

# Report of a Pre-school Inspection

St Bernadette's Nursery School, Belfast

October 2024



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# **1. INTRODUCTION**

## **A. BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

St Bernadette's Nursery School is located in the heart of Ballymurphy in West Belfast, with the majority of the children attending coming from the local area. A minority of the children are on the special education needs (SEN) register; a small number of whom have statements of SEN. Just over three-quarters of the children have free school meals entitlement.

The staff complement consists of a teaching principal, six classroom assistants and a family support worker. The nursery school has recently been awarded the 'Forest Schools Northern Ireland' accreditation.

## **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. A summary of the questionnaire responses was shared with the principal and the chair of the board of governors.

A small number of parents completed the questionnaire, the responses of which were very positive. All of the parents indicated that their child is happy in the nursery school and that they are clear on how to report a safeguarding or child protection concern. In addition, inspectors met with a number of parents during the inspection, all of whom spoke positively about their experience of and inclusion in the life of the nursery school. They commented on, in particular; how well their child has settled; the progress their child is making; and the helpful support, guidance and advice they receive from the staff.

Almost all of the staff completed the questionnaire, and the responses were wholly positive. All staff indicated they feel safe and valued and their wellbeing is promoted. The large number of written comments emphasised that the staff enjoy their job and they work collaboratively to provide a welcoming, nurturing and enriching environment for the children.

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

The ETI worked alongside St Bernadette's Nursery School to consider how well the nursery:

- 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 vision, which is shared and understood by staff, parents and governors, is embedded in a child-centred ethos. The staff have created a warm, welcoming, calm environment underpinning their ethos where the children are happy, loved and feel a sense of belonging to the nursery school.
- All of the staff engage actively in and contribute to the strategic planning and self-evaluation process. The collegial approach is evident between all staff and collectively they review a range of first-hand evidence to support the identification of clear and appropriate child-centred priorities for improvement.
- The staff are highly professional, dedicated, work collaboratively and reflect continually on their planning and provision. They engage in high quality, supportive interactions with the children which enables each child to enjoy success and make significant progress in their learning.
- All children are very well settled and happy in the nursery school. They are confident, engage readily with their peers and the adults, and participate well in the extensive range of learning opportunities.
- The support provided for those children with special educational needs is highly effective. The staff's knowledge of the children, and their clear understanding of how they learn, supports effectively the early identification of individual needs.
- Strong supportive relationships are at the heart of the community of learning within the nursery school. There is a shared commitment to the holistic development of each child.
- At the time of the inspection, the evidence provided by the nursery demonstrates that the arrangements for child protection align to the current statutory guidance.

## **3. MAIN REPORT**

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

The vision, 'Learning and Growing together' is shared and understood by staff, parents and governors and is embedded in a child-centred ethos. The staff have created a warm, welcoming and calm environment in which the children, aligned to the nursery school's vision, are 'happy', 'loved' and both they and their families feel 'a sense of belonging' to the St Bernadette's family.

All of the staff engage actively in and contribute to the strategic planning and self-evaluation process. Input and information gathered from all stakeholders through, for example, surveys, parental feedback and observations of the children have supported staff to identify appropriately the child-focused areas for improvement.

A recent focus on the development of the outdoor area and the completion of externally accredited teacher professional learning has impacted positively on the children's learning experiences and outcomes. The extensive outdoor learning areas have been enhanced, are inviting and stimulating and provide well considered opportunities for the children to develop, lead and take responsibility for their learning across all areas of the curriculum. The inclusion of the range of natural resources promotes successfully the children's interest in, and understanding of their learning, particularly in the world around them.

The governors are wholly committed to the achievement of the nursery school's vision. Their range of skills and longstanding links with the local community provide great support to the staff and parents. They are invested in the nursery school and value the collective engagement of all stakeholders to support the continued development of the nursery school within the community.

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

All of the staff support the children's learning in a professional and considered way.

The use of open-ended questions by all staff, to engage the children in their learning, is promoting successfully the children's thinking, deepening their understanding and extending their learning. The staff model language skilfully which supports the development of the children's language and literacy skills. The promotion of child-led play has created an environment where children settle easily to their learning and engage in sustained, independent and collaborative play across both the indoor and outdoor areas.

The planning within the nursery school is detailed and provides a wide range of learning opportunities across the pre-school curriculum. The staff observe learning with confidence and allow the children to take time to develop their play without interruption. The observations are of a high quality and are used to adapt the planned learning in response to the children's interests and needs. The staff monitor effectively the progress of the children.

The routines and clear expectations promoted by the staff support effectively the children's independence. All of the children have the confidence to lead and develop their play. They access easily the resources which enhances their engagement and supports sustained play. Through the extensive range of learning opportunities provided, the children are building well their resilience, are confident to experiment, investigate, take chances and 'give new things a go'.



The emotional health and wellbeing of the children is a priority for all of the staff. The mindfulness sessions, relaxation and breathing strategies and the positive relationships at all levels contribute to an inclusive and happy environment where the children are safe, cared for and supported to learn. The children are developing an understanding of how to manage their emotions. All of the children engage enthusiastically in the extensive range of activities which promote very well their physical development and the development of their gross motor skills.

### **C. BUILDING EQUITY**

The pastoral approach of all staff and the individual welcome each child receives as they arrive to the nursery school, supports effectively a smooth transition for all children to their learning. The well-established routines and structures enables all children to move between the various play zones and develop their learning in all areas of the pre-school curriculum.

The board of governors and staff are wholly committed to meeting the needs of all of the children. To support more fully the range of needs, the nursery school has invested in additional classroom assistance hours and the provision of weekly sessions by a speech and language therapist; both of which are having a positive impact on all of the children. In addition, the staff access a range of external services to support the early identification of the children's needs which informs their response to meeting identified needs. The staff know all of the children very well. Their confidence in meeting the children's learning and developmental needs, combined with, their knowledge of how the children learn enables all of the children to learn and make progress.

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

As part of the positive culture within the nursery school, the staff provide encouragement and feedback to the children and identify and celebrate their achievements and successes regularly. The staff's use of praise and acknowledgement of individual successes builds the confidence and self-worth of each child. The children's work and achievements are celebrated and displayed within the classroom and shared areas and are communicated to parents and the school community via a digital application and the nursery's newsletter. The children, staff and wider school community participate in events which mark and celebrate individual and whole-school achievements.

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

Strong relationships are at the heart of the community of learning within the nursery school, with a commitment to each child at the core. The nursery school enjoys a true sense of community where all are valued and welcomed.

The parents are encouraged to engage regularly with the staff, in the interests of the child. The "Time Together" sessions, developed by the family support worker are designed to encourage parents or extended family members to engage in their child's learning and development. These sessions are very well attended and build and maintain vital relationships with families. Additional opportunities for parental

engagement through activities such as, yoga and the wellbeing programme 'My Happy Mind', support further the nursery school's achievement of its vision of "Learning and Growing Together". The grandparents and the wider school community are also encouraged to celebrate the children's successes through, for example, the graduation ceremony and the nativity play.

The staff place a strong emphasis on their professional learning. They proactively source and engage in learning which aligns to and supports the progression of the key areas for development identified through their school development planning. In particular, the completion of professional learning relating to outdoor play and the 'Forest Schools Northern Ireland' accreditation have impacted significantly on the provision and delivery of high-quality play experiences for all of the children. The well-established culture of joint planning, self- and peer-reflection and regular opportunities to share good practice across the team, ensures consistency of approach and enhances successfully the learning experiences of all the children.

## **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 St Bernadette's Nursery School, the sensitive and pastoral engagement of staff and the carefully planned learning opportunities provided, support effectively the children's holistic development. The collective approach to the further development of the nursery school provision, ensures that the staff meet effectively the range of children's needs, enhances staff capability and strengthens the wider school community involvement.

Inspectors identified aspects of highly effective practice from which others may learn. The aspect of practice which should be shared more widely is:

- the adaptive and responsive approaches and interactions employed by the staff to support and extend the children's 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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