

Report of a Pre-school Inspection  
Millington Nursery School

November 2024

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# **1. INTRODUCTION**

## **A. BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Millington Nursery School is located in the Brownstown area of Portadown. The majority of the 78 children who attend come from the local area. The nursery school operates three full-time classes. Over one-fifth (21%) of the children have been identified as having special educational needs (SEN) and a small number have a statement of SEN. Approximately one-half of the children have free school meals entitlement and almost one-half (45%) of the children are newcomer children. The staffing complement is a teaching principal and four teachers, who all work in a job share capacity; 5 nursery assistants, 2 of whom work part-time; 1 temporary SEN assistant and 5 ancillary support staff.

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

The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) issued confidential online questionnaires to parents/carers and staff in advance of the inspection.

Just over one-half of the parents (40) completed the questionnaire. All of the parents indicated their child is happy in the nursery school and is making good progress in their learning. There were 14 written comments and almost all were very positive, with parents highlighting: the inviting, nurturing environment in the nursery school; the helpful support for the children; and the regular communication with parents. Inspectors met with a small number of parents during the inspection all of whom spoke positively about their experience of and inclusion in the life of the nursery school.

All of the staff completed the questionnaire, and the responses were wholly positive. All of the staff indicated they feel valued, their wellbeing is promoted, and they enjoy working in the nursery school. Around one-third of the staff provided written comments expressing the challenging nature of the job and the pride they have being able to serve the local community.

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 Millington 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's vision is understood by all stakeholders and is being lived out fully by the staff who create a caring, safe and stimulating environment in which the children are happy, settled and learning and experience success.
- The very detailed and well considered interim development plan is informed by robust self-evaluation and is underpinned by the identification of appropriate opportunities for professional learning to support the staff in meeting the needs of all of the children.
- The children are developing well their independence, engage positively and respectfully with each other and participate enthusiastically in the range of learning opportunities which empower them to achieve.
- The highly effective approaches used by all staff support well the children identified with special educational needs and enable them to overcome their barriers to learning and make good progress from their individual starting points.
- The staff are encouraging and facilitate learning in a pastoral and sensitive manner. They know the children well and recognise when they require support to manage their emotions. The clearly established structures and routines and the staff's use of a range of support strategies ensure that the children can re-engage with their learning.
- The promotion of the health and wellbeing of the children and staff is a key priority of the nursery school's development plan. The children are encouraged to try the range of food offered as part of the snack and dinner menu, and they engage readily in the extensive range of physical activities in the spacious outdoor learning area.
- The nursery school has effective partnerships with the parents and the local community which enrich the children's learning experiences and support the development and maintenance of the learning environment.
- 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, governors and parents articulate a genuine sense of pride in the nursery school and the position of respect that it has within the community. The governors are supportive of the work of the staff, and their decision to employ additional adults across the rooms enables the staff to continue to provide high-quality learning experiences for all of the children. The staff have successfully created a caring, safe and stimulating environment in which the children are supported to settle to their learning, are happy and experience success.

The very detailed and well-considered interim school development plan (SDP) is informed by robust ongoing staff self-evaluation which has identified clear and appropriate priorities for development. The plan includes appropriately specific opportunities for professional learning to support the staff to meet the needs of all of the children. The recent professional learning in Makaton (a communication tool with speech, signs, and symbols used to support children to communicate) and Six Bricks (a programme which uses six coloured DUPLO LEGO bricks through which children can develop their short-term memory, movement and creativity) is impacting positively on all the children's ability to process language and on the development of their communication skills.

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

Long-term planning is used well to set out the intended learning across the year. The staff within each class adapt the planning well for the needs and interests of the children, which supports the children all to make progress from their individual starting points. The indoor learning environment is set up to support well the development of the children's independence and confidence. The well-established routines and clear expectations shared by the staff help the children to settle quickly to their learning. The staff utilise well the shared areas and the newly created sensory room to support the emotional health and wellbeing needs of the children.

The promotion of the health and wellbeing of the children and staff is a key priority of the SDP. The children are encouraged to try the range of food offered as part of the snack and dinner menu, and to engage in the extensive range of physical activities provided in the spacious outdoor learning areas. The staff provide opportunities for the children to participate in football and rugby and they have developed links with external groups to provide drama, music and relaxation activities which are having a positive impact on the health and wellbeing of both the children and the staff. The staff also benefit from wellbeing activities, such as the recently introduced dance class which is attended by all of the staff.

#### **C. BUILDING EQUITY**

The staff make good use of their observations and assessment of the children's learning and, together with a commercial diagnostic screening tool, identify those children who would benefit from small group sessions to develop their language and communication skills. The children really enjoy these sessions which are supporting them to develop successfully their understanding and use of language.



Withdrawal sessions are also used well to support a small group of newcomer children to develop their understanding of English. The children who are ready for more challenge in their learning are supported to develop further their thinking skills and confidence in their communication through the use of games and problem-solving activities. The children respond enthusiastically to the challenges provided by the Six Bricks programme.

The staff are beginning to use Makaton signs with all of the children to support their communication with both adults and each other. The parents who met with inspectors are aware their child can use Makaton signs and would welcome further information on the key symbols to enable them to use the symbols at home and support further the development of their child's communication skills.

The children identified as having SEN are very well supported by the caring and nurturing staff. There are personal learning plans (PLPs) in place for a number of the children, which are informed appropriately by the views of the parents and the children. The PLPs include clear targets and outline an appropriate range of support strategies. The staff respond skilfully and intervene in a timely way to distract, support and help the children to manage their emotions and to re-engage them in their learning.

There are well-established links with the local Sure Start setting to support the children who are transitioning into the nursery school. Before they commence their pre-school year, the nursery school staff visit and observe the children play in the Sure Start setting and discuss their needs with the Sure Start staff. The staff also access advice from the Sure Start speech and language therapists and the occupational therapists, and integrate the suggested approaches within the classroom to support the children's speech and language development. The staff are working with the Education Authority's (EA) Early Years Support Service and have joint action plans in place to begin a specific speech and language support programme for a small number of the children.

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

The children engage positively and respectfully with each other. They participate enthusiastically in the wide and interesting range of learning opportunities presented across the indoor and outdoor learning environments. The staff know the children well and have adapted appropriately the daily routines to meet the needs of the children. They provide them with opportunities to become familiar with and confident in their learning environments. As a result, the children are growing in confidence and take on roles of responsibility within the classes, such as, setting the tables for dinner and tidying specific areas of the room and outdoor area at the end of play.

Praise, encouragement and regular ongoing positive reinforcement are used well by all of the staff to build the confidence and self-worth of each child. The children's work and achievements are celebrated and displayed within and outside the classrooms and across the shared areas. Samples of the children's work are recorded in their attractively presented Memory Books which chart the child's individual journey through their pre-school year and are presented to them at the

'graduation' ceremony. The staff use effectively a communication application and the nursery schools' website to celebrate individual, class and whole school achievements. The regular liaison between the staff and parents through, for example, the use of the 'Helping at Home' document, enables the children's external achievements to be recognised and celebrated within the nursery school.

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

The staff and governors are very invested in, and proud of, the role the nursery school plays in the local community. There is a wide range of links with the community and local businesses; these enrich the children's learning and support the development, maintenance and enhancement of the learning environment. Through the recent links with the Portadown Wellness Centre, the staff have planned a programme of work with groups of adults and children to develop the outdoor areas through the planting of flowerbeds and the growing of vegetables.

The staff have long-standing links with a number of neighbouring nursery schools as part of the EA's 'Pathways to Partnership' programme. Through these links they have arranged very useful and cost-effective joint professional learning sessions including Six Bricks and Makaton training. The staff would welcome the re-establishment of cluster opportunities to allow them to meet and share experiences of how they are implementing the approaches developed from recent training and to learn from each other's successes.

## **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 Millington Nursery School, the children benefit from a strong, caring and nurturing learning environment which supports effectively their holistic development and exemplifies the nursery school's vision.

The aspect of practice which should be shared more widely is:

- the highly effective approaches used by the staff to support children identified with special educational needs and the social, emotional and wellbeing of all of the children.

The ETI will continue to work with Millington Nursery School, including to share the example of highly effective practice set out above from which others may learn.

## 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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