

Education and Training Inspectorate PRE-SCHOOL INSPECTION



The Country Playgroup, Ballymena, County Antrim

Private playgroup DE Ref No: 3AA-0273

Report of an Inspection in October 2019



Providing inspection services for:

Department of Education
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1. Context

The Country Playgroup is located in a rural location outside the village of Kells. The facilities consist of two playrooms and a large outdoor area. The children attending the playgroup travel from a wide catchment area. The playgroup operates one part-time morning session with pre-school age children and one part-time afternoon session, with mostly underage children. The playgroup is engaged in a shared education programme with a playgroup in Antrim.

Number of children:	Class 1	Class 2
Attending part-time	20	16
Funded by Department of Education	20	3
At CoP stages 3 or 4**	*	0
At CoP stages 1 or 2**	0	0

Percentage qualifying under DE admission criteria 1 or 2.	100
Average percentage attendance for the previous year.	97
Number of days open in previous school year	185

Source: data provided by the setting.

* On 1 July.

** The stages refer to those set out in the Code of Practice for the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs.

fewer than 5

N/A not available

2. Views of parents and staff

A majority of the parents and all of the staff responded to the confidential questionnaire. The majority of responses were positive about all aspects of the life and work of the playgroup. The small number of comments highlighted the kind, caring staff and the welcoming environment provided for all of the children, parents and visitors. A summary of the questionnaire responses were shared with the leader and staff.

3. Focus of the inspection

In order to promote improvement in the interest of all learners, the inspection linked internal and external approaches to evaluate the:

- outcomes for the children;
- quality of provision for learning; and
- leadership and management.

4. Overall findings of the inspection

Overall effectiveness	High level of capacity for sustained improvement
Outcomes for learners	Outstanding
Quality of provision	Very good
Leadership and management	Very good

5. Outcomes for learners

- The children are making outstanding progress across all areas of the pre-school curriculum; they are developing very positive attitudes and dispositions for learning. The children use age-appropriate mathematical language and have a very good understanding of concepts, especially number, shape, size, patterns and sequencing. They enjoy listening to stories and enthusiastically join in with rhymes and songs.
- The children's personal, social and emotional development is a key strength. They are extremely well-settled for the time of year, and are familiar with the daily routines and transitions. Their independence is already well-established; they choose what they want to explore and where they want to play, building on their own ideas and interests. Almost all of the children engage purposely in play for extended periods of time and take pride in their work; they are very respectful and caring for each other.
- Almost all of the children are curious to explore and investigate their surroundings and are willing to experiment, take risks and solve problems in the indoor and outdoor learning environment, for example, exploring different methods of collecting and transferring water. A majority of children confidently re-enact roles in the home area and mud kitchen; they develop their own imaginations and language through sustained high quality conversations with staff and their peers.
- All of the children engage actively in outdoor activities; their physical skills are well developed through games, running, jumping and climbing. The children have very well-developed fine motor skills; they use confidently and safely a wide range of equipment including real cutlery, writing implements and authentic tools.

6. Quality of provision

- The staff create an attractive, child-centred learning environment, enhanced by displays of the children's art work; they make effective use of the available space and resources. The recently developed outdoor provision is a key strength and creates opportunities for the children to problem-solve and be creative in their learning.
- The interactions between the staff and the children are consistently of a high standard; the staff skilfully model language and use open-ended questions to promote and extend the children's vocabulary.
- The staff plan a varied programme throughout the year which they use flexibly to include spontaneous activities that reflect the children's interests and ideas; while ensuring progression across all areas of the pre-school curriculum. The staff know the children very well and use their observations and assessment of the children's progress to meet the children's individual needs and to inform future learning for all of the children. Parents are informed weekly of their children's progress through the use of a commercial app.
- The children who have additional learning needs are identified early; they are very well supported through the skilful use of appropriate strategies. The staff have developed close links with parents and a wide range of external agencies for the benefit of the children.

- Based on the evidence available at the time of the inspection, the pre-school's approach to care and welfare impacts positively on learning and teaching, and outcomes. The nurturing child-centred ethos and excellent working relationships at all levels create a positive environment for children to learn and develop.

7. Leadership and management

- The leadership of the provision is highly strategic and all of the staff are committed to providing high quality care and education for all of the children.
- There is an effective development planning process underpinned by regular self-evaluation through which the staff review their practice and identify appropriate priorities for improvement and associated action plans to bring about future development.
- There are very good links between the parents, local pre-schools, primary schools and other agencies. The introduction of the 'Big Bedtime Read', as part of the 'Getting Ready to Learn' strategy through the Department of Education, has impacted positively on the children's interest in books and on parental engagement. There are very productive links with local primary schools for transition.
- There are agreed priorities and effective action plans for the 'Sharing from the Start' shared education programme that are leading to improved learning experiences for all of the children and staff, for example, the children benefit from visiting each setting, and staff share examples of good practice.

8. Safeguarding

- Based on the evidence available at the time of the inspection, the arrangements for safeguarding children reflect the guidance from the relevant Departments.

9. Overall effectiveness

The Country Playgroup has a high level of capacity for sustained improvement in the interest of all the children.

The ETI will monitor how the playgroup sustains improvement.

Inspection methodology and evidence base

The ETI's Inspection and Self-Evaluation Framework is available on the ETI website <https://www.etini.gov.uk/publications/inspection-and-self-evaluation-framework-isef-effective-practice-and-self-evaluation>.

Inspectors observed learning and teaching through play, the children's achievements, progression and standards, scrutinised relevant documentation, and held formal and informal discussions with staff with specific responsibilities.

The arrangements for this inspection included:

- a meeting with those involved with leadership and management; and
- the opportunity for the parents and staff to complete a confidential questionnaire.

Reporting terms used by the Education and Training Inspectorate

Quantitative terms

In this report, proportions may be described as percentages, common fractions and in more general quantitative terms. Where more general terms are used, they should be interpreted as follows:

Almost/nearly all	-	more than 90%
Most	-	75% - 90%
A majority	-	50% - 74%
A significant minority	-	30% - 49%
A minority	-	10% - 29%
Very few/a small number	-	less than 10%

Performance levels

The ETI use the following performance levels when reporting on outcomes for learners, quality of provision and leadership and management¹:

Outstanding
Very good
Good
Important area(s) for improvement
Requires significant improvement
Requires urgent improvement

The ETI use the following levels when reporting on governance:

High degree of confidence
Confidence
Limited confidence

The ETI use the following levels when reporting on safeguarding:

Reflects the guidance
Reflects broadly the guidance
Unsatisfactory

The ETI use the following levels when reporting on care and welfare:

Impacts positively on learning, teaching and outcomes for learners
Does not impact positively enough on learning, teaching and outcomes for learners

¹ And the overall provision in a subject area or unit, as applicable.

Overall effectiveness

The ETI use one of the following inspection outcomes when evaluating the overall effectiveness of the school:

<p>The school has a high level of capacity for sustained improvement in the interest of all the learners. The ETI will monitor how the school sustains improvement.</p>
<p>The school demonstrates the capacity to identify and bring about improvement in the interest of all the learners. The ETI will monitor how the school sustains improvement.</p>
<p>The school needs to address (an) important area(s) for improvement in the interest of all the learners. The ETI will monitor and report on the school's progress in addressing the area(s) for improvement. There will be a formal follow-up inspection.</p>
<p>The school needs to address urgently the significant areas for improvement identified in the interest of all the learners. It requires external support to do so. The ETI will monitor and report on the school's progress in addressing the areas for improvement. There will be a formal follow-up inspection.</p>

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