

Report of a Pilot Inspection
Bunnahone Bunnies Cross Community Playgroup, Derrygonnelly

November 2023



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1. INTRODUCTION

A. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Bunnahone Bunnies Cross Community Playgroup is a voluntary playgroup situated in the village of Derrygonnelly near Enniskillen. The purpose-built playroom, located in a privately owned building in the Tir Navan Complex, has access to a well-developed outdoor area. The majority of the children come from the locality and the surrounding rural area, and almost all of the children transfer to the two local primary schools.

The playgroup currently provides a part-time morning session to twenty-four children of pre-school age, a very small number of whom have speech, language and communication difficulties. The playgroup has a well-established experienced staff team consisting of a leader, deputy leader and an assistant. The management committee has been recently reconstituted, and some re-appointed members, on entering their second term of office, have changed roles, while continuing to provide stability to the management structure of the playgroup and inducting new members to the committee.

The cross-community playgroup has a warm and welcoming ethos which is inclusive of children from all cultures and backgrounds.

B. VIEWS OF PARENTS AND STAFF

One-quarter of parents/carers (6) responded to the confidential online questionnaire. All of the responses were wholly positive, with all parents/carers reporting that they are happy with: their child's learning experiences in the playgroup; the pastoral care and support provided by the staff; and, how the staff listen and take account of the parents' views and concerns. Inspectors also met with a small number of parents who reported that the playgroup meets the needs of all children in a caring and supportive manner.

All staff members responded positively to the confidential questionnaire. They report that they enjoy working at the playgroup and staff wellbeing is promoted effectively. There were no additional comments made by parents/carers or staff.

C. THE PROCESS OF INSPECTION

The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) worked alongside the playgroup to consider how well the playgroup:

- has identified and articulates its vision;
- prioritises actions to achieve the vision;
- overcomes the main challenges it faces;

- monitors and reviews progression to identify, celebrate and embed success; and
- grows and develops an inclusive community of learning.

2. SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

- The playgroup vision, to provide a welcoming, safe and inclusive environment, is well-embedded and achieved by the responsive staff and supportive leadership and management.
- There is a very well-established culture of self-evaluation; extensive consultation and reflective practice are used to inform appropriately the priorities on the development plan.
- The staff interactions with the children are of a good quality. They model language and promote the children's oracy and thinking skills through consistent open-questioning and links to the children's interests. The children's learning could be extended with a wider use of more real and authentic materials in all curriculum areas.
- The staff have reviewed appropriately their long- and medium-term planning. They have revised their cycle of observation and short-term planning, with particular focus on the six areas of the pre-school curriculum. This work needs to be developed further to progress and evidence appropriately the children's learning and progression.
- The personal, social and emotional development of the children is a key strength. The staff consistently use embedded positive behaviour strategies, with the children and this is evidenced by the children's very good social skills and independence. The emotional wellbeing of the children is supported well through, for example, an effective 'mindfulness' programme.
- The playgroup is regarded highly within the community and has established very good partnerships with local businesses, primary schools and the local day care centre.
- The staff prioritise professional development opportunities and are selective of specific training opportunities that will help them to meet the needs of the children.
- The arrangements for child protection take full account of current child protection guidance.

Area for further consideration/action:

- To provide more authentic and real resources across all the areas of the pre-school curriculum to stimulate the children's creativity and investigative play.
- To develop further and embed the cycle of observation and short-term planning to support progression across the six areas of the curriculum.

3. MAIN REPORT

A. SETTING THE VISION

The leadership and staff are committed to the playgroup's vision to be an open, friendly and welcoming environment for all the children. The staff work collegially to ensure that all children experience a holistic, play-based learning environment; they reflect on their practice and have high expectations of all the children. The management committee spoke of the commitment of the established staff team to the children's learning and development; the members of the committee use their own professional skill sets to support the sustainability of the playgroup, despite financial constraints and challenges.

The staff engage in good self-evaluation which is directed by the needs of all the children and this informs strategically their development plan and associated action plans. The staff articulate appropriately their improvement work for the playgroup and identify how the areas of focus will impact on the children's learning. The early years specialist (EYS) has provided consistent support to the staff and is confident that the staff team are committed to a culture of robust self-evaluation to adapt their practice to ensure that planning meets the needs of all children.

B. IMPLEMENTING AND IMPROVING TO ACHIEVE THE VISION

The staff prioritise the needs and interests of the children by focusing on particular areas of provision, for example, the construction area, to develop and progress the children's learning. There are well-defined play areas within the playroom where the children access freely and independently a range of resources to develop further their play. The children would benefit from a wider range of authentic and real resources in all areas of play to develop further their imagination and investigation skills. The outdoor environment has a wide range of stimulating opportunities for the children to engage in exploration and problem solving in a sensory and natural area.

The staff have revised to good effect the cycle of planning, observation and assessment and are in the process of evaluating the effectiveness of their short-term planning. The regular observations of the children are used appropriately by the staff to inform future planning. The staff interactions with the children are consistently good, and they model language and extend the children's thinking and oracy skills through effective open questioning.

The staff introduce the children to the use of digital devices over the course of the pre-school year and share videos and information slides linked to their play activities with the parents. The children are provided with appropriate digital devices to enhance their learning experiences. They are encouraged to use the digital devices to capture images during their play and learning, particularly in sessions on the World Around Us, for example, to illustrate the life cycle of the sunflower at various stages of growth.

The children's health and wellbeing is prioritised in the playgroup through energetic play and the provision of a healthy snack. In addition, the relevant and professional delivery of guided 'mindfulness' sessions equip the children with strategies to regulate their emotions and to be aware of their body and how they are feeling. These sessions meet the needs of all children and create a calm and inclusive atmosphere.

C. BUILDING EQUITY

The shared vision for an inclusive playgroup is embedded in the tailored support provided for all children. The staff use their observations to identify each child's specific needs and their progress in learning, and then work closely with parents and the Allied Health Professionals to support the children with their learning and development. The staff have built a very effective collegial team and have developed a strong culture of self-reflective practice. The child-centred ethos is shared among the staff, parents, leadership and wider community. The staff have introduced a one-to-one induction meeting prior to the start of the pre-school year, providing parents with an opportunity to ask questions, share concerns and develop open lines of communication.

The staff use their own personal learning to develop further their skills and practice which impacts positively on the outcomes of all the children. The staff undertake training and professional learning opportunities aligned well with the playgroup's priorities for development in order to meet effectively the needs of all children.

D. EMBEDDING SUCCESS

The children's personal, social and emotional skills are well-developed, and a majority of children sustain good concentration and play collaboratively with their peers during activities. They engage in role play opportunities, for example, in the doctor's surgery area and home area, using appropriate language and assigning roles to one another to extend their play.

Well-embedded positive behaviour strategies are used effectively and independently by the children and turn-taking, sharing and inclusion of others is reinforced consistently by staff during indoor and outdoor play. Almost all of the children's behaviour is very good and strategies to promote positive behaviour are used well by the staff.

The outdoor, adult-led physical play sessions provide good opportunities for the children to respond to music, song and rhythm with energy and enthusiasm. Most of the children explored the properties of water and ice and engaged in discussion with each other and the adults.

The children use a range of early mathematical language during most play activities. They have a good understanding of: positional language which was reinforced during music games; number through displays in the room and incidental counting; shape and colour during art activities and role play; and mathematical language which they use incidentally during their play.

E. GROWING A COMMUNITY OF LEARNING

There are effective lines of communication with parents throughout the year. A monthly newsletter outlines themes, such as areas of interest and the song of the month and celebrates important events in the lives of the children. A private messaging facility keeps parents updated of the work of the playgroup and the children; this is welcomed by the parents.

The children's views are valued and inform well the planning within the playgroup. Initially this is captured in an informal way, orally and through observations. As the term progresses, the staff capture and record the children's views in diagram and share them collectively. This illustrates and reinforces to the children the importance of their voice and opinion in their learning.

The playgroup has established strong links with the local primary schools. A buddy programme with the Year 6 children from two local primary schools is well established and enjoyed by both the children in the playgroup and those in the primary schools. The programme helps aid transition into Year 1 for the children as they establish relationships, have opportunities to visit the schools and build their confidence.

The staff of the playgroup have nurtured and developed excellent relationships with the staff and members of the local day centre for adults with disabilities which is located in the same complex. The children perform plays for the members, invite them to visit on special occasions and, when appropriate, attend sessions within the playgroup and assist the staff. This partnership is highly regarded within the community, mutually beneficial, promotes understanding of difference and is a further testament to the inclusive vision of Bunnahone Bunnies Cross Community Playgroup.

F. CHILD PROTECTION

At the time of the inspection, the evidence provided by the playgroup demonstrates that the arrangements for child protection take full account of the Department of Education's (DE) current guidance.

4. GOING FORWARD

The commitment of Bunnahone Bunnies Cross Community Playgroup to provide a safe and inclusive caring environment for all children is achieved by their reflective practice and in-depth knowledge of the needs of the children. The collegial staff team use their learning from professional and personal learning development opportunities to improve the outcomes for all the children.

The inspection has highlighted some areas for further consideration/action which will support the playgroup in achieving its vision. These include the need to: incorporate more fully authentic and real resources into the indoor environment to further extend and enhance the children's curiosity and creativity; and, develop further the cycle of observation and short-term planning to support progression across the six areas of the curriculum.

An aspect of effective practice in this playgroup which should be shared more widely is:

- the consistent use by staff of well-embedded positive behaviour strategies, promoting the children's social skills and independence.

The Education and Training Inspectorate

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