

Report of a Pilot Inspection
Belmont Pre-school, Belfast

November 2023



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1. INTRODUCTION

A. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Belmont Pre-school is part of Belmont Playcare, a charitable company established in 2009 to provide playgroup, pre-school, breakfast club and after-school provision in the Belmont area of Belfast. The pre-school is located in a modular building in the grounds of Belmont Primary School. The children attending the pre-school come from the local area and almost all transfer to the adjacent primary school. There are currently forty children attending the morning and afternoon part-time sessions, a small number of whom have been identified as special educational needs (SEN).

The staffing complement within the pre-school comprises a coordinator, leader and deputy leader for each session, supported by an assistant and an SEN assistant. A Board of Trustees is in place and a new independent early years specialist (EYS) has recently started working with the staff.

There is a welcoming and inclusive ethos in the pre-school and a commitment to serving the local community.

B. VIEWS OF PARENTS AND STAFF

Twenty-two percent of the parents (9) responded to the confidential online questionnaire. All of the responses were positive. The parents reported they were content with: the pastoral care; the support the children receive with their learning; and the opportunities provided for their children to progress. All parents reported their children are happy and felt their views as parents are valued by the staff. A small number of parents responded with additional written comments reporting, in particular, on the kind and caring staff and the welcoming atmosphere in the pre-school.

All of the staff in the pre-school responded to the confidential questionnaire. Their responses indicated they were clear about the vision for the pre-school, felt their wellbeing is promoted effectively, are happy in their role and felt their views are valued.

C. THE PROCESS OF INSPECTION

The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) worked alongside the pre-school to consider how well the pre-school:

- 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 shared vision to provide a unique and tailored pre-school experience for each child is effective and drives the work of the staff.
- Almost all of the children are making very good progress in their learning and skills development across all areas of the pre-school curriculum.
- A key strength in the pre-school is the ability of staff to build effectively on the children's personal interests and experiences and generate a sense of fun in many of the learning opportunities. They respond effectively to the interests and ideas of the children and incorporate these into their practice.
- The staff have identified appropriate priorities for improvement; however, the process of self-evaluation is at an early stage and requires further development.
- The tailored provision meets effectively the needs of all of the children. Both indoor and outdoor environments, provide a wide range of activities and opportunities for the children to engage in creative, imaginative play across all areas of the pre-school curriculum.
- The cycle of short-term planning and observation needs to reflect the approaches used by staff in practice to ensure all children meet their targets and progress can be monitored and reviewed.
- The arrangements for child protection take full account of current child protection guidance.

Areas for further consideration/action:

- to link more clearly the observations and short-term planning with that of the daily practice to ensure the progress of the children can be monitored and reviewed effectively; and
- to develop further the self-evaluation and action planning process.

3. MAIN REPORT

A. SETTING THE VISION

The leadership and management have a shared vision to provide a tailored pre-school experience for each child attending the pre-school. Their individualised approach and response to each child's needs supports successfully the attainment of this vision. The longstanding Board of Trustees is well informed about and supportive of the work of the pre-school.

The current key areas for improvement have been informed by the needs and interests of the children and the professional development requirements of the staff. Staff recognise the need to develop further the self-evaluation process. Wider consultation with, and contributions from, all stakeholders is required to ensure a collective approach to, and understanding of, the process, the identification of priorities and the impact of the improvement work.

B. IMPLEMENTING AND IMPROVING TO ACHIEVE THE VISION

The tailored provision meets effectively the needs of all of the children.

A structured approach to planning is in place. Regular planned and incidental observations are made of the children's learning which in turn inform the practice and response of the staff to meet the needs of all of the children. Further development of this process is required to ensure the observations and short-term planning link clearly to the practice and the progress of the children can be more effectively monitored and reviewed.

The staff have created a well-organised environment which allows children the freedom to choose their area of play and access easily the resources they require to support their learning across all areas of the pre-school curriculum. Staff manage the access to the outdoor area, while routines are well-established and the transitions are smooth which promote effectively the children's independence and social skills.

The staff know the children very well and their interactions are of a consistently high standard. They take time to observe, ask open-ended questions and model specific language which promotes learning.

C. BUILDING EQUITY

In response to the individual needs of the current cohort of children, the management has employed an additional staff member to ensure all children can access the learning opportunities provided and can make progress. Staff respond well to the specific needs of the children, tailor their practice and provide resources to stimulate and enhance learning. Staff have identified appropriately the need to access additional training to enhance their understanding of SEN and support their creation of a system which will monitor closely the progress of those children with SEN.

A key strength in the pre-school is the ability of staff to respond to the children's individual interests and experiences and enhance further their progression and learning.

D. EMBEDDING SUCCESS

The behaviour of the children is exemplary. They are very well settled, follow easily the rules and routines of the pre-school and transition smoothly between play activities. Almost all engage in collaborative, purposeful play and have high levels of independence; they assist at "tidy up time" and interact naturally with their peers and the adults.

The children display a keen interest in mathematical activities. They are developing very well their understanding of early mathematical concepts through the daily routines and are able to rote count, recognise colour and are beginning to identify numbers and symbols. The freedom and flexibility the children are afforded in the pre-school has resulted in children who are confident experimenting, exploring and investigating in their play.

Language and communication are key strengths. The children talk freely and make links in their learning with their wider experiences and interests. Most of the children are developing an awareness that print has meaning, and control and manipulate the wide range of resources to engage meaningfully in early mark making. Their representational artwork, which is displayed and celebrated in the playroom, is of a very good standard.

The children engage enthusiastically with the songs and rhymes the adults incorporate naturally throughout the play sessions and use musical instruments to accompany their own creative performances on the outdoor stage area.

E. GROWING A COMMUNITY OF LEARNING

Staff have identified appropriately key areas for continuous professional learning. The engagement with the newly appointed EYS is at an early stage and the staff are being supported to develop further their understanding of the self-evaluation process.

Staff have developed an effective partnership with parents. They have built on the positive engagement established from the home visits as part of their induction process which supported their child's smooth transition to the pre-school.

Ongoing engagement has continued through the regular sharing of children's progress via the digital communication tool and the parental participation in the Department of Education's "Getting Ready to Learn" programme. Book packs are shared with families which have enhanced the parents' knowledge of the pre-school curriculum and extend the development of the children's language and communication skills at home. The staff have developed good links with the local primary schools to support the children's transition to Year 1.

F. CHILD PROTECTION

At the time of the inspection, the evidence provided by the pre-school demonstrates that the arrangements for child protection take full account of the Department of Education's (DE) current guidance.

4. GOING FORWARD

The management and staff of Belmont Pre-school have created a warm welcoming environment and provide an individualised and tailored pre-school experience for each child who is encouraged and supported to achieve. The staff work collaboratively, recognise and respond to the needs of the children and actively engage in their learning journey.

The ETI will monitor the progress of the pre-school in addressing the areas for further consideration/action as laid out in this report, namely:

- to link more clearly the observations and short-term planning with that of the daily practice to ensure the progress of the children can be tracked effectively; and
- to develop further the self-evaluation and action planning process.

The Education and Training Inspectorate

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