

Report of a Pre-school Inspection
Bligh's Lane Nursery School

November 2024

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1. INTRODUCTION

A. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Bligh's Lane Nursery School is situated in the Lower Creggan area of Derry, an area with a high level of socio-economic need. The nursery school was purpose-built in 1979 as a double unit. There have been a number of renovations over the years including a modern extension added in 2018, which includes two extra rooms to facilitate small group work with the children. The school has recently repurposed part of the outdoor area to create a forest garden for the children.

Fifty-five children attend the full-time nursery school provision, of which 51 children are of pre-school age and almost all come from the surrounding area. Just under one-half of these children have had family and siblings attend the nursery school. Sixty per cent of the children have free school meal entitlement and sixty-five per cent of the children are on the special education needs (SEN) register, with a small number of children receiving additional one-to-one classroom assistant support. Seventy per cent of the children have additional speech, language and communication needs. The children's attendance is approximately 90 per cent and is reviewed regularly by the two principals.

In September 2021, an additional teaching principal was appointed as part of a job-share arrangement. The remaining staff consists of, the principal, one full-time teacher and nursery assistant, two part-time nursery assistants and six additional classroom assistants.

In June 2023, the nursery school achieved the Education Authority's (EA) School of Sanctuary accreditation, due to their work on welcoming and engaging newcomer families and children with SEN into the nursery school. It also participates in the Department of Education's 'Getting Ready to Learn' (GRTL) programme ('Getting Ready to Learn' programme aims to promote a greater understanding of the pre-school curriculum for parents/carers) and is involved in the Eco-Schools programme, having achieved 'Green Flag' status and Eco-School of the Year award in 2023. As part of their Extended Schools funding, the nursery school offers a breakfast club for the children in the morning and employs a language support assistant who works with children on a one-to-one basis or small groups of children according to their language skills and individual need.

B. VIEWS OF PARENTS/CARERS AND STAFF

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

Sixty-nine per cent of the parents/carers (37) responded to the questionnaire and their responses were very positive, with a just under one-half of the parents/carers providing additional written comments. The parents/carers commented very highly on: the "holistic development" of their child during their year at nursery; how well the staff know their child; and the progress that their child has made in their speech and

language in a short period of time. A significant minority (23) of parents/carers met with the inspectors and were very positive about the support their child receives from the staff and the care provided to families in the community. They emphasised that all the staff provide a nurturing, caring and safe environment in which their child is happy and making progress in their learning.

All the teaching and non-teaching staff responded to the questionnaires and their responses were wholly positive.

A summary of the questionnaire responses, including any issues raised, was shared with the principals and a representative of the board of governors.

C. THE PROCESS OF INSPECTION

The ETI worked alongside Bligh's Lane Nursery School to consider how well the nursery school:

- has identified and articulates its vision;
- prioritises actions to achieve the vision;
- overcomes the main challenges it faces;
- monitors and reviews progression to identify, celebrate and embed success; and
- grows and develops an inclusive community of learning.

2. SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

- Bligh's Lane Nursery School provides the children with a highly effective inclusive and nurturing environment. This is achieved through the shared vision of 'Learning together for a better tomorrow' and supports the development of happy and confident learners.
- All of the staff are engaging in very effective processes of self-evaluation and are committed to providing each child with high quality learning opportunities which are adapted to their individual developmental stages.
- The planning is comprehensive and informed by the children's interests. The staff are implementing highly effective and robust monitoring and evaluation processes that identify and monitor the children's progress across the six areas of the pre-school curriculum.
- The staff's continual review and development of the learning environment is impacting positively on the children's creativity and investigative skills in the World Around Us, and on their speech, language and communication skills.

- The individual and additional needs of the children are well known and understood by all of the staff who skilfully use individual and group language interventions and set achievable targets for the children to experience challenge and success in their learning.
- Almost all of the children are making very good progress in their learning and their achievements are celebrated well by the staff and shared regularly with parents/carers.
- All of the staff are committed to continually developing a highly effective community of learning, through focused professional learning opportunities that empower them to implement high quality provision and improve the children's learning experiences.
- The nursery school staff participate in meaningful engagement and respectful relationships with parents/carers and the wider community which are integral to the successful achievement of the school's vision.
- The arrangements for child protection align to the current statutory guidance.

3. MAIN REPORT

A. SETTING THE VISION

Bligh's Lane Nursery School's vision has been reviewed by all stakeholders to support the staff in meeting the needs of all the children and to respond appropriately to their individual starting points. The dedication of the staff and the commitment from the board of governors is integral to achieving the vision so that all children are 'Learning together for a better tomorrow'. The shared vision is supported by the staff's drive for professional learning and improvement to ensure they have the skills and knowledge to develop each child into a happy and confident learner.

The nursery school's development plan has a clear vision for the development of the 'whole' child, and appropriate priorities have been identified following continuous and highly effective self-evaluation. The priorities are informed well by the children's needs and the staff engage in a rigorous process of monitoring and evaluating to support steady progression in the children's learning and development.

The nursery school has a long serving board of governors who are actively involved in the community and are highly supportive of the work of the staff team towards the children and their families. They strategically use their educational expertise and their links with the wider community to support the nursery in building effective partnerships with families and enriching the nursery school environment. The governors spoke very highly of the dedicated staff team who actively engage in focused professional development to enable them to meet the needs of all of the children.

B. IMPLEMENTING AND IMPROVING TO ACHIEVE THE VISION

All of the staff have high aspirations for the children. They are very reflective practitioners who work collaboratively to self-evaluate the quality of provision and the nursery school environment to provide high quality learning experiences for the children.

The staff have reviewed and improved their planning and assessment procedures over a period of three years. All planning is detailed and outlines effectively the intended progression of the children across the six areas of the curriculum. The short-term planning is informed well by the children's interests and is regularly evaluated to outline the next steps for their learning. The staff have reviewed, evaluated and adapted a digital application which is enhancing the process of recording the children's progress. It provides an effective, balanced and detailed overview of the children's learning across the six areas of the curriculum and assists the staff in planning for the children's individual needs. In addition, the staff complete weekly focused observations of specific children and the skills and learning they are developing, which are shared with parents/carers through an online learning journal.

The staff place a strong emphasis on developing the children's language and communication skills by providing a wide range of highly effective strategies such as small group support, modelling language, the lending library and providing parents/carers with learning aids to guide them when reading books to their child at home. This well-embedded support has successfully improved the children's speech, language and communication skills and outcomes.

There is a clear focus on the World Around Us which allows the children to develop effectively their investigative skills using their senses and develop respect of the environment. The staff are continuously developing and improving the outdoor environment and have recently created a 'Garden of Sanctuary' and forest garden which is helping the children to explore and thrive in their natural environment. The children are also encouraged to participate in recycling, picking up litter and growing their own vegetables and fruit.

The health and wellbeing of the children is at the forefront of the child-centred approach. The children are developing very effectively their healthy eating through their 'healthy snack' initiative, as well as tasting their own fruit and vegetables from the garden. They have regular opportunities to develop their physical wellbeing; through their participation in 'the Daily Mile' initiative; working together in the forest garden to move large resources; and developing core movements through a range of balancing and movement activities. The children also use a range of strategies to manage their emotions, participate in sensory circuits, share their feelings and use 'Calm Plan' strategies which are improving their emotional wellbeing, attention and listening, as well as confidence. This year, the nursery school is participating in the EA's 'Being Well, Doing Well' initiative and staff have completed the EA's School Staff Wellbeing Training.

C. BUILDING EQUITY

The nursery school provides an inclusive and nurturing learning environment for all of the children which helps them to develop and progress at their own pace. The staff have improved proactively the planning to incorporate the increasingly diverse needs of the children which is aligned to their School of Sanctuary approach of welcoming newcomer families and families of children with SEN. All of the children are integrated fully into the nursery environment and the 'Garden of Sanctuary' provides a calming and sensory environment to effectively support the children with SEN.

The staff use a speech and language assessment programme to assess the children's needs and analyse this information to provide a range of highly effective language interventions which support and develop the children's speech, language and communication. The staff provide very effective language-based activities across the curriculum and additional one-to-one support for the children that are informed by weekly language plans.

Personal learning plans (PLP) for children identified with SEN are detailed and identify clear strategies for the staff to support the children. The tailored professional learning and advice from external agencies enables the staff to employ effectively a range of strategies to help support the children with their learning. The parents/carers contribute to the PLPs, and they are informed about their child's progress through a daily written record. The parents/carers spoke very positively about the additional strategies and support that the staff use to ensure that all children are ready to learn.

D. DEFINING, CELEBRATING AND EMBEDDING SUCCESS

The staff are highly effective in cultivating caring and supportive relationships with the children. They recognise and build on their individual starting points and develop the children's confidence, independence and self-esteem. This is further promoted through the 'Daily Helper' roles which the children carry out with a sense of pride. 'Stars of the Week' are celebrated by the staff which boosts the children's self-esteem and makes them feel valued.

The children are very independent in their play and are able to follow the routines and transitions with ease. Through the staff's skilful modelling of language and their open questioning, the children are encouraged to use incidentally in their play a range of appropriate early mathematical language relating to, for example, size, colour, number and capacity.

The staff use consistently positive language to celebrate the children's achievements and the children's early representational work is attractively displayed within the nursery. The 'Celebrating Success Wall' includes the children's Eco-School accomplishments and their 'Daily Mile' progress and provides good opportunities for discussions with the staff and their peers about their achievements. The parents/carers report that the children engage eagerly in recycling at home.

There are high levels of concentration and perseverance from almost all of the children when exploring and investigating the properties of natural materials such as leaves, twigs, water and soil. The children have a keen interest in environmental topics such as recycling and eagerly use vegetables that they have grown in the mud kitchen to make soups and stews.

The children are developing well their fine and gross motor skills and use skilfully a wide range of small equipment and tools indoors, and larger equipment through energetic physical play outdoors. The children are benefitting from opportunities to participate in musical activities and spontaneously sing and play instruments which is developing their rhythm and vocabulary.

E. GROWING A COMMUNITY OF LEARNING

The nursery school prioritises professional learning for all of the staff through a wide range of opportunities which is enhancing their knowledge and skills and increasing their confidence to support the children. Staff professional learning is linked to the key priorities identified in the nursery school's development plan. These priorities include: the development of strategies which focus on how children acquire and develop language and communication; and approaches to support children with additional needs. This learning provides staff with a greater understanding of how to support each child at their individual starting points.

The staff know and value the importance of building relationships with the parents/carers, which is exemplified through home visits to establish trust and confidence with the parents/carers before the children attend. This is further enhanced very successfully through well attended, 'stay and play' visits, curriculum meetings and other networking opportunities such as cookery courses and curriculum workshops through the GRTL programme. The parents/carers are updated regularly about their child's progress through the digital application, conversations and meetings throughout the school year. The children's opinions and comments are also captured informally through analysis of their engagement and enjoyment during activities.

The staff have also developed strong links with a local primary school, which almost all of the children transition to in Year 1. This partnership helps and make transitions easier and less stressful for the pre-school children. The nursery school is also part of a well-established North West nursery cluster group and have benefitted from joint training, peer to peer visits and sharing of effective practice.

The highly effective links with community groups/forums, local schools, further education colleges and local Family Hub continues to develop the staff's knowledge and skills to support families in need. The nursery school has fostered a strong association with a local language college and has hosted trainee teachers from overseas; these associations provide the staff with a deeper understanding of pre-school provision in other countries, as well as having additional language support for the children within the nursery.

F. CHILD PROTECTION

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

4. GOING FORWARD

Bligh's Lane Nursery School's vision is being achieved successfully through the close and meaningful relationships which have been established with the children and their families. The highly dedicated staff ensure that the children: are supported at their individual starting points; develop into happy, confident learners; and are ready for 'Learning Together for a Better Tomorrow'.

The aspects of practice which should be shared more widely are:

- the high quality and robust observation and assessment approaches that are successfully monitoring and evaluating the progress of all of the children;
- the highly effective and well embedded strategies used by the staff to support the children with their speech, language and communication skills; and
- the meaningful partnerships established with parents/carers and the wider community which supports very effectively the children's learning and impacts positively on the children's readiness to learn.

The ETI will continue to work with Bligh's Lane Nursery School, including to share the examples of highly effective practice set out above from which others may learn.

5. APPENDIX

APPENDIX 1: QUANTITATIVE TERMS

In this report, proportions may be described as percentages, common fractions and in more general quantitative terms. Where more general terms are used, they should be interpreted as follows:

Almost/nearly all	-	more than 90%
Most	-	75% - 90%
A majority	-	50% - 74%
A significant minority	-	30% - 49%
A minority	-	10% - 29%
Very few/a small number	-	less than 10%

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