

Education, Children and Families Committee

Sub-committee on Standards for Children and Families

2 pm, Monday, 9 June 2014

Pre-School Inspection of Cowgate Under 5's Centre

Item number	5.5
Report number	
Wards	Ward 11: City Centre

Links

Coalition pledges	PO5
Council outcomes	CO2
Single Outcome Agreement	SO3

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Executive summary

Pre-School Inspection of Cowgate Under 5's Centre

Summary

- Members should be aware that Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education (HMIE), now known as Education Scotland (ES), undertake an annual sample of inspections across Scotland (approximately 240 per year) covering nursery, primary, special and secondary schools. A letter to parents/carers on each inspection is published approximately three months after the inspection. On the basis of this letter the school with the support of the authority amends its improvement plan to take account of any agreed areas for improvement.
- Inspectors usually revisit a school within a year of the publication of the letter where weak or unsatisfactory practice has been identified. For all other schools inspected the local authority will inform the parents about the progress made in improving the quality of education.
- Cowgate Under 5's Centre report is one of the best in Scotland with five evaluations at excellent. The inspectors identified aspects of innovative practice and will work with the pre-school centre and the local authority to share this with others. The inspection team agreed that children's learning at the centre is outstanding and that overall Cowgate Under 5's Centre is an outstanding nursery whose practice will continue to be shared widely.
- This letter (Appendix 1) and evaluations (Appendix 2) advises the Sub-committee on the outcomes of the initial inspection.

Recommendations

The Sub-committee is requested to:

- note the findings of the report including the area where the education authority and the pre-school centre should continue to improve the pre-school centre.

Measures of success

The report identified the following key strengths:

- the ethos based on trust and mutual respect which reflects the strong vision and shared values of the centre;
- the rich learning experiences which promote children’s creativity and bring about achievements;
- the exceptional skills of staff in responding to individual children’s interests and needs;
- the outstanding opportunities for children to reflect, investigate and explore the outdoors;
- dynamic and enquiring leadership throughout the centre;
- five awards of excellent from Education Scotland; and
- four awards of excellent from the Care Inspectorate.

Financial impact

There are no financial implications contained in the ES report.

Equalities impact

There are considered to be no infringements of the rights of the child.

Tracking of pupil performance by gender and Black Minority Ethnic (BME) is undertaken at school level and there are no adverse impacts.

Sustainability impact

None.

Consultation and engagement

Parents, pupils and staff completed an ES questionnaire prior to the inspection.

Background reading / external references

<http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/inspectionandreview/reports>

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Appendices	1.	Inspection letter to parent/carer
	2.	Evaluations

11 March 2014

Dear Parent/Carer

Cowgate Under 5's Centre City of Edinburgh Council

Recently, as you may know, my colleague and I visited and inspected your child's pre-school centre. During our visit, we talked to parents and children and we worked closely with the head of centre and staff. We wanted to find out how well children are learning and achieving and how well the pre-school centre supports children to do their best. The head of centre shared with us the pre-school centre's successes and priorities for improvement. We looked at some particular aspects of the pre-school centre's recent work, including learning outdoors and how well children participate in their own learning. As a result, we were able to find out how good the pre-school centre is at improving children's education.

How well do children learn and achieve?

Children's learning at Cowgate Under 5's Centre is outstanding. From the earliest age, children are encouraged to explore and investigate the world around them, both indoors and outside. In all areas of the nursery, highly-knowledgeable staff provide comfort, encouragement and stimulation. Because their work is of the highest quality, children develop secure relationships with caring and trusted adults and make excellent progress. The nursery has strong and shared philosophies and values. Adults place trust in children and allow them to drive their own learning. They provide them with stimulating, natural materials to help them develop and learn. Throughout the playrooms, children's experiences are designed to foster independence and decision making. By allowing children to consider hazards and take risks, these skills are developing particularly well. Children's outdoor experiences are of an exceptionally high-quality. Here, natural materials provide children with creative and challenging ways to extend their knowledge and understanding, and to develop relationships with the natural world. In the nursery garden, the forest kindergarten and at Stickland, a natural woodland space on the outskirts of Edinburgh, children climb, observe wildlife, reflect, play in running water, cook, problem-solve and create imaginary play situations. Younger children's early language skills are encouraged by staff who understand how to do this effectively. Almost all children love to share stories and rhymes with adults and friends, often curling up in a quiet space alone or with a friend to share a book. Many older

children create their own plays and perform them to each other, dressing up or using puppets. Through nursery routines and play, staff encourage children's pre-writing skills in relevant contexts. In the Sala Infantil, which caters for children aged three to five, children mark-make during their play, making lists, writing labels for the playroom, making tickets for their performances or taking charcoal tree rubbings on their hill walks. Commendably, children's understanding of early mathematics is encouraged through solving real and imaginary problems. For example, children had measured the depth of a river using sticks to check that the water would not flood into their boots. Older children count in many real-life contexts and daily routines such as playing games, helping to bake and having snack and lunch. Consequently, almost all have an excellent understanding of numbers. In areas such as early science and technology, children's early skills in inquiry and investigation are developing very well. By observing and exploring their natural environment they are beginning to understand their place in the world. Children's creativity is encouraged and promoted in every area of the centre. Children frequently choose to sing, dance and perform using musical instruments or indeed pots and pans and other resources they find around the playroom. Children love to use technology to record and share pictures of their friends playing and staff have begun to share these short films and pictures electronically with parents. Children's learning is also recorded in personal learning plans and we have asked staff to consider how these can be further developed so that they demonstrate children's progress even more clearly. The centre has many awards in recognition of its successes, for example as Investors in Children. It has achieved its fourth green flag award from Eco-Schools Scotland to acknowledge its work on sustainability.

How well does the pre-school centre support children to develop and learn?

The nursery supports children's development and learning exceptionally well. It provides a rich and supportive physical and emotional environment for children and their families which is highly appreciated by parents. Partnerships with parents are extremely positive and reflect the shared vision and values which underpin the life and work of the nursery. The unique ethos of the centre allows children to thrive in a safe, secure, yet vibrant setting. Children and their families are very well supported at times of transition or when there is a change in routine. Where appropriate, staff work sensitively and productively with other agencies to provide additional help for children who need support to make progress. The way adults respond to individual children's emotional, developmental and learning needs is exceptional. They listen carefully to children's wishes and tune in to their interests. They immediately plan for exciting ways to respond to children's curiosity and to deepen their understanding. For example, having seen a nearby display of Chinese Warrior Lanterns one morning, adults took a group of children to see these lit in the evening. Almost all learning comes from the children's interests, but staff ensure that children receive a broad and challenging curriculum. They provide a very wide and stimulating range of opportunities in the playroom and outdoors which help children to experience broad, deep, coherent and purposeful learning.

How well does the pre-school centre improve the quality of its work?

The nursery has highly effective ways to monitor what it does well and how it can continue to improve. Parents feel able to influence decisions which affect them and their child, and help to support the centre's priorities for improvement. Children's own ideas generate and drive developments and they enjoy taking responsibility for making changes to their play areas. For example, having decided that they wanted running water in their garden, they helped design and bring about a water pump in their garden. The head of centre has successfully engendered a professional learning community amongst staff and parents to provide an outstanding service for children. She provides very strong, sensitive and very effective leadership of the centre and has successfully encouraged these qualities in others. Consequently, the highly-qualified staff team have a deep understanding of how children develop and learn. They share their own practice and improve aspects of the nursery based on sound research which they often undertake themselves. For example, following her own observations and after extensive research and consultation, a senior practitioner opened up the baby and toddler rooms to benefit very young children by allowing them to play together with siblings and friends. This has been an innovative and successful change which reflects the centre's approach to improvement. Overall, Cowgate Under 5's is an outstanding nursery whose practice will continue to be shared widely.

Our inspection of your pre-school centre found the following key strengths.

- The ethos based on trust and mutual respect which reflects the strong vision and shared values of the centre.
- The rich learning experiences which promote children's creativity and bring about achievements.
- The exceptional skills of staff in responding to individual children's interests and needs.
- The outstanding opportunities for children to reflect, investigate and explore the outdoors.
- Dynamic and enquiring leadership throughout the centre.

We discussed with staff and the education authority how they might continue to improve the pre-school centre. This is what we agreed with them.

- Continue to develop children's personal learning planning so that it is easier to monitor their progress.

What happens at the end of the inspection?

We are highly satisfied with the overall quality of provision. We are confident that the pre-school centre self-evaluation processes are leading to improvements. As a result, we will make no further evaluative visits in connection with this inspection. During the inspection, we identified aspects of innovative practice which we would like to explore further in order to share the practice with others. As a result we will work with the pre-school centre and local authority in order to record and share more widely the innovative practice.

Elaine Merrilees
HM Inspector

Emma Campbell
Care Inspectorate Officer

Additional inspection evidence, such as details of the quality indicator evaluations, for your school can be found on the Education Scotland website at <http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/inspectionandreview/reports/school/eyc/CowgateUnder5sEdinburghEdinburghCity.asp>.

If you would like to receive this report in a different format, for example, in a translation please contact the administration team on the above telephone number.

If you want to give us feedback or make a complaint about our work, please contact us by telephone on 0141 282 5000, or e-mail: complaints@educationscotland.gsi.gov.uk or write to us addressing your letter to the Complaints Manager, Denholm House, Almondvale Business Park, Livingston EH54 6GA.

Quality indicators help pre-school centres, education authorities and inspectors to judge what is good and what needs to be improved in the work of the pre-school centre. You can find these quality indicators in the publication *Child at the Centre*(2)¹. Following our inspection of each pre-school centre, the Scottish Government gathers evaluations of three important quality indicators to keep track of how well all Scottish pre-school centres are doing.

The Care Inspectorate publishes quality grades to better inform people and the Scottish Government about the quality of care services. Awarding grades at inspections is aimed at encouraging providers to identify and address areas for improvement. The Care Inspectorate also uses the grades to ensure our inspection activity is targeted and proportionate. The grades at inspection are awarded against four quality themes, details of which can be found on the Care Inspectorate website.

Here are Education Scotland's evaluations for **Cowgate Under 5's Centre**

Children's experiences	excellent
Improvements in performance	excellent
Meeting learning needs	excellent

We also evaluated the following aspects of the work of the pre-school centre

The curriculum	excellent
Improvement through self-evaluation	excellent

Here are the Care Inspectorate's gradings for **Cowgate Under 5's Centre**

Quality of care and support	excellent
Quality of environment	excellent
Quality of staffing	excellent
Quality of management and leadership	excellent

A copy of the full letter is available on the Education Scotland and Care Inspectorate websites at.

<http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/inspectionandreview/reports/school/eyc/CowgateUnder5sEdinburghEdinburghCity.asp>

http://www.scswis.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=7644&Itemid=489

¹ *The Child at the Centre, Self-Evaluation in the early years*, HM Inspectorate of Education, 2007, : http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/inspectionandreview/Images/catcseey_tcm4-712692.pdf