

# Report of a Pilot Inspection

Loughinisland Cross Community Pre-School, Loughinisland

November 2023



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# **1. INTRODUCTION**

## **A. BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Loughinisland Cross Community Pre-School is a voluntary pre-school in the grounds of St MaCartan's Church, in the village of Loughinisland. The children attending the pre-school come mainly from the surrounding rural area.

The pre-school provides a single part-time morning session for sixteen pre-school children, a small number of whom have special educational needs (SEN).

The pre-school is based in a former parochial house and the staff have redesigned the interior to form an open plan area with designated spaces for all the pre-school curriculum areas. There are three staff members in the pre-school: a leader, a deputy leader and an assistant.

The ethos of the pre-school, to ensure the holistic development of each child, is lived out in the actions of the staff and management and committee.

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

One-half (8) of the parents responded to the confidential online questionnaire. All of the responses were positive, indicating the parents' awareness and support of the vision and aims of the pre-school. All parents report that their child is happy and that they receive helpful information about their progress, planned learning activities and ways by which they can help their child with their learning at home. A small number of parents responded with positive additional comments about the welcoming, friendly and supportive staff and the effective communication methods used by the staff to inform parents how their child is progressing.

Inspectors also met with a small number of parents who reported that their children are very happy at the pre-school and spoke of how their children can transfer skills taught in the pre-school at home. They greatly appreciate the caring, approachable staff and the high-quality experiences their children receive.

All staff members responded to the confidential questionnaire and responses were wholly positive. Staff report they feel valued, are happy in their role and enjoy participating in professional development.

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

The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) worked alongside the 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 vision of the pre-school, which aims to ensure the holistic development of each child, is very well supported by staff, parents and the local community.
- The well-resourced and stimulating indoor and outdoor environments provide an excellent range of learning opportunities for all children across the six areas of the pre-school curriculum.
- The personal, social and emotional development of all children is of a very high standard. They show respect, tolerance and kindness towards their peers and the staff. All of the children display high levels of perseverance, have very good social skills and their behaviour is exemplary.
- The highly skilful staff interactions develop successfully the children's language, independence, creativity, thinking skills and problem-solving.
- The staff's approach to short-term planning is strategic and very responsive to the interests of the children. The staff know the children well and the regular observations and assessments are used effectively to inform future planning.
- Staff have prioritised appropriately areas for improvement in the development plan; however, some of the action plans lack effective targets to guide the staff in developing and measuring the impact of the improvement work.
- The staff's prioritisation of professional learning is impacting positively on the needs of the children and on their progress.
- The arrangements for child protection take account of current child protection guidance.

### Areas for further consideration/action:

- To develop further the processes of self-evaluation and action planning.
- To ensure appropriate risk assessment procedures are in place.

### **3. MAIN REPORT**

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

The leadership and staff are highly committed to the pre-school's vision. They work effectively to prioritise the holistic development of each child by creating an inclusive environment where everyone is valued and respected. The children are developing well their self-esteem, resilience and are building friendships.

The management committee are highly supportive of the staff and encourage them to be proactive in their professional learning which is impacting positively on their knowledge and practice. The management committee is highly positive about the excellent pastoral care and good relationships at all levels.

The staff and management committee have identified appropriately that the process of self-evaluation requires further development and have recognised the need to review the allocation of time for this. Staff have correctly prioritised areas for improvement in the development plan; however, some of the action plans lack effective targets to guide them in developing and measuring the impact of the improvement work. The staff require consistent support from the early years specialist to develop a more strategic approach to self-evaluation.

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

The highly skilful and nurturing interactions of all the staff with the children impact positively on the children's oracy, self-esteem, levels of independence, creativity, thinking skills and problem-solving. The staff create a stimulating play environment that provides broad and challenging learning experiences across all areas of the pre-school curriculum.

The learning environment is rich with language and the use of books is prevalent throughout all areas of the room. The 'Loughinisland forest', created indoors by staff, provides effective imaginative opportunities for children to express their creativity, develop role play and explore the properties of natural resources.

A good range of digital resources are used appropriately by the staff to enhance the children's learning experiences. Children have opportunities to capture their images independently using tablets and cameras and there is an engaging electronic display of images of the children and their topic work.

Early intervention strategies include methods from the Solihull approach and the staff make effective use of suitable strategies which are impacting positively on the children's emotional health and wellbeing, for example, improving their behaviour. The healthy snack routine, participation in energetic outdoor play and the staff's focus on developing the children's emotional awareness are helping the children to develop a healthy lifestyle.

The collegial staff approach to the cycle of planning, observations and assessment is very effective. The staff are reactive to the needs and interests of the children and appropriately incorporate these into the short-term planning. The short-, medium- and long-term planning guides very well the work of the staff.

### **C. BUILDING EQUITY**

The children requiring additional support with their learning are identified early; their needs are well planned for and supported effectively by the staff's expertise and training, and, where necessary, the support of external agencies is sought. Inclusion of children with SEN is prioritised and the learning experiences provided are of a high quality. The personal education plans have appropriate targets to guide well the staff in supporting the children.

There is a culture of learning for all in the pre-school; staff value and seek actively professional learning opportunities to develop further their own knowledge and understanding and to benefit the children. The implementation of strategies they have learned through various training opportunities are having a positive impact on the development of a calm, inclusive learning environment.

### **D. EMBEDDING SUCCESS**

The children's personal, social and emotional development is a key strength; their respect towards their peers, adults, resources and their environment is exemplary. All of the children display very positive attitudes towards their learning; they are happy, confident learners who engage fully in their play. Nearly all of the children explore with curiosity and investigate their surroundings enthusiastically, taking risks to extend their play. Almost all of the children have high levels of concentration and perseverance.

All of the children respond with enthusiasm and excitement to storytelling, ask relevant questions, are developing very good early inferential skills and answering questions with accuracy. Most of the children choose books independently and can retell stories to their peers, staff and dolls. The children are developing their own imaginations and language through sustained high-quality conversations with staff and their peers.

Early mark making within the pre-school is very well-developed for the time of year and the numerous displays of the children's work celebrate their creativity and imagination. All the children are making very good progress in the development of their fine and gross motor skills by creating independently imaginative artwork and models, and using gardening equipment with precision and skill.

The children use mathematical language with confidence across all areas of play. Almost all of the children have a very good understanding of early mathematical concepts, especially number, patterns, time and shapes and most can solve problems. Stories, rhymes, songs and role play in the 'three little bears' home corner, and using the visual timetable, reinforces further the children's learning.

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

Communication with parents is excellent. The staff operate an “open door” policy and offer support to parents on how they can help their child at home, for example, through the provision of information and through support available from external agencies. There is a comprehensive induction process for the children and their parents, and parents are kept fully informed of the work within the pre-school through monthly newsletters, emails and a digital application (app). The staff work hard to ensure all members of the community are well-informed of their work and the achievements of the children.

The management committee report that the pre-school is a vital provision at the heart of the community of Loughinisland. There is strong community support for the pre-school including the links with: the local parish; Gaelic Athletic Association; primary schools; and, Loughinisland Community Organisation. The leader of the pre-school has established strong links with a wide range of Allied Health Professionals and uses their expertise to support children with complex needs in the pre-school. The well-established, supportive relationship between the pre-school and the local primary schools provides seamless transitions for the children.

## **F. CHILD PROTECTION**

At the time of the inspection, the evidence provided by the pre-school demonstrates that the arrangements for child protection take account of the Department of Education’s (DE) current guidance.

## **4. GOING FORWARD**

The strong, collaborative vision for a holistic learning experience shared by staff, management and parents is impacting very positively on all the children in Loughinisland Cross Community Pre-school. The highly effective staff team are providing consistent high quality, inclusive learning experiences for all children in a stimulating, creative and nurturing environment.

The inspection has highlighted some areas for further action which will support the pre-school in achieving its vision. This includes the development of the self-evaluation process and strategic action planning for improvement.

Aspects of effective practice in this pre-school which should be shared more widely are:

- the holistic approach to integrating skilfully all aspects of the pre-school curriculum into the children’s play; and
- how staff identify, and participate in, staff professional learning to ensure the highest outcomes for all children.

# The Education and Training Inspectorate

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