

St. Bernard's Pre-School Education Centre

PROSPECTUS 2020/21



EVERY SCHOOL A GOOD SCHOOL

St Bernard's Pre-School Education Centre

In recognition of the pre-school having been evaluated as having a high level of capacity for sustained improvement in the interest of all the learners in an inspection undertaken by the Education and Training Inspectorate.

Peter Weir

Peter Weir
Minister of Education
December 2016

eti
The Education and Training Inspectorate



St. Bernard's Pre-School Education Centre Staff



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Introduction

It was 1983 when St Bernard's Pre-School Education Centre began its journey as a playgroup in a classroom of the local school, St Bernard's Primary School, Rosetta. Three decades on the pre-school now runs from its own secure annex building within the St Bernadette's Parish Centre, enabling access to their large hall for continuous indoor play provision in a more open physical space; giving children access to vehicles, scooters, bikes and climbing frame. Our outdoor space is kindly provided by St Bernard's Primary School, who donated a small green area for our garden and permits use of their playground adjacent to the garden, giving the children wider space in which to play their livelier games. In Autumn 2020, we were able to start the development of our direct outdoor space which enables children to use daily in small groups. This provides children with a variety of different play experiences both indoors and outdoors.

At St Bernard's PSEC, we work hard to promote an inclusive environment for all children, regardless of ethnic origin or religious beliefs. We encourage children to explore their environment and the people within that environment. The team at St Bernard's PSEC are all trained early year's practitioners and have bountiful experience and training in all areas of the provision we provide, We pride ourselves in our openness to training and continuous development of our professional practice. We have created a holistic environment where our children feel a sense of belonging and through our keyworker approach (ratio of 1:8), we are able to pay close attention to the interests and current development of each individual child; finding the right balance between children's self-chosen play and experiences planned by adults.

What sets us apart from the rest?

For over three decades St Bernard's Preschool Education Centre has remained a reliable, holistic learning environment; where generations of families have trusted to be the right start for their child's learning journey in education. The outcome of our ETI inspection 2016 states;

St Bernard's Preschool 'has a high level of capacity for sustained improvement in the interest of all the learners'.

This is the highest category any preschool/nursery can achieve, and it is the highest classification the preschool has ever received. This demonstrates not only how the team, who are all trained early years practitioners, offer children high end quality provision, but proves that our open-ended approach to the preschool curriculum is providing our children with the platform for them to become independent thinkers; who enjoy learning. Our holistic environment will offer your child opportunities to engage in meaningful learning through the provision of a wide range of fun and practical play based activities.

ETI key findings: All of the children are very well settled and engage purposefully in all of the activities; as a result, the achievements and standards of nearly all of the children are of a very high quality. In particular, the children's creativity, language, communication and early mathematical skills are of a very high standard.

We are also the first pre-school in Northern Ireland to introduce a digital smart tablet, The Learning Book, which we use for capturing observations through videos, photographs, auditory and by text. This system enables the team to observe, track and view information on every child's progress more effectively and securely, giving us and parents a real insight into their child's learning journey. This system inspires and supports both staff and parents throughout your child's pre-school experience by using smart technology that is both fit for purpose and safe to use.

Our aim in using this technology is to build better, stronger partnerships with parents, and we believe by giving parents the opportunity to view photographs and video clips through their child's digital learning book (each family will be given a unique password to access their child's learning book on-line from a secure site, a site that **cannot** be used for social media), will enable parents to support their child's education beyond the classroom. By seeing what your child does, what they do day to day, and how they learn; we believe our partnership with parents will be better than ever. Here are some parent's comments from class of 2018/19.....

"Enjoyable to view, informative, thorough assessment of pupils by staff". "I find it helpful to see how my son is getting on in nursery and obviously over time how he has developed. It is a good opportunity to observe rather than just relying on written reports and parent/teacher interviews. I also like the fact, parents can upload and make comments as well so it's more interaction between parents and teachers".

"I think the digital system is a good idea – it gives parents the opportunity to see how their child is progressing and interacting with other children".

"My child liked to see themselves in the photos and videos".

"Great, we love the digital system and look forward to buying the learning book as a keepsake at the end of the year".

ETI key findings: Self-evaluation is now very well embedded into the staff's practice; there is very good evidence of improvement through rigorous evaluation of the children's learning.

We are also involved with Getting Ready to Learn Project, and the focuses over the Pre School year includes programmes such as, Education Works, Happy Healthy Kids and Big Bedtime Read. For each of the themes, a different resource will be sent home with each child each week with the aim that you and the family get involved in your child's development. We have 26 different activity bags focusing on language development and development of fine manipulative skills, coordination and muscle control. We are currently putting together physical development bags with resources focusing on gross motor development and home library bags where children can take home 5 story books every week. Every child will be given the opportunity to participate in all the themes throughout the school year. Here are some parents' comments from class 2018/19....

"My child thoroughly enjoyed all the activities – we went to the library fortnightly as well as doing the Big Bedtime read, there was a great variety of books in the house".

"Great resources, fab variety. My child really enjoyed the activities. Would have preferred one more day for the busy bags but know that it takes time to organise the resources for the next child".

"We love the bags and playing with them as a family, great idea".

"All bags and books have been hugely enjoyed. It is a real eye opener to have the information on busy and kit bags to explain the relevance to child development".

We also provide parents opportunities to attend workshops focusing on topics aimed at empowering parents through explanation and practical ideas, of how they can support their child's learning through play, and how to develop language and numeracy in the early years.

These workshops are linked to our implementation of the curriculum thereby, supporting continuity of learning at home and getting parents involved with their child's education.

COVID-19

Due to COVID-19 and the disruption this caused to the children attending in Spring 2020, we were unable to roll out our programmes to the full extent. Comments above reflect on previous years. During the period of lockdown in Spring 2020 Ms Mulhern and Mrs Scott provided children with Home Learning and this consisted of activity and idea sheets, recordings of numeracy rhymes, music sessions, story sacks and stories through Learning Book. This ensured children were continuing elements of the Pre School learning at home, but this was very much kept in a fun and playful way as well as being realistic to family circumstances.

Now that we are in another lockdown as of January 2021, we are currently rolling out our Home Learning which will involve recordings of in-class group adult led activities as well as activity bags which will be rotated each week and cleaned in between to ensure we are in keeping with hygiene standards and reducing cross-contamination. This year we have been able to maintain and implement our Pre School curriculum as much as possible within the guidelines. Whilst adjustments have been made, we have aimed to ensure that children still have as normal as possible Pre School experience replicated of previous years. Staff do a deep clean of the Pre School setting every day after the Extended Service and this consists of using antibacterial products as well as steam cleaning. The play resources are rotated every day and we continue to change and amend play areas as part of usual practice. Staff continuously follow and update on guidance, hygiene standards and risk assessments are kept high to reduce the risk of COVID-19 coming into our setting. Going forward into 2021/22 we hope that normal provision will resume, however, we feel knowledgeable and well-equipped that we can still provide a stimulating, caring and exciting play learning environment for all children no matter where the year leads...

Testimonials for the year 2019/2020

"Both of our children spent their preschool year at St Bernard's PSEC, and we were so pleased with our choice! They absolutely loved their time here and learnt so much-both in an educational sense, and socially. The teachers cannot be praised highly enough for their dedication-they could not have done more for the children! I thoroughly recommend St Bernard's PSEC, and will always think fondly of the time our girls had there"

"Both my children attended St Bernard's preschool, and loved it so much. As a parent I could not have asked for more, they ensure each child gets everything they need to prepare them for P1. The teachers are all amazing, they make every child feel so special and make their preschool year a truly special time"

"St Bernard's Preschool was the perfect setting for my two children to learn, grow and develop under the exceptional staff led by Ms Mulhern and Mrs Scott, all of whom were professional, caring, dedicated and, above all, great fun-always going above and beyond to ensure the best experience for each individual child. My children's time at St Bernard's preschool was precious and delivered more than we could have hoped for.

The curriculum was superbly delivered in an accessible, creative and engaging manner which was enthusiastically received resulting in skill building, emotional and

physical development and relationship building at every crucial stage of their learning journey.

St Bernard's Preschool instilled a confidence in my children offering the best possible start on the path of education, fully preparing them for primary one and beyond.

Both my children had the most amazing experience at St Bernard's Preschool, growing and developing in ways I did not think possible, as a family we take away many happy, long lasting memories from their time there and wouldn't hesitate to recommend it to other families looking for an exceptional learning environment"

"My daughter attended St Bernard's preschool and loved it. Our family was made very welcome from day one and my child skipped in delighted to get started. All the staff were amazing and my child thrived in an environment where play focused learning helped her confidence, social skills and she naturally gained new knowledge and experiences. She loved putting on her uniform and having something for herself.

Unfortunately, covid 19 cut short her time and many others at the preschool but the dedicated staff continued online actives which enabled my daughter, and us, to still feel part of the school and in touch with teachers and friends which was great during such hard times.

I could not have wished for a better introduction to education for my daughter and hope my next daughter has such a positive experience... A fantastic, personal preschool"

"We are so glad we sent both our kids to pre school with you both. I know that it has prepared them so well for p1. The level of support we were provided as parents was above and beyond our exception. We will always hold fond memories of their experiences. During Covid you both outshone yourselves. Providing craft activities and videos on the learning book. This was vital for my son to continue to develop his skills for p1 preparation"

Additional Pre School Programmes

Our musical programme consists of a range of activities involving exploring musical instruments, action number rhymes, movement/dance sessions and listening to a range of music genres. Part of our music sessions that we provide each week includes the 'Beat Babies' which is primarily linked to numeracy development through movement and sense of timing using monkey puppets. We also use 'The Learning Groove' which provides children with the experience of listening to a range of different music genres. Children recall the words as well as following actions promoting both language and physical development skills.



These programme enables children to develop their counting skills in context; through singing, dancing and rapping, playing with instruments, jingles and rhymes. Children need to develop a sense of timing when walking, dancing, writing, or cutting with scissors; and our programme provides each child with the opportunity to engage in rhymes and tunes that can be chanted to a steady beat.

Learning to problem solve is fun with Crispin the Crow, a mischievous bird who likes to collect things in his bag, he creates different scenarios for children to problem solve in a fun way.

When children feel they are personally involved, they are far more likely to extend their current thinking when they can be active physically; as well as intellectually challenged.



Our holistic environment includes other puppets, 'Nosey' the ant-eater, he helps children think about their behaviour when they are unkind to their friends. Wise Owl helps children resolve problems e.g. when they have difficulty sharing resources; and Ken the cockerel helps children talk about their feelings when they're a little sad. Our respecting difference programme is implemented through The Media Initiative Programme devised by Early Years Organisation and Sesame Tree 'Lets Play and Learn Together'. Together the programmes combine messages with the aim to building a better understanding among children of physical, social, ethnic and cultural differences. We provide children the opportunities to discuss and acknowledge the similarities and differences between themselves and others; and to increase their awareness regarding diversity and inclusion.

How has the pre-school improved and developed over the years?

There is a vast difference in the playgroup that started in 1983 and the pre-school we see now in 2021. Our team collectively have 50 years with young children; as a team we believe in personal development through further education and gaining higher qualifications enabling more meaningful and effective early learning for our children through a more informed approach.

During 2014/15 we participated in The Pre-School Capacity Building Project run by the Education Authority, and continue to participate in vital training provided by the authority. This training has proved inspirational in terms of enriching our knowledge in early childhood development and has placed clear value on our practice and continuity among staff in delivering a child centred curriculum that is accessible by all children.

As a team we believe experience and training, will be the linchpin that will bring together high end quality provision and a team who are willing to reflect on their approach; and make changes to our environment and curriculum framework for good reasons.

ETI key findings: As a result of high quality planning, the quality of the staff's interactions with the children is now consistently of a very high standard; the staff are skilful in identifying and promoting the children's learning through appropriate questioning and discussions about their learning. The quality of learning and teaching is now very good.

We work closely with our parents and like to involve them and family members in their child's learning experience, starting off each year with Grandparents/Special Person Day; this is a very special day for grandparents as they are given a unique opportunity to interact with their grandchild in a learning environment far removed from their own experience. In this relaxed atmosphere they meet other grandparents, chat to the staff and enjoy some scrumptious homemade cakes, tea and coffee. Refreshments are also made available at Christmas time before the children perform their play, again at Parent's Day and Games Day, To complete the year we organise a day away to Streamvale Farm for an exciting day out.

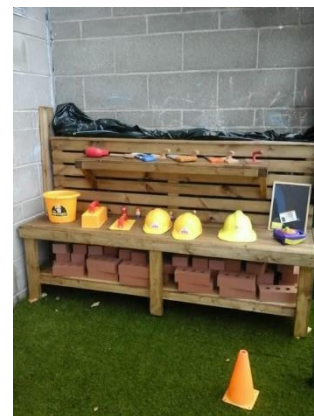
2019/2020 was our third year of the Shared Education Partnership programme. With our community schools, St Bernard's Primary School, Knockbreda Nursery and Knockbreda Primary, we share learning experiences with the pupils from each school. Our first experiences this term have already begun with the children from St Bernard's Preschool Education Centre and Knockbreda Nursery with a Forest School event. This first experience focused on introducing the children to each other with the aim to form friendships and positive relations. We had eight shared events organised*.

*Due to COVID-19 and restrictions we were unable to continue with our Shared Education Programme. But we hope to continue where we left off when it is safe to do so.

The now...



In 2020 we were able to develop our direct outdoor space as part of our Development plan and the children (and staff!) have enjoyed getting outside every day (unless bad weather decided otherwise!). We have also been enjoying our Daily Mile walks (which would be part of normal planning) and these have been crucial during this pandemic in ensuring that children and staff are getting out into the fresh air and moving – ensuring we are promoting physical activity and wellbeing.



Extended Service

For the intake of children in 2020, families have been able to avail of our Extended Service which operates after the Pre School session Monday - Thursday. This provides parents/main carers with that additional afterschools care as well children being able to enjoy extra activities after the normal Pre School session – which has been a huge success! At present on Mondays, we have our Craft Club, Tuesday we have our Rhyme time & Relaxation Club, Wednesdays we have our No-Bake Club and on Thursdays we have our Physical Movement Club. **Please note that the Extended Service does not operate on a Friday and all children finish at 11:00am.** Clubs/activities may change depending on the children attending – such as their individual interests etc. to ensure that we are always responding to the needs and wishes of children. Children bring a packed lunch as part of the Extended Service and have opportunities for free play within a small group creating a very sociable and intimate experience for children.

As manager and leader of St Bernard's PSEC my goals/aims for the future of the pre-school.

Now in my seventh year as Manager, in that time I have made significant changes which have demonstrated to the Education Training Inspectorate, that we deliver the Northern Ireland Pre-School Curriculum through our vision and unique framework, which is developed to encourage investigative and explorative play in a child-centred environment, and one which presents exciting opportunities and activities that challenge children's thinking and development of key skills; thereby providing children with a framework for life-long learning.

Now as an Associate Assessor for ETI and Independent Early Years Specialist, my goals and aims are to maintain our very high level of Quality Provision. As a team, we are not rooted to the spot and our open-ended approach continues to weave our experience, knowledge of child development, understanding of the pre-school curriculum and good team ethos; underpin our skilful adult interactions providing a broad and well balanced holistic learning environment.

ETI key findings: The leader will now become the playgroup's early years specialist as the management group acknowledge that she has demonstrated a high level of capacity to manage and develop the significant improvements evident in the playgroup's work.

Our Future Development Plan....

As more research emerges about our changing lifestyles, we are learning how this is having an impact on children through reduced physical activity as they become more sedentary; an increasingly common issue. Our future development plans will be focused on children's physical movement both indoors and outdoors. Our intentions are to redevelop the indoor classroom by creating a more natural organic environment with less tables and chairs tempting children to sit too much!

Finally,

The team at St Bernard's Pre-School Education Centre place a strong emphasis on the need to provide activities and experiences that challenge children and promote their development. We are aware of the importance our role plays on children's future learning and through building trust and showing openness with our children, we have developed a framework that provides children with the means to engage in learning, enabling them to develop emotionally, intellectually, physically and socially; building a solid foundation for their future learning.

St Bernard's Pre-School Education Centre is thriving, we believe our innovated ideas endorse our ethos, to provide every family with high end quality Educare; and..... we are leading the way forward in the Early Years Sector.

ETI key findings: the planned curricular programme, through the provision of a wide range of interesting activities and resources, now provides an appropriately stimulating, challenging and progressive curriculum that reflects fully the pre-school curricular guidance.