

Report of a Pre-school Inspection  
Dungannon Nursery School

November 2024



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# **1. INTRODUCTION**

## **A. BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Dungannon Nursery School is a controlled nursery school located in the town. It provides full-time provision for fifty-three children in their pre-school year. The nursery school is consistently over-subscribed, and the children come from a wide catchment area, including the local and wider rural areas. The percentage of children on the special educational needs (SEN) register is just above 13%, and a small number of these children have a statement of SEN. Newcomer children make up 55% of the nursery school's total enrolment and 15% of the children are in receipt of free school meals entitlement. The staffing includes a teaching principal, a full-time class teacher and five classroom assistants.

The school participates in the Department of Education's (DE) 'Getting Ready to Learn' project which aims to encourage and develop parental involvement in children's early learning. In this academic year, the nursery school is celebrating 45 years of teaching and learning in the local community.

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

The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) issued online confidential questionnaires to parents/carers and staff in advance of the inspection. Over two-fifths (43%) of the parents responded to the questionnaire and they were wholly positive about the nursery school provision. All of the parents reported that their child is happy, making good progress and that they receive helpful information about the planned learning activities for their child. A small number of past parents met with the inspectors and emphasised how well the school lives out its vision, through the staff's use of nurturing and supportive strategies, where the child is placed at the centre of all they do.

Almost all of the nursery school staff responded to the questionnaires. All of the staff reported that they have the resources to do their job effectively and almost all of the staff were positive about the work of the school and felt valued in their role.

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 the 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 school's shared vision to nurture and enable all children to achieve their full potential in every aspect of their development is palpable and realised through its warm, welcoming and highly inclusive environment in which "every child matters, every second counts".
- The exceptionally collaborative staff, including the proactive board of governors, have a clear understanding of strategic planning and use effectively robust self-evaluation processes to identify key priorities for development, in line with the school's vision.
- The children are happy, well settled and highly motivated to learn and explore in the well-planned, stimulating and authentically resourced indoor and outdoor learning environments.
- All of the staff consistently interact skilfully with the children. They listen attentively to them and use every opportunity to develop their vocabulary, knowledge, skills and understanding across the six areas of learning of the pre-school curriculum.
- The needs of the children who have been identified as having special educational needs are met very effectively through the robust process of early identification, individual planning and well-targeted interventions, and are supported through partnerships with parents and a range of external professionals and agencies.
- The strategic and well-considered approach to staff professional learning, including partnerships with a number of local schools, adds value to the school's well-developed community of learning and impacts positively on the the overall quality of the children's learning experiences and the outcomes they attain.
- 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.

### **3. MAIN REPORT**

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

Dungannon Nursery School's mission to ensure "every child matters, every second counts" is underpinned by a very well informed and shared vision by all school stakeholders "to nurture and enable all children to achieve their full potential in every aspect of their development." The highly effective team collaborate regularly, are solution-focussed in their approach and they have a clear understanding of strategic planning. The staff use robust self-evaluation processes, which includes a thorough analysis of stakeholders' views and feedback to identify relevant key priorities and plan for development in line with the school's vision.

Current school priorities include appropriately the review of the planning, assessment and observation cycle and the development of the children's digital skills to enhance their learning across all areas of the pre-school curriculum.

The governors are highly committed to the school's vision and are extremely proud of the nursery school within the local community. They have also experienced the nursery school from a parental perspective, with all members having children who have previously attended the nursery school. In discussions with inspectors, they expressed that the holistic development of the child is central to their role. Their comprehensive knowledge and understanding of the school context supports them well with school improvement.

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

The nursery school's shared vision is evident in the staff's daily interactions with the children. All of the staff meet regularly to discuss the children's learning and progress across the curriculum, which has led to a comprehensive and highly child-centred pre-school curriculum planning process. A recent staff review of parental evaluations identified appropriately the need to introduce a new method to gather parents' views at regular points in the year. Parental evaluations are used well to inform school and curriculum planning. The staff have also recently introduced the views of the children and collectively, this work is impacting positively on the short-term curriculum planning for all children.

The staff are highly responsive to the needs of the children, are confident early years practitioners and are led by the children's interests, for example, allowing some children to stay dressed up in their roleplay clothes at story time so they could continue their roleplay without interruption after story time. The staff use knowledgeably and competently a digital application to observe and assess the children's learning and progress. They are monitoring and reviewing appropriately this information so that it aligns better with their revised planning process.

The creation of a well-planned learning environment which includes the use of authentic and natural resources alongside the staff's skilful interactions with the children, is improving and extending the children's learning experiences and outcomes. The staff encourage the children to recognise significant play moments, for example, when they build something of which they are proud. This is evident in the children's independent use of digital devices to take photographs of their play or models they have constructed which are later shared during whole class discussion.

Well embedded nursery routines and consistent use of positive behaviour strategies by all staff is influencing positively the children's awareness of keeping themselves and others safe. There are suitable policies in place to safeguard the children and these are shared annually with parents.

The nursery school staff provide a variety of healthy daily snacks and drinks, from which the children can choose. The children are tasting and eating new healthy food options confidently. Through natural conversations at the snack table, children engage well with staff about their food and drink choices. Their understanding of the importance of eating healthily is developing well. The well-planned outdoor play sessions include a wide range of resources and activities to engage the children in high levels of energetic play and this is contributing greatly to their overall health and wellbeing. Through the staff's detailed knowledge of each child and use of a wellbeing assessment tool, they are highly responsive to the children's wellbeing and their individual needs.

### **C. BUILDING EQUITY**

Families and children of all backgrounds and abilities are welcomed and valued by the staff and are supported to become integral members of this diverse and vibrant nursery school community. At drop-off and pick-up times, staff greet parents and carers warmly and engage in meaningful conversations with them about their child's experiences in the nursery school. This also offers parents and carers valuable time to view and celebrate some of their child's work on display and to read the information display boards which are accessible to all, through the use of pictorial and bi-lingual cues. The effective use of picture and communication cues by the staff with the children is developing well their language and communication skills.

The staff work hard to skillfully and sensitively meet the needs of the large number of newcomer children in the school. Effective use is made of the Council of Europe's Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) to provide a baseline of the newcomer children's level of proficiency in the English language, to inform individual planning and to monitor progress across the year.

The staff have put in place robust procedures to identify, assess and meet the needs of children with special educational needs. Personal learning plans (PLPs) are devised in partnership with parents and appropriate professionals, and set out clear strategies to guide staff in their interactions with the children. A range of reasonable adjustments and interventions are appropriately in place, including for example, the availability of quiet spaces, first/then object schedules, and one-to-one sessions with an occupational therapist. There are also differentiated story groups for the children to help them engage with books at a level and pace which is appropriate to their understanding of the English language. Through this very effective work, the children are supported well to overcome challenges in their learning and to access the range of high-quality and individualised learning experiences.

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

Success is defined individually for the children in the nursery school through the well embedded processes which staff use effectively to get to know all of the children. The thorough induction process gathers relevant and vital information to inform baseline assessments of the children's needs, their individual starting points and their abilities and interests. The staff use effectively this information to plan the curriculum and their teaching strategies accordingly to meet the needs of all of the children. Continual, detailed and highly evaluative observations and assessments of the children's progress provide evidence that the children are making good progress in line with their abilities.

The staff meet with parents termly to share information about each child's progress and successes. In the discussions with inspectors, the parents praised the staff for their dedication, ongoing communication and detailed knowledge of their child. The parents also appreciated the strategies and advice that were shared with them to use at home with their child, which enable them to develop their child's learning at home and build on their achievements.

The children's progress is celebrated meaningfully in the nursery school through daily praise from the staff and the acknowledgement and celebration of the children's achievements. Photographs are shared with parents and stickers are awarded to celebrate the children's achievements, which they receive with pride. These strategies are effective in motivating the children to learn. The children's individual work is displayed aesthetically in two- and three-dimensional displays with photographs and annotations to celebrate the children's achievements, which parents delight in seeing at flexible drop off and pick up times. The staff are reflective and thoughtful, and make celebrating the children's birthdays a big event, aware that many of the children live far away from their extended families.

The children are friendly and kind to each other and to adults in the nursery school. They are keen to share play resources with their play partners and peers. Their attention and listening skills are well developed for the time of year, and they enjoy listening and joining in with stories. The children enjoy music and show good beat and rhythm as they sing, dance and play musical instruments in their daily music sessions, and on their outdoor music stage. The well-planned learning environments are helping to extend the development of the children's thinking and problem-solving skills, as well as highly sustained engagement in creative and investigative play. The children's use of language across all areas of the pre-school curriculum is developing very well, in particular, their use of mathematical language naturally and appropriately throughout their play.

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

A culture of collaboration and continuous learning is well-embedded in the nursery school. The staff have developed high quality and purposeful professional partnerships, underpinned by the shared mindset of 'forward thinking, solution focused' which is supporting staff well in living out their vision. The nursery school is

proud to be part of the Dungannon community and works hard to create opportunities for the children to interact positively with their community and for a range of local businesses, charities, creative industries and public services to actively and meaningfully support the families and contribute to the life and work of the school.

The staff are working towards the Northern Ireland 'Forest School' accreditation and use their professional learning and development well to organise weekly Forest school lessons in the school's well established outdoor play area.

Partnerships with a range of professionals which include, Sure Start providers, local primary schools, and a range of higher and further education organisations, all impact positively on the children's educational and wider experiences.

## **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 Dungannon Nursery School, the children are happy, well settled and highly motivated to learn in a warm, welcoming and highly inclusive environment. The school's mission "every child matters, every second counts" is empowering the highly skilled, forward-thinking and solution focused staff, to work in partnership with parents and external agencies to consistently live out and achieve its vision to nurture and enable all children to achieve their full potential in every aspect of their development.

ETI will continue to work with Dungannon Nursery School, including to share examples of highly effective practice from which others may learn. The aspect of practice which should be shared more widely is:

- the well-planned, stimulating and authentically resourced indoor and outdoor learning environments which naturally promote, develop and extend the children's creative and investigative play.



## 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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