

## **Ashgrove Nursery School**

### **Use of self-evaluation to make improvement**

Ashgrove Nursery School is located in Newtownabbey, a suburb of Belfast. The school operates one 26 place full time class as well as two 26 place part-time classes.

This case study focuses on the school's effective use of self-evaluation to effect school improvement.

The school was inspected in March 2017 and was found to have a high level of capacity for sustained improvement. All key areas, including the outcomes for learners, the quality of provision and the quality of leadership and management were found to be outstanding.

#### **School development planning**

The inspection highlighted many strengths, one of which was the quality of the school development plan (SDP). A feature of the SDP was the extent to which it, and the associated action plans, were informed by effective monitoring and evaluation processes which included an appropriately wide level of consultation with stakeholders. Consequently, the inspection team identified clear evidence of ongoing development and improvement.

#### **Engaging staff**

The development planning process is a collaborative activity with all staff are engaged in discussing every aspect of the plan. They begin this with a thorough examination of a range of qualitative data, such as evidence gathered during weekly nursery natter sessions where staff meet with a group of parents and discuss what's going well and what could be better for their child.

#### **The importance of data**

Quantitative data is also used during the process where parental surveys are administered, and the outcomes used to inform discussions. Attendance data is analysed thoroughly, and appropriate intervention plans introduced as necessary.

A particularly effective use of data is the analysis of the extent to which the parents access an app that was introduced by the school to promote links with parents and the wider community.

### **Adapting to changing needs**

The staff of the school are aware that while they may set out a SDP for the coming year(s) these plans need to be revisited in light of unforeseen developments.

For example, during one recent school year, nine children with English as an additional language (EAL) were enrolled. This was unexpected and consequently the school had to adapt its SDP to cater for the specific needs of these children.

One strategy introduced by the school was to invite some older children of the same ethnicity from the neighbouring primary school to read to the nursery children in both their native language and in English.

### **Working with parents**

Another strategy the school has introduced prior to the start of the school year for all children is to ask parents to complete a data capture booklet called 'My story so far.' This provides the staff with a rich source of information about the child's developmental stage and any specific adaptation that may be required to the school's provision because of the child's needs.

The booklet forms the basis of a discussion with the parent which takes place during a subsequent home visit. This ensures a good transition into the child's nursery experience. Baseline data is then used to inform the on-going review of the targets set out in the SDP.

### **A collaborative approach**

The key strength of the school in producing a SDP is the collaborative approach taken in its creation.

This collegial approach ensures that all staff understand what the school aims to do. They are also more willing to suggest how the plan may need to be adapted as circumstances change.

Another good example of such flexibility are the strategies the school put in place when one teaching group had a disproportionate number of boys compared to girls. The staff, well informed about the learning preferences of boys, made adaptations to the classroom layout and their teaching strategies to cater for these needs.

Such collaborative working requires a high level of trust and dedication within the staff team. The continuous review and evaluation of the effectiveness of their teaching and subsequent monitoring and recording of the outcomes requires hard work.

This commitment was recognised in the inspection report. The inspection team noted that 'there is a strong sense of teamwork in which the contributions of staff, parents, governors and the children are all utilised and valued'.

**For further information, please contact:**

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