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**Department of Education
Department for Employment and Learning
Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure**



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Education and Training Inspectorate

Report of an Inspection

Little Ducks Playgroup Carew II

Inspected: January 2008

STATISTICAL INFORMATION

Name of pre-school centre:	Little Ducks Playgroup Carew II
Address:	Family and Training Centre 15 Tamar Street BELFAST BT4 1HS
Management Type:	Voluntary

Date of inspection:	16 January 2008
Date of previous inspection:	N/A

1. Details of Children

Total number of children:	am session	pm session
• attending the pre-school centre	16	-
• in their immediate pre-school year	16	-
• funded by Department of Education	16	-
• qualifying under DE admission criteria 1 & 2	9	-
• 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	0	-
Attendance:		
• attendance* of funded children for the previous school year	77%	-

* Calculated from the date when the intake was complete

2. Details of Staff

Number of:	Full-time	Part-time
Staff, including leader	2	0
Staff holding recognised childcare qualifications	2	0
New appointments within previous 12 months	2	0

Number of: **	
Students	1
Trainees	2

** 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
4 hours	-	188

4. Parental Questionnaires

Number issued to parents:	16
Percentage returned:	31.3%
Number of written comments:	1

LITTLE DUCKS PLAYGROUP, CAREW II, BELFAST, BT4 1HS (1AB-0477)

1. Little Ducks Playgroup is a pre-school group funded by the Department of Education accommodated within the Carew II Family Centre. The family centre provides child care and training programmes for families in the local area. The children come from a wide surrounding area. The playgroup withdrew from the pre-school programme in 2005 and re-entered in 2006. The high turn-over of staff within the playgroup has impacted negatively on the quality of the provision. Each of the current members of playgroup staff has been appointed very recently; the manager of the centre reports difficulty in recruiting staff with suitable qualifications and experience.
2. The parents, staff and management group were given opportunities to express their views about the centre through the inspection questionnaires. Although few in number, the responses have been taken into account as part of the inspection and the issues raised have been shared with the staff.
3. The quality of the arrangements for pastoral care and child protection has a few strengths. Although some appropriate practice is in place, there are important areas for improvement which require prompt action. The pre-school centre's policies and procedures for child protection need to be reviewed and improved. In particular, action is needed to ensure that the procedures for reporting concerns are clarified and understood by all of the staff and trainees, and that procedures for the personal care of children are shared with the parents. The District Inspector will return to the centre within six weeks to ensure that these important issues are addressed appropriately.
4. The pre-school centre's programme for the promotion of health and well-being has some strengths, with a developing commitment to encourage the children to eat healthily and be physically active.
5. The staff have worked hard, in recent weeks, with their early years specialist (EYS), to enhance the quality of the learning environment within the playroom. They are developing a range of activities and interest areas. The staff demonstrate a caring approach in their work with the children. However, a significant number of children are very unsettled and unproductive in their play; noise levels are too high. The staff need to have an agreed understanding of the behaviour management policy and training on how to implement it consistently.
6. The daily timetable places an appropriate emphasis on extended periods of free play balanced with group activities. The staff need to improve the management of the transitions between activities and review the organisation of story time and outdoor play.
7. During the inspection, there were some examples when the staff engaged in useful conversations with the children about their experiences. The staff need to develop their skill in promoting purposeful play, extending the children's language and learning, and handling group situations.
8. Significant work is required to enhance the quality of the children's learning in all areas of the pre-school curriculum.

- A significant number of children display poor concentration and a lack of social skills. More needs to be done to foster the children's independence and their confidence in using the recently resourced play areas. The inspectors observed a few examples of co-operative play within the home play area.
- There are some appropriate opportunities for the children to develop their fine motor skills through the use of a range of tools such as glue spreaders and dough. The provision for physical play needs to be planned for and managed more effectively.
- A few children are beginning to explore the materials in the recently introduced creative area and music table. On the day of the inspection, these areas were generally underused; the children's art work on display is at a very early stage of development.
- The staff need to place more emphasis on promoting the children's listening skills, oral language, early-marking and use of books.
- During the inspection, the children particularly enjoyed exploring the resources at the sand and water trays. Construction play is currently too limited.

9. The staff require further training on how to identify, plan for and meet the needs of children with special educational needs. For this to happen, there needs to be better communication between the manager, staff and other professionals to ensure a more coherent approach to addressing the children's needs.

10. The staff seek the parents' views on aspects of the centre's work and communicate with the parents through a noticeboard, newsletters and information pack. More should be done to involve the parents in their children's education and development. The staff need to share more information on the children's progress with their parents.

11. The staff are in the early stages of developing their written planning and assessment methods.

12. The recently appointed leader in the pre-school room demonstrates a willingness to improve the quality of the current provision and recognises the need for further training and support in developing her role. The centre manager needs to give clear leadership and work more closely with the staff and the EYS to plan the developmental work which is required. The recently appointed EYS has given good advice and guidance within the very limited period of time available to date. The centre manager needs to ensure that the EYS is deployed appropriately within the centre.

13. The manager and staff have appropriately identified the need for further training and support in a wide range of areas including child protection, planning, assessment, staff interaction to promote learning, and special educational needs.

14. The quality of the accommodation within the playroom is good. The outdoor garden area needs to be made secure and safe; this area provides the potential to enhance greatly the children's learning and broaden their experiences.

15. The centre is developing effective links with the primary schools to which the children will transfer. The manager should review and build on the current links with the local SureStart in order to ensure that the staff in the playgroup make better use of the resources available.

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

- the recent improvements to the quality of the learning environment;
- the staff's caring approach to their work with the children;
- the instances of purposeful play;
- the links with the local primary schools; and
- the promotion of healthy eating.

17. The inspection identified the following areas for improvement:

- the staff need to review and implement consistently their behaviour management policy in order to promote the children's personal, social and emotional development and ensure more settled and productive play;
- the staff need further training and support to build their capacity to plan, implement and evaluate a rich pre-school programme which meets the needs of the children; and
- the management and leader need to further develop their roles to ensure that quality provision is achieved and maintained.

18. These major areas for improvement in the work of the Little Ducks Playgroup need to be addressed urgently in the interests of the children.

The Education and Training Inspectorate will monitor regularly and report within 12 months on the organisation's progress in addressing these areas for improvement.

HEALTH AND SAFETY MATTERS

- The water tray is leaking.
- The garden's perimeter fence is broken allowing uncontrolled access to the outdoor play area.
- There is broken equipment and rubbish throughout the garden area.
- The management of wheeled toys around younger children is unsafe.

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