

Tots and Teens Playgroup Evaluation

Phase One - January 2012

Executive Summary

The Tots and Teens Playgroup was established in Knox Academy in September 2011. It offers fifteen places to children aged two to five years for three mornings a week. The playgroup staff team is supported by two S3 pupils each day. The steering group set up to oversee this initiative involves the Depute Head Teacher of Knox Academy, the Playgroup Leader, the Principal Educational Psychologist and the Childcare Development Officer for East Lothian.

The aim of the playgroup is to provide an additional resource for young children and parents in the community, combining this with meaningful childcare and work experience for S3 pupils within the secondary school campus. These aims are aligned with the Education Service Plan 2011-2012 Achievement and Attainment, Pre-Birth – Three, Early Years Framework, Support from the Start, Partnership and Early Years and Childcare, as well as supporting the Curriculum for Excellence experiences and outcomes in Health and Well Being, Listening and Talking.

Results from the first phase of evaluation show clearly that this innovative model has been successful in achieving the desired outcomes for young children, their parents, the S3 pupils and the school.

Seven recommendations are made in this report to inform the effective roll out of this model to other schools and settings within the authority.

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1. Background

The Tots and Teens Playgroup was established in Knox Academy in September 2011. Its aims are outlined in Appendix 1, linking into the Education Service Plan and Curriculum for Excellence. The cost of setting up and running the playgroup for the first year is an estimated £10,600, dropping to annual running cost of approximately £5,000 for subsequent years. It offers 15 places to children aged two- five years for three morning sessions a week. Five of these places are “supported” by the authority enabling children of families who are disadvantaged by circumstance to access the same opportunities as their peers. Health Visitors, who have close contact with families in the area, refer families for “supported” places. A Play Leader and Assistant run the playgroup with the support of a volunteer. Six S3 pupils from Knox Academy work in the playgroup each term, each pair of pupils supporting one morning session a week. By the end of academic year 2011-12, eighteen S3 pupils will have taken part in the playgroup. The steering group set up to oversee this initiative involved the Depute Head Teacher of Knox Academy, the Playgroup

Leader, the Principal Educational Psychologist and the Childcare Development Officer for East Lothian.

This paper reports on the first phase of evaluation, (see Appendix 2 for evaluation design) after one term of implementation.

As well as active participation in the playgroup, training to the eighteen S3 pupils on communication, attachment and early child development, play and pre-literacy skills is provided by the Educational Psychology Service (EPS) throughout the year. Each session of this training is evaluated.



2. Methodology

A Trainee Educational Psychologist and the Principal Educational Psychologist carried out the first phase of the evaluation. The following methods were used to determine impact against the intended outcomes as laid out in Appendix 1;

1. Focus Group of S3 pupils
2. Questionnaire to parents
3. Semi-structured interview with Depute Head Teacher
4. Semi-structured interview with Play Leader
5. Observations of children
6. Observations of S3 pupils
7. Other anecdotal feedback gathered by playgroup staff
8. Evaluation of training sessions delivered by the EPS.

3. Results

3.1 Children

The following outcomes were identified at the start of the playgroup for the young children attending;

- Successful experience of separating from parents in a group environment
- Engaging with and choosing from a wide range of play experiences
- Increased confidence in making choices and decisions and accepting rules which accompany these
- Develop social skills with adults and peers

Results from the parental questionnaires, the observation of individual children, the interview with Play Leader and also the log of anecdotal evidence collected by the playgroup staff show that these outcomes were met, at various levels, for the children attending during the first term.

There were several comments from parents regarding how well their children had settled into the playgroup, and observations from them about how the S3 pupils had helped with that process of settling in. For example,

'He loves it here, we have been offered his place at nursery but I might keep him here as he loves it so much and I wasn't sure he would settle.' (parent)

'New child today and she settled very well. (Two S3 pupils) were asked to support her transition. She settled really well' (Play Leader's observation log)

The Play Leader also identified some challenging times with settling some new children, and indicated that these had been successfully managed by her and the Playgroup Assistant with appropriate support from the S3 pupils. She reported that



she was able to plan for and meet the needs of children very well within this model of service delivery, particularly during the settling in period. The S3 pupils took on appropriate activities, planned by the Play Leader, that were tailor-made for an individual child to develop a sense of security and confidence.

There was a wealth of evidence to demonstrate that children were engaging with and choosing from a wide range of play activities.

This evidence came from parental responses and the Play Leader's observation log. In addition, there was evidence that children had been well supported and extended in their play by the S3 pupils, and that this had been transferred into other environments. For example,

'B. went out trick or treating last night and she gave a great rendition of some of the songs she has learned here. I couldn't believe it!' (parent)

The Play Leader reported that there was a good range of activities on offer for children and that she was able to plan activities to extend their exploratory and creative play using the support of S3 pupils. For example, one child with an interest

and a flair for art was provided with a full range of materials. The S3 pupils were then guided in their approach to developing creative art and craft activities with the child. One problem was that there was insufficient storage in the room for the resources required by the playgroup. This is being addressed, although the storage cupboard which has been ordered is yet to be delivered and installed.

There was very good evidence to show that children taking part in the playgroup had grown in confidence and were accepting rules and new routines. For example,

'He is starting to talk a lot more and he is much clearer. I can see a huge difference in confidence, its' great.' (parent)

The Play Leader identified child participation in snack time as an indicator of how confident the children had become over the course of the term. At first only one or two children had joined the snack table, but by the end of the term they were all comfortable eating snack together. They were also following the rules and routines of the playgroup. The routines were embedded within the playgroup through songs sung by the playgroup staff, reinforcing good manners, washing hands before snack time and tidying up. These songs were popular with the children and some parents had requested the words in order to reinforce the same messages at home. The playgroup staff had produced a booklet of songs for parents to use at home including some of the others used in the playgroup.

The Play Leader identified one child who spoke very little at home and not at all in the playgroup, who had recently begun singing the songs and giving one word responses. This was noted by staff and parents as an extremely positive development in the child's communication.

Several parents felt their children had learned how to play with others and that their children's social skills had developed. One parent also commented on the benefit of having a male S3 pupil in the playgroup as a role model for the younger children.



3.2 Parents

The intended outcomes for parents were;

- To feel supported and know how to get further support as required
- Successful experience of separating from their children
- To feel comfortable as part of the educational community
- To increase understanding of the value, importance and benefits of play for young children
- To feel their views, questions and contributions are welcomed and valued

Feedback from parental questionnaires, the anecdotal evidence log collated by the playgroup staff and the interview with the Play Leader showed that several of these outcomes were being achieved after one term. Parents reported that their children were settling well, and where there were any issues, the playgroup staff and the S3 pupils were very helpful and supportive in easing the children into a new environment. For example,

'My little girl took a week or two to settle in, as it was her first time in a playgroup or nursery environment, but the staff and pupils were very supportive in helping her (and me!) through the settling in stage.' (parent)

Most parents commented that they spent their time whilst their child was at playgroup doing the shopping, housework, exercising, seeing friends and pursuing hobbies. One parent reported that she was taking a painting class. They commented that the staff were professional, friendly and welcoming. Access to the playgroup room at pick up time was noted as being problematic. This has been addressed by allowing the parents to collect their children by entering through the main foyer of the school.

Parents generally viewed the playgroup as a useful bridge between home and school, enabling children to have the experience of a range of play experiences and separation from their caregivers. The Play Leader has encouraged parents to stay during the session if they wish to, for example on a child's birthday. So far this has not been taken up. It appears that parents really value the opportunity to do other things whilst their child is happy and secure in a rich play environment.

3.3 S3 Pupils

The intended outcomes for the S3 pupils were;

- To engage in purposeful, meaningful work experience which relates to real life
- To be responsible for the Health and Well Being of others
- To develop a basic knowledge of child development
- To develop communication skills with adults and young children
- To increase the number of young people going to a positive destination
- To know and understand the responsibilities and demands of parenting

These outcomes were to be achieved through working one session per week for a school term in the playgroup and through attending a training course provided by the EPS over the academic year 2011-12. An outline of the course is provided in Appendix 3.

Once identified the pupils undertook a basic induction programme, prepared and facilitated by the Playleader and Childcare Development Officer. This gave pupils clear guidance on expectations whilst in the playroom. It also provided an opportunity for hands on play with materials that the children themselves would have access to. An outline of the induction programme is provided in Appendix 4.



The S3 pupils who participated to date unanimously agreed that it was a useful experience and one which they would recommend to others in East Lothian. They commented that it has helped improve confidence and communication as well as knowledge and understanding of looking after a small child. One pupil commented,

'I have found out that children have the best imagination and that they don't always need us.'

The Play Leader's observations and interview reported a growth in confidence, in social skills in interacting with parents and also an understanding of the responsibilities of working as part of a team, for the S3 pupils involved. The Play Leader reported that she saw the pupils developing initiative in playing with the younger children and setting up new activities such as a Treasure Hunt. She

commented that they had developed their responsibility in helping with health and well being in various ways. They were able to witness the challenges of being a parent and the issues around separation and settling children into a new environment. The Play Leader commented that if this kind of playgroup were to be set up elsewhere she would recommend having the secondary pupils starting their involvement in the second week after the children had started in order to stagger the induction period for both young children and the S3 pupils.

The semi-structured interview with the Depute Head Teacher (DHT) reported that S3 pupils had grown in confidence during their involvement with the playgroup. Absence from school or from scheduled playgroup sessions were very low and related only to pupil illness. Some pupils had withdrawn before starting their commitment because of concerns there would be a negative impact on their learning by missing classes. As yet there is no data regarding the destinations of the pupils taking part. This will be tracked as longitudinal data as the pupils leave school.

The two training sessions for the S3 pupils which had been delivered by the Educational Psychologists in the first term were evaluated as both useful and enjoyable in developing a knowledge base about child development and communication. All the participants would recommend the training to other pupils. Useful feedback was given by the S3 pupils on how to make the first training session more interactive and activity based which informed the planning and delivery of the second session.

Pupils will also have the opportunity in the summer term to take part in a certificated course "Introduction to Childcare", facilitated by Jewel & Esk College. This course will be made available to pupils who have already taken part and to those due to take part in the next academic session. It will consolidate knowledge for some and act as preparation for others. The benefits of training before and after the hands on experiences in the playroom will be evaluated to inform future training.

3.4 The School

The intended outcomes for the school in general were to;

- Maintain and develop a positive contribution to the community
- Promote greater engagement in learning from secondary pupils taking part

There was a wealth of evidence from parental questionnaires and other verbal parental feedback indicating that this initiative was extremely beneficial and positive for the school and wider community. One parent commented that teenagers often got a "hard time" and were labelled with a bad reputation. She felt strongly that this was one very positive way for young people to be involved in serving the community whilst in school and this would impact on their image. Another comment from a

parent highlighted that it was very helpful to have a playgroup set up and managed by the local authority, rather than parents themselves. She felt this was less stressful for parents who were able to access the service for their children without having to take the responsibility for financing and running the provision.

A letter of congratulations from the MSP for South Scotland was received by the Playgroup Leader in November 2011, to congratulate her and the S3 pupils on the launch of the playgroup. This letter acknowledged the value of the experience for the S3 pupils as well as the service being provided for young people. There was also local press coverage for the initiative, highlighting it as a useful provision within the town.

The DHT interview noted that other S5 pupils had also been involved in organising activities within the playgroup, demonstrating a wider impact within the school. The DHT also highlighted that pupils were noticeably calmer around the playgroup area. She commented that she stops to talk to parents and carers and that this is a part of being more open and welcoming to the wider community.

3.5 Recommendations

The data gathered in the first phase of evaluation demonstrates the success of Tots 'and' Teens in achieving most of the original intended outcomes.

Further investigation in Phase 2 of the evaluation in August 2012 will add to this. At this stage, it is clear that the Tots 'and' Teens provision is an effective approach for delivering on areas within the Education Service Plan 2011-12 and also in supporting the delivery of Curriculum for Excellence experiences and outcomes.

The following recommendations are offered for consideration for the future development of the provision within East Lothian:

1. Careful consideration and planning should be made of the prerequisites for establishing a playgroup within a school. These include adequate storage, toilet/changing facilities, access for parents, and embedding the provision within the wider school.
2. A concerted effort to recruit and select male pupils as well as females should continue to be made.
3. Consultation with parents and carers about additional activities or courses to be delivered on the school campus should be carried out.
4. Pupils should be introduced to the playgroup after the young children have been attending for at least a week.
5. The links with Jewel & Esk College should be maintained and developed. This may mean that training sessions from the EPS are no longer required.

6. Evaluation of the approach should continue and longitudinal data on the destination of the pupils involved should be gathered.
7. Where there is interest in rolling out the initiative to other schools, a small steering group should be established to co-ordinate implementation.

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Appendix 1

Tots and Teens Playgroup Knox Academy

Outcomes and links to Education Service Improvement Plan/Curriculum for Excellence

Children

- Successful experience of separating from parents in a group environment.
- Access to a wide range of play experiences.
- Increased confidence in making choices from a range of activities.
- Develop social skills with adults and peers.

Parents

- To feel supported and know how to get further support as required.
- Successful experience of separating from their children.
- To feel comfortable as part of the educational community.
- To increase understanding of the value, importance and benefits of play for young children.
- To feel their views, questions and contributions are welcomed and valued.

Secondary Pupils

- Engage in purposeful, meaningful work experience which relates to real life.
- To be responsible for health and well being of others.
- Knowledge of basic child development.
- Develop communication skills with adults and young children.
- To increase the number of young people going on to a positive destination.
- To know and understand the responsibilities and demands of parenting.

School

- Maintain and develop a positive contribution to the community (Parents and Community Council), (Parent/School Partnership), (Parent Forum).
- Greater engagement in learning from secondary pupils taking part.

These outcomes are in accordance with the Education Service Plan 2011 – 12:

Achievement and Attainment

- Continue to develop and improve the transition of young people from mainstream education to work, training, further and higher education through working with secondary schools.

Partnership

- Encourage schools to continue to develop further and adopt a more outward facing perspective in order to meet the needs of the community.

Early Years and Childcare

- Continue to support the service re-design process by working with all services to improve the health of children (aged 0 – 5) in the targeted areas of Prestonpans, Tranent, Wallyford and Whitecraig and extend good practice to other areas.

They also support Curriculum for Excellence Experiences and Outcomes:

Health and Well Being

- Through contributing my views, time and talents, I play a part in bringing about positive change in my school and wider community.
- I understand the importance of being cared for and caring for others in relationships, and can explain why.
- I recognise that power can exist within relationships and can be used positively as well as negatively.
- I can explain the importance, and the enduring and complex responsibility of being a parent/carer and the impact on life choices and options.
- Through investigation I can explain the support available for parents and carers looking after babies and bringing up children.

Listening and Talking

- When I engage with others, I can make a relevant contribution, encourage others to contribute and acknowledge that they have the right to hold a different opinion.
- I can communicate in a clear, expressive manner when engaging with others within and beyond my place of learning, and can independently select and organise appropriate resources as required.

Appendix 2

Tots and Teens Playgroup Knox Academy

Evaluation Framework 2011-2012

	Phase 1 Oct-Nov 2011 (LM)	Phase 2 August 2012
Children	Observation by Playgroup staff Interview with Playgroup Leader	Observation by Playgroup Staff Follow up with local nurseries
Parents	Questionnaire	Focus Group Questionnaire
Secondary pupils taking part in playgroup	Focus Group Observation by playgroup staff/ school staff EPS Training Evaluation Interview with Playgroup Leader	Focus Group Questionnaire Observation by playgroup staff/school staff School data on positive Destinations 16+ School data on attendance/exclusion Questionnaire
School	Interview with DHT	Questionnaire to School Staff/SMT/ Parent Forum
General	Ad hoc data on impact collected by DHT/playgroup staff e.g. verbal feedback, anecdotal observations Consideration of any negative impact	Ad hoc data on impact collected by DHT/playgroup staff e.g. verbal feedback, anecdotal observations Consideration of any negative impact

Appendix 3

Tots and Teens

EPS Training Sessions for S3 pupils 2011-12

Session	Group	Theme
1 (04/10/11) 2-4pm	Whole Group (18)	Introduction Early Development / Attachment.
2 (29/11/11) 2-4pm	Practice Group (6)	Contact Principles / Communication Adult Mediation activities / task Homework task – film
3 (17/1/12) 2-4pm	Whole Group (18)	Feedback from Practice Group Careers – Childcare Skills / Qualities / Being a Parent / Working in Childcare – limited resources/International perspective
4 (14/3/12) 2-4pm	Practice Group (6)	Contact Principles / Communication Adult Mediation activities task Homework task – film
5 (2/5/12) 2-4pm	Whole Group (18)	Feedback from Practice Group Play Pre-Literacy skills
6 (6/6/12) 2-4pm	Practice Group (6)	Contact Principles / Communication Adult Mediation activities task Homework task – film

Appendix 4

Tots and Teens

Induction Programme for Pupils August 2011

Programme:

1. Welcome and Introduction to staff
2. Aims
3. Code of Conduct
4. Policies and procedure
5. Information for parents
6. Health & Safety
7. Risk Assessments
8. Play and the importance of play
9. Your expectations
10. Our expectations