

PRE-SCHOOL INSPECTION



Education and Training
Inspectorate

Cregagh Pre-School Playgroup,
Belfast

Report of an Inspection
in January 2010

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*The Education and Training Inspectorate -
Promoting Improvement*

Providing Inspection Services for

Department of Education
Department for Employment and Learning
Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE



CUSTOMER SERVICE EXCELLENCE

STATISTICAL INFORMATION

Name of pre-school centre:	Cregagh Pre-school Playgroup
Address:	Mount Merrion Avenue BELFAST BT6 0FL
Management Type:	Voluntary

Date of inspection:	28 January 2010
Date of previous inspection:	11 March 2004

1. Details of Children

Total number of children:	am session	pm session
• attending the pre-school centre	24	-
• in their immediate pre-school year	0	-
• funded by Department of Education (DE)	24	-
• qualifying under DE admission criteria 1 & 2	2	-
• with a statement of special educational needs	0	-
• without a statement but receiving therapy or support from other professionals for special educational needs	0	-
• 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	94%	-

* Calculated from the date when the intake was complete

2. Details of Staff

Number of:	Full-time	Part-time
Staff, including leader	0	3
Staff holding recognised childcare qualifications	0	3
New appointments within previous 12 months	0	3

Number of: **	
Students	0
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
3 hours	N/A	190

4. Parental Questionnaires

Number issued to parents:	24
Percentage returned:	25%
Number of written comments:	2

CREGAGH PRE-SCHOOL PLAYGROUP, BELFAST, BT6 0FL (4BB-0162)

1. Cregagh Pre-school Playgroup is accommodated in the community centre situated beside Cregagh Primary School on Mount Merrion Avenue, Belfast. Since the last inspection on 11 March 2004, there has been a number of changes in staffing, including the appointment of the current leader two years ago. There have also been several changes of personnel in early years specialist (EYS) support from the early years organisation (EYO).

2. The arrangements for the inspection of pastoral care and child protection included the opportunity for the parents, management committee and the staff to complete a confidential questionnaire prior to the inspection. The limited number of responses from the parents were mainly positive, although they indicated that they would welcome more information about their children's learning and development, and guidance on how they could support their child's learning at home. There were no returns from the management committee. All of the staff completed the questionnaire; they indicated that they were satisfied with all their work in the playgroup. In their written responses, the staff highlighted the difficulties they face having to set up, and tidy away, all of the play resources each day, to accommodate other groups which use the pre-school centre's room. All of the responses have been shared with the staff and the Chairperson of the management committee.

3. The provision for pastoral care within the playgroup is satisfactory. The children appear happy and content; they are at ease with the staff and often invite the adults to join in their play.

4. The playgroup's arrangements for safeguarding children are unsatisfactory and do not adequately reflect the guidance issued by the relevant Department. The management committee needs to ensure that:

- all of the staff within the pre-school centre receive adequate child protection training on a regular basis and that they are clear on the procedures for recording and reporting child protection matters;
- there is a designated and deputy-designated person, within the playgroup, with responsibility for reporting child protection matters; and
- all policies and procedures relating to child protection are shared with the parents, in particular, the procedures for the intimate care of young children.

5. The playgroup gives satisfactory attention to promoting healthy eating; for example, fruit is provided on a daily basis. The playgroup has regular use of the adjoining primary school hall, which the staff use to provide physical activity sessions for the children.

6. The children clearly enjoy exploring the range of activities on offer. Small groups of children are beginning to engage in collaborative and imaginative play, particularly where stimulating resources are provided; a significant number of children were observed engaging in solitary or parallel play. There were times during the inspection, when small groups of children were observed settling to sustained periods of concentrated play supported by the adults; a small number of children, however, found it difficult to settle to any of the activities provided. A few children had difficulty sharing and taking turns; the staff often provided these children with appropriate encouragement to share materials agreeably.

7. The staff have worked hard, in recent months, to develop an attractive learning environment. On the day of the inspection, the playroom was clean, bright and colourful; appropriate use was made of the children's own art work, posters and interest areas to create an inviting learning environment.

8. On the day of the inspection, the range of activities on offer provided useful learning opportunities for the children in all areas of the pre-school programme. The programme on offer, however, is not sufficiently supported by a wide range of natural materials, authentic items and books.

9. The children have access to a small, secure outdoor play area, which was used well during the inspection to provide an interesting range of activities and learning opportunities. The staff need to plan and manage the physical play sessions more effectively to promote greater choice, exploration and energetic activity for all of the children.

10. A particular strength of the programme was the emphasis on the promotion of the children's language development. The staff encourage the children's interest in books by reading to individuals and groups; on occasions children were observed browsing in the book area. The staff use reference books, in the areas of play, to provide new ideas and extend the children's vocabulary. The children are introduced to script through captions on their work and labels around the room; they are provided with good opportunities for early mark-making as they explore materials and writing tools provided in different areas of play.

11. The daily timetable includes a lengthy period of free play when the children have opportunities to explore the activities both indoors and outdoors. The snack routine is organised to provide the children with opportunities to develop their social and conversational skills. The routines in the latter part of the day do not support fully the differing needs of the children; for example, some of the children were restless and not fully engaged when required to sit as part of a large group during story-time.

12. The staff acknowledge the need to work together more effectively, as a team, to bring about the necessary improvements in the best interests of the children. The staff meet regularly to plan the programme and have developed some useful long- and medium-term plans. As the staff continue to develop their planning, more needs to be done to identify the learning expected from the activities and to use the children's subsequent achievements to inform future planning. The playgroup is currently using the neighbouring primary school's special educational needs policy; this is not appropriate as it does not require the pre-school staff to identify and monitor the children's special needs and to plan effectively to support them.

13. The staff have only recently begun to observe the current group of children at play. All the staff need to develop their skill of observation and recording as a matter of urgency. The information they gain through observations should be used to inform the planning of the programme in order to meet the children's differing needs and to report accurately to the parents and the year 1 teacher on the children's learning and development. It is inappropriate that the staff do not meet with the parents during the first term to discuss their children's progress.

14. The current leader took up post two years ago. She has worked hard in recent months to bring about necessary and appropriate improvements in the fabric of the building. The leader has set out her intentions for the development of the playgroup; she has drawn up a three-year development plan which outlines some useful targets. The staff and management committee need to work closely together to build on this initial work and continue to raise the standards achieved by the children.

15. The high turnover in recent years, of both the staff in the playgroup and the EYS support, has impacted negatively on the steady and continuous development of the playgroup. The quality of the EYS support has been inadequate. The EYS provided temporary support to assist the staff in the preparation for the inspection. Another temporary EYS has recently been appointed to support the group until the end of the current academic year. It will be important that the playgroup staff are provided with more regular and targeted support if the necessary improvements identified during the inspection are to be met effectively.

16. Although the playgroup has some useful resources, there is a need to extend these considerably. The staff and the management committee need to put in place a more strategic plan to ensure the continual upgrading of the resources to support a more stimulating programme of learning.

17. There are currently only three members of the management committee; they meet infrequently. All three members work in the neighbouring primary school; the Principal of the primary school is the Chairperson of the playgroup. These arrangements do not meet the requirements as set out by the Department of Education (DE) for groups receiving funding as part of the Pre-school Education Expansion Programme (PSEEP) 1998. Aspects of the admission criteria outlined in the booklet sent home to parents do not reflect the community aspect of this playgroup. These management matters need to be reviewed urgently.

18. The key strengths in this playgroup include:

- the range of activities provided on the day of the inspection;
- the use of the outdoor space to provide an interesting range of activities;
- the contented and settled children and the instances of purposeful play; and
- the improvements made to the learning environment in recent months.

19. The priorities identified for further development include the need to:

- review and improve the child protection policy and procedures;
- ensure that the administration and management of the pre-school centre meets fully the requirements as set out by DE for groups receiving funding as part of the PSEEP;
- develop further the methods for planning and evaluating the provision, and for assessing the children's progress; and
- ensure that the quality of the interaction of the staff is consistently of a high standard to support the children in their learning.

20. In almost all of the areas inspected, the quality of education provided by this pre-school centre 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, and in leadership and management, all of which need to be addressed urgently if the pre-school centre is to meet effectively the needs of all of the

children. The Education and Training Inspectorate (Inspectorate) will monitor and report on the pre-school centre's progress in addressing the areas for improvement, over a 12-18 month period. The local Health and Social Care Trust has been informed about the child protection arrangements, which will be reviewed by the Inspectorate within six weeks.

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