

Report of a Pre-school Inspection
Bethlehem Nursery School

October 2024

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1. INTRODUCTION

A. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Bethlehem Nursery School is a maintained nursery school located on the Ravenhill Road in Belfast. All of the fifty-three children come from the local area. The nursery school operates two full-time classes. Just under 10% of the children have been identified as having special educational needs (SEN); a small number of whom have statements of SEN. Almost one-fifth (19%) of the children have free school meals entitlement.

The staffing is comprised of the principal, a full-time class teacher and three assistants. The nursery school provides a breakfast club for the children. After-school childcare services are also provided for the children who attend the nursery school and a local primary school. The school also participates in DE's 'Getting Ready to Learn' Project.

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. A summary of the questionnaire responses was shared with the principal and the chair of the board of governors. Almost two-thirds (64%) of parents responded to the questionnaire and all reported that they would recommend the nursery school to others and that their child was happy.

In discussions with inspectors the parents emphasised their appreciation of the support the school provides for their child. They value greatly the after-school provision and report that their child's confidence and social skills have developed since they started the nursery school.

All of the school staff responded to the questionnaires; they were all positive about the work of the school and how they feel valued and supported in their role.

C. THE PROCESS OF INSPECTION

The ETI worked alongside Bethlehem 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 vision that every child is supported 'to develop intellectually, socially, morally and physically' is successfully realised by the dedicated staff in partnership with parents and is supported by the strong ethos and culture in the school.
- The reflective and honest process of self-evaluation is informing effectively the improvement work in the school.
- The ongoing development of the outdoor learning environment is impacting very positively on the progress the children are making across all areas of the curriculum and is extending the children's opportunities for high quality, investigative and creative play.
- The children's physical skills are promoted very effectively. This is supported by the wide range of opportunities to nurture and develop their gross motor skills in the outdoor environment.
- The staff identify at an early stage any additional support the children require and their response is informed well in consultation with the parents.
- The language development of the children is enhanced through the high quality story telling sessions and opportunities to engage in imaginative role play.
- The children's thinking skills are developed and well supported by effective staff interactions.
- The staff use their detailed observations to enable them to plan effectively for the development of the children's holistic needs, in line with their vision.
- There has been an ongoing, appropriate focus on ensuring staff have access to professional learning that supports them in achieving the identified priorities for the school.
- At the time of the inspection, the evidence provided by the nursery school demonstrates that the arrangements for child protection align to the current statutory guidance.

3. MAIN REPORT

A. SETTING THE VISION

The staff in Bethlehem Nursery School work collaboratively and diligently, in close partnership with parents, to ensure their shared vision for every child to develop intellectually, socially, morally and physically is achieved fully. The respectful, calm, and welcoming ethos supports all of the children to feel welcome, cared for and important.

The collaborative, honest and reflective approach by the staff to self-evaluation has informed the identification of well-considered priorities in relation to the planning and provision for outdoor learning which have a clear focus on the long-term impact on the children's learning. The board of governors are committed to the school, proud of its place in the community and are highly supportive of the staff in their work to achieve their vision for every child.

B. IMPLEMENTING AND IMPROVING TO ACHIEVE THE VISION

The staff team communicate very effectively with each other and support one another in their work. The collaborative approach to self-evaluation and planning is supporting very effectively the children's learning experiences and their progression across all the areas of the curriculum. The observations made by the staff, both spontaneous and planned for, inform successfully the future learning needs for each child. All of the staff know the children and their needs well. They use this knowledge to support their engagement in high quality effective interactions with the children, which promote their thinking and development.

Previous school priorities which included the development of early mathematical language, the world around us and physical development are areas of strength. The staff are confident in providing learning experiences which support the children's language development and which impact positively on all of the children's play experiences. The development of language is promoted further through the imaginative story-telling, opportunities for role play in the rooms and in the high quality engagements between the staff and children.

The current focus on the development of outdoor learning is research informed and aligned with professional learning opportunities for all staff. The thoughtful consideration of the learning environment is providing high-quality, open-ended opportunities for imaginative play. The gross motor skills of almost all of the children are developing very well. They are engrossed in sustained play with their friends and are growing in confidence and self-esteem as they discover what they can do. The children are experimenting with different ways of moving using developmentally appropriate resources to support their physical development, such as balance beams, climbing equipment, scooters and bikes.

All staff prioritise consistently the children's safety within the learning environment; their health and wellbeing is paramount, and the children are supported and encouraged to talk about how they are feeling. There are appropriate policies in place to safeguard children and these are shared annually with parents.

C. BUILDING EQUITY

The nursery school provides a welcoming learning environment where the uniqueness of each child is valued. Through a comprehensive induction programme for the children, discussions with parents and information shared from outside agencies, alongside the staff's observations and assessments, they know each child very well. The staff observe and consider the developing skills and knowledge of the children, alongside their levels of wellbeing and engagement, to enable them to plan effectively for the development of the children's holistic needs, in line with their vision. Consequently, any support that the children may require is identified quickly and interventions are put in place in consultation with parents.

Professional learning undertaken by the staff is informing and improving classroom practice. For example, the staff use a range of strategies to: support the children to manage their emotions; develop attention and listening skills and; support assessment of learning. These strategies are implemented consistently and very effectively by staff across both classes. In addition, the staff use effectively an intervention programme which supports the children in developing their fundamental movement skills, which includes balance and gross motor skills. The success of the intervention is evident in the children's progress across these skills.

The indoor and outdoor environment is accessible to all of the children and the planning for learning shows that the children's individual needs and resources are carefully considered. As a result, almost of the children have settled very well into the school day and there are high levels of engagement among the children during the sessions.

D. DEFINING, CELEBRATING AND EMBEDDING SUCCESS

Staff have high expectations for every child and the well embedded daily routines and smooth transitions throughout the day, have contributed successfully to the high levels of independence, resilience and perseverance that are evident among the children at this early stage of the school year. The children are confident in exploring their learning environment, and many have begun to engage in sustained, collaborative play. Through praise, 'high fives', stickers and awards, the staff regularly affirm the children's progress and are proud of their achievements.

The children's work and creations are also showcased proudly in the classrooms and include the children's rubbings of autumn tree bark gathered on a walk in a local park, their paintings and Lego creations.

The development of early mark making is supported in both the indoor and outdoor environment where the children write cards to their families and make lists. The children are encouraged to take pride in their school and carry out litter picking, tidy away their play resources and show respect for their environment. The opportunities to sing, dance and be immersed in music in the outdoor stage area is supporting very well the development of the children's language, personal, social and emotional development and creative expression. The children can articulate what they can do and share their achievements with the staff who praise and celebrate their progress which is also shared with their parents or carers through the online digital app.

E. GROWING A COMMUNITY OF LEARNING

The staff in the nursery work very well together as a team and regular meetings ensure that all staff are involved in reviewing the learning experiences of the children and in planning the provision for learning, so it is continually developing and evolving to meet the needs of the children. There has been an ongoing, appropriate focus on ensuring the staff have access to professional learning that supports them to achieve identified school priorities. As a result, there is consistency in the approaches and strategies used by the staff to support the children in their learning.

The staff have a strong focus on engaging parents and grandparents in the child's learning, and parents are valued as their child's first educator. The staff encourage families to use the online application to share information about their child with grandparents and wider family members.

'Stay and Play' events are held on a termly basis, and parents and grandparents are invited to participate in events, such as a recent charity coffee morning and an autumn walk to a local park to observe seasonal changes. In line with the ethos and values of the nursery school, the staff are pro-active in raising money for charities and supporting the wider community, such as the children singing to residents at a local care home. External providers are used effectively to support the wellbeing of the children and to extend the staff's repertoire and use of wellbeing strategies with all of the children.

F. CHILD PROTECTION

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

4. GOING FORWARD

In Bethlehem Nursery School the children are happy, motivated and highly engaged in their learning, supported by a hardworking, dedicated and caring team. In partnership with the parents and governors, the nursery school is successfully realising the vision for every child in a pastoral, child-centred way with their strong, cherished ethos at the core.

The school are well placed to take forward the current priorities that they have identified in its development plan.

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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