

PRE-SCHOOL INSPECTION



Education and Training
Inspectorate

Little Acorns Playgroup,
Coleraine, County Londonderry

Report of an Inspection in
December 2017



The Education and Training Inspectorate
Promoting Improvement

Providing inspection services for:

Department of Education
Department for the Economy
and other commissioning Departments



CONTENTS

Section	Page
1. Context	1
2. Views of parents and staff	1
3. Focus of the inspection	1
4. Overall findings of the inspection	1
5. Outcomes for learners	2
6. Quality of provision	2
7. Leadership and management	3
8. Safeguarding	3
9. Overall effectiveness	3

Appendices

- A. Health and safety
- B. Inspection methodology and evidence base
- C. Reporting terms used by the Education and Training Inspectorate

1. Context

Little Acorns Playgroup is located on the outskirts of Coleraine, adjoining the grounds of Castleroe Primary School. Since the last inspection, the enrolment has increased significantly (by 75%), and an additional assistant has recently been employed.

Number of children:	Class 1
Attending full-time	20
Funded by Department of Education	20
Without a statement but receiving therapy or support from other professionals for special educational needs	#

Average percentage attendance for the previous year.	96%
Number of days open in previous school year	192

Source: data provided by the setting.

* On 1 July.

** The stages refer to those set out in the Code of Practice for the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs.

fewer than

2. Views of parents and staff

Forty per cent of the parents and all of the staff responded to the confidential questionnaires. The responses to the parental questionnaires were highly positive about the life and work of the playgroup. In particular the parents appreciate how well their children are valued and cared for, and the very good progress they make. The staff responses were all very positive; they appreciate the high level of support they receive from the management group and the very good communication between staff and parents.

3. Focus of the inspection

In order to promote improvement in the interest of all learners, the inspection linked internal and external approaches to evaluate the:

- outcomes for the children;
- quality of provision for learning; and
- leadership and management.

4. Overall findings of the inspection

Overall effectiveness	High level of capacity for sustained improvement
Outcomes for learners	Very good
Quality of provision	Very Good
Leadership and management	Very good

5. Outcomes for learners

- The children are developing their capacity as learners very well across all aspects of the pre-school curriculum. They settle quickly and engage enthusiastically in sustained, purposeful and imaginative play both individually and in groups.
- The children are making very good progress in developing their language and communication skills. They benefit well from the quality of the interactions with the staff which promote the children's thinking. The children communicate their ideas and reasoning confidently during play and group activities. They listen attentively to the group story and ask and answer questions in an informed way. A small number of children engaged purposefully in early mark-making while writing Christmas cards and lists.
- The children have a good early understanding of number and measurement and use the language of capacity and measure in meaningful play-based and social contexts, for example, counting the number of Christmas presents to be wrapped, estimating how much paper it would take, and sorting the presents by size.
- The children enjoy and participate enthusiastically in music and drama and show considerable pride in performing, for example in their rehearsal for the Christmas show.

6. Quality of provision

- Detailed planning builds on the children's previous experiences and provides progressive learning opportunities across all areas of the pre-school curriculum. The staff maintain, through the efficient use of an observation and record-keeping app, frequent and regular reports on the learning experiences and progress of each child in personal files. The assessments are used very effectively to inform, adapt and develop future planning, focusing appropriately on meeting children's individual needs.
- The staff present a stimulating learning environment; the space available is used creatively and resources are accessible to the children. Effective use of natural materials, such as, the use of logs, pine and hedge cuttings, extends well the quality of the children's learning experiences. The playgroup shares the use of a small wooded area with the neighbouring primary school. The staff have identified the potential for further joint development of the use of this area which the inspection endorses as appropriate. The staff are, undertaking further development of activities for outdoor play to take advantage of new resources financed through external funding.
- All of the staff interact skilfully with the children to promote learning; they use effective, open-ended questions, and model both language and play very well to extend the children's thinking and understanding.
- The children who have additional learning needs are identified early and benefit from well-planned programmes which include opportunities for developing social and communication skills. The staff have appropriately identified the need for further staff development in this aspect of provision.

- Based on the evidence available at the time of the inspection, the playgroup's approach to the care and welfare of the children impacts positively on all aspects of the learning, teaching and outcomes. The staff have a highly respectful and caring approach to working with the children, whose interests and opinions are valued.

7. Leadership and management

- There is a collegial and highly supportive leadership culture at all levels in the playgroup. Self-evaluation and action to promote improvement is well-embedded and there is evidence of focused monitoring and evaluation leading to improvement in the quality of the children's learning experiences and attainment. The thorough approach to detailed, well-organised policy and planning documentation is exemplary.
- The management group values the child-centred and welcoming ethos of the playgroup. They play a significant role supporting staff through continued growth and change, including appraising the effectiveness of the leader, and facilitating the leader's appraisal of staff. They provide supportive challenge to the leader and staff with the care and wellbeing of the children remaining paramount. The early years specialist from the Early Years Organisation supports the playgroup very well in identifying areas for development and improvement.
- Effective links have been developed with appropriate support agencies, local schools and the local community. The setting has further developed its links with the neighbouring primary school to support transition by the children, as well as sharing in the use of the P1 outdoor play area and the school's science trail.

8. Safeguarding

- Based on the evidence available at the time of the inspection, the arrangements for safeguarding children reflect the guidance from the relevant Departments.

9. Overall effectiveness

Little Acorns Playgroup has a high level of capacity for sustained improvement in the interest of all the children.

The ETI will monitor how the playgroup sustains improvement.

Health and safety

- There is a need for traffic control signs at the front of the playgroup to manage parking and to slow passing traffic at the start and end of the playgroup session and school day.

Inspection methodology and evidence base

The ETI's Inspection and Self-Evaluation Framework is available on the ETI website <https://www.etini.gov.uk/publications/inspection-and-self-evaluation-framework-isef-effective-practice-and-self-evaluation>.

Inspectors observed learning and teaching through play, the children's achievements, progression and standards, scrutinised relevant documentation, and held formal and informal discussions with staff with specific responsibilities.

The arrangements for this inspection included:

- a meeting with those involved with leadership and management, including the management group; and
- the opportunity for the parents and staff to complete a confidential questionnaire.

Reporting terms used by the Education and Training Inspectorate

Quantitative terms

In this report, proportions may be described as percentages, common fractions and in more general quantitative terms. Where more general terms are used, they should be interpreted as follows:

Almost/nearly all	-	more than 90%
Most	-	75% - 90%
A majority	-	50% - 74%
A significant minority	-	30% - 49%
A minority	-	10% - 29%
Very few/a small number	-	less than 10%

Performance levels

The ETI use the following performance levels when reporting on outcomes for learners, quality of provision and leadership and management:

Outstanding
Very good
Good
Important area(s) for improvement
Requires significant improvement
Requires urgent improvement

Overall effectiveness

The ETI use one of the following inspection outcomes when evaluating the overall effectiveness of the school:

The school has a high level of capacity for sustained improvement in the interest of all the learners. The ETI will monitor how the school sustains improvement.
The school demonstrates the capacity to identify and bring about improvement in the interest of all the learners. The ETI will monitor how the school sustains improvement.
The school needs to address (an) important area(s) for improvement in the interest of all the learners. The ETI will monitor and report on the school's progress in addressing the area(s) for improvement. There will be a formal follow-up inspection.
The school needs to address urgently the significant areas for improvement identified in the interest of all the learners. It requires external support to do so. The ETI will monitor and report on the school's progress in addressing the areas for improvement. There will be a formal follow-up inspection.

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