

**Report of a Pilot Inspection**  
Drumaness Cross-Community Playgroup, Ballynahinch

April 2024



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# **1. INTRODUCTION**

## **A. BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Drumaness Cross-Community Playgroup is situated within the grounds of Christ the King Primary School in Drumaness; it is a registered charity since November 2020. The playroom is in a modular unit classroom, with a recently developed outdoor area. The staff also use regularly the playground of the primary school to provide the children with additional space to engage in a range of physical activities, such as “The Daily Mile”.

There are currently 15 pre-school children attending the part-time session; they come from a catchment area covering a ten-mile radius. The pre-school staff also provide an afternoon session for underage children three days per week.

The pre-school comprises of an experienced leader and a recently appointed deputy leader. An additional assistant is employed on a short-term contract through the Department for the Communities JobStart Scheme. A volunteer also supports the staff when required. The leader is also the playgroup’s early years specialist (EYS) since September 2023. The experienced management committee has a core team of six members, all of whom have been members for a considerable period of time.

Six weeks prior to the pilot inspection, the staff had to switch to remote learning for one week due to problems with the playgroup’s heating system.

## **B. VIEWS OF PARENTS AND STAFF**

The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) issued online confidential questionnaires to parents and staff in advance of the pilot inspection.

Two-thirds (10) of the parents responded to the questionnaire and one-third of these provided additional written comments. All responses were wholly positive. The parents reported that they appreciate the work of the approachable and caring staff who communicate regularly with them.

One-third of the parents also met with the inspectors. The parents commented positively on the recent period of remote learning which was well-planned and included the provision of helpful videos which their child enjoyed watching. They also reported that their child enjoys attending the playgroup and is making good progress. All of the parents expressed their appreciation of the playgroup which is a valued resource within the local community.

All of the playgroup staff responded to the questionnaire and their responses were also wholly positive.

## **C. THE PROCESS OF INSPECTION**

The 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 management committee's strategic and creative use of funding to implement education, training and support programmes has impacted positively on parents, young people and the wider community, particularly over the last three years.
- The staff work in close partnership with the management committee and know how their individual work contributes to the shared vision of the playgroup. The priorities within the current action plans should be consolidated into a smaller and more manageable number of overarching priorities, to allow the staff to monitor and evaluate better the children's progress.
- The staff are reflective in their practice and have a good understanding of the pre-school curriculum. They have identified appropriately the need to develop long-term planning and review aspects of their short-term planning. This is required to reflect better the progression in learning across all areas of the pre-school curriculum, in particular within language and the arts.
- The staff know the children well and use their regular observations of the children's progress to identify any barriers to learning and implement supportive strategies. The staff have identified appropriately the need for further professional learning opportunities to: enable them to create and implement individual education plans (IEPs); and build further their capacity to meet the increasingly complex and diverse needs of the children.
- As a result of the work of the staff in developing the learning environment, both indoors and outdoors, all of the children observed are curious and motivated learners and are making very good progress in most areas of the pre-school curriculum.
- At the time of the inspection, the evidence provided by the playgroup demonstrates that the arrangements for child protection align to the current statutory guidance.

Areas for further consideration:

- for the staff to access professional learning opportunities to enable them to create and implement IEPs and build further their capacity to meet the increasingly complex and diverse needs of the children; and

- to develop long-term planning and review the learning potential within the short-term planning to reflect better the progression in learning of the children across all areas of the pre-school curriculum.

### **3. MAIN REPORT**

#### **A. SETTING THE VISION**

The staff and the management committee are wholly committed to social impact and making a positive difference to the village of Drumaness which is reflected in their vision of “*being in the heart of the community for the community*”. Through regular consultation with parents and the wider community, the management committee are proactive and resourceful in accessing funding which they use to implement a range of community programmes. These programmes promote positive parenting skills, support parents with their education and career development, and provide young people with employment opportunities to enhance their career prospects.

The management committee have clear strategic goals and can articulate the impact of their work over a three-year period. The staff team know how their individual work contributes to the shared vision of the playgroup and what they want to achieve in relation to the outcomes planned for the children. The playgroup has currently a large number of identified priorities informed by the needs of the children which are outlined in a significant number of separate action plans. These priorities should be consolidated into a smaller and more manageable number of overarching priorities and action plans, with a continued focus on the provision and the outcomes of the children. This consolidation will allow the staff to monitor and evaluate better the children’s progress.

#### **B. IMPLEMENTING AND IMPROVING TO ACHIEVE THE VISION**

The staff provide a calm and pastorally supportive learning environment underpinned by respectful relationships. Very good use is made of the indoor and outdoor spaces to provide opportunities for learning across all areas of the pre-school curriculum. The resources are well-organised and readily accessible to the children, enabling them to select independently the resources they want to extend their learning.

The staff have implemented recently a new approach to their planning and observation of the children’s learning. They are reflective in their practice and have a good understanding of most areas of the pre-school curriculum. The staff are responsive to the views of the children and their engagement in the activities, adapting to the needs and interests of the children throughout the week. At the weekly meetings, the staff refer to the Curricular Guidance for Pre-School, evaluate the impact of their work on the outcomes of the children, and use this information to inform the next planning. There is currently no long-term planning in place. The staff have identified appropriately the need to review aspects of the short-term planning, in particular the learning potential. This is required to reflect better the progression in learning across all areas of the pre-school curriculum, in particular within language and the arts.

The adult interactions are effective in promoting the children's interest in and enjoyment of learning and making learning fun. The staff build well on spontaneous opportunities for learning, such as the discovery of a ladybird during outdoor play and observing the birds, to develop further the children's knowledge of the world around them and the associated language.

Priority is given to the children's health and wellbeing, which is exemplified through the children's access to a water station, participation in regular physical exercise, and engagement in daily tooth-brushing as part of the Happy Smiles programme. The well-established routines and the focus on respecting each other ensures that the children feel safe and secure, and they are confident in looking to the adults for support when necessary.

### **C. BUILDING EQUITY**

The staff know the children well and use their regular observations of the children's progress to identify any barriers to learning and implement supportive strategies. For example, the use of children's individualised symbols and sand timers to support children's turn-taking and transition across play activities. The staff have identified a small number of children with barriers to their learning and communicate regularly with parents to discuss their child's progress and the support strategies they are implementing.

Staff have not put in place IEPs to document the support strategies being employed by them for the children they have identified with special educational needs, as well as to record their evaluations of these children's progress. The staff have identified appropriately the need for further professional learning opportunities to enable them to create and implement IEPs and build further their capacity to meet the increasingly complex and diverse needs of the children.

### **D. EMBEDDING SUCCESS**

As a result of the work of the staff in developing the learning environment, both indoors and outdoors, all of the children observed are curious and motivated learners. They are keen to explore and observe closely the world around them, showing care and respect for plants and living things. They are developing well their investigation, fine motor, and problem-solving skills, particularly at the 'tinker table', which provides them with an interesting range of items, tools, and technological devices to explore, such as nuts and bolts, keys and locks, and a digital camera.

The children are developing well their early mathematical skills and associated mathematical language. Naturally during their play, the children count, measure, sort, talk about shapes in the environment and have an awareness of time. All of the children listen attentively during story time and join in with repetitive phrases. The children's interest in browsing books and engaging in early mark-making is less well-developed. Most of the children enjoy expressing their ideas through art activities. They use the wide range of resources to paint, draw and create collages but do not have sufficient support and visual stimuli to develop their observational skills and representational drawings.

The staff are quick to identify and acknowledge positively the children's success in developing their social skills, respect for others and managing their emotions. The impact can be seen in how effectively the children are developing their independence, resilience and respect for others. The staff celebrate the children's learning across their pre-school year with a community-based pre-school graduation ceremony; the parents with older children who previously attended the playgroup spoke very favourably about this ceremony.

## **E. GROWING A COMMUNITY OF LEARNING**

The playgroup leader and the management committee have prioritised appropriately the development of a cohesive staff team and ensuring that all permanent and temporary staff are upskilled in safeguarding policies and procedures. As the leader has now taken on the role of EYS for the playgroup, the staff and management committee recognise the value of collaborating with other settings and establishing links to share effective practice.

The management committee has a particular interest and involvement in parental engagement, adult training, and community development. The work of the leader and management committee led to the implementation of the 'Parent and Children Together' programme and 'Skills for Rural Women Project', publication of a book entitled 'Empowering Women, Empowering Us' in April 2023, and establishment of the 'Villagers Women's Group' in Drumaness.

## **F. CHILD PROTECTION**

At the time of the inspection, the evidence provided by the playgroup demonstrates that the arrangements for child protection align to the current statutory guidance.

## **4. GOING FORWARD**

Drumaness Cross-Community Playgroup is a safe, secure and stimulating playgroup which is highly valued by the local community. The playgroup is characterised by excellent relationships at all levels; the good progress of the children; the openness of staff and the management committee to learn from others; and, a shared commitment to the children, their families and the local community.

ETI will monitor the progress of Drumaness Cross-Community Playgroup in addressing the areas for further consideration as laid out in this report.

Inspectors identified an aspect of highly effective practice from which others may learn. The aspect of practice which should be shared more widely include:

- the staff and management committee's strategic and creative approach to developing a community of learning.

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