

PRE-SCHOOL INSPECTION



Education and Training
Inspectorate

St Colmcille's Pre-School
Playgroup, Belfast

Report of an Inspection
in May 2012

STATISTICAL INFORMATION

Name of playgroup centre:	St Colmcille's Pre-School Playgroup
Address:	191 Upper Newtownards Road BELFAST BT4 3JB
Management Type:	Voluntary

Date of inspection:	14 May 2012
Date of previous inspection:	21 February 2005

1. Details of Children

Total number of children:	am session	pm session
attending the playgroup centre	48	40
in their immediate playgroup year	48	37
funded by Department of Education (DE)	48	37
qualifying under DE admission criteria 1 & 2	0	0
with a statement of special educational needs	0	0
without a statement but receiving therapy or support from other professionals for special educational needs	7	6
with English as an additional language	12	0
who left in previous school year to attend reception provision within a primary school	0	0
Attendance:		
attendance** of funded children for the previous school year	91.8%	0

** Calculated from the date when the intake was complete

2. Details of Staff

Number of:	Full-time	Part-time
Staff, including leader	0	11
Staff holding recognised childcare qualifications	0	11
New appointments within previous 12 months	0	6

Number of: ***	
Students	1
Trainees	

*** 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
3 hours	2½ hours	190

4. Parental Questionnaires

Number issued to parents:	84
Percentage returned	44%
Number of written comments:	21

ST COLMCILLE'S PRE-SCHOOL PLAYGROUP, BELFAST, BT4 3JB (1AB-0306)

1. St Colmcille's Pre-School Playgroup is situated in the grounds of St Colmcille's Parish Church on the Upper Newtownards Road. Since the last inspection in 2005, the playgroup has moved to a purpose build unit which has two classrooms. The playgroup has increased its capacity from two sessions to four part-time sessions due to the significant increase in the number of funded pre-school places. The corresponding number of staff has also increased from three to eleven. In addition there have been several changes of early years specialist (EYS). The current EYS from the Early Years Organisation (EYO) took up post in September 2011.

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 the capacity for sustained self-improvement.

CHILDREN'S ACHIEVEMENTS

3. The children use very good levels of independence and autonomy in their learning as they select and explore the wide range of materials available to them. They show respect and care for one another and are developing excellent social skills. During all of the sessions observed almost all of the children were fully engaged and highly motivated in their learning. The staff are aware of the very small number of children who still require adult support to concentrate and engage fully; they are sensitive to their needs and track their progress.

4. The children are making very good progress in communicating their needs and interests with the adults and each other. The children are interested in books as they browse independently and enjoy smaller group and whole group story sessions. The children refer independently to photographic displays of themselves to talk about their previous experiences and achievements. Both boys and girls show an interest in mark making and print and a few children are beginning to write their names and explore words and letters through their play. The children's listening skills are generally very good. The children for whom English is a second language are making very good progress in their understanding of English and the majority are growing in confidence and competence to communicate orally especially as they join in enthusiastically with familiar rhymes and songs.

5. Many of the children show an interest in counting and understanding of positional language as they take part enthusiastically in stories and rhymes which include mathematical concepts. They count, make comparisons, sort items and explore pattern and shape as they engage in play activities.

6. The children are imaginative and creative in their use of materials as they paint, draw and make models using a wide range of media. They almost all join in enthusiastically with group singing and enjoy exploring the musical instruments available. Many of the children are confident and imaginative as they engage together in a range of role play both indoors and outdoors.

7. A particular feature of the playgroup is the children's sustained interest in exploring, investigating and experimenting with the rich range of natural and stimulating materials both within the playroom and outdoors. Excellent use is also made of visits to places of interest in the local community and a wide range of visitors to the playgroup which help to broaden the children's learning experiences. Many of the children make detailed models with the range of blocks and junk materials. They would also benefit from daily opportunities to use a wider range of table top construction materials.

PROVISION FOR LEARNING

8. The staff provide a rich, stimulating and attractive learning environment both indoors and outdoors. The rooms are well prepared into clearly defined areas for learning with equipment readily accessible to the children to allow for independent choice and exploration. The environment is language rich and includes a very good range of natural and authentic items. The rooms are enhanced by displays of the children's artwork, photographic evidence of their learning and captions of what the children say and do.

9. The daily timetable provides a good balance between extended periods of freely chosen play both indoors and outdoors and whole group activities. The daily routines are managed well to encourage responsibility during for example snack and tidy up times. Staff work hard to manage the transitions as a learning opportunity. These should be developed further to ensure that 'greeting time' and the transition to outdoor play are shortened to limit unnecessary waiting times for the children.

10. The staff are all warm, caring and supportive of the children; they show them respect and value their ideas. Almost all of the staff show a very high level of skill as they interact with the children. They listen to the children carefully, build on their ideas and extend their language, thinking and learning as they engage with them during the play and other daily activities. Very good support is provided for those children who have a range of additional needs.

11. The staff are making good progress in developing the written planning to provide a broad and balanced curriculum and which guides effectively the staff in their work with the children. The records of the children's achievements are increasingly being used to inform their planning and to match activities to the children's needs and interests. The EYS is providing support for the newer members of staff to develop these skills further; this work should continue.

12. The playgroup is well supported and valued by the parents, who are kept informed through a regular newsletter, notice boards and relevant meetings. They have appropriate opportunities to meet and discuss their child's progress with the staff and are encouraged to contribute to the work of the playgroup.

13. The quality of the arrangements for pastoral care is very good. The strengths in the pastoral care include the caring, respectful and inclusive ethos based on excellent relationships between the staff and the children.

14. The playgroup has satisfactory arrangements in place for safeguarding children. These arrangements broadly reflect the guidance issued by the relevant Department but the following minor areas need to be addressed:

- the written policy on behaviour management needs to include more specific guidance on the implementation of strategies used by staff in the playrooms; and
- there is a need to ensure that the processes and procedures for recording concerns are adhered to rigorously by all staff.

15. The playgroup gives very good attention to promoting healthy eating and physical activity through, for example, a healthy break, regular physical activities and the use of topics in their curriculum, which all encourage the children to adopt a healthy lifestyle.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

16. The playgroup leaders, management and staff have a clear vision for the development of the playgroup as a quality pre-school setting for the local area. They have worked in close partnership with the local parish, Eastern Child Care Partnership and the Department of Education to fund the new premises and increase the number of funded pre-school places.

17. The senior leader has taken a key role in developing many aspects of the practice and in managing the many changes in the last year. She is a good role model in her own practice and fosters a collaborative approach. Each room leader takes responsibility with their staff team for the practice within their room. The staff have undergone a range of relevant training to ensure their continued professional development.

18. The staff have worked very successfully to overcome any challenges presented by the increased numbers of sessions and their work is endorsed by the parents and the management committee. The leadership and management, in consultation with the staff, need to review the current leadership roles and responsibilities as they need to ensure they remain fit for purpose in light of the many recent changes within the playgroup.

19. The new EYS from the EYO has provided good support and guidance which is valued by the staff. While the development plan is in the early stage of development, there is clear evidence of ongoing self-evaluation and significant improvements since the last inspection.

20. The key strengths of this playgroup include:

- the very positive and inclusive ethos;
- the stimulating and imaginatively resourced learning environment;
- the skill of the staff in promoting concentrated play, building on the children's own ideas and frequently extending their thinking and learning;
- the broad and balanced pre-school curriculum which provides very good opportunities for the children to learn in all areas of the pre-school curriculum;
- the excellent promotion of the children's personal, social and emotional development and the very high levels of engagement and motivation by the children in their learning; and
- the commitment of the staff to continuous improvement and development.

21. 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 the 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 group and the staff to complete a confidential questionnaire prior to the inspection. Thirty-seven parents responded to the questionnaire and 21 made additional written comments. The responses from the parental questionnaire indicated a very high level of satisfaction with the quality of the educational and pastoral provision provided by the playgroup. In particular, they reported their appreciation of the caring and sensitive staff, the good quality learning environment and the progress their children are making.

The responses from the management group provided a strong endorsement for all aspects of the playgroup. The staff returns were also positive about their shared commitment to the well-being of all of the children. All of the key messages from the responses have been shared with the staff and management of the playgroup.

© 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

