

Report of a Pre-School Inspection
Ballinderry Playgroup

December 2024

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1. INTRODUCTION

A. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Ballinderry Playgroup is situated in the local community hall in Ballinderry, on the outskirts of Coagh near Cookstown. There are currently 26 pre-school children attending the part-time session; they come mainly from the local area.

The pre-school staff comprises an experienced leader, deputy leader and two assistants. A newly qualified assistant works on a voluntary basis with the playgroup on two days each week.

B. VIEWS OF PARENTS AND STAFF

The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) issued online confidential questionnaires to parents and staff in advance of the inspection. A small number of parents responded to the online questionnaire; all of the responses were very positive. The parents stated that their child is making good progress, and they are content with the care and support given to their child in the playgroup. The small number of written comments reported an appreciation of the work of the staff and the playgroup provision. Most of the staff responded to the online questionnaire. They reported that they enjoy working in the playgroup and their well-being is promoted effectively.

C. THE PROCESS OF INSPECTION

The ETI worked alongside Ballinderry 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

- Priorities identified within the playgroup's current development plan have a clear rationale and there are thorough, ongoing processes for monitoring and evaluating the progress made.
- Planning for learning considers progression across the six areas of the pre-school curriculum and there is a whole staff approach to the observation, planning and assessment cycle that guides well the children's learning.

- Language and early literacy development is promoted very effectively by all staff across the playgroup.
- The staff review continually their approaches and the environment, adapt routines, and reflect on the use of resources and staffing to support the successful inclusion of all the children. As a result, all the children have settled in well, their needs have been identified and acted upon, and the pace of induction has been considered well to support successful inclusion.
- All of the children in the playgroup are making very good progress in their learning from their individual starting points and they are enjoying success in all areas of the pre-school curriculum.
- The established culture of a team approach to planning, and a daily reflection on learning, is having a positive impact on the learning experiences for all of the children.
- The staff value and embrace the opportunities for professional learning, embedding new strategies into their practice to support effectively the children and to meet their individual needs.
- 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.

3. MAIN REPORT

A. SETTING THE VISION

The staff in Ballinderry Playgroup have a clear vision for the children to learn and grow in a safe, caring and stimulating environment where they can develop their independence, confidence and social skills, and build friendships that will support them in their transition to primary school.

The processes for self-evaluation within the playgroup are well established.

The staff work effectively alongside an independent early year's specialist to review the provision for learning and consider how the needs of the current cohort of children can be addressed appropriately. Priorities identified within the playgroup's current development plan include the review of the learning environment to support Special Educational Needs (SEN) and the use of consistent strategies and approaches to support successful learning. Identified priorities have a clear rationale and there are thorough and on-going processes for monitoring and evaluating the progress made. The management committee have a wide range of skills and knowledge and support fully the work of the staff.

B. IMPLEMENTING AND IMPROVING TO ACHIEVE THE VISION

All of the staff are warm, encouraging and supportive in their interactions with the children. A great emphasis is placed on promoting consistency of approach among the staff team; new staff are supported well through a programme of induction and they are encouraged to reflect on strategies and approaches within the team.

There is a literacy rich environment within the playgroup that is characterised by a range of seasonally appropriate and accessible books and the extensive library that supports and promotes an enjoyment of reading, both at home as well as within in playgroup setting. The children access books independently, enjoy having stories read to them by staff and use puppets to retell stories in their own words. A range of writing materials including whiteboard markers, chalk and pens encourage the children to make marks, draw and engage imaginatively and enthusiastically with writing as they consider soup recipes, measure and compare heights, and recount their own experiences of the weekend with staff.

Role play, storytelling and opportunities for “show and tell” all contribute to a learning experience which is successful in promoting the language development of every child. Similarly, the environment promotes successfully the development of early mathematical concepts as children engage well with opportunities to count, make patterns and experiment with weight and measurement.

The snack routines are well considered, paced appropriately and encourage independence among the children as they wash their hands in preparation for snack, pour their own drinks and select their preferred healthy snack. It is evident from the social interactions between the children, and with the staff, that the social skills of the children are being developed well at snack time. Emerging friendships are also evident though the children’s enjoyment in being in one another’s company and through their collaborative play.

Planning for learning considers progression across the six areas of the pre-school curriculum and there is a whole staff approach to the observation, planning and assessment cycle, that guides well the children’s learning. As part of the playgroup’s on-going self-evaluation processes, there has been a focus on the development of the outdoor learning environment in recent years. The staff have worked together to monitor and evaluate progression in learning in outdoor play and are building on the use of natural and authentic resources to promote investigative play and develop the children’s problem-solving skills. They have appropriately identified the need to provide extended opportunities for children to further develop their skills and understanding within the distinct nature of the outdoor environment.

The impact of staff professional learning is evident in the consideration that has been given to developing the wellbeing of the children as they settle into the playgroup. The staff get to know the children well through the induction process and priority is given to building relationships with each child. Stories, in this ‘settling in term’, are carefully selected to explore and discuss emotions that arise when making the transition from home to playgroup and consequently the children are able to explore their feelings in a safe space with the staff team. The children are at ease in the playroom and are able to relate to stories and empathise with the characters.

C. BUILDING EQUITY

The staff make effective use of a range of information, links with parents and outside agencies to identify and make provision for children with special and additional learning needs. The staff review continually their approaches and the environment, adapt routines, and reflect on the use of resources and staffing to support the successful inclusion of all the children. As a result, all the children have settled in well, their needs have been identified and acted upon, and the pace of induction has been considered well to support successful inclusion.

Sensory toys that support emotional regulation are infused among the play resources throughout the playgroup and are used appropriately by many of the children. Transitions are supported well by consistent cues from the staff to which all children respond positively and actively, as they comfortably move from one activity to another throughout the session.

Individual Education Plans for children with special educational needs (SEN) consider and build upon the child's strengths while addressing their overarching needs. The strategies employed within the setting reflect that the staff have learned from, and are implementing ideas suggested by, the specialists from outside agencies such as EA Educational Psychology service and Allied Health Professionals, such as speech and language therapists.

D. DEFINING, CELEBRATING AND EMBEDDING SUCCESS

The well embedded processes in place to monitor progression across the curriculum is successful in identifying and meeting the needs of every child. All of the children display very good levels of confidence and engagement in their learning. The staff's skilful and supportive interactions with the children are guided well by the planning, which details the language staff use in their interactions with the children and supports them in extending the children's thinking. As a result, all of the children are making very good progress in their learning and development from their individual starting points and are enjoying success in all areas of the pre-school curriculum.

The success of every child is recognised through regular praise, encouragement and recognition of all their achievements. The use of stickers, certificates and the displays of drawings, artwork and mark making throughout the room all acknowledge and celebrate the children's successes and development. Throughout the year the staff collate evidence of the progress the children are making through photographs and pieces of work. These are put on display and shared with parents at key points in the pre-school year when they visit, such as at the "Hibernation Party". The parents can see as the year passes, the progression their child is making, and the examples are then collated at the end of the year in celebration and recognition of the pre-school journey and the progress made by every child.

E. GROWING A COMMUNITY OF LEARNING

The collaborative staff team use skilfully their individual areas of talent and expertise to meet the needs of all the children. The established culture of a team approach to planning, and a daily reflection on learning, is having a positive impact on the learning experiences for all the children.

The skills and knowledge of the staff in identifying and addressing individual needs is supported well by ongoing professional learning and the support and advice they receive from external agencies, which they implement and adapt to meet the needs of current learners.

The regular communication between the playgroup and parents is informative and supportive. The parents are encouraged to be involved in their child's learning and the very detailed 'settling in' report and regular informal communications keep them up to date and provide them with strategies for supporting their child with their learning at home. There are regular opportunities to visit the playgroup through participation in the Department of Education's 'Getting Ready to Learn' programme, the Christmas play, "stay and play" sessions and the annual graduation. These experiences are also building effectively the confidence of the children, in line with the vision of the playgroup.

The programme to support the children's transition to primary school is well developed and the staff work in close partnership with the local schools to ensure the children are well prepared and ready to move to the next stage. Opportunities for the children to visit their new schools and for their teachers to visit them in playgroup nurtures relationships and builds the confidence of the children. The specific strategies in place for transition for children with SEN are also well considered and thoughtful in their implementation.

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. There are clear systems and procedures in place for volunteers who work in the playgroup.

4. GOING FORWARD

The staff in Ballinderry Playgroup work effectively as a team to support the children as they develop their independence, confidence and social skills. They are enthusiastic about their work and embrace opportunities for professional learning to support them in realising their vision and preparing the children well for their transition to primary school.

Ballinderry Playgroup is well placed to take forward the priorities they have identified through their own development planning processes.

5. APPENDIX

APPENDIX 1: 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%

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