

# Thematic Report on Pre-schools' Delivery, Monitoring and Evaluation of Effective Remote Learning

May 2021



Providing Inspection services for:  
Department of Education  
Department for the Economy  
and other commissioning Departments



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\*Please note that references to commercial resources contained within the report are for information only. The ETI does not endorse specific resources.

## Introduction

On 6 January 2021, Education Minister Peter Weir MLA, announced that, in light of the Covid-19 crisis in public health, the Northern Ireland Executive had agreed that all mainstream education providers, including pre-school education settings, primary and post primary schools were required to provide remote learning at home to their pupils rather than face-to-face teaching in school, until the half-term break in the middle of February, this was effective from Thursday 7 January. Staff were advised to work remotely where they could do so effectively, but in many pre-schools staff were required to support supervised learning for vulnerable children or those of key workers.

On 5 February these arrangements were extended via a further [Educational Continuity](#) Direction to give legal effect to the operational arrangements in the education system from 5 February 2021. The Department of Education (DE) provided [updated guidance](#) to support schools in the delivery of remote learning and schools are required to have regard to this guidance. Both remote and supervised learning were to continue until 5 March and are to be reviewed as part of the wider consideration of restrictions by the Executive.

Throughout January and February 2021, the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) engaged with pre-schools to understand their experiences of monitoring and evaluation of the delivery and quality of remote learning provision, The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) invited all pre-school schools to complete an online [questionnaire](#) on remote learning that took place in the week beginning 25 January 2021. A total of 483 pre-schools completed the questionnaire (69% of all of Northern Ireland's pre-schools) and a [summary of the quantitative findings](#) can be found on the ETI website. The key findings in this report are based on both the quantitative and qualitative evidence obtained from this [questionnaire](#) and the further information, gathered during focused discussions undertaken by district inspectors between Monday 25 January and Friday 12 February 2021 with 66 pre-school leaders<sup>1</sup>.

These discussions included aspects referenced in the ETI [questionnaire](#) to schools, namely:

- the planning for remote learning;
- the delivery, monitoring and evaluating of remote learning;
- safeguarding, including online safety; and
- professional development of staff.

Case studies from five pre-schools detail their self-evaluation of delivering, monitoring and evaluating effective remote learning from March 2020 to February 2021 and are included in the Appendix.

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<sup>1</sup> Appendix 1- Pre-schools that participated in discussions with ETI District Inspectors.

## Planning and delivering Remote Learning

**All pre-schools are using a range of approaches to plan and deliver the pre-school curriculum remotely, enhanced with the provision of practical learning packs of materials for families to use at home.** The questionnaire responses indicate that over 85% of leaders use pre-recorded videos and online platforms with 80% supplementing this with hard copy resources.

### Using digital technology to plan and deliver remote learning

Most pre-school staff are confident that their approaches to planning and supporting the remote delivery of the pre-school curriculum in a home environment have improved significantly since the lockdown in March 2020.

*Our plans for the curriculum since January 2021 have been 100% better than in March 2020. We are more organised and staff are more confident to have a go.*

Leader, February 2021

A majority of leaders who spoke to the inspectors reported that **the improved Information and Communication Technology (ICT) skills** of their staff is leading to an increased confidence to plan, deliver and monitor the pre-school curriculum remotely. As a result, the responsibility for the remote delivery of curriculum is less dependent on the leader and is distributed across most of the staff team.

**Increased online 'teacher presence'** is having a positive impact on the levels of children's interest and engagement. This is mainly through pre-recorded videos, oral and written feedback comments or use of emoji's. Videos are pre-recorded to allow children to revisit them and to fit in with the parents' working hours and family life. Live sessions are not as widely used because of a lack of staff skill or confidence in interacting live online or staff concerns around safeguarding online.

Most staff pre-record stories and songs and upload them on a daily, weekly or fortnightly basis. In Irish Medium Education (IME) pre-school settings, videos and recordings of stories and rhymes in Irish along with associated language sheets, assists the parents with pronunciation of Irish and language structure. Other examples of staff presence include: the use of recorded messages from staff at the start of the week to motivate the children and at the end of the week to reflect and affirm the children's own work; task demonstration videos by the staff; and pre-recorded daily 'good morning' lessons with a short re-cap on the previous days' learning.

*We use the media initiative puppets in our videos. The children see our two familiar puppets Ton and Jenny going to areas of the playroom. For example, we take puppets to the art area and model an art activity. The children watch Tom and Jenny make bird feeders from junk materials the children can easily find at home.*

**Leader, February 2021**

Questionnaire responses indicated that **live online sessions are being used** and developed by around 22% of settings to engage with small groups of children and their parents and maintain relationships with them. These include, for example, live videos via Zoom to facilitate interaction or group chats between the children and their pre-school staff, and regular stories, games and dance sessions. A small number of pre-school leaders, who spoke with the inspectors, indicated that they only started to develop these types of video approaches since January 2021. A very small number of pre-schools are not using any digital approaches to engage with the children.

**An increased flow of communication** between home and the pre-school via online platforms provides a more effective and creative exchange of planning, delivery and feedback. Increasing numbers of staff have introduced the use of an online app such as Seesaw or Class Dojo for the first time since January 2021. Seesaw is the most frequently reported app being used and less frequently, Tapestry or Class Dojo.

Pre-schools report that **the planned curriculum** is posted online for parents and covers a broader range of activities to build on the work in term one, and promote progression in learning across all six areas of the pre-school curriculum. There is also a greater focus on planning for the needs of individual children through differentiated activities and an emphasis on supporting the mental health and wellbeing of the whole family.

Day	Area of Learning	Activity	Learning Outcome	What you might notice
Monday An Luan	Súgradh Taobh Amuigh/ Outdoor Play	Go for a walk around your house or an area of your choice. You could progress to skipping with swinging arms for a count of ten in Irish and then revert to walking. Do knees up next followed by star jumps.	Promoting outdoor gross motor play. Exploring the outdoors. Observing the weather. Using gross motor skills. Using good listening skills and following instructions.	Your child listens to your instructions. Ask them open ended questions to encourage observations such as what sort of weather is it today? They may make observations about the changes in their breathing while exercising or what they see outside.
Tuesday An Mháirt	Irish Language	Scéal (See attached video)	To promote Irish Language. Recall the sequence of events. Ask your child what Happened in the scéal/story.	Child may be able to re tell the story to you. They may be able to recognise some colours or items and tell you in Irish.

An example from an IME náiscoil of a digital remote learning plan accompanied by a physical learning pack.



### Strengths and challenges in the remote delivery of the pre-school curriculum

Despite the challenges of delivering remotely a play-based curriculum, staff plan for all areas of the curriculum and experiment with ways to support all aspects of the children's development with varying degrees of success. Leaders reported to the district inspectors the remote delivery of the following areas of the pre-school curriculum as the most and least successful.

***The most successful areas of the pre-school curriculum that are being delivered remotely are:***

- speech and language activities to promote listening, speech, language and communication skills; linked most commonly to stories, songs and 'things to talk about' prompts for parents and 'show and tell' activities;
- the arts, including music sessions, songs and rhymes, arts and crafts using materials from packs provided by the pre-school or resources in the home environment;
- early mathematical experiences linked to matching and sorting, counting and pattern making with items in the home and positional language linked to physical development outdoors;
- world around us activities linked to outdoor experiences of the weather, nature and local amenities and cookery; and
- physical development including fine and gross motor skills through ideas for physical activity and dance and use of scissors and everyday opportunities in the home such as setting the table.

***The more challenging areas of pre-school curriculum to plan and deliver remotely are:***

- children's personal, social and emotional development due to the lack of direct social interactions with other children;
- children's independence and creativity - many parents tend to give less autonomy to their children to explore and develop their own open-ended creative ideas at home as compared to a pre-school environment; and
- energetic physical play - children are reported as having less energetic play outdoors to support their gross motor skills and wellbeing during this period due to inclement weather.

***There are a number of barriers to developing a consistent approach to the delivery of digital remote learning*** in pre-schools. Questionnaire responses indicate that almost one-third of pre-school children have limited access to technology. This is due to a combination of poor connectivity, lack of suitable equipment or affordable data. The largest proportion is due to connectivity issues.

The competing demands of several children at home, at different stages of learning and parents working from home can limit significantly the time available for pre-school children to access technology. The pre-school child's need for access to the available technology may take less priority in these circumstances.

**Priorities to improve remote learning** reported by leaders included:

- increasing the frequency and quality of pre-recorded videos of staff;
- providing social opportunities for children to see their friends online; and
- requesting regular feedback from parents about the remote learning activities.

### Using learning packs to support the delivery of remote learning

Over 86% of pre-schools indicated their use of the Getting Ready to Learn<sup>2</sup> (GRtL) website in the questionnaire responses. In addition, almost 30% of leaders' reported to District Inspectors that the ideas on the website, combined with learning packs is successful for increasing parental and child engagement.

*The pack was useful for keeping the children engaged and focused during activities as they have everything they needed in one place.*

Parent, February 2021

The GRtL funding is important for families with limited access to suitable resources for supporting learning within the home.

*We know all our children are interested in our remote learning because all of the packs are collected each week. We have a box left outside for return items including some of the children's work and we always receive things.*

Leader, February 2021

Some pre-schools have upgraded their previous learning packs to include a broader range of materials. They also include more specific guidance for the parents to provide progression in learning and help sustain the interest of the child. Leaders report increased confidence, since the first lockdown, in planning what to send out to parents to meet their individual children's needs and interests. Others pre-schools have introduced learning packs for the first time since January 2021 or are providing them more regularly than they did during the previous period of remote learning.

The learning packs may be themed to an area of the curriculum such as, fine and gross motor skills, creativity and language development. Staff either create the packs to their own specification or buy a pack and supplement it with additional materials and guidance notes for parents.

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<sup>2</sup> 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.



Examples of the materials in the learning packs include:

- games and prompts for parents with additional vocabulary and ideas for talking;
- peg boards and beads to support pattern making in early mathematics;
- bug scoops and magnets to foster investigation and exploration in the World around Us; and
- mark making materials such as chinks and pens and a dry white board.

In order to maintain Covid-19 health and safety guidelines, most pre-schools provide drop boxes for used items and organise staggered pick up times for collection of packs by parents.

A small number of pre-schools do doorstep deliveries when it is considered necessary and appropriate to support a specific need.

### Examples of Learning Packs



Health and wellbeing pack



Cross-curricular pack



Arts and Craft Materials

### Partnership with parents in the delivery of the pre-school curriculum

***Parents/carers engagement is paramount in the successful participation of pre-school children in the curriculum while at home.***

Focused discussions with pre-school leaders reveal that staff give a high priority to engaging with parents. Pre-school children cannot fully benefit from the information provided by staff if their parents do not register, log on and follow-up on the planned practical activities with their child. Staff are in frequent, direct contact with parents by phone, email and communication apps to convey curricular information and to provide them with pastoral support. Leaders report that the parents inducted into the use of digital platforms for a blended learning approach in term one, are consequently more confident in their use of the online apps and able to engage with staff remotely in term two.

Pre-school leaders recognise that enhancing the parents' skills can have a direct impact on improving the children's learning and development in the home environment. Consequently, they continue to support parents to enhance their own wider skills and knowledge beyond the immediate pre-school curriculum. Examples include: evening online workshops on parenting skills such as: using positive behaviour strategies; parent-led support groups via Zoom or WhatsApp; and, lessons on using Seesaw.

### **Planning and delivery for specific groups of children**

During discussions, pre-school leaders reported that they continue to provide additional support for children from vulnerable families, newcomer families, those on the special needs register, or children for whom they have an initial developmental concern.

**Children with additional learning needs** identified by the staff in term one continue to be supported with online tailored planning, practical support materials and personal contact with the parents and child. Many of the children who have a statement of special educational needs under the Special Educational Needs (SEN) Code of Practice, attend for supervised learning in the setting. Staff report these children have often benefited from the smaller groups and the continued one-to-one support of an allocated classroom assistant. Progress for these children is reported in areas such as personal care and toileting, speech, language, increased confidence, social and emotional skills and more settled behaviours.

For parents of children identified with special needs, examples of the support from pre-school staff in term two has included:

- increased one-to-one phone calls from the leader, assistant, key worker or SENCO to provide advice and support for parents;
- making referrals and signposting parents to other agencies and materials such as Action for Children, Family Support Hub (FBH), RISE NI and the EA ASD team;
- continuation of referrals and support, in line with the SEN Code of Practice; liaising with other professionals such as, the teacher for hearing impaired, health visitor, social worker, educational psychologist, speech and language therapist;
- providing support for remote learning including, the loan of an iPad with suitable apps, making individualised videos for children with attention problems or providing practical packs tailored to specific needs such as visual impairment; and
- providing practical materials such as language support packs, 'First and Then' cards with simple instructions, sensory materials, social stories and visual aids.

Staff have, in a number of settings who spoke with District Inspectors, continued during this period to access online professional development and training in SEN from, for example, Middletown Autism Centre, the Early Years Inclusions Service (EYIS) and SEN inclusion service.

A small number of pre-school leaders reported that they are not giving any specific support for children identified with special needs, while others indicated a number of barriers to providing the support. These included parents reporting that their child did not need any additional support or parents not responding to the staff despite their best efforts.

Leaders reported some children identified with special needs struggle to contribute as fully online as other pre-school children and while Individual Education Plans (IEPs) were in place before the closure and shared with parents, some parents find them difficult to implement at home.

A minority of the leaders (11%) who spoke with ETI reported delays in the support for children identified with special needs. This was linked to a delay in the formal assessment of children identified by the staff in term one and a difficulty in accessing suitable services, therapies and support for individual children.

**Newcomer children** who attend the pre-school for supervised learning are reported as benefiting from the interactions within a smaller group context and as a result are making very good progress with their English language skills.

*One child who would not communicate is now talking freely; one child with English as a second language is now communicating using basic vocabulary also.*

**Leader, February 2021**

One pre-school reported that they had linked with the Inclusion and Diversity Service (IDS) or other agencies to support newcomer families. Another setting employed a classroom assistant to assist with a child's language development and the translation of materials being delivered to their newcomer children which improved access and engagement by the families.

Staff report barriers in providing information or conducting parent interviews with parents who speak limited English. Examples of how staff have sought to overcome language barriers include the use of extra story books, using Google Translate or Class Dojo translator. Others have found the Seesaw app is more difficult for newcomer parents to manage and they make greater use of learning packs to compensate. The language barriers for some newcomer families prevents access of the online written materials to guide learning unless the pre-school has ready access to software for translating.

**Vulnerable children** are being supported and supervised directly in settings where parents have chosen this option in line with guidance. The parents who have chosen not to send their child, despite being eligible, make the choice for various reasons including concern about their child or family's health linked to Covid-19, choosing day-care because it provides longer hours or various other individual family circumstances.

Where staff are aware of vulnerable children not attending in person, they adopt approaches such as more regular phone contact with the parent or carer and providing practical materials for use within the home environment or food deliveries.

Where staff need to attend a Case Conference for a vulnerable child, this is conducted online and close links are kept with social workers. In one setting, the staff planned an individual topic with associated resources based on the family, feelings and emotions to support a child who was due to meet their adoptive parents for the first time.

## Monitoring and Evaluating Remote Learning

***Questionnaire responses indicate that levels of engagement from parents vary between pre-school settings from less than 20% to 100% participation; a majority of leaders who spoke with ETI (60%) have noted a significant drop in engagement since the previous lockdown period.***

There is no consistent or coherent pattern to fully explain the extent of variation in the engagement of parents and children at this stage. In a majority of pre-schools, the staff monitor, to varying degrees, the levels of engagement of parents and children who are using the planned online activities and practical resources. This ranges from informal conversations with parents to more robust monitoring of online activity through apps.

Examples of the outcomes of the monitoring feedback include: a leader who was able to quantify, based on feedback from their parents, that 50% more had engaged as compared to March 2020; a setting where parental feedback indicated that seeing their teacher/assistant on line had helped their child to focus or that their child enjoyed listening to the story at bedtime; and, a setting that conducted a parent audit which indicated 100% positive feedback on the benefits of the practical learning packs.

Pre-schools using an app such as Seesaw or Class Dojo can monitor whether parents have or have not read messages which have been sent. If they note that parents have read the messages but not engaged, they follow-up with a phone call to address any concerns from parents. These have included for example, not understanding how to navigate an app or concerns about privacy and confidentiality. The staff reassure parents through explanation and information and distribute learning packs.

Informal parental feedback is used to inform, amend and tailor approaches more closely to the needs of families, such as amending the timing of their online sessions, resulting in higher levels of engagement from parents. Some pre-school leaders report either very low response rates to a request for formal feedback or poor quality responses. Many of these settings are planning for more in depth feedback on the quality and nature of remote learning from their parents through a questionnaire later in term two.

Barriers to staff being able to monitor systematically the engagement of parents to facilitate their children's remote learning include the availability of apps, digital devices or staff skill to track and monitor the levels of engagement. In these cases leaders have sought alternative methods such as, follow-up phone calls or socially distanced face-to-face engagement when parents collect the learning packs at the setting.

Leaders report a number of key barriers to parental engagement with remote learning which account in some measure to a drop in levels of engagement in 60% of settings since the first lock down. These include: the previous novelty of home learning has gone; expectations of home schooling can be overwhelming; increasing demands on parents due to Covid-19 affecting individual family circumstances; and parents needing to prioritise their time for home schooling older children in the family.

Where the stress of the uncertainties and restrictions arising from Covid-19 affect the parent's mental health and wellbeing, it can also impact negatively on their capacity to support their child's learning. There are parents with limited digital literacy skills and difficulties when there is a need to share devices in a larger family or there are ongoing connectivity issues.

Leaders also reported success in **increasing engagement** through, for example, pastoral phone calls, introducing the Seesaw app to facilitate recorded story and song videos by the staff, reducing the expectation of engagement with daily videos to two videos per week or a personalised "thank you" note to parents for previous engagement.

### **An example of communication with parents**

*Thursday 7<sup>th</sup> January*

*Hello everybody, thank you to everyone for responding so quickly yesterday and helping us to make the necessary arrangements required. Although we are not all going to be together every day for a while, I want us to keep connected here & I value your response in this. It has been lovely to see some photos of the children doing activities so far. We are more than a building, we are a pre-school family and we think of families who have lost loved ones and families who have someone very ill. Be safe everybody & please take care xx. The winter weather is really here with us so today's activity is all about finding things associated with winter. I wonder how many items our clever boys & girls can find?*



### **Assessment of the children's progress in learning**

***All of the leaders reported to the district inspectors their reluctance to attempt a comprehensive assessment of children's progress at this stage but plan to pick up on their direct observations and assessments once pre-schools re-opens.***

Staff began to record observations and make assessments of the children's learning and development in term one and many had virtual meetings with their parents to report on the initial settling-in phase. A small number of settings planned to have a virtual meeting with parents in February to discuss their child's progress in learning, with more of a focus on input from the parents about their views and to identify any areas in which their child may need further support.

A majority of pre-school settings continue to record the oral and photographic feedback and online or phone call responses from parents and children and collate this to inform some elements of the children's progress, compiling blended learning photo books or folders. They report, however, that it is difficult to verify how much input parents have had to tasks and how much is reflective of the child's own independent progress.

Almost all settings have moved from term one priorities of settling-in and the children's personal, social and emotional development, to progression in learning across all six areas of the pre-school curriculum in term two through remote learning.

Direct feedback to the children by the staff about their achievements and progress is most commonly through pre-recorded or online video feedback, online written comments, stickers, certificates or letters.

**Example of assessing a child's fine motor skills:**

Parent: *"My child keeps changing hands when using scissors. Is this OK?"*

Pre-school: explained that this was not unusual practice at this stage of the child's development and also sent information to the parent about ambidexterity in the early years. The parent felt reassured.

The pre-school also sent home a pair of right-handed and left-handed scissors for the child to try out. Subsequently, the parent sent videos of the child cutting with the scissors and commented on which pair the child preferred.

Parents have the opportunity to provide evidence of their child's learning by uploading examples of the children's' responses such as photos or videos of them singing, talking or being creative. Staff in return give feedback and celebrate children's achievements with, for example, personal written comments or electronic stickers, a collage of photos that can be shared with all those whose parents have agreed to share images or during live sessions when the staff can give direct feedback and encouragement to the children.

*Since we have started using See-saw our engagement has gone up by 100% with parents responding either by comment, photo, live videos, and pictures of children's work and recently some are sending audios. It is the new way forward!*

**Teacher, February 2021**

Children whose families cannot access online materials or choose not to engage, can miss out on affirmations and positive feedback on their progress and achievements unless alternative arrangements are made. Some staff have overcome this by encouraging the use of whatever device they have available at home such as sending attachments on email or phones.

Leaders and managers have amended their pre-school communication policy to give clear boundaries and set realistic expectations for parents on the timing and frequency of communication.

Leaders are reflecting on the areas of the pre-school curriculum that are more challenging to deliver remotely. It will be important that pre-school leaders communicate any changes to the children's normal rates of progression in learning, health and wellbeing with the feeder primary schools to enable them to adapt their year one curriculum where necessary.

## Professional Development of Staff

***Building further the capacity and confidence of staff to use ICT and support learning online is highlighted, in both the questionnaires and the discussions with the district inspector, as a priority for a majority of leaders.***

The highest demand for training (39%) by pre-school staff over this period has been for the development of their ICT skills in general and in particular specific training on the use of new online platforms such as Seesaw.

As a result of the ICT training to date, staff are building their capacity to work online; pre-school staff attend virtual meetings and many engage in staff training webinars through a range of online platforms.

*There is now more time for other leadership responsibilities as the rest of the staff are now trained and competent to share responsibility for providing remote learning.*

**Principal, February 2021**

Leaders expressed to district inspectors and the questionnaire responses, the value and benefit of the professional development they have had through their engagement with other early years professionals. One third of leaders reported on the value of clustering with other pre-schools for peer support, guidance and training. This included local early years cluster training (13%), early year's specialist support (12.5%) in non-statutory pre-schools and NI Teachers Collaborate. ICT training provided by BlendEd NI, instigated by early year's practitioners themselves, has been constantly oversubscribed with a pre-school leader reporting that they had over 300 course attendees at one of the training sessions in January 2021.

Pre-school leaders value the benefits of in-service training delivered either by the leader, by experienced staff (ICT champions), or linking with an adjoining primary school or pre-school cluster group. Pre-school specific webinars were reported as beneficial for information and advice on remote learning and signposting to relevant online links on the Education Authority (EA) Pre-School Education Professional Learning Portal. The responses to training have varied considerably. For some, it was reported that the information and training was overwhelming, whereas others felt it was really helpful and often affirmed their own pre-school practice.

In addition to training in ICT, staff continue to seek training focused on supporting children with special educational needs, supporting health and wellbeing and the pre-school curriculum. A small number of pre-schools reported that they initiate their own professional learning through research articles and use this information to inform practice and share with the staff and parents.

Pre-school leaders report barriers to accessing training include: training being oversubscribed; training at inaccessible times; a lack of suitable devices and connectivity issues. Leaders also report frequently on competing demands on their time and capacity to access online courses due to heavy workload with challenges in accessing, reading and negotiating the volume of Department of Education (DE), Education Authority (EA) and Catholic Council for Maintained Schools (CCMS) guidance.

## **Support**

Pre-school leaders value support and advice, through phone calls and email contact, from their cross-organisational link officer, district inspector and, in the voluntary and private sector, their designated early year's specialist, including those from the Early years Organisation, independents and Altram.

The early year's specialist for the voluntary/private pre-schools was described by many as being a very good support through regular leader days, catch-up phone calls, training and general sharing of practice.

## **Guidance**

Online guidance was accessed for information covering areas such as, health and safety, education re-start, supporting children with special educational needs and the delivery of the curriculum online. The 'Pre-School Continuity of Learning' section of the GRtL website is described as being helpful to identify examples of practice. Leaders report the materials from the EA, RISE NI and Department of Health (DoH) websites, DE guidance and the ETI publications as the most useful documents.

The EA pre-school portal and website became available in June 2020 to voluntary/private pre-schools along with the statutory sectors to access training, and a range of guidance materials. It will be important to maintain and continue to develop this equity of access across all types of pre-school for the benefit of the children and staff.



**Leaders report feeling overwhelmed by the amount of information they receive** from DE, EA or DoH which is exacerbated by the timing of the delivery and the need to read, understand and respond to ongoing changes to guidance.

Barriers that were reported as impacting on the access to support and training for staff include:

- a lack of principal cluster groups or professional connections among pre-school leaders in some areas;
- oversubscription of popular courses in ICT;
- nursery unit leaders not receiving the support materials because they had been issued to the school principal and were not passed on to the nursery unit;
- lack of access to pre-school devices and hardware for staff;
- insufficient training and support for specific aspects, such as, developing a remote learning policy and how to deliver remotely aspects of the curriculum including physical movement and personal, social and emotional development; and
- training that is not adequately tailored to the needs of staff; while some have reported favourably on training opportunities, others have described it as too advanced when they need to develop more basic skills.

### **Management groups**

A majority of pre-school leaders have continued to meet with their management groups online and have commented on how well they have adapted to online planning meetings. This has enabled the settings to continue with communication, decision making and strategic development planning.

In a small number of voluntary settings, leaders report limited support from the management group due to poor communication or a lack of personnel for key roles including the chairperson. In a small number of cases there is no functioning management group at all.

### **Links with others**

Over the lockdown, many pre-school leaders have reported on the benefits of formal cluster meetings and conversations with other pre-school professionals.

*These groups have been the best thing to come out of all this chaos!*

**Principal, February 2021**

Others have liaised with their local primary school principals to agree the implementation of guidance materials and promote continuity of approaches for staff and parents. For example, by adopting similar communication tools for remote learning activities such as Seesaw or Class Dojo, they could ensure smooth transitions for parents and children in Year One.

## Emotional Health and Wellbeing

**All pre-school leaders who spoke to the district inspectors are giving an increased focus to emotional health and wellbeing** in their planning and decision making. High levels of stress and anxiety are reported among parents, staff, and in some cases the children, linked either directly or indirectly to the current Covid-19 crisis.

*There is a whole school approach to mental health and wellbeing starting with parents to enable them to be in the right headspace to help their child.*

Principal, February 2021

Poor physical and emotional health can create a barrier to a child's ability to learn and a parent's capacity to fully support them. In addition, it can be a barrier to sustaining staff morale, motivation and resilience to overcome the current challenges and uncertainties.

### Children's emotional health and wellbeing

The lack of direct interactions with other children has limited the opportunities for most children to develop their early personal, social and emotional skills. A small number of children are also reported as being fearful and anxious of Covid-19.

*We cannot see if the children are using socially acceptable behaviour such as sharing, taking turns or tidying up and if they are independent in clothing or feeding themselves - we can do planning around feelings such as smiley faces but we cannot observe the child's emotions.*

Leader, February 2021

Children who have continued to attend a pre-school for supervised learning have had the advantage of continued social interactions with other children in smaller groups.

Restricted access to outdoor and physical play impacts negatively on the opportunity for children to experience the positive emotions that come with running and jumping, the challenge of climbing and balancing, the satisfaction of solving physical challenges and problems and the ability to self-regulate behaviour.

While the resilience and adaptability of the children in term one surprised many staff, discussions with the leaders indicated that the impact of the pandemic on parents has increased since January 2021. The impact for children whose parents are not engaging with the pre-schools is as yet unknown.

**Parental emotional health and wellbeing** is impacted by the competing demands of work, childcare, home schooling, caring responsibilities for new babies or family members, illness and/or bereavement, and financial pressures. Leaders report an increase in mental health issues for parents caused by stress and anxiety, poverty of food, clothing and heat, all of which create barriers to their children accessing learning.

*We have a wide range of parental needs - mental health issues; capacity to support home learning; time and organisational skills. Many families have lost family members with Covid-19 and staff have to be very conscious of the issues being faced.*

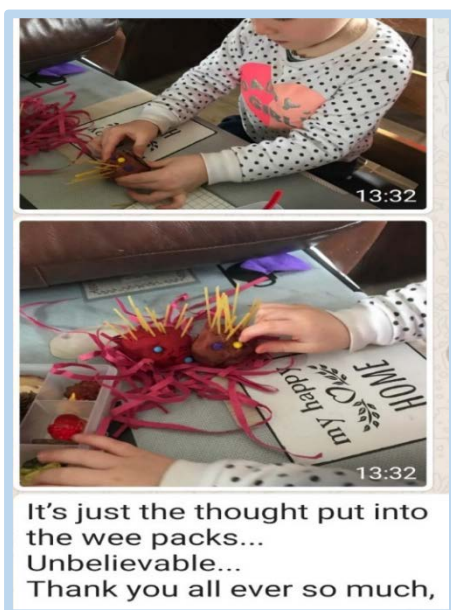
Principal, February 2021

Supporting and implementing strategies for children with special needs is an added pressure for some parents in the home environment during this period of more limited respite and support.

**Staff emotional health and wellbeing** are impacted by the stress and fatigue linked to the competing demands of administrative work, planning and delivery of remote learning and supervising key worker children. New leaders and acting leaders in particular, report feeling overwhelmed by the cumulative demands of the leadership role.

The reduction of a staff team through illness and shielding, coping with ever changing working patterns and the emotional impact of Covid -19 relating to bereavements within the pre-school community add further pressures.

Staff demotivation is compounded when, despite all of their best efforts, parents still do not engage with them. Conversely, leaders who talked to the District Inspectors reported a sense of pride and achievement in being able to remain open to support their communities at this difficult time and are motivated by the positive responses from their parents and management which have made it worthwhile.



## Approaches to support emotional health and wellbeing

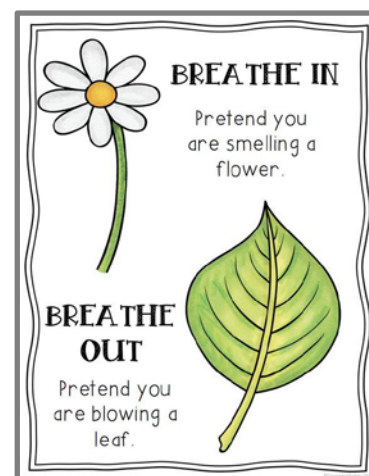
**Maintaining personal contact and relationships with families has been key** in supporting their emotional health and wellbeing. Almost all pre-school leaders make or receive phone calls as an integral part of their pastoral care and welfare to children, parents and the staff.

Staff support the health and wellbeing of the children by focusing on relevant activities linked to stories, songs, use of puppets, physical activity, dance and friendship, self-regulation, mindfulness, cooking activities and direct staff engagement with the children to build working relationships.

**Parents are supported** through pastoral phone calls, practical advice on using positive behaviour approaches and, signposting parents to suitable online resources focused on health and wellbeing.

*For the month of February, the staff gave foot massage cream for parents and children, scented dough, yoga exercises and had heart themed activities centred around emotions-care and love linked to Valentine's day.*

Leader, February 2021



**The questionnaire returns and discussions with the leaders** indicate the use of a range of training focused on emotional health and wellbeing including mindfulness, emotional wellbeing of 3-4 year olds, first aid and supporting bereavement. Courses, training and information have been accessed through, for example, Action Mental Health, Minifirstaid.co.uk, Blended NI webinars, Department of Health, AWARE, INSPIRE NI and Family Support NI.

Meeting online with other pre-school leaders and staff through cluster groups is reported, by one-third of pre-school leaders, as being beneficial for their mutual support and mental health and wellbeing.

*I have developed a strong link with our 'Sharing from the Start' local nursery school sharing practice and offering each other support.*

Leader, February 2021

Leaders provided examples, during their discussions with the district inspectors, of how staff motivate and support each other with positive messages through their private WhatsApp group to keep up morale and keep in touch with each other.

*We have a "Coffee and Cake" day once a week where we try to switch off and talk about something other than Covid or curricular planning.*

*The conversations and social interaction between our staff is our means of attributing positively to our own mental health!*

Leader, February 2021

## Safeguarding

### Policies and procedures

**Leaders are aware of the need to keep safeguarding policies and procedures up-to-date in line with developing practice** and have made amendments to reflect the increase in online interaction between staff, parents and children in pre-schools. The questionnaire responses indicated that 85% of pre-school leaders have developed protocols for the safe use of technology in the delivery of remote learning and 97% had communicated expectations around remote learning to parents.

The leaders who spoke with District Inspectors indicated that they had either created a separate remote learning policy or added relevant sections within existing policies. Some staff have reissued their policies during this second lockdown and added further safeguarding guidance to packs. In a small number of these settings, the safeguarding concerns of staff are cited as the main barrier to using live sessions online.

**The key types of amendments** made to policies include risk assessments, reference to the supervised learning of vulnerable and keyworker children and a code of conduct for live online sessions with children and their parents. Visual image policies have been amended to include specific parental consent for sharing photos or videos with a group online. A small number of settings reported that they have reviewed and subsequently stopped using Facebook as an online tool, due to the negative impact of parents making comparisons of one another or due to a lack of connectivity.

When ***uncertainty or concerns about safeguarding*** issues were discussed with the district inspector, these focused on the implications of GDPR on remote learning due to the sharing of photos and contact numbers and the difficulties arising from staff being unable to see the children first-hand to observe and risk assess their levels of need. A small number of leaders also report that it is difficult to access First Aid and Safeguarding and Child Protection training due to the lockdowns.

### **Support for families**

To develop parental understand safety online, pre-schools have signposted them to various resources linked to keeping children safe such as, online safety and integrated services for parents of children under five; and information about and safer internet day. Staff have assisted parents with the set-up of online platforms and their safe use.

In instances where families do not engage and staff have specific welfare or safeguarding concerns about a child, they keep contact through regular phone calls or may make home-garden visits. Staff continue to follow their normal procedures if they have a safeguarding concern and make the necessary referrals.

## **Conclusion**

The pre-school sector has made significant progress since March 2020 in the use of ICT to plan and deliver remote learning to children. The leaders and staff have responded to the challenges presented by the pandemic strategically and creatively.

Further to the key considerations outlined in the ETI's [Pre-school Phase Report September 2018 - December 2020](#) and for this period of remote learning, considerations going forward include the following.

- Continue to review equity of access to online resources and training for staff in all types of pre-school.
- Maintain a focus on the knowledge and skills required for leaders to use technology effectively within an early year's environment in early education workforce development at all levels.
- Build on the successes of the GRtL programme to support the crucial role of parents and the home environment in early learning and development.
- Target any additional funding to minimise the negative impact of Covid-19 at maximising the opportunities for children to have quality play experiences within a group setting.
- Communicate clearly to the transferring primary schools the pre-school assessments of the children's learning across the pre-school curriculum to enable them to adapt their year one curriculum to take account of additional gaps in learning and development resulting from Covid-19.

- Pre-schools continue to self-evaluate the quality and impact of remote learning and take any necessary actions to ensure all children receive consistently high quality experiences.
- Integrate the creative learning and teaching strategies, developed by pre-schools through remote learning, into a blended learning approach that promotes on-going partnership with parents in supporting learning at home.
- The process of referral for children identified with SEN needs to be completed to ensure they receive the support they require in advance of their transition into primary school.

The Education and training Inspectorate will continue to engage with schools to gather first-hand evidence on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on curriculum provision, evaluation of learning and outcomes for the children.

## Appendix 1: List of pre-schools that participated in discussions with ETI District Inspectors

Arellian Nursery School	Cairnshill Nursery Unit	Alphabet Playgroup
Ballyclare Nursery School	Cedar Nursery Unit	Ballee Pre-school Playgroup
Bangor Central Nursery School	Enniskillen Integrated Nursery Unit	Ballybeen Women's Centre Pre-school
Barbour Nursery school	Florencecourt Nursery Unit	Ballyronan Playgroup
Bligh's Lane Nursery School	Iveagh Nursery Unit	Carryduff Pre-school
Brefne Nursery School	Moyle Nursery Unit	Clogher Valley Playgroup
Drumnamoe NS	Orangefield Nursery Unit	Dromore Community Playgroup
Dunclug Nursery School	St Malachy's Nursery, Unit, Castlewellan	Glasswater Pre-school
Edenderry Nursery School	St Malachy's Nursery Unit	Greysteel Playgroup
Glenbrook Nursery School	St Mary's Nursery Unit, Banbridge	Humpty Dumpty Playgroup
Harrison Nursery School	St Joseph's Nursery Unit, Dunloy	Jolly Rogers
Magherafelt Nursery School	Towerview Nursery Unit	Little Acorns Playgroup
Malone Nursery School	Whitehead Nursery Unit	Little Oaks Playgroup
Mossley Nursery School		Little Sunbeams Playgroup
Our Lady's Nursery School		Naiscoil Cholmcille an Charraig Mhór
Railway Street Nursery School		Naiscoil Léim An Mhadaidh
Sandbrook Nursery School		Naiscoil na Fuiseoige
Stanhope Street Nursery School		Naiscoil Charn Tóchair
Strathfoyle Nursery School		Peter Pan Playgroup
St Luke's Nursery School		Poyntzpass Community Playgroup
Tandragee Nursery School		Rathkeltair Cross Community Pre-school
Tudor Lodge Nursery School		See-saw Playgroup
Victoria Nursery School		Straidarran Community Playgroup
		St Comgall's Pre-school Education Centre
		Sugar and Spice Early Year's Centre
		Tobertiny's Community Playgroup
		The Country Playgroup
		The Magic Roundabout Playgroup



## Appendix 2: Reporting terms used by the Education and Training Inspectorate and Methodology/evidence base

### 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%

The ETI's Inspection and Self-Evaluation Framework publication is available on the ETI website: [The Inspection and Self-Evaluation Framework \(ISEF\): Effective Practice and Self-Evaluation Questions for Pre-School](#)

### Methodology/Evidence Base

Throughout January and February 2021, the ETI has been engaging with pre- schools to understand their experiences of monitoring and evaluation of the delivery and quality of remote learning provision.

A questionnaire issued by the ETI was completed by 69% of pre-schools during the week of 25 January 2021. [The quantitative analysis was published in February 2021.](#)

District inspectors engaged via video conferencing and telephone with leaders in 66 schools.

## Appendix 3: Case Studies

Case studies from five schools detailing their self-evaluation of delivering, monitoring and evaluating effective remote learning from March 2020 to February 2021.

### Bangor Central Nursery School

Bangor Central Nursery School has 78 pupils enrolled across three classes, offering both a full-day class and two part-time classes. There is a teaching principal, an assistant teacher, two nursery assistants and two classroom assistants. Within the school community, eight languages other than English are spoken, with 15% families speaking a language other than English at home.



#### Educational Challenge

The nursery had previously introduced the Seesaw app as a home-school communication tool from September 2019, as well as launching a school website and social media channels – Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. In March 2020, there was very little time to prepare for remote learning: there were different levels of staff and parental confidence in using technology, for example, in accessing and using apps. There was also variation in the range of devices available for children to use at home; made more difficult where parents or older siblings had to share the same device(s). Working out how to provide for young learners who were used to experiential play-based approaches within a social context presented challenges. Replicating the six learning areas of the pre-school curriculum at home, particularly the personal, social and emotional (PSE) and physical development aspects became a key priority for the staff team.

## Educational Response

During the first lockdown of March – June 2020, the nursery school developed further the use of Seesaw as the main home-school communication tool. The children were familiar with uploading their photos and creations using the class iPads. Together with the new social media accounts (Facebook, Instagram and Twitter) and school website, Seesaw provided a good and secure infrastructure for remote learning. To compliment the online content, the staff assembled and distributed home learning packs containing a wide range of carefully selected materials and equipment, along with guidance for parents to support their children's learning through play at home.

A Seesaw activity, along with prompts to draw out the learning, was pre-scheduled daily for 9.30am, to give the children and their parents a regular routine. The children's learning responses, including drawings, photos and messages, were returned to the teachers by the parents at a time which worked for them, and the staff responded with 'likes' and recorded voice comments. At other times, the staff pre-recorded stories and rhymes on Seesaw for the children to watch and join in. The staff did not place any expectations on children and parents to complete activities within a specified timeframe. During that period, the staff were able to monitor through the app that about 58% of parents and children across the three classes engaged actively, with very positive parent and child feedback.

A dedicated section for remote learning was developed on the school website with ideas, activities and advice for parents across the pre-school curriculum. The social media channels also provided ideas for play-based learning from other organisations from, for example, RISE NI. They also provide helpful information about relevant live-streamed events and learning resources such as the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) or other suitable family events. The staff shared and displayed the children's work on the website initially and on Seesaw with the permission of parents and taking steps to protect their identity.

In term 1, September 2020 - December 2020, the staff had reflected on the benefit and effectiveness of their social media accounts in supporting the parents; they continued to include these sharing platforms as part of their on-going practice. Non-teaching staff had opportunities to become increasingly involved in creating content for the children, such as, recording videos of stories and nursery rhymes told using Makaton and videos of dough-making and other creative art ideas. All content is approved by the principal before uploading. Staff continued to widen the ways in which they used Seesaw and monitored and evaluated the impact of the planned activities on the children's learning and their ability to connect meaningfully with the staff. The children continued to develop their understanding of digital forms of communication and their sense of a real audience and purpose. The parents increased their understanding of how to support home learning in playful ways and their confidence in using the Seesaw platform as a communication and learning tool.

Learning from their previous experience, the staff now post two videos every day containing a variety of content and activities to the children's Seesaw learning journals<sup>3</sup> and tailored one-to-one videos are posted to children who require individual approaches.

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<sup>3</sup> Learning journals are the system used to record the observations of the children's learning within the app.

The school is using the 'Early Years Media Initiative'<sup>4</sup> resources and puppets to work through key aspects of the children's personal, social and emotional well-being and development and the children are invited to make a variety of responses in their individual Seesaw journals. They are also including aspects of the Department of Education 'Getting Ready to Learn' programme, such as, the 'Big Bedtime Read'.

To ensure continuity and progression in the children's learning and to avoid repetition or overlap, the teachers use an online collaborative Google document to share and agree the planning and activities. They plan 'at pace' a week in advance, so if a member of staff is absent, the children's learning will continue uninterrupted. This also ensures no repetition of content or type of activity when different staff are creating the videos. The children leave voice notes and/or their parents' type and send comments, which enable the staff to monitor the impact of the learning activities and the children's levels of interest and engagement. Parents are also free to upload photos and videos of the children using the practical resources sent from the school or participating in other activities at home that they feel benefit the children's development e.g. playing in the snow.

The staff appreciate the importance of their 'digital presence' to the children's continuing emotional well-being and all access Seesaw to reply and comment on the children's responses to the uploaded activities. They continue to focus on ways of developing the children's personal, social and emotional development as they find that this critical learning area continues to be one of the most challenging to address effectively through remote learning.

### **Impact**

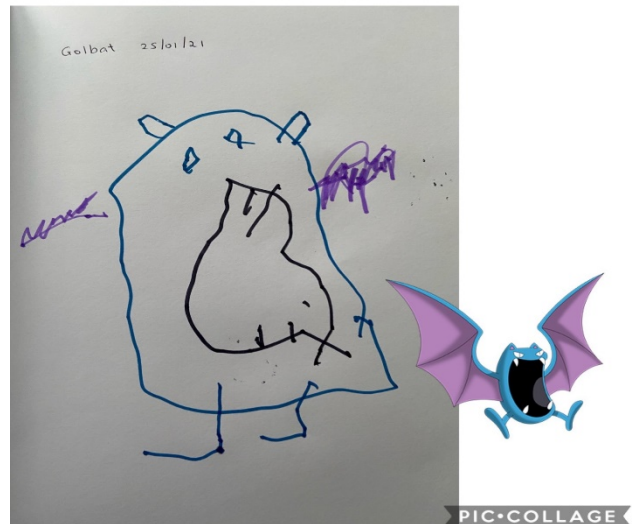
The staff use all the available feedback from parents and children to reflect on the development of the digital platforms, their creative use of technology and the planned content and on impact on the children's learning. This evaluation is used to inform their future planning and strategic decision-making. The continuous improvement of everyone's digital skills and creativity (staff, children and parents) has enabled the whole school community to adapt quickly and positively when subsequent lockdowns occur. All staff are now skilful in contributing to the video-based content. For example, the school secretary, a published children's author, wrote and recorded a video of her story for the children.

There are now very high levels of child and parent engagement and participation (usually 100%). The staff report the positive impact of effective communication at all levels within the staff team, and with the children and their parents. Most importantly, the staff report that the children are happy and that they and their parents engage and adapt readily to changes the staff introduce in the provision in the best interest of the children's learning and development.

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<sup>4</sup> [Good Relations Respecting Difference](#)

The leadership is having a wider impact on upskilling and training for other teachers, and advises and advocates for innovative and purposeful use of technology to impact learning and teaching in her role as an [Apple Distinguished Educator \(ADE\)](#)<sup>5</sup>. As a Seesaw Certified Educator<sup>6</sup>, she also leads training and advises schools and teachers and more recently voluntary pre-school staff on how to use Seesaw effectively.



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<sup>5</sup> The Apple Distinguished Educators (ADE) programme recognises teachers who are using Apple technology to transform teaching and learning.

<sup>6</sup> Seesaw Certified Educators have maintained their Seesaw Ambassador status for 3 years and are ready to share, lead, and inspire beyond their school community.

## Cedar Integrated Primary School Nursery Unit

Cedar Integrated Primary School Nursery Unit is a single unit nursery with two staff and provides one part-time session. The nursery unit is also facilitating a student from Belfast Metropolitan College who is on placement two days per week. The children who attend the nursery come from the whole community and both the local and a wider catchment areas. The school plans to celebrate integrated education month in March 2021 through online activities; highlighting the integrated practice within the school and exploring what integrated means with the children.

### **Educational challenge**

The nursery staff experience in communication with parents online was very limited prior to March 2020. Parent newsletters were only shared electronically in February 2020. All communication regarding children's progress/ advice & support was done in person or occasionally over the phone. The nursery had not provided any kind of remote/ blended learning online. The staff had prior experience of using the Seesaw app as a record keeping tool for three years previous to March 2020. During the period prior to lock down in March 2020, the nursery teacher used the Seesaw app as a tool to gather observations, inform her assessment of the children's progress and to share this information with the parents. It was not primarily being used as a tool for two-way communication. A key challenge was to improve further the flow of communication between the parents and the staff.

At the start of the lockdown in March 2020, the staff immediately recognised the potential to extend the use of the app and the need to upskill the staff and the parents in the use of it to send messages and access YouTube videos. The teacher also met the challenge of upskilling herself on how to use the app more broadly to support learning at home through online tutorials. In the early part of lockdown, staff capacity in the use of digital technology to provide remote learning was built through a lot of trial and error. It was further enhanced by completing online training from BlendEd NI and other online tutorials.

Staff initially sent a lot of information to parents to support learning at home but feedback indicated that this proved overwhelming for many, and resulted in a limited response from them. The staff met the challenge to reduce and make more manageable the amounts of information that were being sent home.

The nursery unit was unable to host its normal induction visits and meetings for the new children and parents in term 3, 2020 due to the restriction on social gatherings. Instead the induction for new children was facilitated and enhanced by the creation of videos of the current nursery children telling the new intake what they enjoyed about nursery. During this period, the nursery unit staff also contributed to the updating of whole school policies to take account of remote and blended learning. In line with the updated policies, the nursery teacher does not send out links to online YouTube videos as there are concerns about what children can access through this platform.

## Educational response

On returning to school in August 2020, the whole school staff reflected on the lessons learned during lockdown. The nursery unit, FS and KS1 staff shared practical ideas and links that had worked well for them.

The Year 1 teacher provided the nursery teacher with support to make recordings of voice messages using Seesaw and also provided helpful tips. For example, if a recording of a story is longer than five minutes, first send the recording to a staff member through WhatsApp and then send it back. Using WhatsApp compresses the video and makes it smaller and easier to upload on Seesaw.

In order to prepare for any further closures and enhance contact with families, the teacher inducted the new parents into the use of Seesaw in June 2020 via an online class.

Due to restrictions in place in August, the parents did not have access to the classroom and the staff could not conduct the usual home visits. The staff realised the negative impact this had on the level of rapport and contact that the staff would normally have had with parents and children at that time. As a result the nursery teacher prioritised the need to develop further partnership working with parents by maintaining communication with them through Seesaw and signposting them to useful websites such as the Early Years Inclusion Service, to support early language and communication skills at home.

### January to February 2021

As term two began and remote learning re-commenced, a small number of eligible children<sup>7</sup> from the nursery are still attending school two days a week. They are supervised in the nursery unit with familiar staff and environment.

Based on parental feedback and the evaluation of the first period of remote learning, the staff reviewed their topics and planners. They have developed a weekly planner to guide parents more fully, and highlight the skills and language opportunities within the learning activities. There is a focus on developing activities that don't need a lot of resources and providing more scaffolding of the learning for parents.

The staff noted that an iMovie with instructions by the teacher on the making of a butterfly feeder had received little response from the parents, as it had proved to be too complicated and time consuming. However, a simple back and forth drawing game and an activity with a cardboard box had a very good response from parents. It promoted lots of language development through conversations at home, fine motor skills and creativity.

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<sup>7</sup> Key worker and vulnerable children as defined by DE guidance.

**MATERIALS**

- Paper
- A pen or other drawing tool

**1/2** SM Suzanne Marner

**Student Instructions**  
**The back and forth drawing game**

Play a drawing game with an adult or brother/ sister. You start drawing a picture, then pass it to someone else and they draw something, then they pass it back and you continue passing back and forth till you have finished your picture!

This is a great activity to encourage imagination and conversation. I can't wait to see your collaborations. 😊

▶ Play Instructions (0:23)

Pre-K

Compatible with: Chromebooks, computers, iPads, iPhones, Android tablets, Android phones, Kindle Fire tablets.

The teacher recognises the importance and challenge of encouraging the children’s physical development. The staff plan activities that support both gross and fine motor skills within a range of suitable contexts, such as, weekly yoga, cutting challenges, threading Cheerios onto pipe cleaners to make bird feeders and play dough recipes. The staff have also made recordings of musical movement songs and a cool down activity to promote physical activity. They have received very positive feedback from parents on the range of physical activities provided.

**1/2** SM Suzanne Marner

**Student Instructions**  
**Monster Tunnel**

Make a Monster Tunnel using the instructions to practice ball rolling and accuracy skills.

▶ Play Instructions (0:07)

Pre-K

Compatible with: Chromebooks, computers, iPads, iPhones, Android tablets, Android phones, Kindle Fire tablets.

**- FIND A BOX**

**- CUT SOME DIFFERENT SIZED HOLES IN THE SIDE**

**- DECORATE YOUR HOLES TO LOOK LIKE MONSTERS**

**- ROLL A BALL ACROSS THE FLOOR...CAN YOU GET IT IN A MONSTER'S MOUTH?**

**- YOU CAN GIVE EACH MONSTER MOUTH A NUMBER AND MAKE A SCORE SHEET**

*Daddy*  
Rolls: 10  
1  
2  
3  
4  
5  
6  
7

To support the children’s creativity and skills, learning packs were provided for all of the children which include a range of craft materials. The parents in response have shared photos of the children’s work through Seesaw. Importantly, the nursery teacher continues to promote good principles of early years practice about, for example, creativity being a process rather than the product and cautioning against formality before children are developmentally ready. The teacher is mindful of the difficulties in assessing progression in learning, as it is impossible to determine the level of input by parents.



The nursery teacher has continued with her own professional development and learning during his period through a range of means including: informal professional links with other nursery leaders; media links to Forest School<sup>8</sup>, Twitter and BlendEd NI<sup>9</sup>. The teacher has also accessed materials for herself and the parents through the Education Authority 'Getting Ready to Learn' (GRtL) website and the ABC Does website<sup>10</sup>.

The teacher is providing GRtL sessions for parents through Seesaw. This requires considerable work as videos from GRtL are not compatible with Apple. The leader is using an asynchronous approach where she has provided a voice-over recording of her own power points and shared these with parents through Seesaw. She has covered topics such as the importance of play, talking and reading stories.

## Impact

During the period March 2020 and January 2021 the nursery teacher has continually reviewed and made adjustments to the remote and blended learning approaches. The teacher reports that this ongoing review and subsequent amending of approaches is having a positive impact on the quality of the remote learning and resulted in an increased response from the parents and children. As a result of the parent's induction and the staff's contingency planning, the parents and staff were better placed during the second lockdown to progress learning from home remotely. They are more skilled in using the Seesaw app to access and respond to the learning.

The teacher is more knowledgeable and confident to use Seesaw more creatively and provide a broader range of activities. It was used solely during the last lockdown to record observations, but the teacher now reports it is used effectively as a communication tool to share learning. The online professional development undertaken, keeping abreast of online guidance and available materials and linking with others has enriched the range of materials being provided for parents.

There are 50% higher levels of engagement and participation from both the parents and the children in response to activities and more parents engaging in the online GRtL workshops than before. Thirteen parents have already viewed the power point which is a greater than the uptake than previous face-to-face workshops.

The nursery teacher is currently reflecting on the longer-term manageability and sustainability of the approaches as there is considerable time involved in locating and producing quality online resources, responding to parental Seesaw comments and providing feedback to children. She sums up the experience:

*"I honestly don't know why I didn't use the digital methods for communication with children and parents before! I have found the pandemic has propelled me forward in using these methods and has led to a better-than-ever three way communication path - parent-child-teacher. I will be more confident in combining digital communication with face to face going forward and feel it will only be of benefit to all."*

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<sup>8</sup> [Northern Ireland Forest School Association](#)

<sup>9</sup> [BlendEd NI](#)

<sup>10</sup> [50 Fantastic Ideas To Try At Home](#)

## Clogher Valley Playgroup

Clogher Valley Playgroup is located in a converted former primary school in the town of Clogher. Two morning sessions run simultaneously in two rooms named after the local forests, Knockmany and Fardross, to give the children a sense of belonging to the wider community of Clogher Valley. The children come from the local and a wider rural catchment areas of Clogher and Augher. Six members of staff provide remote and supervised learning for the twenty-seven children and families that attend the pre-school provision.

### Educational challenge

The main challenges for the playgroup since March 2020 have been to adapt the planning for a play-based curriculum from the playroom face-to-face interactions, activities and resources to home learning remote provision involving parents as partners in delivery. They have also reviewed and updated COVID-19 risk assessments, policies and procedures to meet the Departments of Education and Health and the Public Health Agency (PHA) standards. The staff have had to develop their skills, confidence and competence to transition from the playroom practical activities into support for children and families through remote learning platforms; while sustaining external links and partnerships with the children and families to meet their individual needs.

The leader and the staff worked together with the parents to consider how they could best address the challenges and embarked on a learning journey to develop remote learning from March 2020 - February 2021. Links were maintained with the local feeder primary schools and with the educational psychology service, to ensure that children with special and additional needs received appropriate support to transfer to primary school.

### Educational response

March 2020-June 2020

During the first lock down, March 2020 - June 2020, the leader embraced the challenge of finding ways to connect and communicate with the parents to sustain continuity of learning in the pre-school programme. Initially, the playgroup saw the potential of social media, such as Facebook and WhatsApp, to maintain links and two-way communication with the parents. The staff experimented with GoogleDrive later in the term and found that it was a better means of sharing attachments and videos with the parents; however, not all parents engaged fully.



During this period, the main source of learning support was through physical packs which included guidance for the parents on how to help the children learn. The messages to parents were positive, with a focus on partnership to support home learning.

The pre-school programme and organisation of the pre-school calendar were adjusted in a reactive and experimental way to ensure that the children could transition smoothly to primary school. The leader used a mobile phone to record videos and modelled for the staff and parents, the potential learning opportunities to be found at home and in the local area of Clogher. The leader created information videos, opportunities for one-to-one phone contact with staff and group messages for the parents to help the children conclude the pre-school year, to receive a report and to make preparations to transition to primary one. The staff team acknowledged that they were all on a journey in developing their skills and confidence to appear and speak on camera. Remote learning was identified as an area for staff development.

The leader gave the parents some ideas as to how they could explore the world around us with their children in the local Clogher Valley area and posted a video to encourage involvement in learning.



The parents were encouraged to go for nature walks with the children and to investigate and observe minibeasts. A sheet was provided to help the children find and name minibeasts and the parents were encouraged to feedback to the staff about their learning.



### Transition to primary one

In June the staff adapted the usual end of year activities. This included live story sessions and an opportunity for a drive through graduation to help the children transition from the playgroup to four local primary schools. Parents received feedback by phone from the staff.



Using features of the Inspection Self-Evaluation Framework (ISEF), the playgroup team reviewed what was going well to engage children and parents and what could be done to develop further the breadth of the learning in the pre-school curriculum. The staff acknowledged that, while the parental partnerships had developed well, it could be improved further in the best interests of the progress and development of all the children. Through personal research and links with other pre-school practitioners, the leader decided to try and utilise an online platform called Seesaw. Members of the team also prioritised the development of their skills to use Seesaw to deliver remote/blended learning as an area for further development.

September 2020 – December 2020

The periods of self-isolation of staff and playroom bubbles from September 2020 - December 2020 challenged the staff team in a new way to develop further approaches to provide remote and blended learning. Policies and procedures were kept under review and amended to reflect new health and safety regulations to ensure safe e-communication with the parents. The staff attended webinars and training provided by the Early Years Organisation and the Education Authority<sup>11</sup>. New arrangements for safe drop off and collection of the children were shared with the parents through a virtual discussion, followed by written policies and procedures as part of the induction arrangements.

Seesaw, video and phone calls to parents were crucial to support the partnership arrangements for progressing the learning and development of the children. The staff signposted the parents to the Early Years Inclusion Service<sup>12</sup> and to useful websites, for example, Getting Ready to Learn. Links with the educational psychology service were maintained to progress the special needs referral processes.

The staff planned remote and blended learning activities, including guidance for parents, in such a way that the children have, as far as possible, the same learning experiences whether they are in the pre-school setting or at home.

#### **An example of guidance for sensory home learning: Gloop Play Fun**



#### **WARNING CAN AND WILL GET MESSY – USE THE TRAY PROVIDED – HAVE FUN**

All you have to do for this activity is get something to hold the gloop in the tray provided. Add water (approx. 3/4 cup - add a little at a time) to the cornflour until it is nice slimy consistency and have fun.

<sup>11</sup> [Education Authority](#)

<sup>12</sup> [SEN Early Years Inclusion Service \(SEN EYIS\)](#)

**Other things you can do before you get started:**

- Instead of water why not use some hair conditioner as it creates a softer texture which is quite therapeutic
- Add food colouring (few drops)
- You could use the gloop and mark making, shapes, pictures within it using your fingers.

**Some Learning Outcomes:**

- **Developing Sensory Awareness**
- **Building on descriptive language while we play**
- **Making comments on changes from powder to when water added – observing and predicting**

**Words to potentially use:**

How does it feel? slimy, cold ...

How does it change – observing before and after water is added.

January 2021 – February 2021

Parental feedback, indicating that some felt overwhelmed by too many activities, informed changes in the planned menu of suggested activities. Planning and assessment of learning became the team focus for development of the remote learning. The staff provided packs of practical materials to develop creative, language, mathematical, gross and fine motor physical skills along and parental guidance on promoting learning through play in December. The staff focused normal family routines, the 'World Around Us' local environment through the seasonal changes and the use of ordinary and everyday family resources.

A key success of this period, was the staff development for and the setting up of the Seesaw app as a tool to gather observations, and to use the information to inform assessment of the children's learning and to share their progress and development with the parents. Feedback to the staff was encouraged through photographs and conversations with the staff by phone or online.

The staff report that the children are developing a range of skills across most areas of the pre-school curriculum. The staff help the parents to connect the learning, for example, through being creative with pom-poms, bun cases and tweezers, the children can develop language skills, fine motor skills, mathematical concepts and skills to sort, count and match, develop sequence and create/find patterns. Additionally, children can enjoy family time whilst developing social skills, such as, turn taking, in a simple game using a straw to blow pom-poms in a race.

The staff provided suggested vocabulary to assist with the development of the children's language.



**Some Learning Outcomes:**

- Colour and Size Recognition
- Developing pencil grasp and fine motor control
- Sequence and Pattern Awareness
- Support muscle movement for speech

**Words to potentially use:** Fast, slow, match, sort, big, small, more, less.

The staff promote outdoor play and learning and parents send photos of the children engagement.

An energetic winter walk in Knockmany Forest and making big and small footprints in the snow.



The staff provide materials and guidance for specific areas of the curriculum such as physical development. The parents upload photographs of the children's responses to the activities at home.

#### Gross Motor Bag

- Skipping Rope
- Bean Bag
- Small Ball

#### Activities:

- Place the skipping rope in a line and jump over it.
- Use the skipping rope to make a circle using the bean bag or ball had target throwing.
- Encourage the child to throw and catch the small ball
- Use the skipping rope to make shapes
- Begin to introduce the idea skipping
- Put the bean bag on your head and walk while balancing

#### PLUS ANYTHING ELSE YOU CAN THINK OFF

#### Some learning outcomes:

- Fine and gross motor development
- Hand- Eye Co-Ordination
- Shape Awareness
- Skipping, Balancing, Throwing



#### The playgroup also provided the practical resources such as modelling clay and some ideas to develop fine motor

Use your imagination and shape and mould anything you desire.

Roll up and go again.



#### Some Learning Outcomes:

- Manipulation of the dough
- Using their imaginations to express thoughts, feeling and emotions
- Support developing a sense of achievement and pride in what they creating

#### Words to potentially use:

Long, short, squash, squeeze.



## Impact

The development of effective communication and parental partnerships enabled the staff to monitor and evaluate the delivery of aspects of the pre-school curriculum and to take account of the varying needs and interests of the children and family circumstances. The staff were able to adapt planned activities to meet the children's needs and interests, and the expectations of the parents. The differentiated programmes took account of the additional needs of the children.

Parental responses to the staff questionnaire were used to inform and improve the planning for delivery of a play-based programme through remote learning. As a result the staff are mindful of having more reasonable expectations of parents to provide examples of responses to the activities sent by the playgroup. They are more reflective and enabling of the parental partnership to provide examples of outcomes for learning that were not originally initiated by the playgroup and are arising naturally within the home learning environment.

The leader cascaded training for Seesaw and as a result the staff are more confident to upload activities, take feedback from parents and to engage through videos with the children. The asynchronous approach is reported to suit parents better than live sessions. The leader has also added voice-overs to the newsletters and information for parents and there is less reliance on text as the sole means of sharing information.

The higher levels of engagement of all the parents and children through Seesaw and the variety of responses to the activities, are very encouraging for the staff and facilitate the ongoing monitoring of access to learning through the pre-school curriculum and the use of the support materials from a range of sources such as Getting Ready to Learn.

The staff continue, throughout the spring term, to share ideas and promote continuity of learning in partnership with the parents. As a result, the children's interest in the outdoors and the natural world, and in learning continues to grow and develop.

## Strathfoyle Nursery School

Strathfoyle Nursery School provides 52 full-time places for pre-school children from the local community and wider catchment area. The nursery is located in a rural area of high social deprivation and this year 25% of the children are registered on the Code of Practice<sup>13</sup>.

### Educational Challenge

Access to the internet is inconsistent and unreliable for the parents and the staff owing to connectivity issues within this rural area. Prior to March 2020, the staff did not use any digital platforms or learning packs to support parents at home, but would have provided parental workshops and opportunities to come into nursery to share in their child's learning. Staff wanted to ensure that all parents had access to practical and online resources that would encourage the children's independence, support their language development and skills for learning, as well as instilling confidence in the parents.

During the first lockdown of March - June 2020, the school identified the need to introduce a remote learning approach to support parents in their children's learning at home cognisant of the emotional health and wellbeing of all at this time and taking on board parental views in moving forward. The nursery was concerned that as the children were mid-way through their pre-school journey, their developing skills and attributes would not be embedded fully for them to transition effectively into Primary 1.

Following a home learning survey issued to parents in April and the positive feedback from parents, the nursery used the Class Dojo app in September 2020 with the new intake of children, to share the children's work from the nursery with their parents. This approach was welcomed by the parents as, under the social distancing restrictions, they were unable to come into nursery for play and stay sessions or participate in their children's learning. The Class Dojo was used initially only to send information to parents instead of a two-way communication where they could respond. The nursery initially wanted to build up the confidence of the parents in using the app and for them to feel more engaged in their child's learning experiences before taking the next step.

During the second lockdown from January 2021 the nursery used Class Dojo as the main tool for communication with parents; sharing activities and encouraging parents to share their child's experiences of learning. The staff have the added challenge of connecting daily with those at home while and providing 'supervised learning' for the minority of children still attending.

### Educational Response

The staff provide a range of pre-recorded and live activities to support children at home using a selection of digital devices, despite unstable connectivity in their geographical location.

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<sup>13</sup> [Special educational needs: code of practice](#)

The staff adapted their planning and thinking as part of their evaluation of the previous remote learning and produced Home Learning packs that were linked to all areas of the pre-school curriculum. They are able to include a wider variety of resources for the packs as they are still working in the nursery and consequently have more access to materials and resources. This was a smoother transition to remote learning as staff were all present to assist with the packs and accommodate the handover to parents before closure.

When the nursery decided to introduce Class Dojo as an online communication tool for parents from September 2020, the leadership shared some practical activities, positive affirmations and signposting to links 3 days a week.

The staff used the tool to post relevant information for parents such as links to information from the NSPCC<sup>14</sup>, Parenting NI<sup>15</sup> and Getting Ready to Learn. The activities shared on Class Dojo were supported by learning packs so that the children had resources available to them to enable them to complete the activities. Other activities shared through the app concentrated on the physical well-being of the children and included outdoor activities, such as, scavenger hunts, identification of mini beasts and energetic play.

The parents shared pictures of their children completing the activities and uploaded them along with comments to the app. Parents responded positively to the information being provided during this period and through the questionnaire that was issued during term 3, they asked for further support about managing behaviour, attention and listening.

The nursery began to share pre-recorded bedtime stories, read by staff, for parents to encourage the children into a bedtime routine and also shared a daily routine that parents could follow to provide structure for the children and promote positive behaviour. During this time, a lot of activities were based outdoors to encourage the health and well-being of the whole family during the good weather.



<sup>14</sup> [NSPCC Our work in Northern Ireland](#)

<sup>15</sup> [Parenting NI](#)

In September 2020 the leadership, in consultation with staff, reviewed the nursery's monthly newsletter and decided that the parents would benefit from a focus of the week. The nursery now shares the focus of week using Class Dojo which links to the planned activities in school and provides ideas, so that the parents can build upon the experiences and activities at home to develop their child's skill and learning. Parents were invited to upload pictures of their experiences at home to share with staff. These pictures were shared in nursery and children were encouraged to talk about them to promote their confidence, self-esteem and language development.

For those children who were in isolation due to COVID-19 in term 1, the nursery provided learning packs to help support them at home. It also kept them connected to the nursery day experience, so they felt they were still part of the nursery family.

Monday Mindfulness was trialled in October through Class Dojo and is now a regular feature in the weekly activities for the children. Health and well-being is promoted through Yoga links, sensory activities, memory games and quiet time.

**Strathfoyle Nursery School**  
Mindfulness Monday

**Yoga**  
Try cosmic yoga for kids on YouTube...a fun way for the whole family to relax!  
<https://www.youtube.com/c/CosmicKidsYoga/playlists>

**Play-Dough**  
▪ 250g Plain flour  
▪ 50g Salt  
▪ 140ml Water (warm)  
▪ 1-2 tbsp veg. oil  
▪ Food colouring  
▪  
Mix dry ingredients. Add water, oil, and food colouring. Knead until smooth. Keep in plastic bag.

**Memory Game**  
Gather 3 or 4 items & place on tray. Allow child to study them for a few minutes & then cover. How many can they remember? Add or remove items depending on how easy your child finds the game.





**Reading Corner**  
Set up a reading corner in a quiet area at home with cushions, soft blankets and cuddle up together to share stories.

Week 1

In January 2021 a minority of children are attending nursery weekly. Some of the activities that the children are engaged in at nursery continued to be shared through Class Dojo to all children and parents as a live session.

Learning packs were distributed to parents at the end of December in anticipation of lockdown. They focused on grasp grip, fine motor skills, the development of language and listening skills and helpful hints for parents to facilitate learning through play. The activities that are shared are easily adapted to the stage of development and individual needs of each child.

An extract showing daily activities on the 6 weekly daily calendar. There are specific days for themed activities and additional guidance for parents.

Monday Maths	Listen & Talk Tuesday	Creative Wednesday	Try It Out Thursday MM	Feel Good Friday
<p>Play your 'Sock Game' or 'Snap' Game - see Parent Prompt Card. <b>Please send a photo and tell us what 'maths words' your child used</b></p> <p>Set a challenge for your child and set a stop watch on your phone. How quickly can they tidy their toys/how quickly can they match a collection of socks?</p>  <p>Sorting and Matching</p> <p>LD, EME, WAU, PSED, PDM</p>	<p>Where is Teddy?  Prompt Challenge - Extend to beside/between</p> <p>Play Kim's game with a grown up. Put five or six small items on the floor. Try to remember them! Close your eyes. The grown up will take away one item and cover the ones that are left with a tea towel. Open your eyes and look -What's missing? LD, WAU, EME</p>	<p><b>Please send a photo of any A/C activity showing your child making and doing</b></p> <p><b>Make a snowdrop and share the rhyme</b> -look in the garden for spring flowers waiting to grow</p>  <p>TA, PSED, WAU, EME, LD, PDM</p>	<p> Clay Play Card Prompt</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Messy Play</li> <li>- Work your fingers- push, poke and prod</li> <li>- Make 'special marks' with anything you can find</li> </ul> <p>TA, PSED, WAU, EME, LD, PDM</p> <p><b>Big Bedtime Read Thursdays</b> With Mrs Fox 'Giraffes Can't Dance' LD, WAU, TA,</p>	<p>Have an 'Animal Dance' Party- make up your own Animal Boogie moves Dress up as your favourite animal for the day choosing clothes the same colour as your animal</p>  <p>PDM, EME, LD, PSED, TA</p>

PN – Parent Note

**Areas of Learning**

EME – Early Mathematical Experiences

LD – Language Development

PSED – Personal Social & Emotional Development

PDM – Physical Development & Movement

WAU – World Around Us

TA – The Arts

These activities are all linked across the six areas of learning in the pre-school curriculum and include learning tips to support the parents. The promotion of the children's self-help skills and independence is encouraged.

In addition to the play-based activities, the nursery staff share a daily calendar of physical development with parents on Class Dojo to complement the physical activity resource pack that was sent home. The promotion of a daily activity to be completed is emphasised to promote the health and well-being of the children and parents.

An example of the physical daily activities shared through Class dojo:

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
11/01/2021 <b>WAKE UP! SHAKE UP!</b> <b>Jumping and Hopping</b> In and out of hoops/shapes drawn on with chalk Play hopscotch games – <b>chalk</b> Repeat patterns – jump and hop, jump and hop	12/02/2021 <b>WAKE UP! SHAKE UP!</b> <b>Brilliant Ball skills</b> Roll and retrieve – get into different seating positions, push along table – hand/straw <b>Use a medium sized and small ball, practice counting too</b>	13/01/2021 <b>WAKE UP! SHAKE UP!</b> <b>Balance Beams Put</b> masking tape on floor— walk forwards, backwards, or on tiptoes. Make shapes with tape, play music instruct them to run to shape when music stops <b>Masking tape</b>	14/01/2021 <b>WAKE UP! SHAKE UP!</b> <b>Family Active Play</b> Chasing and energetic games Beans game/Traffic lights/Stuck in the Mud  All the family can join in!	15/01/2021 <b>WAKE UP! SHAKE UP!</b> Fun Friday – Dance and Movement  Get outside –Get Active- Get Moving!

With additional tips for the parents:

**Wake Up! Shake Up!**

Warm up those Muscles

- Stretch up tall and touch your toes (x5)
- Jog on the spot for 30 secs
- Jump up and down 5 times
- Star jumps (x5)

**Garden Yoga**

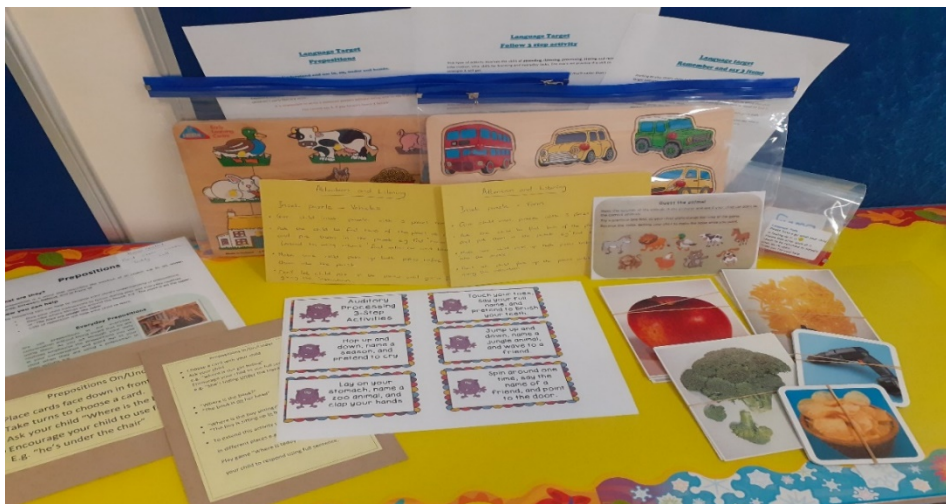
Pretend to be:

**A Tree-** stand on one leg, bend other knee and place the sole of your foot on your inner thigh. Sway like a tree in the breeze, repeat on other side.

**A frog-** squat down with knees apart and arms in between. Touch hands to ground and jump like a frog.

**A seed-** sit back on your heels, bring forehead down to rest on floor.

Children who require additional help with their speech and language are supported by the extended schools speech and language assistant. She shares weekly topics with parents including a short video about managing the use of screen time, provides language packs to support language development and is available for parents to contact for support or advice.



Recently the principal has started Zoom Home Learning Clinics for parents so that she can check in with them to see how they are coping with activities, answer any questions or concerns, provide a virtual face-to-face presence and continue to build the home/school relationship. These Zoom sessions are with around 4 or 5 parents at a time to keep it manageable and personable. The principal also reports that she enjoys these sessions as it helps to keep her connected to the families and she is able to see if parents are feeling vulnerable.

## **Impact**

The leadership has kept approaches and their impact on staff, children and parents under review throughout this period of the pandemic.

All staff are now all engaged in participating in stories and videos to support remote learning activities to support the parents and the parents are more confident in the use of Class Dojo. The nursery is particularly focused on reaching out to find ways of including the minority of parents who are not engaging in the remote learning activities with their child. As a result of the parent's induction and the staff's contingency planning, the parents and staff were better placed during the second lockdown to progress learning from home remotely.

All parents were signed up for the use of the Class Dojo app in August, ensuring that they were well prepared in advance of future closures. The principal has adapted her policies and safeguarding requirements in line with online safety guidance informing staff and parents on the safe use of remote learning. The 'meet and greet session', which is part of the daily routine, is viewed by 75% of the children, including those attending nursery, and is shared both onsite and at home through Class Dojo. The parental use of Class Dojo is monitored by the staff and any parents who are not participating over a period of time receive a pastoral call from the principal.

Parents are encouraged to share one photograph of one activity per week and the nursery reports that more than 50% of parents are sharing their home experiences in this way. These photographs and comments are used to form part of the child's ongoing observation and assessment records. The nursery reported that while the staff understand that parents are not practitioners, they are currently reliant on parents' engagement and interactions to be able to keep track of the children's learning and development.

The leadership and staff continue to build on their knowledge and confidence of using Class Dojo for remote learning and a blended approach in the future. They are reviewing and considering how to maintain parental presence and engagement with their child's learning beyond this period of lockdown.

## 174 Trust Pre-school Playgroup, Belfast

174 Trust Pre-school Playgroup is a voluntary pre-school playgroup accommodated in a community hall and has three staff members. It is located in a densely populated urban area which is ranked as an area of high social deprivation. The children who attend come from a wide range of social and cultural backgrounds and include children in their penultimate pre-school year. The pre-school works closely with those providing support to asylum seeker families.

### **Educational challenge**

At the start of the pandemic in March 2020, the staff and parents of the pre-school initially accessed most of their information through social media during a period of great uncertainty for all involved. Anxious parents and carers withdrew their children before the pre-school officially closed. Staff had to plan, within a very short timescale, how to respond to and support the families.

The staff response during the first lock down was initially reactive and unstructured in the midst of the new and rapidly developing circumstances. While the staff worked together to gather a range of materials to support learning at home and shared these with the parents, the materials at this stage were lengthy, covered too many aspects of the pre-school curriculum and were delivered to parents, in line with socially distanced guidelines, in paper format only.

The staff also recognised that there would be a need to adapt and amend policies in line with emerging practice and guidance on working remotely.

There was limited response from many of the parents and carers at this stage and in June 2020 the staff did not undertake any formal evaluation of the methods used to support home learning provision.

In term one, the staff considered how Covid-19 restrictions had impacted negatively on the opportunities to have face-to-face meetings with parents and on receiving direct feedback from them. Some parents indicated that they were not receiving the emails and letters being sent home. A small number also reported that the online platform and applications being used to share photos and information of their child's learning was confusing and unclear. In addition, the staff were not content with the data collection provided by their current observation tool. They concluded that they needed to broaden and improve the means of remote communication with all parents and also consider the specific cultural needs of individual families.

### **Educational response**

In March 2020 staff recognised and understood the pressure parents were under, so they focused on pastoral support by emphasising that they would work through the crisis together with parents and carers. Parents were encouraged to use the ideas and materials provided in a way that worked for their own family circumstances; to do what they could reasonably do and not feel guilty. The key and important message for these parents of young children sent, via letters and emails was "*keep playing with your child.*"



The staff engaged in online meetings at the end of June to analyse the children's assessments and the evidence of the progress that had been made on their priority areas from September to March 2020.

Staff agreed the first key priority for development from September 2020 was to improve further their communication with parents. The whole-staff team agreed what they needed was to combine a better observation tool that would also be a better means to communicate with parents. Through the experience of a member of staff and feedback on what their feeder primary schools were using, they identified the Seesaw app as a new tool to pilot for improved communication with parents and a tool to gather their observations of the children.

Taking into account the feedback gained from parent and carers, many of whom are grandparents, the pre-school decided not to enrol underage pre-school children during this pandemic in term one of 2021. An additional funded place was allocated for a vulnerable pre-school child identified with particular needs.

During this period, the staff trialled and evaluated their use of the Seesaw app and agreed that it was working much better to collect observations and at the same time share and receive information with parents.

In addition, during the extended mid-term break in Term 1, the staff prepared and distributed physical learning packs that included a printed story, clearer and more manageable information, activities that used every day routines and materials and a short section on the learning potential of the pack's content.



During the current period of closure in Term 2, all of the staff work in the setting on a rota basis, to combine the planning, preparing and delivering of remote learning, as well as supervising key worker and vulnerable children.

They have taken on board all of the lessons learned from March 2020 and have adapted their approaches to supporting the children's remote learning at home. Every Monday, staff post a weekly overview of activities for parents. The staff are making more use of pre-recorded videos including stories and rhymes to keep closer connections between the staff, children and parents. The children can see the familiar faces of the staff team and can request particular stories and familiar songs which they can join in and watch at a convenient time at home. The children currently favour the familiar, repetitive rhymes they learned in term 1. Challenges are set to engage the children in practical learning tasks that can easily be completed in the home, such as, finding one big and one small object or building towers with household items such as such as food tins. The parents post a range of photos and comments of their children engaging with tasks on their children's behalf.

The staff have recognised that many of the families do not appear to be outdoors as much as usual, so the children are encouraged to go on treasure hunts outdoors or be creative with natural materials.



**An example of a how learning activity was stimulated by a story**

The staff introduced, through a video, the story of 'Pip and Posy on a Snowy Day'. In the story the children quarrel and the staff linked the story to thinking about using gentle hands. This provided a good stimulus to talk about emotions and encourage the children to solve a problem. As the children in the story play with playdough, a simple recipe was sent home. There was lots of engagement with this activity and parents fed back very positively and shared what their children said and photos of the activities with the playdough.

The staff updated a number of policies including safeguarding, intimate care and health and safety and explained any changes to parents. The permission forms that are signed by the parents have been amended so that parents can indicate their consent for their child's images to be shared and in what context and medium in the new platforms.

The second priority identified on the development plan for 2020/21, was a focus on emotional well-being and self-regulation for all of the children in September. This work was started and children's behaviours were improving as term 1 progressed.

Activities were planned to support emotional well-being for all of the children and a small number of families and children who require more specialist help for trauma. The staff have completed training in Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) but did not consider it to be fully comprehensive for the cultural needs of some specific children. They have identified the need for access to specialist training and support that will enable them to support more fully, children with traumas from a different cultural background.

### **An example of planning for individual needs**

The staff planned specific activities to meet the needs of a child who had relocated with their family. They introduced conversations about what "everyone needs".... everyone needs a home, everyone needs friends, and how we can be good friends.

A book about giraffe who gets angry when things were not working out provided a stimulus for talking about what to do when we feel angry and practicing calming down strategies.

Staff have noted during term 2, that the smaller groups of vulnerable children who are attending each day, during the current lockdown, are benefiting and making progress in the smaller face-to-face group situation.

The staff are planning an online session in February to support the children's language and communication skills through the 'Big Bedtime Read'. A parental survey indicated that parents would prefer this to be via Zoom rather than a pre-recorded session to help them to connect with each other.

The staff are also planning how best to transition the children back into the pre-school once the current lockdown ends. They will issue a more formal survey to parents to get feedback on what children have been enjoying and engaging in most and will build on their interests in future planning.

### **Impact**

The improved communication with parents between the first and second lock down period, has meant all parents can more easily access all of the materials and guidance provided. In particular, the Seesaw app is reported as a valuable tool during the second lockdown period for recording and sharing videos with children and parents and for increasing the levels of engagement, enjoyment and connection with the staff.

The written comments and videos clips shared by the parents, enable the staff to see the children sing familiar songs and rhymes, express their own ideas and opinions and discuss their feelings and emotions.

The staff and parents have reported positively on the consistency, planning for and quality of the online materials provided to support children's learning at home during the second lock down period. Remote learning is more accessible, simpler in format and more interactive leading to higher engagement from the parents and children.

The parents also responded very well to using the physical packs that were distributed and fed back positively to the staff on how this has enhanced the children's engagement at home.

Staff report that their own health and well-being is helped by having direct contact with other staff and the continued engagement with the small group of children accessing supervised learning in the setting during this period. The staff can identify many changes and improvements that have been made in their journey of remote learning and the positive impact these have had on the parents, staff and children. They acknowledge that the full impact will not be known until the children return to the setting.

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