

Report of a Pre-school Inspection
Paddington Playgroup

February 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

Paddington Playgroup is located in purpose-built accommodation in Galbally Community Centre, County Tyrone. There are currently 36 children attending the playgroup: 24 children in the morning session and 12 children in the afternoon session. Almost all of the children come from the local area. A small number of children have been identified as having special educational needs (SEN) and there are a very small number of newcomer children. There are five full-time staff members: a leader, deputy leader and three assistants and one part-time assistant.

B. VIEWS OF PARENTS AND STAFF

The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) issued online confidential questionnaires to the parents and staff in advance of the inspection. Over fifty percent (20) of the parents/carers responded to the online confidential questionnaire and a significant minority (7) of these responses included additional written comments. All of the respondents agreed that their child is making good progress in their learning and that they are content with the pastoral care given to their child by the staff. The written responses praised: the friendly and caring staff; the support given to their child; and the good communication between the staff and parents.

All of the staff responded to the questionnaire. They all agreed they have benefitted from recent professional development opportunities, they understand the needs of the individual children, and their well-being is promoted effectively. A majority of the staff also included written comments about their enjoyment in working as part of the pre-school team to provide a happy and caring environment for the children.

C. THE PROCESS OF INSPECTION

ETI worked alongside Paddington 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 pre-school's development and improvement work is wholly child-centred and is guided well by the ongoing feedback from parents, staff and external agencies.
- Short-term planning, observation and assessment is informed well by the interests and needs of the children.

- Almost all of the children are independent, confident and resilient learners who approach their learning with enthusiasm, curiosity and excitement.
- The World Around Us curriculum is a key strength of the provision; the children have access to a wide range of stimulating and exciting opportunities which enable them to observe, explore, experiment, discuss and problem solve.
- The commitment to inclusion within the playgroup is strongly reflected in the compassionate and child centred response to individual needs and circumstances.
- The staff have engaged well with a range of external educational and health support services developing their skills and knowledge through an extensive programme of professional learning which enables them to understand and address the holistic needs of the children.
- The children are developing firm friendships. Almost all of the children warmly greet one another and settle quickly into purposeful and productive play.
- Success stems from the high expectations set for the children by the experienced and well-supported staff team who are valued by the community.
- The staff foster strong connections with the local community, including the parents, the local primary school, and other pre-school providers to enhance the children's learning experiences and support their transition to primary education.
- 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

Paddington Playgroup staff are committed to ensuring that all of the children enjoy their pre-school experience within an environment that supports their physical and emotional well-being, and consequently, their learning. There is clear evidence of thorough self-evaluation. The focus of the pre-school's development and improvement work is wholly child-centred and guided well by the ongoing feedback from parents, staff and external agencies. The current priorities identified within the three-year development plan are appropriate and well-considered, and improvement work within the setting is well-paced. Development priorities include supporting effectively the children with additional and special educational needs, and the development of outdoor learning.

The community interest in the success of the playgroup is reflected in the large number of management committee members who are well informed about the work of the playgroup. They have a wide range of skills and knowledge and are fully committed to supporting the staff in their work.

B. IMPLEMENTING AND IMPROVING TO ACHIEVE THE VISION

Both the indoor and outdoor learning environments have been created and adapted to ensure the children's safety, facilitate their enjoyment in learning, and provide a breadth of learning experiences across the pre-school curriculum.

The long- and medium-term planning guides well the work of the staff team. There is an effective cycle of short-term planning, observation and assessment that is informed appropriately by the interests and needs of the children. The well-embedded approaches enable the staff to monitor the children's progress across the six areas of the pre-school curriculum throughout the pre-school year.

The World Around Us curriculum is a key strength of the provision. The children engage enthusiastically with the wide range of stimulating and exciting learning opportunities which enable them to observe, explore, experiment, discuss and problem solve. The children's curiosity of the world around them is evident as they use binoculars and magnifying glasses to explore the learning environment, experiment with calculators and cameras, investigate how locks and magnets function, test pulleys on a crane, and use tablet technology to capture photos of their play. Additionally, many of the learning opportunities provided reflect the local context, such as, quarries and farms. These stimulate further the children's interest in role play, construction and jigsaws. The children are proud to point out their family photos on display and talk about their homelife.

The literacy rich environment promotes an evident enjoyment of books and early mark making and supports the children to develop their speech, language and attention and listening skills. The staff value the enjoyment the children derive from their learning experiences and support them well in extending their language and thinking through consistently high-quality interactions that are gentle and encouraging.

Early mathematical language and concepts are developed naturally through the play experiences. The children hear and use mathematical language as they count, sort colours, and explore length and weight with adults and their peers.

Information and Communication Technology resources are used well to enhance and support the children's learning experiences. The children engage imaginatively with digital technology, such as keyboards and calculators and connect their learning across the pre-school curriculum.

Outdoor learning is a focus of the current three-year development plan. The ongoing review of outdoor play is supporting staff in exploiting the unique opportunities for learning that can be developed in the outdoor environment.

In line with the vision for the pre-school, health and well-being is supported effectively as each child is enabled to thrive in a secure and supportive emotional and physical environment. The warm and encouraging interactions with staff are fundamental in ensuring a learning environment where every child is valued and included. The physical development of the children is supported very well by access to facilities such as the adjoining sports' hall and 3G pitch. The opportunities for exuberant and energetic play help the children develop their gross motor skills as they run, climb, balance, kick footballs, throw and catch.

Healthy eating is promoted through an effective snack time routine and communication with parents encourages healthy bedtime routines through advice from the staff on appropriate use of screens and digital devices.

C. BUILDING EQUITY

The commitment to inclusion within the playgroup is strongly reflected in the compassionate and child centred response to the individual needs and circumstances of each child. The approach to all aspects of the development work including, curriculum planning, professional learning and communication with parents, is driven by a knowledge and understanding of each child's needs and a willingness to support them to make progress at their own pace.

The staff have engaged well with a range of external educational and health support services, developing their skills and knowledge through an extensive programme of professional learning. This supports them well in understanding and addressing the holistic needs of the children. The impact of professional learning and collaboration with external agencies is evident in the approaches and strategies used to engage the children and support them in accessing the learning. For example, the staff use visual cues, timers and skilful distraction to support children to manage their emotions and enable them to join in with the daily routines. As a result, every child is supported to engage and achieve in line with their own abilities.

Targets within the children's Individual Education Plans build upon the progress they have made in their learning and development and outline clearly the next steps to support them to make further progress. The information gathered through monitoring procedures is collated and reported sensitively to parents and is shared with the primary school at transition, enabling them to support the child in the next steps on their educational journey.

D. DEFINING, CELEBRATING AND EMBEDDING SUCCESS

A key learning goal within the playgroup is for the children to 'have fun', which is reflected clearly in their joy, excitement and enthusiasm on arrival at the pre-school and maintained throughout the session. The children are developing firm friendships. Almost all of the children warmly greet one another and settle quickly into purposeful and productive play. Most of the children are highly independent, selecting confidently the materials they need for their play, taking responsibility for tidying away the toys when they have finished playing, and washing their own dishes after snack. Their resilience in learning is evident as they persist through challenges, such as completing a jigsaw puzzle.

The children's vivid imagination, natural curiosity, and creativity are evident in their play. They explore their ideas through art and design activities and use a wide variety of materials to bring their ideas to life. The staff value and celebrate the children's achievements, displaying their artwork in the playroom which promotes further the children's confidence and pride in their work.

Most of the children communicate with confidence, engaging naturally with their peers, staff and the inspectors. They participate eagerly in mark-making activities, with a small number of children showing an interest in letters and writing their own names. The children's excellent listening skills are demonstrated through their attentiveness during story time. They join in with the repetitive phrases in 'The Gingerbread Man' and a small number of children retell and adapt stories, creating their own versions using playdough and toys. They participate enthusiastically in singing and rhyming activities, which supports effectively their language development and early numeracy skills.

Almost all of the children are developing well their fine motor skills. For example, they chop finely vegetables in the home corner to prepare a 'stir fry' and 'salad', match keys to locks, use scissors and glue spatulas, and handle confidently tongs and spoons when serving snacks.

The children's success culminates in a graduation ceremony, where each child is presented with a scrapbook entitled, 'My Year at Paddington Playgroup', which documents clearly the children's achievements through photographs and memories.

Success stems from the high expectations set for the children by the experienced and well-supported staff team who are highly valued by the community.

E. GROWING A COMMUNITY OF LEARNING

The staff work well together to continually improve the provision and meet the needs of the children. They value the important role that parents play as the children's first educators.

The staff enjoy a strong partnership with the parents who are kept well-informed about their children's learning and the wider activities of the playgroup through the detailed monthly newsletter, the informative parents' noticeboard, both formal and informal meetings, and workshops through the Department of Education's 'Getting Ready to Learn' (GRTL) programme*. This advice and guidance shared with parents is enhancing the children's learning experiences at home and school.

By virtue of its location, the playgroup is an integral part of the local Galbally community. There are excellent links with the local primary school, where most children transition after their time in the playgroup. A well-established transition programme enables a smooth progression to primary education. In addition, the pre-school children attend events such as the primary school's Christmas show, and the primary school children visit the playgroup to share their skills and talents, such as Irish dancing, which enhances a sense of continuity and community. The

playgroup benefits from a strong partnership with Galbally Community Centre and utilises its facilities to provide the children with opportunities to perform on stage and to attend community events. These links are enabling the children to develop a strong sense of belonging to a community and as a result children are at ease joining in other clubs and activities in the centre in the afternoons and at the weekends.

Staff maintain professional links and share effective practice with other pre-school providers through an online forum and through attendance at meetings with other the Early Years leaders. The leader also works closely with the local further education college to support their students who are undertaking qualifications in the Early Years and are preparing for their pre-school placements.

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

The children in Paddington Playgroup are valued for their individual character and unique gifts and talents. The staff are committed to ensuring that each child can achieve and progress in an environment that supports their holistic development; sense of fun in learning; and emotional and physical well-being.

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

- the highly effective learning experiences across the World Around Us curriculum, including the use of the local community, to develop a range of skills and concepts and stimulate interest in learning.

Paddington 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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Getting Ready to Learn (GRTL)

The Department of Education's 'Getting Ready to Learn' (GRTL) Project is focused on improving outcomes for children in pre-school by engaging and empowering parents to help them create and sustain positive home learning environments.

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