

Report of a Pre-school Inspection  
Dunclug Nursery School

October 2024

## Contents

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

# **1. INTRODUCTION**

## **A. BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Dunclug Nursery School is a controlled cross-community nursery school located in Ballymena. Most of the children come from the local and wider rural areas of Ballymena. There are 83 children attending the nursery school comprising of a full-time class of 25 pre-school children, two part-time classes of 26 pre-school children and a part-time small class of 6 pre-school children with additional learning needs. Fourteen percent of the children in the nursery are identified as having special education needs (SEN), a minority of the children are newcomers and one-fifth of the children have free school meals entitlement. The nursery has recently requalified for Extended Schools funding from the Department of Education. The nursery school has developed positive links with local SureStart providers to help support the children's transition and to share key information; one-third of the children previously attended SureStart provision.

## **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. Sixty-nine percent (57) of the parents/carers responded to the questionnaire and twenty provided written comments; the responses were extremely positive. In the written comments, the parents praised: the approachable, nurturing and caring staff; the excellent home/school communication; and the support given to children with additional learning needs.

All of the teaching and non-teaching staff responded to the questionnaire, and their responses were wholly positive. Forty percent provided written comments praising: the warm, friendly atmosphere; excellent working relationships; and the strong beneficial links with the community.

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

The ETI worked alongside Dunclug Nursery School to consider how well the 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 nursery school's inclusive vision 'Learning to be a wonderful me' is underpinned by the value placed on life-long learning for everyone in the community and the promotion of the children's confidence, self-esteem and creativity.
- The development plan identifies appropriate areas for improvement and is informed by very effective self-evaluation processes that are aligned well to the vision.
- The staff collegially plan an extensive range of experiences for the children throughout the year to challenge and cater for their individual developmental needs.
- The reflective and insightful observations are used very effectively to inform future planning and to monitor the children's progress across all areas of the pre-school curriculum. The pre-school curriculum is well considered and adapted by the staff to meet the developmental needs of every child.
- All of the staff are extremely skilful in their interactions with the children which is impacting very positively on all aspects of their learning, including their vocabulary and thinking skills. The staff consistently hold high aspirations and expectations for every child in line with their vision.
- The children are confident, friendly, independent learners who sustain self-initiated exploratory, imaginative play for prolonged periods.
- The richly resourced and well-designed indoor and outdoor learning environments provide an excellent range of play experiences.
- Early identification and support for children who have special educational needs is a priority and a significant strength within the nursery school. The support in place is highly effective and the children are making excellent progress from their individual starting points.
- 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**

Dunclug Nursery School has a well-considered vision, 'Learning to be a wonderful me' which is shared and understood by everyone in the school community. The motto was chosen following consultation with staff, governors and parents to encapsulate the nursery's mission statement and to promote life-long learning. Children are supported to learn, make progress in all areas of their development and

have positive attitudes about themselves and towards their learning, in an inclusive environment. Staff, parents and governors are encouraged to continue their own learning and to work in partnership to benefit the children. Consequently, the wider school community value, and are committed to achieving, the vision.

The processes created for self-evaluation are extremely robust. The collegial staff have identified appropriate improvement targets in the development plan, such as providing purposeful experiences that will extend the children's learning and challenge their thinking. The staff skilfully reflect on their own practice when monitoring and evaluating the impact of the actions for improvement on the children's progress.

The board of governors are fully committed to the nursery school's vision, and use their wide skill set to benefit the work of the staff. They have a clear understanding and knowledge of their roles and responsibilities and use their challenge function effectively to help bring about meaningful and impactful change.

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

The staff plan together regularly, taking account of the needs and interests of each child, to create a comprehensive and stimulating programme for indoor and outdoor learning across all six areas of the pre-school curriculum. The staff know the children very well and use the information gained through interactions and observations to inform future learning and to meet the children's individual needs. There is an appropriate balance between planned activities and opportunities for child-led spontaneous play.

Routines are already well established and used to reinforce the children's learning and skills for life. The staff have made a number of significant improvements to the outdoor learning environment in recent years, such as developing an outdoor classroom and a sensory garden. Both additions are enhancing the children's natural curiosity, developing further their sensory experiences and promoting well their physical development and movement. These enhancements are providing the children with greater opportunities to eagerly explore their surroundings and to develop their independence, creativity and investigative play.

The health and wellbeing of the children and staff is paramount and relationships at all levels are excellent. All of the staff are highly competent in their interactions with the children, consistently model positive language and praise the children's efforts. The children are taught to talk about and express their feelings in a respectful and kind way which is impacting very positively on their behaviour. Through skilful questioning, the staff are extending the children's vocabulary and understanding of language and are developing their thinking skills and ability to solve problems.

All of the children are very aware of how to stay safe as they engage in 'risky' outdoor energetic play to extend their learning, supported by high-quality risk assessments. Healthy eating is promoted during the buffet snack routine and dinner for the full-time class. The children are encouraged to try new foods and there are good opportunities for incidental conversations with their peers and with the staff.



### **C. BUILDING EQUITY**

The nursery school is highly inclusive and each child is celebrated, respected and nurtured. The community context is very carefully considered, everyone is valued and the children are placed in suitable groups to ensure they make maximum progress across the pre-school curriculum. Children from diverse backgrounds are very well-supported and the school staff sensitively use external agencies to meet the needs of the children and their families, both educationally and pastorally.

There is a highly strategic approach to the provision for children with special educational needs (SEN). In partnership with the school governors, the staff provide a small group setting for an identified number of children which is supporting effectively the children to access their learning and make progress, in line with the vision.

There is a structured and tailored approach to the planning for children with SEN. The staff communicate regularly with parents and involve them in target setting so that the children's personal learning plans are specific and focused on their individual needs. The staff interact skilfully with the children in the small group provision and ensure that opportunities to integrate with their peers during outdoor play are maximised. This arrangement benefits all of the children, supporting them all to develop a feeling of belonging.

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

The children are very sociable; they engage purposefully in collaborative and solitary play for extended periods of time, and take great pride in their achievements. They have very good levels of independence, can persevere with challenging tasks and are confident in approaching the adults to seek help if required. They are beginning to develop friendships and enjoy engaging in conversations. The children have very good listening skills and participate enthusiastically in the 'story and rhyme' sessions.

The children enjoy exploring and experimenting with a wide range of tools and materials to skilfully build dens for 'the Gruffalo', create musical instruments and make soup and fruit salad. As a result, the children are developing very well their manual dexterity and fine motor skills. They are also confident in using a wide range of equipment outdoors and are developing well their gross motor skills as they climb, balance on logs and beams, dig, and transport materials to extend their play.

The children have fun engaging in sustained imaginative play in the 'fairy garden' and are making real life connections in the home and shop areas, enthusiastically taking on roles in the greengrocers and pumpkin patch. The children's artwork is of a high quality and is valued and celebrated in colourful displays around the nursery school. Most of the children are beginning to integrate mathematical language naturally into their play.

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

Highly respectful and caring relationships at all levels underpin the strong and committed community of learning in Dunclug Nursery School. The staff work in very close partnership with parents and the local Sure Start provider to build relationships and implement an incremental approach to transition from home/Sure Start into the nursery which supports very effectively the specific needs of each child. Parental involvement in initiatives designed to promote a love of reading are well attended, and the consistent and regular communication through digital apps and the school newsletter is welcomed by parents. The successes of the children are celebrated and communicated with pride to parents.

The school staff also work in close partnership with the local primary schools and a very strong transition process supports the children as they move to primary school education. A well-planned professional learning programme is tailored to meet the specific needs of the children, ensuring that staff are equipped with the latest knowledge and strategies. Additionally, the staff work closely with a wide range of allied health and education professionals to support the holistic development of every child and promote their overall wellbeing and success.

## **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**

Dunclug Nursery School is highly successful in achieving its vision and building a strong community of learning, based on care and respect at all levels. The pastoral, nurturing and skilful staff team are providing highly effective, inclusive, holistic learning experiences for all of the children. Inspectors identified aspects of highly effective practice from which others may learn. The aspects of practice which should be shared more widely are:

- the highly effective provision for children in the nursery school with special educational needs and the caring and inclusive approach to the holistic development of every child; and
- the high quality indoor and outdoor learning environment which is imaginatively created and designed to promote learning and development across all areas of the pre-school curriculum.

## 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%



© 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