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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

Education and Training Inspectorate

Report of an Inspection

**Dromintee and Jonesboro Playgroup
Newry**

Inspected: November 2009

STATISTICAL INFORMATION

Name of pre-school centre:	Dromintee and Jonesboro Playgroup
Address:	Community Hall Finnegan's Road Dromintee NEWRY BT35 8TA
Management Type:	Voluntary

Date of inspection:	3 November 2009
Date of previous inspection:	N/A

1. Details of Children

Total number of children:	am session	pm session
• attending the pre-school centre	18	-
• in their immediate pre-school year	18	-
• funded by Department of Education (DE)	8	-
• 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	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	95%	-

* Calculated from the date when the intake was complete

2. Details of Staff

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

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	-	188

4. Parental Questionnaires

Number issued to parents:	18
Percentage returned:	44%
Number of written comments:	1

DROMINTEE AND JONESBORO PLAYGROUP, NEWRY, CO DOWN BT35 8TA (5BB-0550)

INTRODUCTION

1. Dromintee and Jonesboro Playgroup is situated in a quiet rural area between the villages of Dromintee and Jonesborough, west of Newry. The pre-school centre uses the facilities of the local community hall which includes access to an outdoor play area and a large indoor hall. There are currently 18 children attending the pre-school centre; eight are funded by the Department of Education (DE).

2. The arrangements for the inspection of pastoral care and child protection included the opportunity for the parents, the staff and the management group to complete a confidential questionnaire prior to the inspection. A significant minority (44%) of the parents responded to the questionnaire and one made an additional written comment. Almost all indicated a high level of satisfaction with the overall provision of the playgroup and in particular appreciate the safe and caring atmosphere, the staff's concern for the welfare of the children and the range of activities available in the playgroup. The staff questionnaire returns were wholly positive about the provision for the children. The responses from the management committee highlighted the frequent opportunities for the committee to meet, the staff's effectiveness in managing the children's behaviour and the provision of information for parents. The responses also indicated the desire for further training in the role of management and further involvement in the playgroup's development planning process.

3. The provision for pastoral care within the playgroup is good. The staff are welcoming to the children and their parents, and there is a caring and friendly atmosphere within the playgroup. Working relationships at all levels are good and there is a sense of team-spirit among the staff. The children are well-settled and are beginning to establish friendships.

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

- the child protection policy should be updated;
- a flow chart of procedures and key personnel relating to child protection should be displayed where it is accessible to parents and carers; and
- an anti-bullying policy should be developed and implemented.

5. The playgroup gives very good attention to promoting healthy eating and physical activity, for example the snack routine is used effectively to encourage children to try new foods and provides a relaxed opportunity for the children to socialise with their peers. The playgroup has been awarded the Boost Better Break Award for several years. The children have regular access to a large community hall and outdoor area for physical play. The staff plan to further develop and reorganise the outdoor area to extend opportunities for energetic play.

THE QUALITY OF THE EDUCATIONAL PROVISION

6. The playgroup has a relaxed, caring and happy atmosphere. The children are well-settled and participate in purposeful concentrated periods of play. The staff are sensitive in their responses to the children and promote self-esteem and confidence through their positive approach to behaviour management.

7. The staff have worked hard to provide an attractive and stimulating learning environment with clearly identified areas of play. Areas of interest have been created to encourage the children to observe, explore and investigate. The children's individual art work is attractively displayed around the playroom and in the front foyer.

8. The daily timetable and routines are organised to ensure smooth transitions and to make use of all the time available to promote learning.

9. The staff's interaction with the children promotes enjoyment and supports the development of the children's language and learning. The staff engage the children in purposeful discussion about their play and experiences, and encourage early conversational skills. Effective questioning develops the children's thinking skills and extends vocabulary around topics which are of interest to the children.

10. The staff have made a good start to developing the written planning. It identifies themes and topics and highlights aspects of the learning to be promoted. Further consideration should be given to the appropriateness and time span of some of the themes for young children.

11. The playgroup's educational programme offers good opportunities across the pre-school curriculum. During the inspection the children demonstrated high levels of enjoyment, motivation and independence. The points which follow illustrate specific aspects of the programme.

- The staff effectively support the children's personal, social and emotional development through their sensitive and caring approach. The children are encouraged to make independent choices, take turns and share.
- A good range of creative activities encourages the children to express themselves using different materials and tools. Resources are labelled and are easily accessible to the children. The staff engage with the children and encourage them to talk about their work, extending learning through skilful open-ended questioning. The children's individual art work is valued and displayed prominently around the playroom.
- The staff promote the children's oral language and communication skills through individual or group discussion, stories and rhymes. Books related to the current theme or areas of interest are attractively displayed and staff respond sensitively to the children's interest in books with informal story telling sessions. There are examples of printed text on display and children's art work is appropriately annotated. The computer is used effectively to develop early thinking skills and fine motor skills using the mouse control.
- The staff are effectively promoting the use of early mathematical language. Activities are planned to encourage early mathematical skills and staff are effective in extending learning through thoughtful questioning. Playroom displays encourage and promote an interest in mathematical skills.
- The children's interest in the environment and science is encouraged through planned activities based on the seasons and displays of natural resources which arouse the children's innate curiosity. There are opportunities for children to grow flowers and vegetables in the outdoor area.

12. The staff operate a key worker system and have made some useful observations of the children's learning which have informed future activities. This practice needs to be extended; observations and assessments should be linked more consistently to the planning in order to ensure progression through the year. There is also a need to update the Assessment Policy in line with the current pre-school curriculum.

13. The leader has recently taken up post after a period of leave. One of the assistants has also been on leave and returned on the day of the inspection. The process for self-evaluation is at an early stage and staff should continue, with the support of the early years specialist (EYS) and in conjunction with the management committee, to draw up a school development plan which will guide and support future improvements in the centre. A range of policies has recently been reviewed by the leader and the management committee; further review of the documents pertaining to the life and work of the playgroup is necessary to ensure clarity of information.

14. Communication with parents has been effectively established. A regular newsletter updates parents on current themes and other relevant information. Parents are invited to attend for formal interview regularly and there are opportunities for less formal discussions on arrival or collection of children. There are several prominent information display boards in the front foyer and parents are invited to make written suggestions and comments on the life and work of the playgroup. The staff in the playgroup have close links with other pre-school centres and the local primary school.

15. The EYS has made a very good contribution to the overall development of the provision in the playgroup. The support is well focused and matches effectively the needs of the playgroup, in particular the identification of appropriate areas for improvement, the playgroup's inclusion in clustering arrangements, the promotion of early mathematical language and the process of development planning.

16. The strengths of the playgroup's educational and pastoral provision include:

- the welcoming and friendly ethos which promote purposeful, settled play and is developing the children's concentration;
- the good working relationships at all levels and the committed staff who work well together as a team;
- the examples of good staff interaction used effectively to promote and support the children's language and learning through all the activities and routines;
- the interesting and varied range of activities across the six areas of the pre-school curriculum and in particular the children's confidence in using early mathematical language; and
- the thoughtful organisation of the day which ensures that all the time available is used effectively to promote the children's learning.

17. The inspection has identified areas for improvement. The following are the most important that need attention:

- policies should to be reviewed to ensure clear and consistent information for staff and parents particularly in relation to child protection and assessment;

- planning and assessment methods should be further developed to ensure that observations inform future planning and there is progression in the children's learning; and
- self-evaluation and school development planning should be further developed to guide and support future improvements.

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

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