



Limavady Nursery School

Staff collaboration and a focus on speech and language

Limavady Nursery School is a purpose-built school located in a residential area of Limavady. It serves the immediate local area and operates one full-time and two part-time classes.

This case study focuses on the successful staff collaboration which has allowed the school to develop a nurturing and stimulating learning environment with a particular emphasis on the development of speech and language.

The school was inspected in February 2017 and outcomes for learners, the quality of provision and leadership and management were all reported to be outstanding. The report identifies a well-resourced school, children who are achieving well and a leadership which is strategic in its thinking and planning and committed to the current and future needs of the children.

The report concluded that the school has a high level of capacity for sustained improvement in the interests of all learners.

Child centred

A focus on the individual child is a key feature of Limavady Nursery School. This pervades the life and work of the school and is emphasised in the school development plan (SDP). Planning is entirely driven to address the needs of the child.

It is recognised that children have only one year of provision at the school and staff are keen to ensure that they are well prepared for the transition from nursery to primary.

Curricular planning takes cognisance of the child's learning in the context of a nurturing and stimulating environment. Co-operation, joint planning and preparation is characteristic of staff working and is carried out in a collegial and systematic manner leading to a consistency of approach which benefits pupils attending the full-time and two part-time classes.

The Principal has very clear views of the support required for children prior to transition and these views are informed by her knowledge of the changing circumstances of the local community and family life.

The Principal is selective in resourcing the school and in deciding what experiences the children should benefit from during their time at nursery.

An excellent outdoor play area with a range of purpose built, large scale outdoor equipment is available as well as a wildlife area. These areas are imaginative in design and well maintained. Indoors the children share a wide range of play equipment, and there are attractive displays and circulation areas.

Identifying areas for support

The school has identified aspects of nurturing and speech and language support as key areas which require attention so that the needs of the children are met.

Increasingly, children coming to the school have weak levels of concentration, poor language development, including speech issues, and poor levels of concentration.

In recent times, the school has engaged the external expertise of a speech therapist to support the children's development; the principal reports that this has been very effective but this provision has been reduced due to financial constraints.

Through operating an open-door approach to classroom organisation, staff cooperate to work in a consistent manner and to identify and support children across the school.

Furthermore, this approach increases the opportunities for children to socialise with others and develop their language skills, thereby enriching their overall experience at nursery.

Reflective practice and the school development plan

The SDP is a working document which is reviewed regularly throughout the year and in response to changing circumstances and experience.

It is a document which is influenced by the contribution of all staff and is shared with both governors and parents.

Planning for learning is closely aligned to the development plan and is very responsive to the changing needs of the children.

The Principal is committed to ensuring that all planning is reflected in practice and that policies guide and support practice. This practice also informs planning and so this two-way link in planning is supported by a strong culture of monitoring and evaluation and reflective practice; it is well supported by teamwork and clear leadership.

Planning is reflective of the views of parents, governors and the children themselves.

Sustaining effective practice

While recent financial constraints have had an impact on the school's provision, the Principal is committed to ensuring that the good practice, developed over time, is protected and consistently applied.

Central to the continuation of this good practice is the positive working environment which at its core has the commitment to ensure the best for all those who attend the nursery.

The school benefits from a strong team identity which is fostered through joint planning, sharing of resources and agreed teaching and learning practices.

The Principal of Limavady Nursery School, Roberta McLaughlin, offers her reflections on the school's efforts to support its pupils:

Communication, speech and language needs have long been identified as a barrier to children's emotional health, well-being and readiness for school among education providers in this community.

In 2013/2014 the nursery school was included in a joint neighbourhood renewal partnership which incorporated local primary schools, Sure Start and WHSC Trust.

The over-arching aim was to put in place a strategic plan to identify and measure the speech and language needs of our enrolment and remediate them across the early years from pre-school/ foundation and key stage one.

The group worked together to begin the process of providing an inter-agency approach to providing high quality speech and language services within the participating schools.

Over time the programme has ebbed and flowed at the mercy of secure funding. At its most effective the nursery school was able to plan speech and language support collaboratively for one day per week with an experienced speech and language therapist.

The therapist worked directly with children at the school to assess need, and, provided planned group work which was integrated naturally into classroom practice. The therapist liaised with and supported parents, provided staff training and targeted support for individual children for whom core speech and language support in a clinical environment was a challenge. The weekly arrangement gave the programme time to breathe and mature; strong working relationships flourished among children, staff, parents and schools.

A creative and flexible approach to meeting needs was fostered and expertise was "on tap" to support onward referrals for more complex SEN.

Our annual programme for transition was enriched with information shared sensitively and professionally with the consent of parents – all of whom agreed for their children to take part.

Wellcomm GL Language Assessments completed as children exited nursery were used to inform primary one teachers of the needs of their new pupils and allowed the dedicated speech and language therapist to address individual needs immediately once children were settled into their new school.

This dovetailing of services between schools supported a culture of early identification of needs and swift and timely intervention naturally follows.

For further information, please contact:

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