

Report of a Pre-school Inspection  
St Oliver Plunkett Pre-school, Belfast

January 2025



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

# **1. INTRODUCTION**

## **A. BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

St Oliver Plunkett Pre-school is located in a modular building adjacent to St Oliver Plunkett Primary School in West Belfast. Most of the 24 children attending come from the local area and a minority of the children are on the special education needs (SEN) register.

The staff team consists of a pre-school leader, a deputy leader, two full-time assistants, one part-time assistant and an additional assistant funded through the Belfast Childcare Partnership\*.

## **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.

Almost two-thirds of the parents and almost all of the staff completed the questionnaire, the responses of which were wholly positive. All of the parents indicated that their child is happy in the pre-school and that they are clear on how to report a safeguarding or child protection concern. Over one-half of the parents who responded to the questionnaire also provided written comments in which they praised the 'fantastic' staff and the care and support provided to them and their child.

A summary of the questionnaire responses was shared with the leader and the chair of the committee.

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

The ETI worked alongside St Oliver Plunkett Pre-school to consider how well the pre-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 staff are implementing successfully the well-considered vision which is reflective of the needs of the children and the families. The staff provide a safe learning environment in which the children show increasing confidence in their learning.

- Whole staff self-reflection and evaluation has identified appropriate key priorities for the further development of the pre-school provision. Carefully considered professional learning linked to these priorities has enhanced the staff's understanding and knowledge of special educational needs and their ability to meet effectively the needs of all of the children.
- All members of the staff team are caring and patient in their interactions with the children.
- All of the children are making progress in their learning. Many of the children have a keen interest in early mark making and are developing well their language as they share and talk about books with staff.
- Daily routines are well-established and have been instrumental in supporting the children to settle easily and access their learning readily. The children's personal, social and emotional skills are well developed, and they have a sense of enjoyment and excitement in their learning.
- The staff work collaboratively with parents, education and health services to co-ordinate a broad range of interventions which supports them to meet the needs of each child.
- At the time of the inspection, the evidence provided by the pre-school demonstrates that the arrangements for child protection align to the current statutory guidance.

Area for action:

- to continue the development of the outdoor area, including the planning, to ensure opportunities for learning are maximised and the practice and provision established indoors is replicated in the outdoor learning environment.

### **3. MAIN REPORT**

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

All of the staff are clear on the vision for the pre-school and are committed to meeting the needs of the children and their families. A detailed development plan is in place and includes associated action plans which have been informed by whole staff self-evaluation. Key and appropriate priorities include the review of planning, and provision for learning, in the outdoor learning environment. A refinement of the targets within the current action plans is required to support the staff to monitor and evaluate more effectively the impact of the improvement work on the provision and outcomes for the children.

All of the staff have reflected on and identified their individual professional learning needs, with a particular focus on supporting children with SEN. The alignment of their identified learning needs to the key development priorities, is supporting effectively the staff in responding to the needs of the children. The well-established management committee has a wide skillset and a range of experience and expertise which assists them in their oversight role. They are actively involved in the life and work of the pre-school and are fully committed to supporting the staff to realise their vision for the children, their families and the community they serve.

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

Long-, medium- and short-term planning is informed by the pre-school curriculum and guides well the work of the staff. All of the staff know the children and are fully informed of their needs. They undertake both spontaneous and planned observations which are detailed and inform well the future learning needs for each child. Through caring and patient interactions with the children, the staff support them to settle easily to, and make progress in, their learning.

The health and wellbeing of the children are promoted well by the staff. The children register for snack and choose independently from the healthy food on offer. Recent staff professional learning on yoga and breathing techniques has provided the staff with new strategies which they use effectively to support the children to manage their emotions and self-regulate. The current focus on the development of outdoor learning provides a good range of opportunities for physical and energetic play and facilitates well the development of the children's gross motor skills.

## **C. BUILDING EQUITY**

The staff have created a positive and welcoming learning environment for all. They acknowledge the individual needs of the children and proactively access advice and support from external agencies to enable them to respond appropriately to the children's identified needs. Recent professional learning completed by staff, including the completion of the TinyLearners Award\*, has enhanced the skill set and knowledge of the team on SEN and the potential needs of children who are born preterm. Staff use this professional learning to good effect, to identify and support children with special educational needs at an early stage. The staff intervene and support effectively the children to manage their emotions and use de-escalation strategies when a disagreement occurs. They use skilfully a range of resources and strategies to support children with social, behavioural, emotional and communication needs including visual schedules, choice boards and the sensory area. All of the children benefit from the inclusive approaches used by the staff, which help them to build positive relationships with their peers and the adults, play collaboratively and share the resources during their learning.

The staff work alongside a number of external educational and health services to co-ordinate support and respond effectively to the needs of each child. For example, small group sessions delivered by Regional Integrated Support for Education in Northern Ireland\* (RISE NI) support well the development of the children's attention and listening skills. Individual education plans for the children with SEN are detailed and incorporate the advice and guidance from external agencies. The parents are consulted regularly and are kept well informed of the progress their child is making, including any further support required.

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

The staff understand what individual success and achievement is and take time to acknowledge and celebrate the children's successes, praise their efforts and their perseverance with challenges. All of the children are making progress in their learning. The individual work of every child is celebrated and displayed around the room. The children's work is current and annotations are made by the staff to reflect the children's ideas and their developing language skills.

The development of the children's personal, social and emotional skills is a high priority in the pre-school. As a result, the children are well settled, at ease within the pre-school setting and are confident with the staff. They manage the daily routines well and have increasing levels of independence as they, self-register on arrival, and accept readily personal responsibility during tidy up time. The children make independent choices for play and can select easily from the range of interesting and accessible resources to enhance their learning. They show obvious enjoyment and, at times, excitement in their learning and are developing well their exploratory and investigative skills. Many of the children have a keen interest in early mark making and are developing well their language as they share and talk about books with staff. All of the children engage well in the indoor learning, and most maintain sustained periods of concentration in their play.

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

The staff team work well together to achieve their vision, which is the focus of all their work, including meeting the needs of the children and enhancing the profile of the pre-school in the community. Through the Department of Education: Getting Ready to learn (GRtL)\* programme the staff have worked hard to involve parents more fully in their child's learning. The 'Stay and Play' and information sessions staff provide for parents are well-attended and include practical support in encouraging healthy lifestyles and supporting the development of the children's early language and literacy skills.

There are well established links with the local primary school to which almost all of the children transition for year 1. Arrangements are in place to ensure a smooth transition for each child. The staff share progress reports and assessment information at the end of the pre-school year and the children attend a range of events throughout the year, for example, the Christmas concert.

The staff make effective use of external agencies to enhance the learning experiences of the children and support further their physical development and musical experiences.

## **F. CHILD PROTECTION**

At the time of the inspection, the evidence provided by the pre-school demonstrates that the arrangements for child protection align to the current statutory guidance.

#### **4. GOING FORWARD**

All of the staff at St Oliver Plunkett Pre-school work collaboratively to achieve their vision and meet the needs of the children and their families. The children are happy, motivated and engage enthusiastically in their learning, supported by a dedicated and caring team.

The ETI will monitor the progress of the pre-school in addressing the area for action set out in the body of this report, which they are well placed to take forward.

## 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

#### **Belfast Childcare Partnership**

The Childcare Partnerships were first established in April 2000 as a result of the Northern Ireland Childcare Strategy, "Children First" (1999) and offer information and support to childcare providers, parents and employers.

### Page 3

#### **TinyLearners Award**

The TinyLearners Award Programme raises awareness of the impact of prematurity on development and learning. The Programme is funded and supported by the Department of Education to enhance the skills and training of professionals in schools across Northern Ireland, strengthening the links between health and education.

### Page 3

#### **Regional Integrated Support for Education in Northern Ireland (RISE NI)**

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

### Page 4

#### **Department of Education: Getting Ready to learn (GRtL) Programme**

The Getting Ready to Learn project seeks to support pre-school education providers with DE funded places to encourage and develop parental involvement in children's early learning. It is focused on improving outcomes for children in pre-school by engaging and empowering parents to help them create and sustain positive home learning environments.

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