



Today Nursery, Tomorrow the World or the Moon!

Fostering Inclusion and Aspiration at Low Hill Nursery School, Wolverhampton



Introduction

Low Hill Nursery School in Wolverhampton has been rated by OFSTED as Outstanding since 2012 and hearing about the inclusive and aspirational approach they take, it is hardly surprising. It offers so much more than one might expect from a nursery. In this case study, the focus is on two key elements: 1) how they manage to be inclusive of the children with additional needs and 2) how they support all children towards positive life outcomes as adults.

About the Nursery School



The school has over 200 children attending it with ages ranging from two to five years. There is a resource provision of 12 places that has been open since 2016. The area surrounding the nursery is one of deprivation with high levels of domestic abuse, mental health issues and substance misuse. Despite this, the nursery is at the heart of the community, offering a variety of supports to families that increase the likelihood of parental engagement and positive outcomes for children. These include running a food bank twice a week for parents and the wider community.

The Ethos

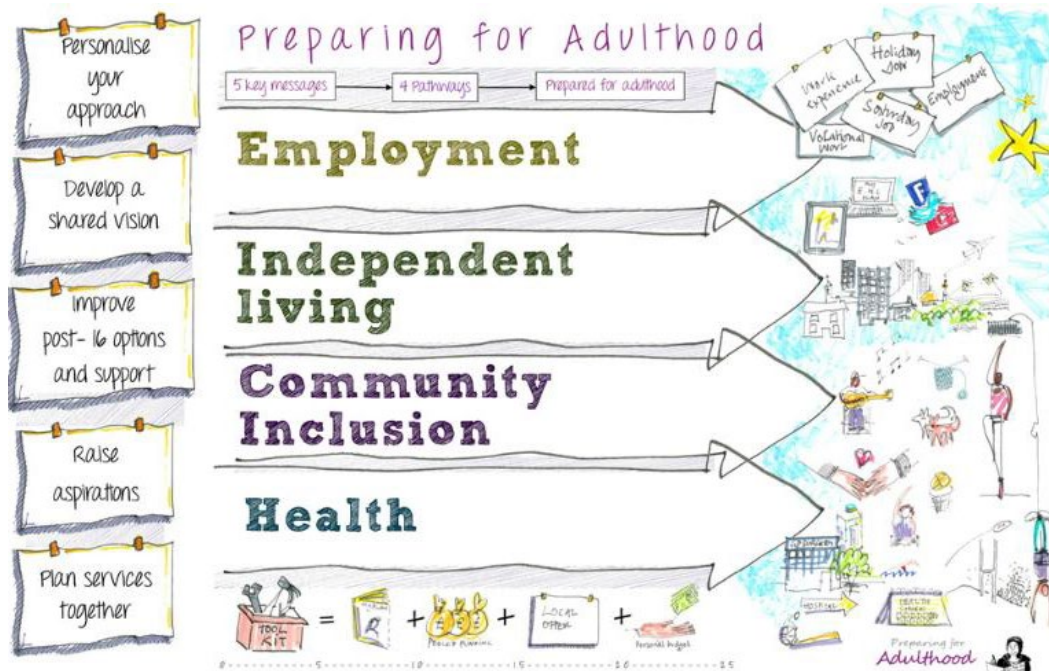
The school has adopted inclusive practice and all staff have had training to support children with additional needs so that everyone is welcome. There is a strong 'can do' approach with an emphasis on finding solutions, even if there are barriers to a child's learning. There is a belief that everyone has something to offer whatever their starting point, and staff are encouraged to not make assumptions about needs or what can be achieved just because a child has a label such as autism. Instead, the staff respond to the child's needs, interests and preferences as they manifest themselves.

Partnership working with parents and the wider community is at the centre of and underpins how the school operates. The environment is designed to be supportive and secure so that parents feel welcome and all children can flourish and feel safe.

The team enjoys positive working relationships with many professionals including health visitors, speech and language therapists, physiotherapists. This partnership working enables the school to work effectively with parents to support them in their parenting role and to understand how best to help their children thrive. The school has a pastoral manager and a support practitioner who coordinate and deliver much of what is available to families, but care is taken to ensure it is a partnership with parents rather than them feeling 'done to' or judged.

Life-long learning is a theme in the school with staff, children and parents being encouraged to keep learning. This is helpful in supporting families to take up training offers and improve their economic and social circumstances.

Below, are some examples of how the nursery has enabled children to have opportunities and increase their chances of achieving an ordinary life as adults. This is not a comprehensive account of all the activities happening in this setting but provides a picture of the ethos and work of the nursery. These examples have been organised under the four Preparing for Adulthood pathways of: employment, independence, friendships and community inclusion and health. An additional section focuses on mental health and resilience initiatives that have proved helpful.



Employment

The school is careful not to stifle children's ambition; opportunities to succeed are created by giving children a chance to try new things, even if the element of success is small. Positive risk-taking is part of the approach and children can use real tools such as screw drivers and saws under supervision when they are learning motor skills. Staff follow the interests and foster children's curiosity, which helps promote possible ideas for careers, although of course, these may change over time.



Children are also taught self-regulation of their emotions and how to seek help if they need to co-regulate¹. They are also encouraged to do as much as they can for themselves even if they cannot complete the task without assistance. We know that employers are looking for reliable workers and ability to stick at a task is one way of demonstrating reliability and commitment.

Parents are seen as the child's first educator, so it is important that children have positive role models around the world of work. The school itself has run courses in childcare at levels 1 and 2, which has enabled both parents of current and former pupils to complete them and gain paid employment or volunteer at the school. The rationale for making these courses available is that there are too many barriers for many of the parents to gain qualifications through more formal education settings that are further afield.

Independent Living & Independence Skills

The children are encouraged to be as independent as possible such as doing as much as they can towards becoming toilet trained or working with peers to come up with solutions to problems.

Staff model the behaviour they want children to adopt and help them develop strategies for learning. Over time, staff learn what children are likely to be able to do unaided and will make reasonable adjustments to allow all children to participate in learning opportunities. Staff are quick to build on successes, however small. Routines support children to understand what is expected. [Total Communication](#)² is used to enable children to have a voice so they learn to be able to make choices, a key skill to foster for later decision making.

¹ Co-regulation is defined as **warm and responsive interactions that provide the support, coaching, and modelling that children** need to “understand, express, and modulate their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors”. Murray, Desiree W., Katie Rosanbalm, Christina Christopoulos, and Amar Hamoudi. 2015. Self-regulation and Toxic Stress: Foundations for Understanding Self-regulation from an Applied Developmental Perspective.

² Total Communication is an approach to communicating that aims to make use of a number of modes of communication such as signed, oral, auditory, written and visual aids, depending on the particular needs and abilities of the person.

In addition, [Tacpac](#)³, a sensory communication resource that uses touch and music is offered to children who would benefit from it.

The 'Strawberry Patch' garden is used to help children to learn how to look after things and to understand the natural world around them. All children have the opportunity to attend a local forest school and the nursery promotes this as a way of gaining independence and connecting with the natural world.

Friendships & Community Inclusion

Headteacher, Natalie Showell says that the relationships that develop between children happen naturally and that staff do not have to do anything to actively promote them. However, it is clear that children are encouraged to accept difference and be kind and supportive to each other, behaviour that staff model. This is evident in the photographs that show children cooperating over a range of tasks. The impressive thing is that it is not clear from these pictures who are the children with special educational needs.



Health

A number of activities in the school promote a healthy lifestyle including growing vegetables and harvesting them, cooking healthy food from different parts of the world in the home corner and promoting good dental hygiene. However, in line with the aim to work with the whole family, classroom activities are supplemented with other initiatives. Take dental hygiene, for example, the NHS outreach nurse came into the school to talk to the children and a workshop was run for parents. The mobile dental unit was also parked in the school's car park so that families could get an appointment immediately without having to go anywhere.

Supporting Children's & Parents' Mental Health

A number of specific initiatives are in place within the school to support children's mental health and building resilience:

³ Tacpac helps people with sensory impairment, developmental delay, complex learning difficulties, tactile defensiveness, and limited or pre-verbal levels of communication.

- [Nurture groups](#)
- [Relax kids](#)
- [Attachment/trauma informed approaches](#)

A whole family approach is used and within the support in place are a number of offers that parents can accept, if they wish:

- Charge Up for parents⁴
- Wellbeing walks
- [Every Family Counts](#)
- Sensory workshops over a period of six weeks
- Play therapy

The work of the school has recently been acknowledged with a wellbeing award and the most recent Ofsted report in 2017 concluded that:

The school's welcoming environment is greatly valued by parents. One parent said that she feels that **'the school is like a family to me'**. This sensitive and caring environment, along with the excellent teaching, means that children continue to make outstanding progress from starting points that are much lower than are typical.

Of children with special educational needs or disabilities, inspectors said:

These children are achieving particularly well. They play and learn very well alongside their peers and are just as excited by the tasks given. Staff work very closely together to support this high level of integration and care.

To conclude, the school has an ethos that values:

- ✓ equality and diversity
- ✓ inclusion for all
- ✓ working with the whole family
- ✓ high aspirations and enabling children to fulfil their dreams as adults, illustrated by their choice of quote from Paul Brandt:



“ Don't tell me the sky is the limit when there are footprints on the moon. ”

⁴ Charge Up aims to equip young people with an understanding of what it is to be human and to help them to connect their mind and body. The programme also provides them with mindful tools to help them self-regulate and to assist them to feel empowered in dealing with life's ups and downs.

