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How to be outstanding – a nursery’s guide to making the grade: Witton Gilbert Nursery

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Brief description

Witton Gilbert Nursery is a welcoming and inclusive environment which both supports and challenges children to make the best progress they can. This example describes how it has been achieved. It is one of a set of 10 that have been published to support the survey report: *Getting it right first time*.

Overview – the provider’s message

‘The journey to become outstanding has been built on a firm foundation of staff sharing high expectations of themselves and of the children and their families.

We value all members of the team and work together as reflective practitioners. Experienced staff model outstanding provision for newer staff and students. Different forms of supervision are used both formally and informally to monitor the views and feelings of staff. We endeavour to support each other, to identify our own strengths and those of others. We work in partnership with other childcare providers and within multi-agency teams. Working closely with families is an essential part of what we do, they are the main carers of these children and that must be respected.

Staff are fully committed to the group and take pride in its achievements. It is regularly said at staff meetings that we are an outstanding nursery because every single one of the team is prepared to go that extra mile for the children.’

Lynn Markwell, Nursery Manager

The good practice in detail

Witton Gilbert Nursery was judged ‘good’ in its inspection in March 2007, but the manager firmly believed that the children deserved even better. Her starting point was that well-qualified, reflective practitioners were the foundation on which to build outstanding provision. Four years later, she and her staff team have created a welcoming and inclusive

nursery environment which both supports and challenges children to make the best progress they can. Working together with parents and families, staff constantly ask themselves and

‘Having a staff team with the necessary skills, knowledge and understanding of early childhood development is crucial if a setting is to improve the quality of its provision.’ - Lynn Markwell

each other – ‘how could we have done that better?’

Effective professional development

Individual staff have clearly established roles, linked to qualifications, with clear progression routes in place to enable them to continually improve their qualification levels and experience.

When the nursery moved into the Reception class area in 2006, Lynn explains that staff development became even more of a key focus. Being in the school environment emphasised for her the importance of pursuing further qualifications: ‘At the time, most of the staff were already qualified to level 3, but they wanted to further develop their practice and focus more on how this impacted on children’s learning.’ In 2011, the manager graduated with BA in Early Childhood Studies and gained Early Years Professional Status in February 2012. With these qualifications and the help and support of the Reception teacher, she ensured that the nursery went from strength to strength. ‘In particular, the skills and knowledge I acquired through my studies, enabled me to better understand and evaluate the impact of what I was doing on the children’s learning,’ said Lynn.

Meeting individual needs



Careful planning takes into account each child’s individual needs, informed by sensitive listening, observations and reflection by skilled staff. Staff support child-initiated and spontaneous play exceptionally well, and because they know children’s needs they are able to ensure that all are challenged and helped to make outstanding progress.

Arrangements for tracking and monitoring the individual progress of children feed into termly assessments of what children know, can do and understand. Where children may be struggling with a particular aspect, small focus groups or 1-1 sessions are planned to ensure that children do not fall behind in key areas. Planned and regular opportunities for communication are key to ensuring that staff remain focused on outcomes for children in relation to their learning. Staff are actively encouraged to be reflective practitioners and are constantly looking at how they can improve practice. In staff meetings, they are encouraged to unpick each of the areas of learning as a team and look at good

practice in relation to teaching. They always ask themselves how could they have done that differently?’

As stated in their [inspection report](#): ‘Staff go beyond expectations to develop highly effective relationships.’ Parents and carers are actively encouraged to become involved with their children’s learning in the nursery. A particularly striking example of this work is through the contributions to the ‘Wow’ wall. Children love to look at the pictures of themselves and their families and proudly report examples of their ‘wow’ moments. As one parent says: ‘Just having a comment on this wall has done wonders for my son’s confidence and has made me feel that my contributions are important too.’



Working well with partners

The nursery has developed many productive partnerships with other agencies locally. ‘If we are to make sure all children thrive’, says Lynn, ‘we have to support not only their needs, but also those of their families.’ Links with the local children’s centre have been fundamental, ensuring that consistent messages are delivered between nursery and home. The skills within the team also enable them to effectively support disabled children and those with special educational needs. The dedication of the nursery’s special educational needs coordinator (SENCO), in partnership with local statutory agencies, has ensured that all children receive the support they need and are able to make excellent progress.

The manager and staff believe that all children deserve the best start in life and are determined to ensure that, in partnership with the school, the nursery delivers high-quality provision. The manager communicates this vision and value to all staff well and expects members of staff to be reflective practitioners who take responsibility for reviewing their practice. There is a very strong culture of continuous professional development. When asked what were the key strengths of her setting, Lynn remarked: ‘An environment that is nurturing and welcoming, and children who are happy confident learners within it, alongside well-trained, dedicated staff who feel valued as individuals and who have confidence in their abilities’.

Provider background

Witton Gilbert Nursery has been registered since November 2000. It operates from premises within Witton Gilbert Primary School, situated approximately three miles from Durham. The nursery supports disabled children and those with special educational needs as well as children who speak English as an additional language.

Other examples published in this set

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[Baldon Nursery School](#)

Childminder 510228
Garstang Pre-School Nursery
Highters Heath Nursery School
Southwater Village Hall Pre-School
Newstead Children's Centre
Our Lady Star of the Sea Nursery
Wheatley Hill Community Nursery

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