the good use of seasonal topics. They are developing a good understanding of the properties of materials through well-planned play with sand, water and scrap materials. The children are gaining a very good understanding of the early mathematical concepts. During the inspection, the staff used appropriate mathematical language when participating in the children's play and promoted the children's understanding of size, shape, weight, capacity and positional language. The children access the resources independently, demonstrating a very good sense of responsibility for the learning environment.

4. The children's conversational skills are developing well. The staff use effectively the play opportunities to model the use of language and to extend the children's thinking skills. The children browse frequently in the book area and the adults read stories at the children's request. The availability of an appropriate range of writing tools and materials, both indoors and outdoors, provides the children with very good opportunities to develop their experimental writing skills.

THE PROVISION FOR LEARNING

5. The daily session provides very good opportunities for the children to make choices and to explore freely the full range of activities both indoors and outdoors; they engage in purposeful play. The adult interactions with the children are of a consistently very good quality.

6. A wide range of themes and topics is incorporated skilfully to develop a very good variety of stimulating activities and learning experiences for the children in all areas of the pre-school curriculum. The evolving planning format takes increasing account of, and is informed by, the children's responses to the activities; as a result, the programme is amended to ensure progression in the children's learning. The individual plans for children with specific learning needs identify appropriate targets for development and the staff provide good support; there is a need, however, for the staff to evaluate the effectiveness of the strategies that they use with the children.

7. The staff report that a valuable programme of liaison has been established with the local primary school. This enables the children to visit the year 1 classroom, and to participate in foundation stage events, and allows the leader of the playgroup to discuss the children's progress with the year 1 teacher. Transition records are completed for all the

primary schools to which the children transfer. The parents are kept well-informed about the children's learning and events within the playgroup through the regular, helpful newsletter. They receive appropriate information about their child's progress through formal meetings and their child's transition report.

8. The quality of the arrangements for pastoral care in the playgroup is very good. There are very good working relationships at all levels in the playgroup. During the inspection, the children demonstrated high levels of independence, and shared materials agreeably; the staff gave much praise for their achievements. The staff are alert to those children who need additional support to develop their social skills and they offer appropriate guidance.

9. The playgroup has satisfactory arrangements in place for safeguarding children. These arrangements reflect the guidance issued by the relevant Department.

10. The playgroup gives very good attention to promoting healthy eating and physical activity, for example, through the healthy snack routines and the regular opportunities for outdoor physical play, which encourage the children to adopt healthy lifestyles.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

11. The playgroup leader provides very good leadership; she brings a high level of skill and commitment to her work and develops effectively the skills of the dedicated staff team. They plan and evaluate the programme together and all contribute to the effective operation of the playgroup. The staff value the consistent and well-informed guidance and advice offered by the early years specialist. Appropriate areas of the curriculum are identified for developmental work in the playgroup's development plan.

12. The key strengths of the playgroup include:

- the welcoming and caring atmosphere and the very good relationships at all levels;
- the well motivated children who demonstrate high levels of independence;
- the very good opportunities for learning in all areas of the pre-school curriculum;
- the suitable period of free play, both indoors and outdoors, and the children's sustained and productive activity;
- the very good quality of the interaction between the staff and the children; and
- the very effective leader and the high quality of the staff team.

13. In the areas inspected, the quality of education provided by this playgroup is very good. The playgroup is meeting very effectively the educational and pastoral needs of the children; and has demonstrated its capacity for sustained self-improvement.

QUESTIONNAIRES

The arrangements for the inspection of pastoral care and child protection included the opportunity for the parents, the management committee and the staff to complete a confidential questionnaire prior to the inspection. Seventeen (approximately 71%) of the parents responded to the questionnaires and eight made an additional written comment. All of the responses from the parental questionnaire indicated a very good level of satisfaction with all aspects of the playgroup's work, in particular, they appreciated the approachable and dedicated staff and they valued the existence of the playgroup in a rural community. There were four responses from the management group and four responses from the staff to the questionnaires; they all indicated a high level of support for the continued development of the playgroup. All of the responses have been shared with the staff and the management committee.

HEALTH AND SAFETY

The playgroup's management and staff need to complete a risk assessment of the layout of the outdoor provision and to develop robust safeguarding procedures for the use of the outdoor facilities.

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