

Report of Pre-school Inspection
Banbridge Nursery School

November 2024



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1. INTRODUCTION

A. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Banbridge Nursery School is located on the outskirts of Banbridge town and is set in its own enclosed grounds. All of the 53 children attending come from the wide catchment area of Banbridge and almost 19% of the children have free school meals entitlement. Newcomer children make up 9% of the school's total enrolment numbers. Very few of the children are identified as having special education needs (SEN); a small number of whom have statements of SEN. The staff complement consists of a teaching principal, a full-time class teacher and five assistants.

The school participates in the Education Authority's (EA) Extended Schools programme and clusters with three other nursery schools through which staff benefit from professional learning.

The school participates in the ECO Schools programme and are working towards their 7th Green Flag award.

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. Over one-half (55%) of the parents responded to the questionnaire, all of whom reported that their child is: happy in the nursery school; making good progress; and encouraged to eat healthily and take regular exercise. They also reported that their child benefits from educational trips and visitors to the nursery school such as, musicians from the Ulster Orchestra.

The inspectors met with a small group of parents who described the staff's enthusiasm, excitement and passion for learning as infectious. They discussed the commitment and professional expertise of staff, and the valuable information they receive to support their child's learning at home. The parents are also appreciative of the new morning routine which begins with outdoor play and is contributing positively to their child's happiness and readiness to begin learning.

Almost all of the nursery school staff responded to the questionnaires, and all of their responses were wholly positive. In the large number of written comments, the staff reported that they feel valued in their role and enjoy working and learning together as a team, to progress and celebrate the children's achievements at the nursery school.

C. THE PROCESS OF INSPECTION

The ETI worked alongside Banbridge 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

- Banbridge Nursery School's mission, "**Together we learn**", is assisting and supporting well rich and robust self-evaluation which includes the views of stakeholders. This work is informing appropriately a revised school vision statement to reflect its current school context.
- The compassionate and collaborative staff, including the longstanding and experienced board of governors, prioritise respectful relationships and strong communication which informs well appropriate key priorities for school development.
- The introduction of an increased outdoor play session at the beginning of the day is impacting positively on the children's overall health and wellbeing and their motivation to engage in high levels of collaborative play.
- The highly committed collegial team use their excellent knowledge of early pedagogy from relevant staff professional learning to passionately create and an 'excitement for learning' amongst the children and the wider school community.
- The staff's consistent and high-quality interactions with the children are used very effectively to extend child-led play and develop the children's early language and communication skills, across all areas of the nursery school curriculum.
- The children are happy, very well settled and curious; they lead their own learning and think independently in a welcoming, calm and highly inclusive learning environment.
- The staff exploit the unique outdoor learning opportunities which only the outdoors can provide, and they use a wide range of authentic and recyclable resources which is developing very well the children's creative skills and knowledge of Eco-schools topics.
- The school's proactive approach to providing enriched learning experiences for the children, includes relevant and local educational visits. There are effective partnerships with external agencies, other local educational settings and local businesses which is adding value to the children's wider learning experiences.

- Staff use a comprehensive and highly effective curriculum planning cycle which informs a “learning journey” for each child. The children are making progress from their individual starting points, and this is shared and celebrated regularly with their parents.
- At the time of the inspection, the evidence provided by the school demonstrates that the arrangements for child protection align to the current statutory guidance.

3. MAIN REPORT

A. SETTING THE VISION

Robust staff self-evaluation processes identified the need to revise the nursery school’s vision to reflect the learning and developmental needs of the children and staff and societal change. There has been appropriate widespread collaboration with all of the nursery school’s stakeholders, which is informing the evolving vision statement. The staff have strategically created a vision information and photo display board in the nursery school’s entrance to invite and gather ongoing feedback from parents. The staff act on the views received from stakeholders, such as retaining the nursery school’s mission statement “Together, we learn”, which places a strong emphasis on learning and collaboration and underpins the work of the nursery school.

The comprehensive school development transition plan and two associated action plans identify appropriate priorities which include the vision, learning and teaching, the extension of high-quality musical experiences and developing the children’s knowledge about taking care of the world around them.

The long-established board of governors are highly committed to the school’s mission. The representatives of the governors who met with the inspectors expressed their privilege in fulfilling the role. They work collaboratively with the leader and the staff and emphasised that constructive and meaningful relationships at all levels within the school community, contributes greatly to the success of the nursery school.

B. IMPLEMENTING AND IMPROVING TO ACHIEVE THE VISION

The staff have a clear, strategic vision and rationale for the curriculum. They are knowledgeable, skilled and experienced early years practitioners and use competently observations of the children in a range of play situations to assess their interests, knowledge and skills to inform curriculum planning. This supports the children to make progress from their individual starting point. The staff monitor, evaluate and review the effectiveness of their planning regularly to enable all of the children to make progress across the pre-school curriculum.

The staff proactively seek research informed professional learning opportunities which are aligned appropriately to the nursery school's priorities and supports them in their improvement work. For example, the staff work with the children alongside a music agency for a weekly music session. This professional learning opportunity is contributing well to the staff's confidence in engaging children in enjoyable musical activities, such as, playing percussion instruments to music. A small number of staff have gained accreditation in outdoor learning and are building capacity across the nursery school team to deliver structured forest school lessons. This is impacting positively on the children's outdoor experiences as they explore, observe and investigate a range of well-planned forest lessons in the school's outdoor environment, the local forest park and or on educational school trips with an outdoor focus.

The provision of extensive outdoor play activities are contributing very well to the development of the children's physical health and emotional wellbeing. The children manage well their own feelings and engage happily in high quality collaborative play with their friends. Staff monitor appropriately the children's well-being through ongoing daily observations and the effective use of a wellbeing assessment tool.

All of the staff have completed training in Makaton (a communication tool with speech, signs, and symbols used to support children to communicate) and use Makaton effectively to support the development of the children's language and communication skills. During the "family-style" dinner routine, the staff sit with the children at the dinner tables, use Makaton to communicate, model appropriate table manners and engage the children in child-led conversation. This is impacting positively on the development of the children's language and communication skills as well as increasing their knowledge and experiences of new and healthy foods and drinks.

C. BUILDING EQUITY

The nursery school's warm, welcoming and inclusive ethos is underpinned by respectful relationships at all levels within the nursery school community. Well-established morning routines, including the "Happy Hug" poster at the school entrance supports the positive separation between children and their parents at the start of the learning day. A range of detailed information is gathered about each child as part of their 'learning journey' which reflects their strengths, interests and needs. The information is used effectively by the staff to inform the provision and enable all of the children to progress in line with their ability. Effective partnerships and regular liaison with parents and external professionals support the early identification of individual needs. In addition, a small number of children benefit from carefully planned interventions and small group work delivered by the staff to support the children's learning and progression across all areas of the pre-school curriculum.

The staff focus on outdoor learning has resulted in well-defined and authentically resourced outdoor play stations which are contributing to increased levels of child engagement in high quality investigative and sensory play. They have reorganised and changed the nursery school's daily routine to begin with outdoor play on arrival, which is impacting positively on all of the children's readiness to learn.

D. DEFINING, CELEBRATING AND EMBEDDING SUCCESS

The high value placed on celebrating the child's learning by the nursery school is apparent in each child's individual "learning journey" which celebrates the children's ongoing school and home achievements and progress across all areas of the curriculum over the year. The nursery school proudly display these on individual classroom display boards which all parents and carers get the opportunity to view daily when collecting their child at the end of the day.

The children lead their learning and access easily the vast array of natural and authentic resources provided which supports very effectively the development of their curiosity, creativity and investigative skills. The stimulating learning environments support well the development of the children's risk-taking skills and assist them to make informed choices about keeping themselves and others safe during play.

The children are happy, confident, and calm and engage in high levels of collaborative play and articulate their ideas and feelings respectfully to their friends, using a wide vocabulary. They interact positively with all of the staff and use a wide range of mathematical language through their physical, creative and investigative play. Their gross and fine motor skills and their knowledge and interest in their world around them are very well developed for the time of year. The children access independently the wide range of books available and participate enthusiastically in the story, rhymes and songs sessions.

The staff are responsive to the children's diversity and celebrate a wide number of cultural festivals throughout the year. All school celebrations and events are shared with parents through the effective use of a digital communication app.

E. GROWING A COMMUNITY OF LEARNING

Strong collaborative relationships exist within the nursery school. The open plan environment facilitates the staff to share effective practice, engage in regular evaluation and model interactions which are consistently high-quality and enable all of the children to experience success in their learning. The staff cluster with three local nurseries to discuss and share effective practice and undertake professional learning which is further enhancing the provision within the nursery.

Parental participation and engagement in the life of the nursery school is highly valued, encouraged and achieved through, for example, learning with the children on a minibeast hunt in the forest or on their educational school trip to a local conservation area. Parental access to the weekly lending library, games and physical play activities support very well the children's learning at home. Staff provide a wide range of learning opportunities for the parents through for example, the 'Learning Together Evening' where almost all parents accept the invitation to extend their knowledge and understanding of how children develop and learn. All of the parents are invited to participate in the Parent Support Group which coordinates fundraising and social events throughout the year. Parental focus groups are used well by the staff to provide valuable feedback and contribute fully to the school development planning process.

The staff have developed effective links with the broader community with, for example, the PSNI, paramedics and firefighters which has enhanced the children's learning and understanding of the world around them.

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

Banbridge Nursery School's mission "**Together we learn**" is underpinned by respectful relationships at all levels and supports the children and wider school community to participate in collaborative and exciting learning experiences. The stimulating and authentic learning environments supported by highly effective staff interactions with the children, enables all of the children to make progress across all areas of the pre-school curriculum.

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

- the consistent and appropriate high-quality interactions between the staff and the children, which supports well the development of child-led play; and
- the highly effective use of authentic and recyclable resources in the learning environments and the exploitation of learning opportunities unique to outdoors which is developing well the children's thinking and investigative skills across all areas of the pre-school curriculum.

ETI will continue to work with Banbridge Nursery School, including to share examples of highly effective practice 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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