

# PRE-SCHOOL INSPECTION



Education and Training  
Inspectorate

Strawberry Tree Playgroup,  
Newry

Report of an Inspection  
in May 2011

## STATISTICAL INFORMATION

<b>Name of pre-school centre:</b>	Strawberry Tree Playgroup
<b>Address:</b>	41A Sheeptown Road Saval NEWRY Co Down BT34 2LA
<b>Management Type:</b>	Voluntary

<b>Date of inspection:</b>	18 May 2011
<b>Date of previous inspection:</b>	18 May 2004

### 1. Details of Children

<b>Total number of children:</b>	<b>am session</b>	<b>pm session</b>
• attending the pre-school centre	26	-
• in their immediate pre-school year	26	-
• funded by Department of Education (DE)	26	-
• qualifying under DE admission criteria 1 & 2	3	-
• with a statement of special educational needs	0	-
• without a statement but receiving therapy or support from other professionals for special educational needs	1	-
• with English as an additional language	0	-
• who left in previous school year to attend reception provision within a primary school	0	-
<b>Attendance:</b>		
• percentage attendance* of funded children for the previous school year	86%	-

\* 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	4	0
Staff holding recognised childcare qualifications	4	0
New appointments within previous 12 months	2	0

<b>Number of: **</b>	
Students	1
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>
3 Hours	-	184

## 4. Parental Questionnaires

Number issued to parents:	26
Percentage returned:	50%
Number of written comments:	9

## **STRAWBERRY TREE PLAYGROUP, NEWRY, CO DOWN, BT34 2LA (5AB-0191)**

1. Strawberry Tree Playgroup is situated in the townland of Saval, about three miles outside Newry, County Down. Since the last inspection in May 2004, a new leader has been appointed and the playgroup has moved to the current purpose-built accommodation. At the time of the inspection, the staff reported that the support from the Early Years Organisation (EYO) had been infrequent and had not focused sufficiently on the playgroup's needs.

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. The children are confident and well motivated; they settle quickly to their chosen learning activities and engage enthusiastically with the adults and with their peers. They demonstrate independence in their selection and replacement of resources, in their personal care and in the buffet snack routines. During the inspection they made full use of all the available space within the playroom and there were many examples of sustained, purposeful, collaborative play.

4. The children are eager to talk about their play and can express their thoughts and ideas confidently; they listen to each other respectfully demonstrating good levels of social communication skills and are very attentive during planned and incidental story times. They make good use of the wide range of attractively displayed books and reference materials. During the inspection, there were very good examples of the boys sharing books and 'reading' for enjoyment. All of the children can recognise their own name in print and many of them can identify letters and the printed names of their peers. Whilst there were a few good examples of the children engaging in purposeful early mark making during the outdoor play session, this is an area which needs to be developed further and to be integrated, as appropriate, into other areas of play.

### **THE PROVISION FOR LEARNING**

5. There is a relaxed, happy atmosphere within the playgroup; the warm, respectful environment promotes the children's self-esteem and helps them develop the confidence to express their ideas and to talk about their play. The daily session is well organised with effective and purposeful use of all the available time for learning. The adult interactions with the children are consistently of a high quality; the adults respond effectively to the children's interests, achieving an appropriate balance between support and engagement in the children's play according to their needs and stage of development. There are very good opportunities for learning in most areas of the pre-school curriculum. The use of books and role-play to develop the children's language and communication skills and the opportunities for them to extend their understanding of the world around them are particular strengths of the provision.

6. There are very good planning, observation and assessment procedures. The comprehensive planning is informed effectively by the staff's observations and evaluations of the children's progress. The staff have also developed additional planning procedures which detail how they identify and respond to individual children's interests and needs.

7. The links with the parents to help them support their children's learning are outstanding. The parents receive a monthly overview of the planned learning in each area of the curriculum together with a newsletter which details the themes, songs and rhymes for the month. They are kept well informed about their children's progress through a purposeful

progress report each term; the parents are also encouraged to comment on their child's progress and needs. This information is used very effectively by the staff to inform further the planned learning programmes. There are very good social and pastoral links with the neighbouring primary school to which most of the children transfer. It will be important for these links to be developed further and extended to include other local primary schools, as appropriate.

8. The quality of the arrangements for pastoral care in the playgroup is very good. This is characterised by the excellent working relationships at all levels and by the account taken of individual children's needs and progress.

9. The playgroup has satisfactory arrangements in place for safeguarding children. These arrangements broadly reflect the guidance issued by the relevant Department but there is a need for the Leader and Assistant Leader to be officially identified as the designated and deputy designated persons for child protection within the playgroup and for this to be communicated appropriately to the parents.

10. The playgroup gives very good attention to promoting healthy eating and physical activity, for example, through regular energetic outdoor play and through the healthy snack menus and routines.

#### LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

11. The Leader is a very good role-model in her work with the children; she has a clear understanding of the under-pinning principles of the pre-school curriculum, is very well organised and sets high standards in all aspects of the playgroup's provision. She is very well supported by the dedicated and professional staff team who share her enthusiasm and who carry out their roles very effectively to ensure consistency in the high quality of provision for the children. The management committee is fully involved in the work of the playgroup and is highly supportive of the Leader and the staff.

12. Reflection and self-evaluation to promote improvement form an integral part of the staff's day-to-day practice. The recent review and development of the outdoor play and garden areas have led to improvements in the provision for the children, particularly in relation to their understanding of the world around them. The staff are in the process of reviewing the current development plan to identify the priorities for the playgroup's development over the next three year period.

13. At the time of the inspection, the staff reported that the support from the EYO had been infrequent and had not focused sufficiently on the playgroup's needs.

#### **14. The key strengths of the playgroup include:**

- the confident, well-motivated children;
- the outstanding links with the parents to help them support their children's learning;
- the very good learning opportunities in most areas of the pre-school curriculum;
- the consistently high-quality adult interactions with the children;

- the comprehensive planning, observation and assessment procedures; and
- the very effective Leader and dedicated, professional staff team.

15. 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 staff and the management committee to complete a confidential questionnaire prior to the inspection. Thirteen of the parents (50%) responded to the questionnaire and nine made additional written comments. The responses from the parental questionnaires indicated a high level of satisfaction with all aspects of the playgroup's work; in particular the parents praised the enthusiastic and caring staff, the varied programme of learning activities and the regular information about their children's progress . 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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