

Report of a Pre-school Inspection
Little Doves Community Playgroup

October 2024



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1. INTRODUCTION

A. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Little Doves Community Playgroup is located in a purpose-built modular building in the Westwinds estate in Newtownards. There are currently twenty-one children attending the part-time pre-school session; the enrolment this year is significantly higher than in previous years. The majority of the children come from the Westwinds and Scrabo estates, and the remainder from the wider Newtownards and Comber areas. A small number of the children have been identified as having special educational needs (SEN). The staff team consists of a centre manager, a pre-school leader, a deputy leader, one full-time assistant and one part-time assistant. The playgroup is managed by a longstanding board of directors.

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. All of the staff and almost one-half of the parents responded to the questionnaires; all of their responses were wholly positive. One-half of the parents who responded also provided written comments in which they praised the 'amazing', supportive staff and the caring ethos that exists within the setting.

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

- All staff and the board of directors are wholly committed to meeting the needs of the children and their families in line with their shared vision, 'Supporting your community, supporting your family, supporting you'.
- The children are well settled in the playgroup and are making good progress from their individual starting points.

- A shared process of self-evaluation is in place which identifies appropriate areas for development. The action planning could inform better the changes to the provision if the targets were more specific and the evaluations focused more clearly on the subsequent impact on the children's learning.
- Short-term planning for learning is informed appropriately by observations and the views of the children. The staff have begun to develop the planning to reflect more accurately the pre-school curriculum and the intended learning.
- Songs, rhymes and stories are used very well to develop the children's attention and listening skills, vocabulary, and awareness of sound and rhythm.
- The staff are acutely aware of the main challenges and barriers facing many of the children and families. They work in close partnership with the community and a range of other professionals to provide appropriate support to the children and their families.
- 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 action:

- ensure targets in actions plans are more specific and evaluations articulate more clearly the impact on the children's learning;
- develop further the planning for learning to reflect more fully the pre-school curriculum and the intended learning; and
- review the school's SEN and complaints policy.

3. MAIN REPORT

A. SETTING THE VISION

All of the staff at Little Doves Community Playgroup are proud of the welcoming and supportive environment that they have worked hard to create in their local community. They are committed to meeting the emotional and educational needs of each child and to supporting their families, in line with their shared vision, 'Supporting your community, supporting your family, supporting you'.

A two-year development plan is in place which has been informed by a shared process of self-evaluation and identifies appropriate areas for development. The staff engage in ongoing reflection and professional discussions with each other. They review regularly what is going well, agree what they want to improve and can discuss and evidence the improvements and changes that have taken place. The action planning could inform better the changes to the provision if the targets were more specific and the evaluations focused more clearly on the subsequent impact on the children's learning.

The members of the well-established board of directors bring a wide skillset and range of experience and expertise to their role. They are actively involved in the life and work of the playgroup and are fully committed to supporting the staff to realise their vision for the children, their families and the community they serve.

B. IMPLEMENTING AND IMPROVING TO ACHIEVE THE VISION

The staff have created an attractive, inclusive and welcoming learning environment. Through the playgroup's collaborative self-evaluation process, changes have been made to the layout of the playroom. The resources are now more accessible to the children as they play, and the various spaces support the children effectively to develop further their creativity, independence and self-management skills.

A detailed cycle of planning, observation and assessment is in place. The staff operate a key worker system; they know the children very well and identify at an early stage any additional support required. Observations of learning inform the planning appropriately and are used well by the staff to monitor the progress the individual children make in their learning, across the pre-school curriculum. The planning is a working document; it is discussed, annotated and amended regularly by the staff in response to the views of the children and as a result, learning opportunities and resources are provided that meet better the needs and interests of individual children. The staff have begun to develop the planning to reflect more accurately the pre-school curriculum and intended learning.

The staff, in their interactions with each other, model well positive relationships, care and respect, which the children display in their interactions with one another. The staff interact skilfully with the children, listen actively to them and value their ideas and opinions. Songs, rhymes and stories are used very well to develop the children's attention and listening skills, vocabulary, and awareness of sound and rhythm. A small number of children access books independently. In the more effective practice, the staff model language very well and, through skilful commentary and open-ended questions, extend the children's thinking and communication skills naturally during play. This is particularly effective in the small world, role play and sand and water areas through which the children's independence and social skills are also developing well.

There is a range of risk assessments and policies in place which guide the work of the playgroup. The staff, in consultation with the board of directors, should consider devising a rolling schedule for reviewing policies to enable a systematic approach to the development and review of key policies. The complaints policy and SEN policy require review to reflect the current practice.

C. BUILDING EQUITY

The staff are acutely aware of the main challenges and barriers facing many of the children and families. They work in close partnership with families, the community, and a range of other professionals to provide appropriate support so that the children are ready to learn and can access and benefit from the range of learning opportunities available to them in the playgroup.

The small number of children who have been identified as having SEN are supported well by the staff and are making progress. The effective partnerships with parents, Sure Start providers, health visitors, and educational psychologists, along with the comprehensive induction and settling-in processes, allow for the early identification of needs and appropriate support to be put in place.

The children's individual education plans (IEPs) have been agreed with parents, are supported by partnerships with other relevant professionals, and identify the children's strengths and interests. The staff are appropriately working on improving the targets in the IEPs so that they are specific and measurable and are supported by a range of clear and concise strategies.

D. DEFINING, CELEBRATING AND EMBEDDING SUCCESS

The children are happy and well settled in the playgroup and are making progress from their individual starting points. They are secure in the routines and transitions which are well-embedded, are learning to take turns and speak politely to staff and one another. Almost all of the children engage in sustained, purposeful and collaborative play and many of them are developing friendships with each other.

The children can choose if they wish to have a role or responsibility, such as snack helper or line leader, and they fulfil their daily delegated roles with enthusiasm and pride. Their achievements, both in the playgroup and externally, are shared and celebrated and their artwork is valued and displayed around the playroom. The children's creations and artwork are photographed and shared regularly with parents, using an online communication platform and on social media.

E. GROWING A COMMUNITY OF LEARNING

The staff work very well as a team; they are respectful of each other and reflect and plan collaboratively to best meet the needs of all children. They value and actively encourage the views of the children and use these to inform the planning and provision for learning. The staff, in collaboration with their independent early years specialist and through clustering with other early years settings, engage in appropriate professional learning opportunities that align to the priorities for improvement identified in their development plan. These include for example, planning for outdoor learning.

A strong, caring and community ethos is integral to the playgroup's vision and is exemplified by a range of longstanding partnerships with, for example, the local Sure Start provider, health visitors, local churches and primary schools. The strategic representation of the playgroup on the Westwinds Development Association ensures that the playgroup remains connected and responsive to the local community.

The playgroup is very proud of their annual intergenerational programme of events. The children are provided with invaluable opportunities to interact with the older generation and widen their learning and wellbeing experiences, through for example, their engagement in equine therapy, storytelling, and music and drama opportunities.

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

Little Doves Community Playgroup is an integral part of the community it serves. The staff work collaboratively and collegially, with the support of the longstanding board of directors, to meet well the needs of the children and their families. Together they live out daily their vision, 'Supporting your community, supporting your family, supporting you'.

ETI will work with Little Doves Community Playgroup to monitor its progress in addressing the areas for action as laid out in this report.

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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