

Report of a Pilot Inspection  
Randalstown Community Playgroup, Randalstown

October 2023



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# **1. INTRODUCTION**

## **A. BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Randalstown Community Playgroup is a voluntary playgroup located in the Neilsbrook Community Centre, Randalstown. The playgroup operates a part-time morning session. The children attending the playgroup mainly come from the local town, with a small proportion coming from the wider rural catchment areas. Fourteen out of the twenty (70%) pre-school children are in their immediate pre-school year. None of the children have been identified as having special educational needs (SEN) and 5% of the children have English as an additional language. Since the last inspection, two new members of staff have been appointed. The leader is supported by a deputy and an assistant.

The playgroup's ethos is based on a child-led approach to learning which values each child as an individual. There are positive links with the local primary schools, local businesses, and community groups.

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

A small number of parents/carers responded to the confidential online questionnaire and were very supportive of, and positive about, the work of the playgroup. The parents/carers who provided additional comments report that children are developing social skills as they partake in a wide range of activities. Inspectors also met with a small number of parents who reported that the staff are friendly and caring and take time to listen to their concerns. They particularly appreciate the staff sharing photographs of the children participating in their learning during the day through a digital app and stated they would welcome the addition of a monthly newsletter. The parents report that their children are eager to attend the playgroup and are progressing in their social skills and confidence.

All the playgroup staff responded positively to the questionnaire; they all enjoy working at the playgroup and appreciate that staff wellbeing is promoted. A summary of the questionnaire responses was shared with the staff and the chairperson of the management committee.

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

The Education and Training Inspectorate (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 leadership and staff work collegially to promote a shared vision where children lead the learning in an enjoyable, inclusive environment.
- The management committee have established proactively strong links with the local community, providing positive experiences to enhance the children's learning.
- The long-term planning is effective and guides well the medium-term planning. The short-term planning requires further development to identify the learning potential and progression of the children across all six areas of the pre-school curriculum.
- The staff prioritise the children's health and wellbeing and actively promote energetic play, healthy eating and social skills.
- The indoor learning environment has a good variety of natural materials which helps to enhance and extend the children's play experiences. The well-resourced outdoor play area is not fully exploited or utilised enough to develop the children's curiosity and investigative play.
- The arrangements for child protection align to the current statutory guidance.

Areas for further consideration/action:

- To record consistently observations and assessment of the children's learning across all areas of the pre-school curriculum to effectively inform the short-term planning and ensure progression.
- To develop a more strategic and robust process of self-evaluation and action planning.
- To ensure appropriate risk assessment procedures and health and safety guidelines are applied during outdoor play.
- To update a small number of safeguarding policies in line with guidance from the Department of Education.

## **3. MAIN REPORT**

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

The staff articulate well their vision and work collegially to encourage the children to engage meaningfully in their play. They incorporate the children's ideas and interests into the short-term planning which aims to make their learning fun and interesting.

The management committee have a good understanding of the vision; are supportive of all aspects of the playgroup and are well informed through regular visits to the sessions and regular updates from the leader. While there is a three-year development plan, the playgroup do not have sufficient monitoring and evaluating procedures in place that effectively inform the action planning processes. The early years specialist has provided appropriate training and support for the staff in creating and implementing their vision.

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

The staff are caring, supportive of the children's needs and help to develop their self-esteem and confidence. They create a calm and nurturing indoor environment which is resourced with a good range of natural and authentic materials. The management committee have secured funding for a well-resourced outdoor play area which is not used effectively enough to promote the children's curiosity to explore their natural environment.

The long-term planning is effective and guides well the medium-term planning. The short-term planning does not provide adequate detail across all six areas of the pre-school curriculum. The learning potential for the children and the role of the adult in the short-term planning is not detailed enough to enable the staff to monitor and evaluate the children's progress and inform the next stage of planning. The staff interactions with the children are generally good but they do not consistently support and challenge the children in their play. While there were some examples of good interactions, there were too many missed opportunities by the staff to model play for the children and use open-ended questioning to promote the children's problem-solving and develop their vocabulary, skills and concepts, in particular, their early mathematical language. The staff use appropriately a range of digital resources to develop the children's learning and knowledge.

The children's health and wellbeing is prioritised and promoted actively through healthy break, mindfulness yoga and physical exercise opportunities such as Rugby Tots. The staff promote effectively the children's independence and social skills during snack time, when tidying up, and moving resources to the outdoor area. The children discuss their feelings with the staff and can express a range of emotions when interacting with their peers during play. The staff are caring and pastoral in their interactions with the children and there is a range of safeguarding policies in place to support the staff to keep the children safe. Based on the evidence made available the playgroup need to ensure appropriate risk assessment procedures and health and safety guidelines are applied during outdoor play; and update a small number of safeguarding policies in line with guidance from the Department of Education.

## **C. BUILDING EQUITY**

There is an inclusive ethos within the playgroup. Staff have appropriately implemented additional strategies to promote inclusion, such as visual cards to support children for whom English is an additional language.

The parents/carers are updated on their child's progress and a language interpreter, when required, provides support for families for whom English is an additional language. Although there are no children with SEN in this current academic year, staff reported an increase in the number of children who had a statement of SEN in last year's cohort. As a result, the staff have appropriately identified in their development plan the need to access further training on special educational needs and writing of personal learning plans (PLP) to improve their professional practice.

#### **D. EMBEDDING SUCCESS**

For the time of year, the children are very well-behaved and settle quickly to their self-chosen activities for sustained periods of play. They respond well to praise and enjoy being rewarded with stickers. The staff value the children's ideas and on occasions adapt the provision to meet their interests by adding extra resources to the activities to extend their play. A majority of the children engage confidently with the staff and one another and play collaboratively, for example, in the home corner.

Most of the children's fine motor skills are developing well; they have good hand-eye coordination, for example, threading using string in a controlled manner, making playdough habitats, using scissors, cutting up vegetables and filling and pouring using a wide range of containers.

A small number of children use early mathematical language, such as terms relating to number, colour and size. Most of the children listen attentively during story time and a few children are beginning to join in with rhymes and songs.

The children are not provided with sufficient opportunities to engage in outdoor learning to extend their creativity, investigative play and exploration of the world around us, despite the outdoor learning area being well resourced.

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

The management committee have established proactively strong links with the local community, providing positive experiences to enhance the children's learning. For example, representatives from local businesses visit the playgroup to talk to the children about their professions to help stimulate the children's curiosity and interest. The management committee have also secured additional funding from external agencies to provide resources that enhance the children's learning experiences. Parents/carers are updated regularly with information on their child's learning using digital apps and informal conversations.

The early years specialist supports the leadership of the playgroup, providing guidance on matters such as long-term and medium-term planning and has appropriately identified the need to revise the development plan.

#### **F. CHILD PROTECTION**

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

## **4. GOING FORWARD**

The management committee and staff of Randalstown Community Playgroup work well together to take forward the shared vision of a child-led approach to learning to enable the children to build upon their interests and ideas. The staff are committed to the vision; their focus on developing the children's emotional health and wellbeing is impacting positively on their good social skills and exemplary behaviour.

The inspection has highlighted some areas for further action which will support the playgroup in achieving its vision, including reviewing short-term planning and observations, and developing strategic priorities and action plans to identify more clearly the impact of improvement work on the children's learning and progression.

ETI will monitor the progress of Randalstown Community Playgroup in addressing the areas for further action detailed in the report. There will be a follow-up inspection.



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