

Report of a Pre-school Inspection  
Drumnamoe Nursery School

December 2024

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Throughout the report the use of an asterisk \* denotes further information included at Appendix 2.

# **1. INTRODUCTION**

## **A. BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Drumnamoe Nursery School is a Catholic maintained nursery school located on the outskirts of Lurgan town. The children attending come from the wide catchment area of Lurgan. The nursery school has an enrolment of 106 pre-school children and operates two full-time classes and two part-time classes which provides places for 54 children and 52 children respectively. Just over 10% of the children have been identified as having special educational needs (SEN), a small number of whom have a statement of SEN. Approximately 18% of the children have free school meals entitlement. The staff complement comprises a teaching principal, four teachers and ten assistants, some of whom carry out the role in a part-time capacity.

The nursery school participates in the Department of Education's (DE) 'Getting Ready to Learn' (GRTL) programme\* and, along with local primary schools, also participates in DE's RAISE programme\*. The nursery school has a long-established shared education partnership with another nursery school.

The school achieved their fifth Green Flag award as an ECO School\* in June 2024.

## **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.

Over one-half (51%) of the parents responded to the questionnaire, all of whom reported their child is happy in school. Almost all of the parents indicated that their child is making progress in their learning and that they are happy with their child's learning experiences at the nursery school. There were 22 additional parental written comments in which appreciation of the caring and supportive staff and their approach to parental communication were highlighted strengths. In discussions with inspectors, the parents expressed their gratitude for the very approachable staff who are highly responsive in supporting them with their child's learning at home.

Most of the staff responded to the questionnaire and all were highly positive in their support of the work of the nursery school. All of the staff are clear about the nursery school's vision and feel valued and respected in their roles. There were six additional written comments in which the staff highlighted their privilege to be part of a dedicated, collegial and inclusive team.

A summary of the questionnaire responses, including any issues raised, was shared with the principals and a representative of the board of governors.

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

The ETI worked alongside Drumnamoe 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

- Drumnamoe Nursery School's revised vision statement and associated strapline "**learning and growing together**" is underpinned by the nursery school's new core values, "**kindness, inclusion, nurture and growth**" and is driving the nursery school's commitment to supporting every child along their educational journey.
- The clear, strategic approach to school development planning and the robust self-evaluation processes are used well by the collegial staff team to identify and agree appropriate priorities for improvement, in collaboration with all the nursery school key stakeholders.
- The staff's high expectations for all children to experience a high-quality pre-school curriculum is evident in the comprehensive curriculum planning cycle, which is understood well by all staff and is responsive to the children's abilities, needs and interests.
- The staff use effectively an assessment digital application to record detailed observations and assessments of the children's learning which clearly shows the progression the children are making from their individual starting points, and across all areas of the pre-school curriculum.
- The use of appropriate digital technologies is enhancing the children's learning experiences across all areas of the pre-school curriculum.
- Appropriate staff professional learning has impacted positively on the staff's skilful interactions with the children, through which they encourage high levels of engagement in play, support the children's language development across all areas of the curriculum and develop their emotional health and wellbeing.
- The children are happy, friendly, kind and engage confidently in high levels of collaborative play with increasing independence. Their problem-solving skills are very well developed, and they enjoy browsing books for enjoyment and information.

- Early identification of children with additional needs, prior to transition to the nursery school enables the staff to plan any early intervention required.
- The staff place high value on developing a strong community of learning in the nursery school by harnessing the individual skillset of the staff, as well as seeking and collaborating with a wide range of meaningful partnerships in the nursery school community.

### **3. MAIN REPORT**

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

Drumnamoe Nursery School community has developed a new vision to reflect the nursery school's context. Appropriate staff professional learning and the use of relevant research, guided and informed the staff and stakeholders well in the development of the school's vision, mission and core values. The new vision is driving forward the nursery school's shared commitment **'to provide a high-quality pre-school curriculum from which everyone is learning and growing together in a welcoming, caring and supportive environment'** underpinned by the nursery school's new core values of 'kindness, inclusion, nurture and growth'.

The collegial staff have a clear understanding of the nursery school's self-evaluation processes. Their engagement in well informed strategic discussions has identified appropriate priorities for improvement to inform the school's one-year transitional school development plan. The priorities include: the development of the children's personal, social and emotional skills to increase their engagement in learning; the development of the children's digital skills to enhance their learning; and the development of parent partnerships to assist children with their learning at home. In discussions with inspectors, the teachers and assistants articulated confidently the progress and positive impact of this work on the nursery school's provision and progress in the children's learning.

The recent reconstitution of the board of governors, which now includes parent representatives, is ensuring the voice of parents/carers is recognised and valued by the whole school community. The long- and well-established members of the board of governors use their professional experience well to support the nursery school. In discussions with inspectors, the governors reported that the regular and relevant communication shared with them by the nursery school staff, informs them very well in all of their decision-making processes.

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

The high expectations for the children's learning and progression across all areas of the pre-school curriculum is evident in the comprehensive and curriculum planning cycle which is reviewed and understood by all of the staff and aligned to the nursery school's vision. Long- and medium-term planning shows clear progression and informs the effective short-term planning which has focused learning intentions for all areas of the pre-school curriculum.

The highly reflective staff engage in regular curriculum meetings and their planning and practice is responsive to the individual abilities, needs and interests of all of the children. The children's views and spontaneous responses inform and are weaved skilfully by the staff into the classroom planning which includes appropriate challenge and support for each child.

Due to the large number of children attending the nursery in the morning time, coupled with the very large indoor and outdoor learning spaces, staff decided appropriately not to use an open plan approach\* to learning and teaching in the first term. Staff evaluations and children's assessments reveal that the use of individual classrooms and play areas for each individual class is currently working well. The staff are monitoring closely this arrangement so that an open plan approach to learning can be considered at the earliest opportunity.

The development of the children's digital skills has been identified as a key priority in the nursery school's one-year transitional development plan. The staff have introduced a range of relevant digital technologies into the indoor and outdoor learning spaces, such as, digital cameras, mobile phones, cash registers and digital devices, which is enhancing the children's learning.

The nursery school provides a healthy break which contributes well to the children's understanding of healthy food choices for their personal growth and development, aligned to the nursery school's core value of "**Growth**". Extended periods of outdoor play are providing the children with opportunities to engage in energetic play and is developing well their resilience and emotional health and wellbeing.

### **C. BUILDING EQUITY**

All of the children benefit from a welcoming, nurturing and inclusive environment where the staff support them effectively and take account of each child's individual stage of development. The staff work hard to ensure that the children are well cared for, make progress from their starting points and enjoy their learning. The accommodation has been reviewed to maximise the use of all areas and to meet better the diverse learning and developmental needs of the children.

The processes for the early identification of the children's needs have also been reviewed. The strategic provision for additional parent/carer visits to the nursery school during the admission and induction processes has helped build trusting parental partnerships where relevant information sharing is informing planning and the nature of early intervention, as required to meet the needs of each child.

The well-embedded routines and effective classroom management strategies, alongside a focus on child led conversations and the staff's skilful use of open-ended questioning, is resulting in positive learning experiences and outcomes for the children. The staff are highly responsive in implementing a wide range of strategies to support the children to overcome barriers to their learning through, for example the use of visual prompts to assist the children with carrying out nursery routines. The staff also use transition photo books to support the children's successful and smooth transition to the nursery school, and then onto their new primary school.

The school has links with a range of external agencies, for example, the staff have benefitted from professional learning from the Regional Integrated Support for Education in Northern Ireland\* (RISE NI) which they use well to support the development of children's attention and listening skills. Implementation of this professional learning is contributing positively to the children's receptive language development and their readiness to engage in all areas of their learning. Staff professional learning in Personal, Social and Emotional Development is benefitting the development of the children's emotional literacy skills and the children can talk to the staff about how they feel in a safe and secure environment. The children are starting to identify and express their emotions through a range of ways, including a digital device to capture their views electronically.

#### **D. DEFINING, CELEBRATING AND EMBEDDING SUCCESS**

The nursery school defines success for all children through the realisation of the vision "**learning and growing together**" for each child. The staff's high aspirations for the children to succeed is evident through their dedication to careful curriculum planning and their strong relationships with all of the children, their parents and the wider community.

The children are happy, friendly and communicate confidently with their peers, adults and school visitors. Their speech, language and communication skills are developing well, and they engage in high levels of collaborative and creative role play with increasing independence. Their early mark making and fine and gross motor skills are very well developed for the time of year. They enjoy creating and making music and performing on their outdoor stage. Their investigative skills are developed effectively through their use of a wide range of authentic materials. The outdoor learning environment is spacious and well resourced. Regular parent teacher meetings and written reports for parents are keeping them well informed of their child's progress across all areas of the pre-school curriculum throughout the year.

The children's successes are celebrated daily through consistent positive praise and encouragement by the nurturing staff, for example, through 'thumbs up', 'high fives', smiles and affirmations. Recognition of the children's talents and achievements are reported through the staff's consistent sharing of positive feedback to the parents/carers, in the presence of their child at the daily drop off and collection times. Attractive wall displays of the children's artwork celebrate the children's creativity. Each piece of art work displayed has accompanying annotations explaining the child's work and the processes involved. All of the children's successes are shared in a timely manner with parents/carers through appropriate digital platforms.

Well planned and comprehensive transition processes before the children attend the nursery school and again, when they are moving onto Year 1 in primary school are contributing well to smooth transitions for all of the children. The nursery school has well established and strong links with parents, a Surestart\* project and local feeder primary schools.

## E. GROWING A COMMUNITY OF LEARNING

The staff are committed to the school's vision "**learning and growing**" and the individual skillsets of the staff are harnessed well to build capacity and confidence across the staff, for example, the sharing of expertise on outdoor play development or digital skills.

The staff are also proactive in sourcing relevant professional learning opportunities aligned to the school's key priorities, for example, the development of the children's personal, social and emotional skills. The nursery school hosted an Education Authority's (EA) Educational Psychology Clinic for Early Years attended by other early years settings, demonstrating the nursery school's dedication to growing a broader community of learning. The staff report that this clustering opportunity also provided additional opportunities for relevant incidental staff capacity building with other practitioners.

Other clustering opportunities for example, with the EA Early Years cluster group and the shared education\* partnership provide the staff with professional learning opportunities across common themes, such as the development of parent partnerships.

Following staff professional learning, the staff engage in robust evaluative discussions on how best to incorporate new strategies which are appropriate for the children. Implementation and consistent use of calm spaces, breathing techniques, behaviour visuals and use of agreed teaching phrases are impacting positively on the children's readiness to engage in meaningful learning. Through the nursery school's digital communication app, parents/carers learn how to use these strategies to support their child's learning at home. The parents/carers are also provided with the opportunity to observe staff who demonstrate the use of these strategies at termly parent/carer 'stay and play' sessions. GRTL home play packs, with relevant developmental play activities to support child and parent learning at home, are regularly distributed.

The children are also developing their sense of identity and are building positive connections to their local community through visits to the local post office, intergenerational links in the community centre, and school visits from the fire and paramedic services.

## F. CHILD PROTECTION

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

## 4. GOING FORWARD

Drumanamoe Nursery School lives out well its vision to deliver a high-quality pre-school curriculum which takes into account the needs of all the children through its mission of '**learning and growing together**', underpinned by its new shared core values of "**kindness, inclusion, nurture and growth**".



ETI will continue to work with Drumnamoe 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 include:

- the school's vision for the holistic and inclusive development of children with special educational needs and the well-planned approaches to SEN provision; and
- the staff's effective collaborations with key stakeholders and their use of relevant research and appropriate professional learning to support and agree a new vision, mission statement and core values for the nursery school.

## 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

- Page 1**                    **Getting Ready to Learn**  
The Getting Ready to Learn (GRTL) programme aims to support pre-school education providers to encourage and develop parental involvement in children’s early learning.
- Page 1**                    **DE RAISE Programme**  
The RAISE programme is a new initiative which aims to **raise achievement to reduce educational disadvantage**, to support the Department of Education’s vision that “every child is happy, learning and succeeding”.
- Page 1**                    **Eco Schools Programme**  
The Eco-Schools programme is an **initiative that helps schools to improve the environment in both the school and the local community**.
- Page 4**                    **Open Plan Approach**  
The **nursery** spaces are set up as **open plan** environments for all of the children in the nursery to access at one given time, enabling children to freely access the resources they require. This encourages children to move around independently making their own choices and decisions about their play and learning experiences.
- Page 5**                    **Regional Early Intervention Service (RISENI)**  
RISE NI is a regional early intervention service which supports children in pre-school educational and mainstream primary school settings by working closely with parents and education staff to help children develop the foundation skills for learning, such as, speech, language, communication, sensory-motor, visual perception, social, emotional and behaviour skills.
- Page 5**                    **Sure Start**  
Sure Start is a targeted programme supporting children under the age of four, and their families, living in the most disadvantaged areas in Northern Ireland. Sure Start projects deliver a wide variety of services which are designed to enhance children’s learning skills, health and well-being, and social and emotional development.
- Page 6**                    **Shared Education**  
Shared Education delivers opportunities for children and young people from different communities, as well as social and economic backgrounds, to learn together on a regular and sustained basis, for both social and educational benefits.

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