

Report of a Pre-school Inspection
Killyman Community Playgroup

January 2025



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Throughout the report the use of an asterisk * denotes further information included at Appendix 2.

1. INTRODUCTION

A. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Killyman Community Playgroup is located in Griffith Hall in Dungannon. Twenty-four children attend the part-time session and come from the local village and surrounding area. A minority of children have been identified as having special educational needs (SEN) and there are a small number of newcomer children. The staffing comprises a leader, deputy leader and an assistant. The playgroup participates in the Department of Education's 'Getting Ready to Learn' (GRTL) programme which aims to promote a greater understanding of the pre-school curriculum for parents.

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. Fourteen parents responded to the questionnaires, one-half of whom included written comments which were wholly positive about the provision in the playgroup. All of the parental responses indicated that: their child is happy at the playgroup; they are making good progress in their learning; and the staff have informed them how to report a safeguarding or child protection concern. In the written comments, the parents expressed their appreciation for the work of the staff team and the strong links with the local schools which prepare their child well for transition into primary education.

All of the staff completed the questionnaire. Their responses were wholly positive and indicated that they enjoy working in the playgroup; they feel respected; and their wellbeing is promoted effectively.

C. THE PROCESS OF INSPECTION

The ETI worked alongside Killyman Community 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

- All of the staff in Killyman Community Playgroup are committed to a clear vision for high quality care and education within a safe and welcoming environment for each child and their family.

- The staff's ongoing reflection on the children's needs; the delivery of the pre-school curriculum; and the use of their environment, are pivotal to the identification and agreement of priorities within the playgroup's development plan. The development plan builds on robust, well-established and impactful processes of self-evaluation and improvement.
- There is a rigorous cycle of planning, observation and assessment in place which is impacting very positively on the outcomes for the children.
- The staff communicate very well with parents and seek advice and guidance from external agencies to support individual children and ensure that bespoke interventions are implemented consistently.
- The health and wellbeing of the children is supported very effectively through: the warm, caring and consistently gentle approach of all staff; the support the children receive to help them to recognise and manage their emotions; and the consideration given to meeting their individual needs.
- The children are making very good progress in their learning across all areas of the pre-school curriculum.
- In the indoor and outdoor learning environment, the children engage in sustained, high-quality investigative and imaginative play and are developing well their confidence, friendships and a love for learning.
- A well-embedded culture and ethos permeates all aspects of the life and work of the playgroup in which the community, collaboration and continuous learning for all are valued and prioritised.
- At the time of the inspection, the evidence provided by Killyman Community Playgroup demonstrates that the arrangements for child protection align to the current statutory guidance.

3. MAIN REPORT

A. SETTING THE VISION

The playgroup staff are committed to a clear vision for high quality care and education within a safe and welcoming environment for each child and their family. The staff team gather regular feedback from parents, hold frequent meetings with the management committee and work alongside early years specialists and training providers, to reflect on their provision for learning and plan for continuous development. There is a clear rationale for the agreed priorities within the development plan which is informed by the staff's ongoing reflection on the needs of the children; the delivery of the pre-school curriculum; and the use of their environment. The development plan builds on robust, well-established and impactful processes of self-evaluation and improvement. Identified priority areas include supporting children with emotional regulation and increasing the use of natural and authentic resources across the indoor and outdoor environments.

The management committee are committed to the playgroup's vision and understand their role in supporting the ongoing development of the provision. They are insightful, forward thinking and have the skills, knowledge and enthusiasm to support the staff to meet the needs of the children.

B. IMPLEMENTING AND IMPROVING TO ACHIEVE THE VISION

The playgroup staff are reflective practitioners, and the outworking of previous development plan priorities is evident in the impactful work that has been undertaken to develop further the long-, medium- and short-term planning and enable progression in learning across all areas of the pre-school curriculum. The staff have been proactive in seeking out learning opportunities to support them in their improvement journey. As a result, there is a rigorous cycle of observation, planning and assessment in place which is impacting very positively on the outcomes for the children. The planning for learning is detailed, evaluated regularly, and informed well by focused and spontaneous insightful observations of the children as they play and learn together.

All aspects of the indoor and outdoor environments have been considered thoughtfully as part of the playgroup's three-year development plan. The implementation of several identified actions, such as the inclusion of sensory areas and quiet spaces and the addition of authentic and natural materials, is improving further the children's learning experiences. This is particularly notable within the outdoor environment where the children have opportunities to investigate, explore and use their senses.

Throughout the session all of the staff model language and social courtesies consistently and appropriately. They listen actively to the children and use conversation and open-ended questioning naturally to extend the children's thinking and develop their vocabulary across the breadth of the learning experiences provided. As a result, the children are growing in confidence, are able to express their thoughts and ideas and are using many of the sentence structures and phrases they hear modelled by the staff team.

The staff use ICT resources well to enhance and support the children's learning experience. The children engage imaginatively with digital technology, such as shop tills and telephones and use recording devices to express and reflect their thoughts alongside their displayed work.

The health and wellbeing of the children is supported very effectively through: the warm, caring and consistently gentle approach of the staff; the support the children receive in helping them to recognise and manage their emotions; and the consideration given to meeting their individual needs. The children talk about healthy food choices at snack time and in the home corner. They understand the importance of looking after their teeth and brush their teeth daily during the session. The outdoor area provides the opportunity for physical and energetic play and the children enjoy opportunities to balance and to throw and catch a ball, alongside the freedom to run.

C. BUILDING EQUITY

Prior to starting pre-school, the staff work in partnership with parents and take advice from external specialists to ensure they know and understand the needs of each child well. The staff build on this knowledge through the use of baseline assessment tools and their own initial observations, gathering key information in relation to each child's developing speech and language skills, their physical skills, social skills and play skills. This information is then used very effectively to plan the next steps in the learning.

As a well-established staff team, the professional learning and development opportunities undertaken by the staff over recent years are evident in their everyday practice. They plan for effective interventions to support all of the children, including newcomer children and those children who need some extra help with different aspects of their learning.

As the pre-school year progresses, the staff continue to communicate well with parents and external agencies to support individual children and ensure that bespoke interventions are implemented consistently.

Specialists such as Speech and Language therapists and the external agency RISE NI* have modelled interventions, and recommended and provided resources, to support speech and language development, attention and listening skills and emotional wellbeing within the playgroup setting. The modelling of strategies and approaches has been particularly beneficial as it has developed well the knowledge, skills and understanding of the staff team. Consequently, they are able to identify special educational needs more readily and make appropriate interventions to support the children while they access, or wait on access, to external services.

All of the children are being supported well in their learning in an inclusive and welcoming environment. Specific interventions have impacted positively on those children who have required additional help, as evidenced by the detailed monitoring of the progress made towards the targets on their individual Personal Learning Plans.

D. DEFINING, CELEBRATING AND EMBEDDING SUCCESS

The individual successes of each child within the playgroup are celebrated on an ongoing basis by the staff team as the children overcome challenges, persevere with tasks and reach individual goals. The voice of each child is valued as they select their own work for display on their art wall. 'Praise notes' are used by the staff to record and celebrate individual successes. These are shared with each child and their parents or carers at home time.

The children are making very good progress in their learning across all areas of the pre-school curriculum. In both the indoor and outdoor learning environments, the children engage in sustained, high quality investigative and imaginative play and are developing well their confidence, friendships and a love for learning.

The personal, social and emotional development of the children is a key strength within the setting. Independence is promoted very effectively across all aspects of the session as the children label and put away their own artwork, put on aprons before painting, help to organise the snack and take their turn at assuming the role of 'class helper' indicating key transition points using the shaker and bell.

The routines of the day are well established and supported very effectively by consistency of approaches among the staff team. The children are very respectful of one another and of the adults around them. They share, take turns and show patience and awareness of appropriate behaviour, for example, as they independently form a queue and wait patiently to fill their containers at the outdoor water butt.

The children's language and early literacy skills are developing very well. They show a keen interest in the books that are integrated naturally across many areas of the indoor and outdoor play provision. They enjoy looking through books and discussing the pictures and story with a friend or a member of staff. The whole-class story and song time is particularly effective in engaging the children, all of whom display high levels of interest.

Across the outdoor area in particular, the natural curiosity of the children is developing very well as they engage enthusiastically with purposeful opportunities to; observe and discuss plants and bugs; explore and experiment with water, sand, tubes and wood; and plant and grow flowers and vegetables. The children show a great interest in talking about themselves and their families and enjoy sharing their stories and pictures with the staff.

The ongoing commitment of the staff team to a continuous cycle of regular monitoring, self-evaluation and improvement is embedding and building upon success within the playgroup setting.

E. GROWING A COMMUNITY OF LEARNING

A well-embedded culture and ethos permeates all aspects of the life and work of the playgroup in which the community, collaboration and continuous learning for all are valued and prioritised. The arduous efforts of the leader and the management committee in applying for funding and grants, and their proactive commitment to researching and sourcing bespoke professional learning, has supported the development of well-considered partnerships with a range of health, educational and other professionals. These partnerships are having a significant, positive impact on the children's learning experiences and outcomes, and also support and build further the knowledge and skills of the staff, parents and the wider community.

The playgroup has well-established links with a local primary school to which almost all of the children progress. The parents are appreciative of the very well-paced and considered opportunities for their child to become familiar with the primary school, for example, through play visits to primary 1 which begin early in the pre-school year and continue throughout the year.

The children's learning experiences are being enhanced very effectively through planned walks and visits within the local environment, for example, the autumn walk in the Old Rectory and the walk through the village. These walks support the consolidation of the children's learning across the pre-school curriculum and act as purposeful stimuli for imaginative play when they return to the playroom.

The parents are kept very well informed about events and learning within the playgroup through, for example, an informative and detailed monthly newsletter and the use of social media. Regular parent meetings and informal conversations, at drop-off and pick-up times, keep parents fully informed about their child's progress and achievements. Participation in the Department of Education's GRTL programme is developing parental knowledge and understanding on how they can support further their child's learning and development at home.

F. CHILD PROTECTION

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

4. GOING FORWARD

The children in Killyman Community Playgroup benefit from the commitment of a dedicated staff team who engage in a continuous cycle of self-evaluation and improvement ensuring they are successful in achieving their vision for high quality education within an inclusive environment that supports each child and their family.

The ETI will continue to work with Killyman Community Playgroup, including to share examples of highly effective practice from which others may learn. The aspects of practice which should be shared more widely are:

- the highly effective approaches to working in partnership with parents, external agencies and local schools which impact significantly on the quality of the learning experiences and the outcomes for the children, facilitating a smooth transition to primary education; and
- the highly effective, rigorous and collaborative approach to planning, observations and assessment that facilitates and monitors closely progression in learning for each child across the pre-school curriculum.

Killyman Community Playgroup is well placed to take forward the areas for action they have identified through their own development planning processes.

5. APPENDICES

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%

APPENDIX 2: NOTES

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The Regional Integrated Support for Education in Northern Ireland (RISENI) is a regional early intervention service which supports children in pre-school education and primary schools. The service works closely with parents and education staff to help children develop the foundation skills for learning, that is, speech, language, communication, sensory-motor, visual perception, social, emotional and behaviour skills.

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