

PRE-SCHOOL INSPECTION



Education and Training
Inspectorate

Ballymena Nursery School,
Ballymena, County Antrim

Controlled Nursery School

Report of an Inspection in
April 2018



The Education and Training Inspectorate
Promoting Improvement

Providing inspection services for:

Department of Education
Department for the Economy
and other commissioning Departments



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1. Context

Ballymena Nursery School is situated in Ballymena and operates 4 part-time funded sessions. The children attend from the town and the wider Ballymena area. At the time of the inspection, three-quarters of the children were in their immediate pre-school year and the remaining children in their penultimate pre-school year. Since the last inspection, a new nursery principal and teacher have been appointed and most of the assistants have also changed.

Number of children:	Class 1	Class 2	Class 3	Class 4
Attending part-time	26	26	24	25
Under 3 years of age*	0	0	0	25
Funded by Department of Education	26	26	24	25
With statement of special educational needs	0	0	0	#
Without a statement but receiving therapy or support from other professionals for special educational needs	0	0	#	0
At CoP stages 3 or 4**	#	#	#	#
At CoP stages 1 or 2**	#	#	5	#
With English as an additional language	#	#	#	#
Number of children who transferred from a Sure Start 2 year old programme	#	#	#	0

Average percentage attendance for the previous year.	90.6%
Number of days open in previous school year	178

Source: data provided by the setting.

* On 1 July.

** The stages refer to those set out in the Code of Practice for the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs.

fewer than 5

2. Views of parents and staff

Thirty-six percent of the parents and all of the staff responded to the confidential questionnaire. The responses were highly positive about all aspects of the life and work of the nursery school. The parents' written comments praised the staff's dedicated professionalism and care in meeting the children's individual needs and highlighted the nursery's positive reputation within and contribution to the community. The staff comments endorsed the supportive and productive working relationships at all levels and the caring and positive strategic leadership of the principal.

3. Focus of the inspection

In order to promote improvement in the interest of all learners, the inspection linked internal and external approaches to evaluate the:

- outcomes for the children;
- quality of provision for learning; and
- leadership and management.

4. Overall findings of the inspection

Overall effectiveness	High level of capacity for sustained improvement
Outcomes for learners	Very good
Quality of provision	Very good
Leadership and management	Very good

5. Outcomes for learners

- Throughout the sessions, most of the children, including those with complex needs, settle quickly and engage enthusiastically and purposefully in the interesting high-quality activities provided indoors and outdoors. They select independently where they want to play; building on their own natural curiosity to explore, investigate and use their imaginations to express creative ideas through stimulating role play and art activities.
- Most of the children are developing well their understanding of early mathematical concepts and vocabulary in meaningful contexts within their play, including counting, measuring and comparing. The children listen attentively to stories and join in enthusiastically with the music-making and singing which are part of their regular routines. A majority are developing very well their early-mark making and representational writing. The children are very interested in learning about the natural and man-made environment which is developing their curiosity and knowledge about the world around them; for example, learning about Ballymena Castle as part of the castles topic, through their Eco and Wildlife trust awards and recycling efforts, and caring for their fish and plants.
- The children's personal, social and emotional development is a key strength. Their self-management skills are very well-established; they choose the resources they need to extend their play and manage responsibly their regular daily routines. For example, during the healthy snack time, the children measure out their cereal and recycle their left-overs independently. The children approach the staff and visitors with confidence and show high levels of respect and concern for one another and their equipment.
- All of the children, including those who require additional support with aspects of their learning, are making very good progress across all aspects of the pre-school curriculum.

6. Quality of provision

- Both indoors and outdoors, the staff provide a stimulating, richly resourced and well-organised learning environment; the wide range of authentic and natural resources and displays are easily accessed by the children to progress their self-reliance and to promote their active interest. The staff continuously plan for the further development of the outdoor learning; the recent addition of the 'welly boot room' serves as an additional area for taking various activities, including story-telling, into another space.
- The pre-school programme provides progression and challenge across the six areas of the pre-school curriculum within a well-connected and engaging blend of learning experiences.

- The staff's interactions with the children and their story-telling skills are of a consistently high quality. The learning conversations are positive and purposeful; focusing on extending the children's self-esteem and developing their language and problem-solving skills in all aspects of the play. The nursery school has a calm and nurturing atmosphere; the staff listen respectfully to the children's talk and build on their ideas to extend further the children's learning.
- The staff make effective use of their regular observations of the children to inform the future planning and to tailor the learning experiences. A new software programme is currently being trialled by the staff to track the children's development across the six learning areas. The staff have appropriately identified the need to streamline the overall system for recording the children's progress over time and to make it more systematic.
- The staff know the children very well and monitor and respond spontaneously to their individual needs. The children identified with additional learning needs are included fully in the various activities. Some of the targets within their individual education plans need to be better focused. The staff's active engagement with relevant training from a range of external agencies and their commitment to developing further their 'Safe Place' status have extended the inclusive support strategies they offer the children and their families.
- Based on the evidence available at the time of the inspection, the nursery school's approaches to care and welfare impact positively on the children's learning and all round well-being. The staff nurture consistently the children's efforts within a child-centred learning environment; the children's 'prompt notes' for their parents develop their perseverance and encourage them to share and celebrate their learning at home.

7. Leadership and management

- The nursery school leadership understands fully the changing needs of the children and wider community and shares a clear and practical vision for improvement. The very skilful staff team support the leadership well in securing high quality learning experiences and outcomes for the children. The nursery school's approach to self-evaluation and development planning leads to continuous improvement in the provision in the best interests of the children. The Board of Governors appreciate the school's evolving context and are well-placed to support and challenge the staff in strategic decision-making processes.
- There are highly effective working links and positive communication with the parents and others; for example, the school's website provides helpful practical and policy information and showcases the rich and varied quality of the children's learning experiences. The parents have meaningful, regular opportunities to be involved in their children's learning and the nursery hosts collaborative training opportunities for the local early years cluster, including various playgroups.

8. Safeguarding

- Based on the evidence available at the time of the inspection, the arrangements for safeguarding children reflect the guidance issued by the Department of Education.

9. Overall effectiveness

Ballymena Nursery School has a high level of capacity for sustained improvement in the interest of all the learners.

The ETI will monitor how the nursery school sustains improvement.

Inspection methodology and evidence base

The ETI's Inspection and Self-Evaluation Framework is available on the ETI website <https://www.etini.gov.uk/publications/inspection-and-self-evaluation-framework-isef-effective-practice-and-self-evaluation>.

Inspectors observed learning and teaching through play, the children's achievements, progression and standards, scrutinised relevant documentation, and held formal and informal discussions with staff with specific responsibilities.

The arrangements for this inspection included:

- a meeting with those involved with leadership and management, including the principal and the chair of the Board of Governors; and
- the opportunity for the parents and staff to complete a confidential questionnaire.

Reporting terms used by the Education and Training Inspectorate

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%

Performance levels

The ETI use the following performance levels when reporting on outcomes for learners, quality of provision and leadership and management:

Outstanding
Very good
Good
Important area(s) for improvement
Requires significant improvement
Requires urgent improvement

Overall effectiveness

The ETI use one of the following inspection outcomes when evaluating the overall effectiveness of the school:

The school has a high level of capacity for sustained improvement in the interest of all the learners. The ETI will monitor how the school sustains improvement.
The school demonstrates the capacity to identify and bring about improvement in the interest of all the learners. The ETI will monitor how the school sustains improvement.
The school needs to address (an) important area(s) for improvement in the interest of all the learners. The ETI will monitor and report on the school's progress in addressing the area(s) for improvement. There will be a formal follow-up inspection.
The school needs to address urgently the significant areas for improvement identified in the interest of all the learners. It requires external support to do so. The ETI will monitor and report on the school's progress in addressing the areas for improvement. There will be a formal follow-up inspection.

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