

Report of a Pre-school Inspection
Oldpark Nursery School

October 2024



Contents

1.	INTRODUCTION	1
A.	BACKGROUND INFORMATION	1
B.	VIEWS OF PARENTS AND STAFF	1
C.	THE PROCESS OF INSPECTION	1
2.	SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS	2
3.	MAIN REPORT.....	3
A.	SETTING THE VISION.....	3
B.	IMPLEMENTING AND IMPROVING TO ACHIEVE THE VISION.....	3
C.	BUILDING EQUITY	3
D.	DEFINING, CELEBRATING AND EMBEDDING SUCCESS.....	4
E.	GROWING A COMMUNITY OF LEARNING	4
F.	CHILD PROTECTION	5
4.	GOING FORWARD.....	5
5.	APPENDIX	6
	APPENDIX 1: QUANTITATIVE TERMS	6
	ADDENDUM TO THE REPORT ON THE INSPECTION OF OLDPARK NURSERY SCHOOL, DECEMBER 2024.....	7

1. INTRODUCTION

A. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Oldpark Nursery School is a controlled, cross community nursery school located in North Belfast, within a residential area off the Cliftonville Road. There are fifty-two children who all come from the local area. The nursery school operates two full-time nursery classes. The nursery school is situated in an area of high levels of socio-economic need; 70% of the children have free school meals entitlement. The staffing comprises a teaching principal, a temporary class teacher and six classroom assistants.

The nursery school receives extended schools programme funding from the Department of Education (DE) and provides an extended school day with the provision of a breakfast and after school club. The school has close links with a local primary school; the staff regularly use its facilities and host events there.

B. VIEWS OF PARENTS AND STAFF

The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) issued online confidential questionnaires to parents and staff in advance of the inspection. Just over one-half of the parents who responded to the questionnaire provided additional comments. The parental responses were positive about how well their child has settled in the nursery school, the growing confidence they display, and the welcoming and supportive atmosphere created by the staff. In conversation with inspectors, a small number of parents commented on the difference the school makes in the lives of their children and families. They spoke of the high levels of pastoral care and how the support that the school provides families experiencing difficulties, is invaluable to the community.

All members of staff responded very positively to the questionnaire and commented on how they feel valued in their role and that the school is child centred and inclusive.

C. THE PROCESS OF INSPECTION

The ETI worked alongside Oldpark Nursery School to consider how well the school:

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

2. SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

- The highly committed staff and governors of Oldpark Nursery School are working collaboratively towards achieving their vision where every child can be the best they can be.
- The school is at the centre of the community and all of the staff work hard to provide high levels of pastoral support for families, which is valued by all.
- The process for monitoring and recording observations to inform the planning and the children's progression across the pre-school curriculum is underdeveloped.
- The ongoing development of the outdoor learning area is having a positive impact on the play experiences of the children.
- The process for the identification of children with special educational needs is robust and the school provides high levels of support for the children.
- In the more effective interactions, the staff use skilful, open ended language and effective questioning to extend the children's learning. The children would benefit from this practice being shared and embedded in all staff interactions to enhance their learning.
- At the time of the inspection, the evidence provided by the school demonstrates that the arrangements for child protection do not align sufficiently to the current statutory guidance. The action to take this work forward is to:
 - review the reporting and recording procedures for child protection in line with statutory guidance.

A child protection progress inspection will take place within six working weeks.

Areas for action:

- to develop a more robust cycle of observing, planning and assessing so that progression in learning is evident for all children across the pre-school curriculum; and
- to ensure consistent, high-quality staff interactions to enhance the children's learning.

3. MAIN REPORT

A. SETTING THE VISION

The staff, parents and governors of Oldpark Nursery School have a shared vision that every child in their school deserves to have access to the best opportunities to become the best person they can be. They have carefully considered the context of the school and it is a place where all the children are very happy, developing their social skills and their independence. The school is highly regarded within the local community and parents highlight that the support provided by the staff is having a very positive and fundamental impact on the lives of their children and families.

The main priority identified through the school development planning process relates appropriately to the development of outdoor learning, and while at an early stage, there is identifiable progress in improving the play experiences for the children.

The governors are highly committed to the development of the school and use very effectively their skills and knowledge to ensure the school staff are well supported in achieving their vision for each child. They are proud of the school within their community and are well informed and knowledgeable about the work of the school.

B. IMPLEMENTING AND IMPROVING TO ACHIEVE THE VISION

The process for monitoring and recording observations to inform the planning and the children's progression across the pre-school curriculum is underdeveloped and the staff are in the early stages of implementing a new approach. It is timely for the staff to evaluate the effectiveness of the recently implemented processes on their short, medium and long-term planning to ensure progression in the children's learning is clearly evident and monitored across the pre-school curriculum.

The planning for outdoor play and the outdoor learning environment is undergoing significant development. The revisions to the planning, reorganisation of resources and development of the outdoor space are having a positive impact on opportunities for high quality play experiences for the children.

The development of the children's personal, social and emotional skills is prioritised and the children are praised regularly. There is variability in the quality of the adult interactions with the children and opportunities to develop learning are sometimes missed. Where the interactions are effective, the staff are using skilful questioning and encouraging the children to articulate their thoughts and ideas. A consistent approach by all staff to develop high quality and consistent interactions will have a very positive impact on all of the children's learning.

C. BUILDING EQUITY

The children with additional learning needs are integrated well into all aspects of the nursery school. The staff are very proactive in the early identification of children with special educational needs (SEN) and are benefitting from working closely with a wide range of external partners, such as educational psychologists, Sure Start and

Allied Health Professionals. The personal learning plans (previously referred to as individual education plans) for children on the special educational needs register are developed in collaboration with the parents and staff. Children who require additional help are ably supported by their assigned assistants.

The staff are great advocates for the children. They know the challenges facing their local community and strive to meet the needs of the families. They provide an environment where children are welcomed, cared for and respected. The parents appreciate and value the commitment of the school in ensuring their children receive the support they need.

D. DEFINING, CELEBRATING AND EMBEDDING SUCCESS

The successes of the children are shared through social media posts, newsletters and by email and an annual 'graduation' ceremony is held as a celebration of the progress the children have made during their time in Oldpark Nursery School. The consistent and very positive language used by all staff to celebrate the children's achievements exemplifies their vision, 'where every child deserves the best'.

The development of the children's fine motor skills is encouraged through mark making activities, exploration of natural and authentic materials and the use of tools to promote dexterity. The improvements to the outdoor learning area are having a significant and positive impact on the development of almost all of the children's gross motor skills, imagination and social skills. The successes of the children are celebrated by the staff through the display of photographs and of the children's work within the learning environment.

The school's participation in events like the 'Big Bedtime Read' of the Department of Education's Getting Ready to Learn Programme is supporting the development of the children's language and communication skills. The children enjoy story time and the opportunity this provides to engage in conversation with staff and their peers.

E. GROWING A COMMUNITY OF LEARNING

The staff have invested time in building positive links with the parents. Parental engagement in the life and work of the nursery school is encouraged and there are various opportunities for parents to observe their children at play through 'stay and play' sessions which are helping parents to support and consolidate their child's learning at home. The parents report that they appreciate the regular newsletters, meetings, and opportunities to participate in events, such as first aid training workshops and evening craft sessions.

The staff professional learning opportunities on improving the outdoor provision have been well considered and have increased staff confidence in the development of outdoor learning. A small number of the staff have committed to developing further their own professional knowledge by accessing additional learning and development beyond that provided by the school.

The visitors to the nursery school, such as paramedics, a dental hygienist, musicians and the fire service, are enhancing the learning experiences provided for the children. The staff value their links with the local primary school through their extended school cluster. The breakfast club and after school club provide a nurturing, homely environment and valuable learning opportunities for the development of the children's social skills.

**F. CHILD PROTECTION
(Adult Safeguarding in organisations such as work-based learning,
further education)**

At the time of the inspection, the evidence provided by the school demonstrates that the arrangements for child protection do not align sufficiently to the current statutory guidance.

The action to take this work forward is:

- to review the reporting and recording procedures for child protection within the nursery school in line with statutory guidance.

A child protection progress inspection will take place within six working weeks.

4. GOING FORWARD

The staff and governors of Oldpark Nursery School are committed to realising their vision where every child will develop to be the best they can be. The nursery school are highly valued by the local community and have made significant and important improvements to the outdoor learning experiences for the children.

ETI will monitor the progress in addressing the areas for action within the body of this report to enable Oldpark Nursery School to achieve its vision more fully. There will be a progress inspection, including a six-week progress inspection for child protection.

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%

ADDENDUM TO THE REPORT ON THE INSPECTION OF OLDPARK NURSERY SCHOOL, DECEMBER 2024

Child Protection

The Education and Training Inspectorate returned to Oldpark Nursery School on 4 December 2024 to monitor and report on the school's progress in addressing the areas for action relating to the arrangements for child protection which were identified at the time of the initial inspection.

Key Findings

- The child protection policy and the processes for reporting and recording child protection concerns have been reviewed by the principal and governors. The child protection policy outlines how all staff and parents can recognise and report a child protection concern. The systems and procedures for recording and reporting child protection concerns and complaints against staff are now in place.
- New procedures have been established to review the child protection policy annually with the board of governors and to provide parents with a copy before their child begins the nursery school.
- All parents in the nursery school community have been informed of the updated procedures for reporting child protection concerns.
- A safeguarding meeting for all parents was held in the nursery school, facilitated by the principal and governors, and a detailed presentation of the revised child protection policy and procedures was shared. The parents have confirmed they have received a copy of the revised policy and that they understand what to do if they have a child protection concern.

The arrangements for child protection now align to the current statutory guidance.

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