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*The Education and Training Inspectorate -  
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**Department of Education**  
**Department for Employment and Learning**  
**Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure**



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

## **Education and Training Inspectorate**

### **Report of an Inspection**

### **The Orchard Playgroup Loughgall**

**Inspected: March 2009**

## STATISTICAL INFORMATION

<b>Name of pre-school centre:</b>	The Orchard Playgroup
<b>Address:</b>	Kilmore Community Centre Ballyhegan Road LOUGHGALL Co Armagh BT61 6PX
<b>Management Type:</b>	Voluntary

<b>Date of inspection:</b>	10 March 2009
<b>Date of previous inspection:</b>	N/A

### 1. Details of Children

<b>Total number of children:</b>	<b>am session</b>	<b>pm session</b>
• attending the pre-school centre	13	-
• in their immediate pre-school year	4	-
• funded by Department of Education (DE)	4	-
• 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	4	-
<b>Attendance:</b>		
• attendance* of funded children for the previous school year	92.7%	-

\* 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	2	0
Staff holding recognised childcare qualifications	2	0
New appointments within previous 12 months	1	0

<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>
3 hours	N/A	190

## 4. Parental Questionnaires

Number issued to parents:	13
Percentage returned:	61.5%
Number of written comments:	3

**THE ORCHARD PLAYGROUP, LOUGHGALL, CO ARMAGH, BT61 6PX  
(5AB-0500)**

**INTRODUCTION**

1. The Orchard Playgroup is currently accommodated in Ballyhegan Community Centre, Kilmore in County Armagh. The pre-school centre will relocate to new premises in April 2009. The children come mainly from the local area. Four of the children have been moved from the playgroup on their fourth birthday to attend reception provision in the local primary school; as a result, the number of children attending the pre-school centre has fallen to 13. Only four of the remaining children are in their pre-school year; this figure is well below the number recommended for those centres who are receiving funding through the Pre-school Education Expansion Programme.

2. 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. A majority of the parents responded to the questionnaire and three made additional written comments. The responses from the parents indicate high levels of satisfaction with the quality of the provision and they appreciate in particular:

- the caring attitude of the staff; and
- the happy and settled atmosphere within the pre-school centre.

The responses from the staff were also very positive. All of the responses have been taken into account as part of the inspection and were shared with the staff and the management group.

The quality of the arrangements for pastoral care is very good. The staff demonstrate a strong commitment to the welfare of the children. The working relationships at all levels are good and there are close links with the parents.

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

- the open access to the pre-school centre at the end of the session needs to be reviewed; and
- the toileting and intimate care procedures need to be shared with the parents.

3. The pre-school centre gives good attention to promoting healthy eating and physical activity, and has effective policies and programmes in place to encourage the children to adopt healthy lifestyles.

## **THE QUALITY OF THE EDUCATIONAL PROVISION**

4. There is a settled, happy atmosphere in the pre-school centre; the children are at ease with the staff and turn to them readily to meet their needs and join in their play. The pre-school centre's positive ethos promotes effectively the children's confidence and self-esteem. The staff work hard to create an inviting environment; thought has been given to defining areas for play and appropriate use is made of the children's art work, posters and interest areas to create colourful displays around the playroom.

5. The staff work hard to develop positive, friendly working relationships with the parents. They organise an open day for the parents before their children attend the pre-school centre and hold various curricular and parent staff meetings throughout the year. In addition, an information booklet, a parent's noticeboard and regular newsletters help to keep the parents informed about the work and life of the pre-school centre. The staff value the support given by the parents and the useful contributions they make to the work of the pre-school.

6. The staff meet together regularly to plan the educational programme; they have made a useful start to developing the written planning. The staff should now develop the planning further in order to identify clearly the learning to be promoted in all areas, to take more account of the children's differing needs, and to outline progression in the use of play resources throughout the year.

7. The thoughtful organisation of the daily timetable allows the day to flow smoothly and provides an appropriate balance of free play and activities organised by the staff.

8. The staff are supportive and clearly enjoy participating with the children in their play. They frequently engage the children in discussions, and praise and encourage the children's efforts. During the inspection, there were many instances when the staff's participation fostered sustained play and promoted effectively the children's learning.

9. The pre-school centre's programme provides satisfactory opportunities for learning in all areas of the pre-school curriculum. The points which follow illustrate specific aspects of the programme.

- The children are generally well settled and the staff encourage them to be independent, to share and take turns. Almost all of the children engage in purposeful and productive play and display a positive attitude to learning.
- The children are developing their manipulative skills through the provision of a range of small tools and equipment. There are regular opportunities for outdoor physical play using a basic range of resources. The staff have identified the need to develop further this aspect of the play programme.
- The children have regular opportunities to develop their creative ideas using the wide range of art materials provided. The staff value the work of the children and display it attractively throughout the pre-school centre.

- During the inspection, there was encouragement for the children to develop an interest in books; they had opportunities to browse in the book area and to explore a range of books and reading materials during their play. In addition, a lending library is available for the children. The staff make good use of the play opportunities to develop the children's conversational skills. The children are introduced to text incidentally through captions displayed around the room. Many of the children display an early interest in writing as they explore a variety of writing tools such as whiteboards and papers provided in various areas of play.
- During the inspection, the staff used some appropriate mathematical language when participating in the children's play and necessary routines; they fostered an interest in counting, size, colour and shape.
- Appropriate use is made of seasonal topics, visits to places of interest and visitors to the pre-school centre to extend the children's knowledge of, and interest in, the world around them. The thoughtful development of imaginative play in the 'garden centre' provides opportunities for the children to participate in role-play based on real-life situations. During the inspection, the staff developed scientific ideas through play with compost and water as they encouraged the children to observe and discuss changes that occur over a period of time.

10. The staff operate a key-worker system and they have begun to make some appropriate observations of the children's responses to play. The children's achievements are not yet assessed systematically. Further development is required to provide an appropriate system for monitoring, evaluating and recording the children's progress; the staff need to link the information gained from the observations more effectively to the written planning in order to meet the children's differing needs.

11. The majority of the children transfer to the local primary school. The pre-school centre has established some useful informal links with the primary school and share information about the children's progress to help to ensure a smooth transition to year 1.

12. The leader has been in post for five months; she demonstrates enthusiasm and commitment to developing the work of the pre-school centre. There is a sense of team-spirit among the hard-working staff. The staff have not yet embarked on developing the process of self-evaluation. The contribution made by the centre's early years specialist (EYS) has strengths, including providing advice and guidance regarding key policies, developing links with the parents and other agencies and developing the learning environment for the children. However, a few important areas of the pre-school centre's work have been identified for improvement. It will be important that staff work closely with the EYS in order to address these key areas for improvement.

13. The quality of the accommodation is satisfactory. The pre-school centre is well presented and maintained. A small, enclosed outdoor area is available for outdoor play.

14. There is a basic supply of good quality equipment; many of the areas of play are enhanced by the addition of natural and authentic items. Additional resources are needed for physical play in order to support the implementation of a more progressive programme which meets the needs of the children throughout the year.

15. The strengths of the pre-school centre include:

- the friendly, welcoming atmosphere and the good effort made in creating an attractive and interesting learning environment;
- the good working relationships at all levels and the many instances of good quality interaction between the staff and the children;
- the satisfactory opportunities for learning in all areas of the pre-school curriculum; the promotion of the children's language and the development of their creativity are particular strengths of the programme; and
- the hard-working and dedicated staff who are committed to the welfare of the children.

16. The inspection has identified areas for improvement. In addressing the most important of these areas, the pre-school centre needs to:

- develop further the methods of planning and assessment to guide the work of the staff and to help them meet the differing needs of the children.

## **CONCLUSION**

17. In most of the areas inspected the quality of education provided in this pre-school centre is satisfactory; the strengths outweigh areas for improvement in the provision. The inspection has identified areas for improvement in learning and teaching 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 pre-school centre's progress in addressing the areas for improvement.

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