

Report of a Pre-school Inspection  
Kylemore Nursery School

October 2024



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# **1. INTRODUCTION**

## **A. BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Kylemore Nursery School is situated in a residential area on the Kylemore Road in Coleraine. It is a purpose-built nursery school with two open plan playrooms, a foyer that is used for small group activities, a sensory area and a well-resourced outdoor area. The nursery school staff have also designed an additional outdoor area and established a forest area.

The nursery facilitates two morning and two afternoon sessions. There are 99 children enrolled in the nursery school, 59 of whom are of pre-school age. The children come from the surrounding and wider area. A small number of the children are on the special education needs (SEN) register and almost one-half of the children have additional speech, language and communication needs.

There is a well-established staff team in place which consists of a teaching principal who was appointed in 2021, an assistant teacher and two nursery assistants.

Additional funding made available through a partnership with two primary schools and the local community centre facilitates the employment of a shared transition support worker who provides support throughout the year to parents and children, through a range of courses and activities. There are a number of experienced representatives on the board of governors who are highly supportive of the work of the nursery school.

The nursery school has a well-embedded Forest School programme.

## **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 inspection.

Over one-quarter (27%) of the parents/carers responded to the questionnaire and their responses were very positive. Approximately one-half of the parents/carers provided additional written comments in which they spoke highly of: the warm and inclusive environment; the kind and empathetic staff who care for and value each child; and the progress their child is making in their learning. A small number of parents/carers met with inspectors and highlighted: the caring and nurturing approach of the staff; the rich outdoor learning environment in which their child likes to explore; and the dedication of the staff to all of the children.

All teaching and non-teaching staff responded to the questionnaires and their responses were wholly positive.

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

## C. THE PROCESS OF INSPECTION

The ETI worked alongside Kylemore 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 nursery school provides a safe, nurturing and highly stimulating environment for all of the children which aligns well to the aims of their revised shared vision, **‘Enriching the lives of children’**.
- The committed and dedicated staff are engaging in highly effective processes for self-evaluation to inform the school development plan and provide high quality provision and learning experiences for the children.
- The accessible indoor and outdoor learning environment is used creatively and effectively by the staff to develop and extend the children’s language, problem-solving, curiosity and learning.
- All of the planning is very effective and the staff are developing well their monitoring and evaluating processes to identify appropriately the children’s progress across the six areas of the curriculum.
- The staff are highly effective in supporting the individual and additional needs of all the children, using a range of strategies and interventions such as small group sessions, external speech and language support and engaging in strategic professional learning.
- Almost all of the children are making very good progress in their learning; personal, social and emotional development is a key strength; children are developing their confidence; working independently and collaboratively in sustained play activities with their peers.
- The staff have established and developed a range of partnerships with other schools and organisations to enhance their own professional learning and the provision to improve the children’s outcomes.

- The staff successfully engage parents/carers in activities and workshops which impact positively on relationships in the nursery school community and supports parents/carers at home.
- The arrangements for child protection align to the current statutory guidance.

### **3. MAIN REPORT**

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

Kylemore Nursery School's vision has been reviewed following appropriate consultation with parents/carers and the board of governors. The principal and staff have engaged with an external agency to review and establish a new shared vision focused on "Enriching the lives of children". The revised shared vision aims to embed the existing ethos of a welcoming, safe and inclusive environment for all of the children, so they are ready to learn.

Through effective consultation and robust self-evaluation processes, the nursery school staff have identified appropriate key priorities in their development plan. These priorities are informed well by the needs of the children and there is a clear focus on enhancing the provision and reviewing and developing the procedures for monitoring and evaluating the children's progression across the pre-school curriculum.

The established members on the board of governors who met with the inspectors are committed to achieving the revised vision of the nursery school which aligns to the nursery school values. The board of governors use their educational and professional experience to support and challenge appropriately the staff team. They spoke highly of the hard-working staff team who are committed to meeting the individual needs of each child while also providing support to parents through workshops and other activities within the nursery school.

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

The staff team have established good relationships with each other and are working collegially to support the progress of the children from their individual starting points.

The long- and medium-term planning outlines clearly the progression across the six areas of the pre-school curriculum. The short-term planning is child-led and ensures that the children have access to a wide range of resources to develop and extend their learning experiences. The staff use effectively a digital application to support observation and assessment and to provide a detailed overview of the children's learning. In addition, they complete weekly focused observations of specific children and share them with parents/carers in a digital learning journal. This provides parents/carers with a detailed insight into their child's learning.



The staff are developing further the indoor and outdoor learning environments to enhance and extend the children's learning experiences. The newly designed forest area is: developing the children's curiosity in the outdoor environment; promoting their investigation and problem-solving skills using natural materials; and developing connections in their learning across the curriculum.

The children's personal, social and emotional development is a key strength. They are developing their independence and confidence through many opportunities, such as self-registration and labelling their own pictures, washing dishes and putting on wetsuits and wellingtons. The staff provide for the children's early mathematical development through opportunities for number recognition and opportunities to explore shape, size and capacity in the mud kitchen, construction area, sand and water.

The staff are continuing to develop their knowledge and provision of digital skills to enhance the children's learning experiences as identified in the key priorities set out in the school development plan. They provide a range of digital resources, for example, calculators, cash registers, iPads, light box, musical devices and 'Beebots' which the children use independently during their play to extend their early mathematical language, creativity and imagination.

The health and wellbeing of the children is embedded into the child-centred approach which actively promotes healthy eating, physical development and keeping safe. The children: participate in a healthy snack; engage in weekly cooking opportunities to develop their knowledge around healthy foods and eating; and regularly use the large outdoor environment and participate in physical activities provided by external agencies to develop their gross motor skills. They participate in walking a mile on 'Feel Good Friday'. The staff encourage children to use 'Calm Plan' strategies such as breathing and relaxing exercises when appropriate; and to begin to use their words to share their feelings and emotions. The children show empathy for each other, for example, by helping their peers when they are hurt or upset. The 'Helping hands' programme, developed by Women's Aid Northern Ireland, which increases children's understanding of feeling safe, encourages the children to speak to staff when they are worried or sad. Staff wellbeing is also promoted through a range of activities, including participation in Mental Health Week, and recognition for their commitments and achievements. The nursery school participates in the 'Operation Encompass' programme to safeguard children.

### **C. BUILDING EQUITY**

A welcoming and inclusive ethos is evident within the nursery school. There is a clear focus on developing the holistic needs of each child beginning with staff observations which are informed by discussions with parents/carers. The staff also use commercial assessments to gauge the children's levels of wellbeing and involvement, and their readiness to learn. A great deal of flexibility is evident in the planning for, and use of, the school environment, resources and staffing. This ensures that the provision remains centred on, and responsive to, the needs, interests and abilities of all the children.

Relationships among the staff and with the children are respectful, supportive and encouraging. The staff demonstrate an understanding of behaviour expectations in line with the developmental age and stage of the children. Their professional learning has impacted positively on the consistent use of strategies that support positive behaviour. They use visual keyrings and visual schedules to support the children in following daily routines and use skilfully language to encourage the children to show 'good listening', take turns and share. Opportunities for small group sessions, and access to speech and language therapy provided by the Department of Education's 'Extended Schools' funding is supporting the children with their attention, listening, and speech and language development.

There are Personal Learning Plans in place for children identified with special educational needs (SEN). The targets on each plan are informed by observations of the children's development and learning and include advice from outside agencies. Consequently, the needs of the children with SEN are being met well through appropriate strategies and interventions to support their progress.

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

Almost all of the children are making very good progress across all areas of the curriculum. At this early stage of the school year, the staff are developing nurturing relationships with the children and building their confidence and self-esteem to support the children's readiness for learning. Almost all of the children have settled very well into the routines of the day and are managing well transitions such as 'tidy-up time'. The staff praise the children and affirm their good choices and perseverance during the activities.

During the session, the children access books and seek out adults to share their stories. They listen well during story time and enjoy joining in with familiar phases in the story. The staff use effectively open-ended questioning to develop the children's thinking and comprehension skills. The children independently select materials for example white boards, paper, chalk and paints for early mark making and share their drawings with each other and the adults. This work is celebrated and displayed attractively in the nursery, alongside their other achievements on the 'Proud Wall' for all of the children and parents to see and appreciate. The staff also use digital applications to share photographs, videos and songs with parents/carers regularly throughout the year.

The children are developing well a natural curiosity and respect for the world around them through the outdoor environment and forest school activities. During these learning experiences, they engage well with the staff and their peers in collaborative and problem-solving activities. They are encouraged to articulate what they are doing, and investigate using their senses and resources such as binoculars, bug containers and magnifying glasses.

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

The staff in the nursery school value the collegial approach they have within their team. They make the most of the individual talents of each staff member to build a strong team and they value each other's contributions. All of the staff engage in professional learning opportunities which align with identified priorities in the school development plan, such as observation and assessment and adaptive teaching.

The staff are highly proactive in seeking out opportunities to engage with parents/carers; to support them in understanding, contributing to, and valuing each child's unique learning journey. An open-door policy at the start and the end of each session allows time for informal conversations between staff and parents/carers. 'Family Fridays,' which are well attended, are held once a month, as part of the nursery school's partnership with the West Bann Centre and two other primary schools. It is led by the transition worker and provides parents and children with activities to develop the children's learning and the parents' understanding of their child's development. Opportunities are provided for parents/carers to engage with their child as they are learning. 'Stay and Play' sessions and links to stories and rhymes that are being used in the nursery school are provided through digital platforms and are very effective in promoting high levels of parental involvement. All of this collaboration is fostering open and supportive relationships between home and school.

The nursery school's partnership and collaboration with other nursery and primary schools supports the children's successful transition to primary school and the staff's professional learning needs. External partners who support staff in the delivery of the wider curriculum, such as dance and music, are well considered, enjoyed by the children and enrich their learning experiences by promoting their holistic development.

## **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**

Kylemore Nursery School's vision is being successfully achieved by the dedicated and skilful staff who enrich the lives of all of the children in a safe, nurturing and child-centred environment that meets very effectively the needs of all the children.

The ETI will continue to work with Kylemore 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 highly effective strategies shared with parents which empower and support them in the development of their child's skills and learning.



## 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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