

Report of a Pilot Inspection  
Castlereagh Nursery School, Belfast

June 2024

## Contents

1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
A. BACKGROUND INFORMATION.....	1
B. VIEWS OF PARENTS/CARERS AND STAFF .....	1
C. THE PROCESS OF INSPECTION .....	2
2. SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS.....	2
3. MAIN REPORT .....	3
A. SETTING THE VISION.....	3
B. IMPLEMENTING AND IMPROVING TO ACHIEVE THE VISION .....	3
C. BUILDING EQUITY.....	4
D. EMBEDDING SUCCESS.....	5
E. GROWING A COMMUNITY OF LEARNING .....	5
F. CHILD PROTECTION .....	6
4. GOING FORWARD.....	6
5. APPENDIX : QUANTITATIVE TERMS .....	7

# **1. INTRODUCTION**

## **A. BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Castlereagh Nursery School is situated in south-east Belfast in a purpose built, two classroom nursery school. There are two small rooms adjacent to each classroom which are used as a sensory space and for story-telling, a shared indoor sunroom play area, and a large outdoor learning area. There are 53 children attending the full-time nursery provision. Most of the children come from the local surrounding area. Just over one-quarter of the children have free school meal entitlement. Thirteen percent of children are on the special education needs (SEN) register; a small number of these children receive additional one-to-one classroom assistant support.

In the nursery school, there has been a consistent staff team in place for approximately the last seven years. There is a teaching principal and a class teacher who are supported by two full-time nursery assistants and three SEN classroom assistants. A board of governors is in place who are highly supportive of the work of the nursery school.

The nursery school has participated in the Education Authority's Pathways into Partnership programme with seven other nursery schools to share effective practice and participate in staff professional learning. This year, Castlereagh Nursery School has been awarded the Eco-Schools Green flag award.

## **B. VIEWS OF PARENTS/CARERS AND STAFF**

The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) issued online confidential questionnaires to parents/carers and staff in advance of the pilot inspection.

Most of the parents/carers (75%) responded to the online confidential questionnaire and their responses were wholly positive, with a significant minority of the parents/carers providing additional written comments. The parents/carers report that: the nursery school is a safe and nurturing environment for the children; the staff provide a variety of learning opportunities; and the children are making very good progress and enjoy their time at nursery school.

Eight parents/carers whose children attend the nursery school met with inspectors. They spoke very highly of: the support the staff provide to the children; the children's happiness in attending the school; and the development of the children's confidence and independence for readiness to move to primary school.

All teaching and non-teaching staff responded to the questionnaire and included additional written comments. In their written responses, they reported that: staff enjoy working as part of a dedicated team; their opinions and ideas are valued; and they have established very good relationships with each other.

## **C. THE PROCESS OF INSPECTION**

The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) worked alongside the Castlereagh nursery school to consider how well the nursery 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 “hand in hand we learn together” epitomises the inclusive ethos of Castlereagh Nursery School and emphasises their commitment to developing a community of learning.
- All of the children are very enthusiastic and highly engaged in their learning. They are individually making very good progress in their learning across all six areas of the pre-school curriculum and are ready for transition to primary school.
- The highly effective processes for self-evaluation are well-embedded and help guide development work to enable all children to experience success in their learning.
- The highly creative and stimulating learning environment is used to good effect to promote very effectively the children’s language, curiosity, exploration and problem-solving skills.
- The learning and teaching approaches that are consistently used by all staff are highly effective and focus on the children’s holistic development across the six areas of the pre-school curriculum.
- The staff skilfully support all of the children in their learning using very effective methods of observation and assessment. Children with special educational needs are identified early and supported very effectively to achieve their targets.
- A wide range of digital technology is used very effectively to enhance and extend the children’s learning experiences and outcomes.

- Staff professional learning is prioritised and all of the staff are developing well their professional knowledge and skills through learning opportunities, such as the Education Authority’s Pathways into Partnership programme.
- The nursery school has developed excellent partnerships with: parents/carers; local nursery and primary schools; educational providers such as Sure Start; and the wider community, such as Belfast City Council. These partnerships are impacting positively on the children’s learning and outcomes.
- The arrangements for child protection align to the current statutory guidance.

**The aspects of practice which should be shared more widely include:**

- the high-quality planning, teaching and assessment approaches; and
- the creation and use of a stimulating learning environment, including the use of digital technology to maximise the children’s engagement and extend the children’s curiosity and problem-solving skills in the pre-school curriculum.

### **3. MAIN REPORT**

#### **A. SETTING THE VISION**

Castlereagh Nursery School’s shared vision of “hand in hand we learn together” underpins the nurturing, child-centred and inclusive environment in which the staff and children learn. All of the governors, staff, and parents/carers are committed to the vision and the experienced staff work collegially to ensure that all of the children develop independence and confidence in a safe and happy environment.

The nursery school staff engage in robust self-evaluation and consult very effectively with a range of stakeholders to inform priorities in the school development plan. The priorities are also informed appropriately by the needs of the children so that all children are provided with high quality learning experiences.

Approximately one-half of the members on the board of governors are long-serving which has provided continuity in leadership for the nursery school. The governors use their educational and professional experience to support the principal and staff in achieving their vision. They value strongly the commitment of the staff who provide child-focused learning opportunities which are appropriately tailored to meet the individual needs and starting points of each child.

#### **B. IMPLEMENTING AND IMPROVING TO ACHIEVE THE VISION**

The staff team have established very supportive relationships with each other and use their professionalism and experience to set high expectations and achievable targets for all the children. They celebrate the uniqueness of each child using the child’s interests to skilfully scaffold the children’s learning opportunities. The staff use very effectively speech and language-based programmes to develop and extend the children’s language and communication and the children are actively encouraged by the staff to share their ideas and opinions during activities.



The indoor and outdoor learning environments have been reviewed to provide the children with an extensive range of resources to challenge and extend their learning opportunities. The staff support and challenge the children in their play, encouraging them to solve problems and develop a natural curiosity in the outdoor environment.

The staff are proactive in accessing focused professional learning opportunities that align to the priorities identified in the development plan, for example, nurture training and adaptive teaching training. The training opportunities are used well to develop further the high-quality provision which is impacting positively on the children's outcomes. For example, the children are more curious, highly motivated and engage independently in sustained play with their peers.

The long- and medium-term planning outlines clearly the progression across the six areas of the pre-school curriculum and includes appropriate strategies for parents/carers to use to effectively support their children's learning. The short-term planning is child-centred and led by the children's interests and views. The staff use well a digital application for assessment which provides a detailed overview of the children's learning and the next steps for progression. In addition, the staff have implemented on a weekly basis focused observations of each child's learning experiences across the pre-school curriculum which are captured in a booklet and shared with parents/carers. This provides parents/carers with a greater insight to their child's learning experiences and supports parents/carers to replicate and consolidate learning with their child at home.

The staff provide a wide range of digital resources, for example, remote-control cars, calculators, shopping tills, iPads, digital cameras, musical devices and 'Beebots'. The children use independently the range of resources to extend their language and develop their skills across the pre-school curriculum. For example, they share and discuss photographs of their creations, count and use positional language with confidence, explore their environment with applications on the iPad and perform using a range of musical devices.

The health and wellbeing of the children is developed very effectively through the child-centred learning environment which actively promotes healthy eating, physical development and keeping safe. The well-embedded snack and dinner routines promote actively the children's self-help and social skills. The children understand the importance of recycling their food waste, and visitors such as community police, firefighters and the dental nurse promote healthy lifestyles and staying safe. The children are encouraged to talk openly about their feelings and emotions and show empathy for one another. Their physical skills are promoted through energetic play and external service providers. The nursery school is also part of the 'Operation Encompass' partnership to safeguard children.

### **C. BUILDING EQUITY**

The welcoming, nurturing and inclusive ethos which permeates the nursery school is created by the staff's proactive response to planning for the diverse needs of all children, including those with SEN. The nursery school uses a variety of methods including digital technology to make information accessible to all parents/carers including those whose first language is not English.

Barriers to the children's learning are identified early and the personal learning plans have achievable and appropriate targets which are informed by insightful contributions from the parent, the child and the relevant allied health professionals (AHP).

Staff professional learning aligns well to the needs of the children and is used effectively to inform the daily practice in the nursery. The staff monitor and review regularly the children's progress to enable all of them to achieve success in their learning.

#### **D. EMBEDDING SUCCESS**

All of the children are making very good progress across the six areas of the pre-school curriculum. The staff provide a very effective holistic and progressive curriculum. The staff have nurturing relationships with the children and understand each child's starting point. The positive use of praise by the staff through verbal and non-verbal interactions provides reassurance to the children and models desirable positive attitudes. The staff use stickers to celebrate the children's achievements during the school day and to promote language development at home as children are encouraged to explain their achievement to their parents/carers.

The children are very independent during play and select carefully a range of natural and authentic resources to extend their play. They are highly engaged when working with one another, are forming friendships and can interact confidently with the children from the other class. The children participate enthusiastically in rhymes and songs and use effectively musical instruments and digital applications to perform with each other.

The children are engaging actively in early mark making and their creative drawings show very good progression in their detailed representational pictures. The children's creations and drawings are celebrated using individual galleries to display their work. Using digital applications, the staff share regularly photographs, videos and progress reports with parents/carers to celebrate the children's developmental milestones and readiness for primary school.

Almost all of the children use confidently and incidentally early mathematical language during their play activities. For example, they use positional language, count accurately, and demonstrate a growing awareness of measure.

The children show respect for their outdoor environment which is promoted and celebrated through their Eco-School Green Flag award. The children: plant vegetables and flowers with their parent/carers; use donated natural materials for construction activities; engage in litter picking within the nursery grounds; and work collaboratively to build dens and extend their play experiences.

#### **E. GROWING A COMMUNITY OF LEARNING**

The nursery school has established a strong community of learning amongst the staff and in the wider community through strong links with parents/carers and other nursery and primary schools in the local area and further afield in other towns.

The staff work very effectively in close partnership with parents/carers and value the importance of developing the children's skills and confidence through exposure to a wide range of experiences from internal and external partners. For example, parents/carers explain their job roles to the children and the children learn about recycling activities in collaboration with Belfast City Council. Transitions for the children, to and from the nursery school are effective and are supported by the well-established close links with the local Sure Start providers and primary schools.

The staff share regular information with parents/carers about their children's learning, for example, through: progress meetings; termly distribution of home-school target booklets; stay and play sessions; monthly newsletters; and photographs and videos through the school app. The parents/carers report that their knowledge about the pre-school curriculum and advice from the staff is helping to extend their children's learning at home. During home visits, staff build positive and nurturing home/school relationships with the children and the families. The parents/carers value these visits which they report provides a very good foundation for the beginning of the children's educational journey into primary education.

For the last two years, the nursery school has participated in the Education Authority's Pathways into Partnership programme with seven other nursery schools. This year, the staff had the opportunity to engage in a 'staff swap' programme that provided the staff with the opportunity to attend another nursery school and participate in their session. This was an invaluable learning experience for the staff which they disseminated with one another on completion of their visits.

## **F. CHILD PROTECTION**

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

## **4. GOING FORWARD**

The vision of Castlereagh Nursery School "hand in hand we learn together" is proudly displayed in the entrance of the nursery. The vision is achieved successfully by the skilful staff who provide a child-centred, inclusive high-quality learning environment that very effectively meets the needs of all the children. ETI will continue to work with Castlereagh Nursery School, 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 high-quality planning, teaching and assessment approaches; and
- the creation and use of a stimulating learning environment, including the use of digital technology to maximise the children's engagement and extend the children's curiosity and problem-solving skills in the pre-school curriculum.



## 5. APPENDIX : 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%

© CROWN COPYRIGHT 2024

This report may be reproduced in whole or in part, except for commercial purposes or in connection with a prospectus or advertisement, provided that the source and date thereof are stated.

Copies of this report are available on the [ETI website](#)

Follow us on  [@ETI\\_news](#)  [@ETInews](#)  InsPIRE