

PRE-SCHOOL INSPECTION



Education and Training
Inspectorate

Little Acorns Community
Playgroup, Coshquin, Derry

Report of an Inspection
in February 2011

STATISTICAL INFORMATION

Name of pre-school centre:	Little Acorns Community Playgroup
Address:	3 Benview Road Coshquin DERRY BT48 0NG
Management Type:	Voluntary

Date of inspection:	3 February 2011
Date of previous inspection:	2 December 2003

1. Details of Children

Total number of children:	am session	pm session
• attending the pre-school centre	16	-
• in their immediate pre-school year	10	-
• funded by Department of Education (DE)	13	-
• 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	2	-
• 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	90%	-

* Calculated from the date when the intake was complete

2. Details of Staff

Number of:	Full-time	Part-time
Staff, including leader	1	3
Staff holding recognised childcare qualifications	1	3
New appointments within previous 12 months	0	1

Number of: **	
Students	2
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:	14
Percentage returned:	50%
Number of written comments:	2

LITTLE ACORNS COMMUNITY PLAYGROUP, COSHQUIN, DERRY, BT48 0NG (2AB-0039)

1. Little Acorns Community Playgroup is accommodated within a purpose built centre and is situated on the Benview Road in the Cosquin area of Derry. Since the last inspection in 2003, a new leader and two new assistants have been appointed.

2. In the areas inspected, the quality of education provided by the playgroup is good. The playgroup has important strengths in most of its educational and pastoral provision. The inspection has identified areas for improvement which the playgroup has demonstrated the capacity to address. The Education and Training Inspectorate (Inspectorate) will monitor the playgroup's progress on the areas for improvement.

CHILDREN'S ACHIEVEMENTS

3. The children demonstrate good progress in their overall development in relation to their age and the time of the year. The children appear happy and confident; they enjoy making independent choices and are familiar with the daily routines. They can talk about aspects of the planned theme, show a great interest in books, can serve their own snack and are beginning to use appropriate mathematical language. A majority of the children were observed playing co-operatively and with purposeful engagement in the creative area, outdoors, in dough play, in the home corner and other activities.

4. During the inspection, there were very good opportunities for children to enjoy stories and rhymes in small groups. The children enjoyed browsing through books and 'read' stories to the adults and other children. The staff encourages the children to talk to one another and to develop their listening skills. The playgroup has established very good links with the local SureStart staff and speech and language therapists to reinforce individual and group support for the children within the pre-school programme. The majority of children speak with developing fluency and clarity; a small number are developing their skill to use simple sentences with greater confidence and articulation.

THE PROVISION FOR LEARNING

5. The staff has worked hard to create a welcoming and inviting learning environment for the children both indoors and outdoors. There are distinct areas of play and good use is made of all the available space. The staff displays the children's work, photographs of their experiences and interests. The staff needs to introduce more text and written captions to support further the children's language development. Good opportunities for learning are provided by the staff across most of the areas of the pre-school curriculum. During the inspection, the adults were particularly skilful in promoting early mathematical language naturally and effectively during story time, role-play, snack time and outdoor physical play. The daily routine provides a valuable session of extended play along with time for story, rhyme and physical play. The staff has appropriately identified a need to attend training in the Eiklan Language Communication Programme in order to develop their own skills further.

6. The staff is developing a team approach to planning a broad and balanced programme for the children and in recording and beginning to assess the children's responses and progress. It will be important that the staff ensures that the programme is regularly evaluated, that children's interests, needs and ideas are clearly reflected in the topics chosen and that there is evidence that all the children's progress is systematically recorded. The staff needs to focus more sharply on the learning potential for each activity and link the observations of the children's responses more clearly within short-term planning, in order to demonstrate evidence of progression and challenge throughout the year for the children.

7. The playgroup has developed very good links with the parents, the local SureStart Centre and the feeder primary schools within the community. The staff provides two written reports and one parent meeting each year to inform parents of their child's progress. The parents also receive a monthly newsletter with information about events in the playgroup; this now needs to be developed further to provide the parents with more detailed information about how they can support their children's learning at home.

8. The quality of the arrangements for pastoral care in the playgroup is very good. This is evidenced through the very positive ethos within the playgroup and the very good working relationships at all levels. The staff demonstrates commitment to both the care and well-being of the children and to the promotion of their independence and self-management skills.

9. The playgroup has very good comprehensive arrangements in place for safeguarding children. These arrangements reflect the guidance issued by the relevant Department.

10. The playgroup gives very good attention to promoting healthy eating and physical activity, for example, through the provision of a healthy snack and the daily opportunities to play outdoors and engage in more energetic play experiences, which encourage the children to adopt healthy lifestyles.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

11. The pre-school leader is enthusiastic, motivated and provides good leadership for the staff. She is committed to the continued professional development of all her team. The playgroup receives appropriate support from their early years specialist (EYS) employed by the Early Years Organisation (EYO).

12. The staff has developed useful informal methods of self-evaluation over recent years and there is clear evidence that the methods have led to improvements in the children's learning experiences. An enclosed outdoor play area has been developed and new indoor and outdoor play resources and equipment have been provided across the six areas of the learning in the pre-school programme. The staff now needs, with the support of the management group and the EYS, to develop and introduce a more formalised approach to continuous improvements within the provision through a development plan.

13. The key strengths of the playgroup include:

- the happy, caring ethos based on very good working relationships between the staff, the children, the parents and the wider community;
- the good progress made by the children in their use of early mathematical language and thinking;
- the settled children who are familiar and secure in their routines and environment;
- the broad and balanced programme which provides good opportunities to learn in almost all areas of the pre-school curriculum;

- the significant developments made to improve the quality of the provision in recent years; and
- the hard-working and dedicated staff who are developing a collaborative approach to promoting improvement.

14. The area for improvement is the need:

- to develop further the planning and assessment methods in order to focus more sharply on the learning potential of the activity and link the observations of the children's responses more clearly in order to demonstrate evidence of progression and challenge throughout the year for the children.

In the areas inspected, the quality of education provided by the playgroup is good. The playgroup has important strengths in most of its educational and pastoral provision. The inspection has identified areas for improvement which the playgroup has demonstrated the capacity to address. The Inspectorate will monitor the playgroup's progress on the areas for improvement.

QUESTIONNAIRES

The arrangements for the inspection of pastoral care and child protection included the opportunity for the parents, the staff and the management committee to complete a confidential questionnaire prior to the inspection. Seven of the parents responded to the questionnaire and two made additional written comments. The responses from the parental questionnaire were very positive and indicated a high level of satisfaction with nearly all aspects of the playgroup's work; in particular the parents praised the dedication of the staff and how their children enjoyed the playgroup and the good progress they are making. Three of the staff responded to the questionnaire; all were very positive about all aspects of the playgroup's work. The responses from the questionnaires have been shared with the staff and management of the playgroup.

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