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



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Education and Training Inspectorate

Report of an Inspection

Inchmarlo Playgroup
Belfast

Inspected: October 2008

STATISTICAL INFORMATION

Name of pre-school centre:	Inchmarlo Playgroup
Address:	Cranmore Park BELFAST BT9 6JR
Management Type:	Voluntary

Date of inspection:	7 October 2008
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)	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	1	-
• with English as an additional language	2	-
• 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	94%	-

* Calculated from the date when the intake was complete

2. Details of Staff

Number of:	Full-time	Part-time
Staff, including leader	3	-
Staff holding recognised childcare qualifications	2	-
New appointments within previous 12 months	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
2½ hours	N/A	190

4. Parental Questionnaires

Number issued to parents:	18
Percentage returned:	66.7%
Number of written comments:	4

INCHMARLO PLAYGROUP, BELFAST, BT9 6JR (1BB-0554)

INTRODUCTION

1. The pre-school centre is accommodated on the upper floor of a school building within the grounds of Inchmarlo Preparatory Department. The centre is in its second year of receiving funding from the Department of Education (DE) as a part of the pre-school education 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. All of the responses, including the small number of issues raised by the parents, have been taken into account as part of the inspection and were shared with the staff and management group. The responses from the parents indicate a high level of satisfaction with the overall provision.

3. The quality of the pastoral care within the centre is satisfactory. The centre has an inclusive ethos and the staff are committed to the care and well-being of the children. There are good relationships between the staff, children and parents. Although appropriate policies have been agreed for managing the children's behaviour there are times during the organisation of the day when the children require further help to be purposefully engaged.

4. The centre's arrangements for safeguarding children are unsatisfactory and do not adequately reflect the guidance issued by the relevant Department. In particular the centre needs urgently to secure access to the building and to the playroom. The centre also needs to make the following minor amendments to its policy:

- include a more detailed code of conduct on the arrangements for the toileting and changing of the children; and
- agree a format for recording child protection concerns.

5. The pre-school centre gives good attention to promoting healthy eating and physical activity by, for example, the encouragement of a healthy break and regular sessions for energetic play both indoors and outdoors.

THE QUALITY OF THE EDUCATIONAL PROVISION

6. The staff are all caring and warmly supportive of the children. The children are generally well behaved; at times they become restless and disengaged during daily routines, particularly when the activities lack sufficient challenge. The playroom is bright, well maintained and enhanced with some colourful displays and the children's own art work. The staff should review the layout of the room and the resources available to the children, in order to provide more effectively resourced areas which promote greater levels of autonomous play and investigation. The staff make good use of the school gym and outdoor play area to provide additional activities for the children.

7. The centre has an equal opportunities policy; the staff should access training and advice to support those children for whom English is not their first language.

8. The children and parents are greeted warmly on arrival and the children settle quickly to play. The children have some opportunities for freely chosen play which is balanced with daily, energetic play sessions and group stories and rhymes. The staff should promote the children's independence and learning more fully through the daily routines.

9. The staff all demonstrate a caring, friendly approach in their work with the children. Although there are times when the staff promote the children's language through their involvement in the children's play, there is a need for training and support to enable them to develop further their skills in maximising the learning potential of the activities to extend the children's ideas and thinking.

10. There is insufficient breadth and balance in the curriculum provided; it is poorly matched to the children's stages of development and interests and lacks adequate challenge and progression. The children have daily access to a range of activities, which provide satisfactory opportunities for learning in some areas of the pre-school curriculum. The particular strengths observed during the inspection include the examples of co-operative and concentrated play displayed by a number of the children, their interest in books and stories and the opportunities for physical play sessions, both indoors and outdoors. More needs to be done to foster and extend the children's creativity and imagination, their language skills and early-marking, their early mathematical ideas and concepts, and their understanding of the world around them.

11. The planning and assessment methods are currently insufficient to enable the staff to provide a rich, stimulating and challenging pre-school curriculum matched to the needs and interests of the children. The lack of staff development and appropriate guidance from an early years specialist (EYS) has impeded progress in this area.

12. The centre has recently drawn up a policy for special educational needs. The staff are aware of those children who may require additional support; they now need to undertake the training and support required to implement the policy effectively.

13. The parents receive information about the work of the centre through the prospectus, the noticeboard and open day. To these communication methods should be added more formally arranged meetings to discuss the children's progress, and to involve the parents more fully in their children's education and development.

14. At the end of the pre-school year, the staff forward the completed transition forms to the teachers of year one in the primary school. Curricular links should be further developed to ensure adequate progression in the children's learning and experiences throughout the children's pre-school and foundation stages.

15. It is inappropriate that the location of the toilets requires a member of staff to leave the room and accompany the children.

16. The leader and staff in the pre-school centre work hard to care for the children and provide a range of experiences for them. They work well as a team and demonstrate a willingness to develop and improve the quality of the provision.

17. The centre has had insufficient EYS support to guide the work of the pre-school centre and to train the staff in the skills required to bring about the necessary improvements. There is an urgent need for the management to identify and provide suitable EYS support, ongoing professional development for the staff and the resources necessary to improve the quality of the provision for the children. The actions identified on the current pre-school development plan need to be amended in light of the inspection findings.

18. The key strengths within the centre's educational and pastoral provision are as follows:

- the caring and supportive playgroup staff and their commitment to the welfare of the children;
- the children's interest in books and stories;
- the wide range of visitors which enhance the children's experiences; and
- the opportunities for energetic physical play.

19. The inspection identified areas for improvement. The following are the most important areas and each needs immediate attention:

- the provision of appropriate support from the EYS to support the staff in raising the overall quality of the provision;
- the further development by the staff of their skills in planning and assessment, in order to implement a broad and balanced pre-school programme which matches the needs and interests of all of the children; and
- the quality of the staff's interactions with the children to support the children's learning more effectively through the activities and daily routines.

20. In almost all of the areas inspected, the quality of the education provided by this pre-school centre is inadequate; the areas for improvement outweigh the strengths in the provision. The inspection has identified significant areas for improvement in learning, teaching, leadership and management, which need to be addressed urgently if the centre is to meet effectively the needs of all of the children. This report has been referred to the Department of Education.

The Education and Training Inspectorate will undertake a follow-up visit, within six working weeks, to evaluate the actions taken and planned to address the deficiencies identified in the pre-school centre's arrangements for child protection, including the need to secure access to the building in which the playgroup room is accommodated.

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