

# PRE-SCHOOL INSPECTION



Education and Training  
Inspectorate

Scotwell House Playgroup,  
Armagh

Report of an Inspection  
in November 2011

## STATISTICAL INFORMATION

<b>Name of pre-school centre:</b>	Scotwell House Playgroup
<b>Address:</b>	Scotwell Day Care Centre Umgola Road ARMAGH BT60 2JD
<b>Management Type:</b>	Voluntary

<b>Date of inspection:</b>	21 November 2011
<b>Date of previous inspection:</b>	15 November 2004

### 1. Details of Children

<b>Total number of children:</b>	<b>am session</b>	<b>pm session</b>
• attending the pre-school centre	25	14
• in their immediate pre-school year	25	14
• funded by Department of Education (DE)	26	16
• 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	6	*
• who left in previous school year to attend reception provision within a primary school	*	*
<b>Attendance:</b>		
• attendance** of funded children for the previous school year	85%	

\* Figures above five or fewer

\*\* Calculated from the date when the intake was complete

## 2. Details of Staff

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

<b>Number of: ***</b>	
Students	0
Trainees	0

\*\*\* Total placements since September of current year

## 3. Details of Sessions

<b>Duration of morning session</b>	<b>Duration of afternoon session</b>	<b>Number of days open in previous year</b>
2½ hours	2½ hours	190

## 4. Parental Questionnaires

Number issued to parents:	39
Percentage returned:	18%
Number of written comments:	2

## **SCOTWELL HOUSE PLAYGROUP, ARMAGH, BT60 2JD (5AA-0190)**

### **CONTEXT**

1. The Scotwell House Playgroup is accommodated within the Scotwell House Daycare Centre, which is situated on the Umgola Road in the city of Armagh. Since the last inspection in 2004, there has been a change of Leader, a new member of staff has been appointed and the outdoor play area has been developed extensively. In addition, the playgroup has, very recently, begun to adopt the High Scope<sup>1</sup> methodology.

At the time of the inspection, there were 39 children enrolled in the playgroup. Twenty-five of the children attend the playgroup in the morning and 14 attend in the afternoon. All of the children are in their immediate pre-school year.

2. In most of the areas inspected, the quality of education provided in this pre-school playgroup is satisfactory; the strengths outweigh the areas for improvement in the provision. The inspection has identified areas for improvement in standards, learning and teaching and in leadership and management which need to be addressed if the needs of all of the children are to be met more effectively. The Education and Training Inspectorate (Inspectorate) will monitor and report on the playgroup's progress in addressing the areas for improvement.

### **CHILDREN'S ACHIEVEMENTS**

3. Most of the children in both the morning and afternoon sessions are well-settled; they can choose their resources and learning activities independently, engage in short periods of sustained play and are developing appropriate self management skills, for example, in their personal care and in following the buffet snack routines. A majority of the children are beginning to contribute meaningfully to planning and small group activities and are developing good turn-taking skills. There is a small number of children, however, who are less settled, who do not respond to the adults' requests for good behaviour and whose play can be disruptive for the other children.

4. A majority of the children communicate effectively with one another and with the staff; they respond enthusiastically to music and participate well in songs and rhymes. Most of the children can identify their own symbol and a majority can recognise their name in print; they should be encouraged to use these skills further in labelling their artwork and creative models. There is an attractive range of books displayed within the playroom; however, during the inspection, the children made limited use of these books and only the children in the afternoon session had the opportunity to enjoy a planned story. A few of the children are beginning to engage in purposeful mark-making.

There is a significant number of newcomer children in the playgroup for whom English is their second language; whilst most of these children are well-settled, there is a need for the playgroup to implement more strategic plans to support them in developing their understanding and use of the English language.

### **PROVISION FOR LEARNING**

5. There is a warm, welcoming ethos within the playgroup; the staff know the children well and are attentive to their personal needs. The routines are planned carefully and are effective in ensuring appropriate deployment of staff and supervision of the children; however, there are some aspects of the daily routines which need to be reviewed in order to

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<sup>1</sup> High Scope is an approach to early childhood care and education which is based on the premise that children construct their own learning by doing and being involved in working with materials, people and ideas.

provide the opportunity for a more extended period of outdoor play. There are satisfactory opportunities for learning in most areas of the pre-school curriculum. The opportunity for the children to respond to music is a particular strength of the provision. During the inspection, the quality of the adult interactions with the children was inconsistent; whilst there were a few examples of very good interactions, for example, in engaging the children in making and observing bubbles, there were many missed opportunities to build on the children's interests and there were no agreed strategies in place to meet the needs of individual children, particularly in relation to behaviour management. The staff have developed good links with the parents, for example, through the induction programme, informal meetings and well-focused written progress reports. The parents are kept informed about planned events and activities through a monthly newsletter. The staff now need to consider the curriculum content of the newsletter, in order to further assist the parents in supporting their children's learning.

6. The staff plan consciously for small and large group activities and make extensive anecdotal observations of the children at play. The information gained from the observations is used effectively to identify the children's stage of development and to keep the parents informed about their children's progress. The staff now need to use this information to respond more effectively to the children's changing interests and needs and to influence more effectively the strategies they use in their work with the children.

7. The provision for pastoral care within the playgroup is good. This is evidenced through the very good working relationships, through the 'open door' policy for parents and the adults' attention to the children's personal needs.

8. The playgroup has satisfactory arrangements in place for safeguarding the children. These arrangements broadly reflect the guidance issued by the relevant Department. The proprietors need to ensure that there is a named person within the playgroup to whom parents can address any safeguarding concerns and that the doors to the outdoor play area are fitted with appropriate safety closures.

9. The playgroup gives good attention to promoting healthy eating and physical activity through the provision of a healthy break. There is a need to extend the length of time provided for energetic play.

## **LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

10. The playgroup leader has been in post for one year. She has responded positively to the change in the playgroup's programme and has maintained effectively the children's records and observations. The staff work very well together as a team; they are committed to providing the best quality learning experiences for the children and have worked tirelessly to implement the centre's new methodologies. It would now be beneficial for them to visit playgroups which operate similar programmes in order to develop further their expertise.

The playgroup's procedures for self-evaluation are at an early stage of development. There is an outline plan in place for the playgroup's development over the next three years; a more detailed plan for the current year identifies a few appropriate areas for development. In addition, the staff have developed a range of action plans in response to suggestions made by the Early Years Specialist. The Early Years Specialist from the Early Years Organisation has provided well-focused support for the staff, particularly in relation to the playroom lay-out and the use of authentic resources. The Daycare Manager and Proprietors take a keen interest in all aspects of the playgroup's provision and are supportive of the work of the staff team.

**11. The key strengths of the playgroup include:**

- the welcoming environment;
- the hard-working staff team who know the children well;
- the opportunities for the children to respond to music; and
- the well-focused written reports on the children's progress.

**12. The priorities identified for improvement are the need to:**

- implement more effective behaviour management strategies for the children who display challenging behaviour;
- review aspects of the daily routines to meet more effectively the needs of all of the children; and
- develop a more integrated approach to observation, assessment and planning.

13. In most of the areas inspected, the quality of education provided in this pre-school playgroup is satisfactory; the strengths outweigh the areas for improvement in the provision. The inspection has identified areas for improvement in standards, learning and teaching and in leadership and management which need to be addressed if the needs of all of the children are to be met more effectively. The Inspectorate will monitor and report on the playgroup's progress in addressing the areas for improvement.

## **APPENDIX**

The arrangements for the inspection of pastoral care and child protection included the opportunity for the parents of the playgroup children and the staff to complete a confidential questionnaire prior to the inspection. Seven of the parents (18%) responded to the questionnaire and two made additional written comments. The responses from the parental questionnaire indicated good levels of satisfaction with most aspects of the playgroup's work. The responses have been shared with the staff and proprietors of the playgroup.

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