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Burmantofts Community Nursery

Research Report



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Research Report: Burmantofts Community Nursery

This document reports on findings from a research project conducted by staff from Leeds Beckett University's School of Education and School of Humanities and Social Sciences. The purpose of the research was to develop understandings of the facilities and provision at Burmantofts Community Nursery and to explore how the nursery can plan for the future to better meet the needs of the local community.

Summary of key findings:

In our focus groups parents commented very favourably on their relationships with staff at the nursery, saying that they found them to be friendly, approachable, and supportive; this was highly valued and a key strength of the work the nursery is currently doing.

The additional support offered through initiatives such as the FareShare food offer and the clothing exchange were also appreciated by parents, many of whom were supporting their families on limited incomes.

The flexibility of pick up/drop off times was also noted as a significant benefit for those parents who were attending college courses and were unable to collect their children at the standard session end time.

Several areas for development were identified and following consideration of the findings drawn from the staff survey, focus groups with parents, and the conversations with professionals in the local community, we have compiled a series of recommendations for the nursery based around three themes:

- 1) Marketing and External Communication
- 2) Relationships with Parents
- 3) Diversity and Inclusion.

Under each theme we have highlighted specific areas for further development which can be found later in the report.

Authors

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Burmantofts Community Nursery

The local context

Burmantofts and Richmond Hill is an electoral ward in East Leeds situated a mile from the city centre. Using the Indices of Deprivation, a measure which takes account of the seven domains of income, employment, education, health, crime, barriers to housing and services, and living environment, it is the most deprived ward in the city of Leeds. Following the Covid-19 pandemic, it is likely that inequalities across the city will have intensified, adding to the challenges seen in disadvantaged communities such as Burmantofts and Richmond Hill with a combination of factors including physical, societal, cultural and economic driving many of the stubborn underlying inequalities in the city (Leeds City Council, 2021: 45-46). Data shows that in 2020 (the most recently available data) 82% of those living in the Burmantofts Ward were in the most deprived fifth and the other 18% in the second most deprived fifth (Health Profile Overview, 2020).

Geographically, the ward is close to and dissected by major arterial road routes and railway lines, leading to a fragmentation of the individual neighbourhood areas within the ward. Bus services from more isolated parts of the ward are infrequent and whilst infrastructure for active travel is improving, physical and psychological barriers to mobility in the ward remain (Jarmin and Byrne, 2022: 17). Mobility of local residents is more dependent on public transportation than is usual: in 2021 (the most recently available data) 58.4% of households in the ward did not have access to a private car or van (Office for National Statistics, 2021) compared with 22% in Great Britain as a whole (National Travel Survey, 2021).

This is a large ward with a GP registered population of 31,164 (Health Profile Overview, 2020). Data from 2020 (Leeds Observatory) indicates that there are a higher proportion of children and young people living in the ward than in other parts of the city with the age profile of the area younger than the city average, with 25.4% of the Burmantofts and Richmond Hill population being 15 years old or younger, compared with 19.3% for Leeds as a whole. The area also has a high proportion of pre-school children resident, when compared to other parts of the city. In 2020, under 5's comprised 9% (2,438) of the total population in Burmantofts and Richmond Hill (N = 27,095). In 2019, 2,546 residents of the area were aged between 0-4 and were therefore potential users of the services that Burmantofts Community Nursery offers (Leeds Observatory).

Although the age profile of the Burmantofts ward is young when compared to the city average, the birth rate across the city has declined each year from a peak of 10,350 in 2012 to 8613 from the period September 2020 – August 2021 (Leeds City Council, 2022: 7). The declining birth rate is now impacting on demand for early years places at some providers.

The take up of Free Early Education Entitlement in the area for eligible two-year-olds is 64% and for three and four-year-olds it is 84%. This is low in comparison to other parts of the city (Leeds City Council, 2022: 41) and since publication of the Leeds City Council Childcare Sufficiency Assessment 2019-20, a focus group of local authority and provider representatives has been established in Harehills and surrounding areas to address low take up rates and the high number of vacant places in the area (Leeds City Council, 2022: 22)

The area (Burmantofts MSOA – Middle Layer Super Output Area) is ethnically diverse, with 48.7% of residents identifying as white (all white identity categories) in the 2021 Census, compared with 81% in England and Wales as a whole (Office for National Statistics, 2022). Many languages in addition to English are spoken in the community.

Burmantofts, Lincoln Green and Mabgate has recently undergone a consultation about the development of a neighbourhood plan. This has involved a number of local partners, including local residents, businesses, schools, community groups and charities, and aims to address local concerns by ensuring effective spending when funding is available. The process of consultation has now concluded with final outcomes and future plans yet to be confirmed.

The nursery

About the nursery:

The nursery is located on Rigton Drive in Burmantofts, just over a mile from Leeds City Centre and close to the major road intersections of the A64 and A61. It opened in December 2001 and at its first Ofsted inspection in November 2003, had 53 children on roll.

At the most recent Ofsted inspection (Ofsted, 2022) in March 2022, 69 children were on roll at the nursery. Ofsted noted that the nursery employed twelve members of childcare staff, all with early years qualifications at level 3 and above. The nursery opens all year round from 8am to 6pm, Monday to Friday and provides government funded places for children aged 2, 3, and 4 as well as care for babies. Staff work shifts and the nursery team are led by two managers, Sarah Steeples and Karen Johnson.

As a community nursery, it has charitable status, administered by six Trustees. Total income in the financial year ending 31/03/22 was £341, 531 with total expenditure of £374, 677. The total income figure includes £237,968 from grants and contracts and £42, 630 from nursery fees (source, Charities Commission). The Memorandum and Articles of Association under which the nursery operates were incorporated on 19th November 1998 and later amended by special resolutions on 6th September 2001 and 18th May 2005.

Other providers in the local area:

Burmantofts Community Nursery is one of nine nurseries, and one of 13 pre-school providers, in the LS9 postcode area. The nursery sits directly in the vicinity of Burmantofts and Lincoln Green housing blocks with its site adjacent to the Ebor Gardens Primary Academy which is one of five primary schools in the local area. Ebor Gardens Primary Academy has a nursery on-site, offering places to children aged 3 and 4 with some children moving from Burmantofts Community Nursery to this provider at these ages. Shakespeare Children’s Centre in Harehills provides 0-5 Family Services in the locality.

In general, the nursery is similarly matched with other local providers with regards to its staff-to-child ratio, the offer of funded places for 2-, 3- and 4-year-olds, and having Good Ofsted report ratings. However, Burmantofts Community Nursery is the only provider within the LS9

postcode that is run by a not-for-profit organisation with other providers being commercial organisations.

Research methods and data collection

We used a mixed methods approach to develop data to address our research questions:

1. What resources are available to families as part of standard provision within Burmantofts Community Nursery?
2. What are the characteristics and needs of families currently accessing Burmantofts Community Nursery?
3. Is the nursery currently accessed by families that represent the demographics of the Burmantofts locality?
4. What are the perceptions of the services provided by Burmantofts Community Nursery according to the parents and professionals who access them?
5. What additional or alternative resources are currently available to pre-school children in the Burmantofts area of Leeds?

Phase one:

Initial audit of the nursery provision.

Desk research, examining the demographics of the area, other provision for pre-school children in the locality and information about the nursery itself.

Phase two:

A staff survey comprised of 20 open-ended questions was completed by 10 practitioners, with a range of experience (1-21 years), qualifications (Level 3 Childcare to degree level), and job roles (nursery workers, Deputy Manager, Manager). The survey was split into three sections: personal information, perceptions of the families accessing the nursery, and perceptions of the nursery environment.

Phase three:

Three focus groups were conducted with parents of children attending the nursery. As the families accessing the nursery speak a range of languages, we arranged these groups according to shared language as follows:

Focus group one: parents speaking English as their first language.

Focus group two: bilingual parents speaking Portuguese as their first language.

Focus group three: bilingual parents speaking Arabic as their first language.

An Arabic-English interpreter attended focus group three.

A professional conversation with an informed leader in the local early years community was also undertaken. They have a far-reaching oversight into all the early years provision and family services in the surrounding areas of Harehills, Richmond Hill and Burmantofts.

Staff Survey Findings

1) Staff perceptions of the families accessing the nursery

This section of the survey asked staff to describe the characteristics of the families that attend the nursery, noting the types of support offered to these families, as well as any challenges that they face in supporting them. Staff reported that the typical family that attends Burmantofts nursery is family orientated, traditional, multi-cultural, and often living in poverty. Indeed, most children attending the nursery are accessing funded places, with staff indicating that only 9 of the 72 enrolled children were paying fees privately. The nursery provides support to their families through the offering of childcare, the FareShare initiative, and supporting parents to complete paperwork. Staff reported that the three biggest challenges in being able to meet family and children's needs were language barriers, not enough time for 1-2-1 with specific children and diversity in cultural norms.

FareShare

Staff were aware of the financially challenging circumstances in which many families were living and had recently set up a partnership with FareShare (<https://fareshare.org.uk/>) to provide access to free food parcels on the nursery site. Importantly, this was available for families to use on an 'as you need it' basis without the referral which is required in more formal foodbank settings. This offer of support with essential items has also been extended to include a rail of free adults and children's clothing.

Language barriers

Staff reported that due to the large number of languages spoken by the children in the nursery, communication was at times challenging. Whilst they often made use of available resources, sometimes communication difficulties were compounded by limited and costly access to translators and interpreters.

Cultural norms

Staff noted that managing the different cultural norms of the families that access the nursery could be, at times, problematic. It was suggested that many parents did not understand the British educational system, and some parents did not want to accept that their child might have some additional needs. This was seen to be a barrier to staff identifying the appropriate support for their child or making referrals to the relevant services.

Not enough time with 1-2-1 children

Finally, staff indicated that the need for high child to staff ratios and high proportions of children within the setting that required SEN support was a particular challenge in terms of providing the appropriate level of 1-2-1 support for all children.

2) Staff perceptions of the nursery environment

This section of the survey asked staff to reflect on the provision offered by the nursery, including how they engage families not already attending the nursery, the support offered to families transitioning into and out of nursery, and how the nursery communicates with parents.

In terms of offering, staff indicated that the nursery offered two sessions a day (8.30 to 11.30 or 12.30 to 3.30). Morning sessions were said to be prioritised for working and college parents, but where adaptations were needed to meet the family's needs these were dealt with on a case-by-case basis. When asked to report on which resources were provided as standard provision within the nursery, staff consistently highlighted four specific areas; the FareShare initiative, the library, childcare, and access to toys that are no longer needed. Although no formal record was kept regarding how families had heard about the nursery, staff indicated that most parents chose Burmantofts because they had friends or relatives that used the nursery, and/or it was located close to their home.

Several questions were aimed at understanding how the nursery currently communicates and engages with parents of children attending the nursery. Staff indicated that communication occurred in several ways; newsletters, phone calls, text, and face-to-face discussions at pick up. Although, it was noted that the nature of the handover between keyworkers and parents, which was busy and conducted in a limited space at the entrance to the nursery, was often inconsistent depending on the member of staff.

In terms of supporting parents and children to transition into the nursery, nursery tours were provided but only to those parents who requested one. Short settle in sessions were provided to all new children before they started attending nursery more frequently, but no home visits were conducted by staff. Keyworkers are often assigned based on caseload, although adjustments are made should the child establish a particular bond with another member of staff. Staff noted that the nursery discontinued parent and child groups, where parents can engage in activities or sessions with their child at nursery sessions, during the COVID-19 pandemic and have not revisited this since.

As the nursery boasts a diverse multi-cultural cohort of children, speaking 16 different languages, some questions were asked regarding how the staff support children with English as an additional language. It was reported that the staff team predominantly spoke English, with a few staff members speaking other languages such as Punjabi, Urdu and Bengali. Staff reported that they support EAL (English as an Additional Language) children through learning a few basic words, using translators at important meetings, utilising the language skills of the parents to help communicate, and using multi-cultural books.

At the end of the survey, staff were given the opportunity to raise anything else that they felt would benefit the research that had not already been covered by our questions. The most frequent response related to the number of children with Special Educational Needs (SEN) that were attending the nursery. Specifically, they noted how challenging this is for the staff to manage given the high numbers of children they are working with, and the lack of specialist support provided by professionals. This issue was said to be further compounded by families

not understanding SEN or knowing very little about the what the diagnosis means for their child.

Focus Group Findings

1) Nursery selection

When exploring the parents' reasons for choosing the BCN early years setting, many chose the nursery because it was conveniently close to their home, while others stated it was recommended by friends or family. Some parents were returning to the nursery, as their older children had been at the nursery when they were young. Most of the families using the nursery lived locally, were within a short walking distance and said that the convenience of the location was a key reason for choosing Burmantofts Community Nursery rather than other providers.

“The only reason I sent his older brother here was closeness to all the family members just in case I ever got stuck but they was very welcoming”

“You did research though cos I really wanted somewhere that is, somewhere that I could drop my son and I’d be able to start work for half eight. I called a few nurseries in town close to me and the price was extremely expensive, I confess about that so. It was really dear, because I paid for nursery it was really dear so then I was like there’s one close to the house, I said why don’t I give this a try, because if I drop [child] here, I’ll be able to take a bus from there”

2) Nursery funding

The free childcare places were important for many of the families, and it was this that enabled them to access it. Several parents were attending educational courses themselves and noted that childcare would be unaffordable for them without this funding. Some parents mentioned receiving the ‘golden ticket’ or a text message informing them that they were entitled to funded care and that this had motivated them to make an enquiry about places for their child(ren).

3) Nursery staff

All parents commented on the disposition of key staff members and placed a high value on supportive and friendly relationships with staff. Staff were described as ‘very friendly’ and ‘polite’ leading to positive interactions from families’ first contacts with the nursery. As the management team, Karen and Sarah were identified as being especially helpful during the initial communications before starting nursery and as points of constant contact. Some parents commented that the warm and friendly approach they received, either over the phone or in person, made them feel welcomed.

“As soon as you come, they’re so polite and so welcoming and they make you feel you know like they’re always with them and looking after them.”

Staff were regarded as supportive to the individual needs of parents. Parents attending college welcomed the later pick up time that allowed for the additional time they needed to make the journey from college to nursery.

“They give us a good opportunity that enables us to go to college. They give us extra time if we have extra courses to study, so they provide us extra hours to keep our kids here”

Some parents discussed how staff had signposted them to other professional services to support their child’s development and wider family needs as well as offering time and space for a personal conversation when parents were facing difficulties and needed additional support.

“And I felt at one point... I didn’t know anyone that had a child with disability, well a disability but not [the one my child has], I’ve never heard of it before, so I didn’t really know owt about it until I spoke to Sarah. And you just feel like that support from them.”

When discussing the specific key person who looked after their child, parents commented that the main focus of this relationship was the sharing of daily updates and information such as what their child had eaten and how they had spent their time during the nursery session.

“Just a conversation at the end of the day like when they come and tell you how they’ve been and what they’ve eaten. And then ask if there’s any problems at home that you need help with and things like that. [...] They tell you what they’ve done. If they’ve had a nap, if [child] sometimes he falls, if he fell, how long he cries for and stuff like that.”

“As soon as you come, they’re there, straight away [your child] done this, straight away.”

“my daughter, she has a one-on-one with [staff member] and she absolutely adores her, she follows her around all place all day long but they’re just so welcoming and so polite”

4) Transition from home to nursery

In terms of transition from home to the nursery, parents commented on their experience of the process of transition when their child first joined the setting. There was no indication that transition was differentiated for babies, infants and toddlers, as parents described the process as following the same programme. Some parents reported that they brought their child for a visit and looked around the nursery; while others said that their child came on their first day without a previous visit. Some parents who had previously had older children at the nursery, were familiar with the setting and suggested that they just came back. It was acknowledged that prior to starting nursery, home visits were not taking place, though it was noted that the COVID-19 pandemic may have had an impact on this practice.

“yeah it was a big step for him, and he, at first, he was like ‘no I’m not leaving’, he wouldn’t leave me, he hated coming, he was crying. And then eventually now he can’t wait to get in.”

“she’d turned three, she was three already, so I thought you know she needs to be in nursery now And I thought put her in before September and tried it, I think she come in once and she were crying to come back, she wanted to come back from that day we visited and yeah, ever since she’s just been.”

5) Parental engagement

Parents wanted more opportunities to come into the nursery to spend time with their children there and see what they do. In terms of current offerings, parents reported that they had access to the nursery library and could sit and read or borrow books. Parents suggested some everyday activities and events that they would like to participate in and provided a collection of ideas. These suggestions included for example, cooking and baking with the children or stay and play sessions.

Parents also wanted to be able to celebrate and share important religious and cultural events such as Eid with their children and other families at the nursery. They reported that special family events, such as summer fairs, would be valued by the nursery and local community,

“[I would like] to celebrate with our kids actually for example Eid, to celebrate with them and their school.”

“We’d like actually to see what our kids are doing inside the school. If there is any opportunity to come to the nursery and see our kids, what they are doing.”

“It would be interesting if one day I could come here and just seeing [my child] playing around without him knowing that we are here actually.”

“To be honest, since my daughter started, they do not have any activity.”

“I would like the cooking day [or] just having fun with the kids, play outside.”

6) Learning opportunities

When asked what the nursery provides for their child, some parents commented on how their child could make new friends. At the end of the focus group session, parents were asked what they think their child would say they like most about the nursery. Some parents believed that their child most enjoyed playing with their friends.

“I think the interaction with the kids [is important] because [my child], he doesn’t like to socialise a lot out of the nursery, just with family”

“For me it’s important for my daughter because the first friends are made here and she’s very excited”

“he’s made quite a few friends. He was very clingy to the adults at first but now he’s off on his own doing whatever he wants.”

Others suggested that they would welcome an increased focus on formal learning and school preparedness

“Actually, when the kids move from the nursery to reception, they still don’t know how to write their name. They came to nursery only for playing. They know how to write the letters [we] want them to start writing from the letters.”

7) Marketing and communication

For communication, parents reported that the usual method to relay information about their child or the setting, was via text message in English. For those parents who had English as an additional language (EAL), they then copied the text into Google Translate. Some parents said that they would welcome information being made available in languages other than English. Parents commented that they did not receive many written forms of communication, such as newsletters, and that the website was rarely updated. Some parents mentioned that they would like to see more information on the website, so they could see what their child was doing, while at nursery.

“I’m suggesting if they have a website to put these photos so we can see them.”

Conversations with professionals in the local community

With no nominated professionals that work closely with the setting on a permanent basis, the professional interviews originally planned to form part of this study did not take place. The nursery leadership team highlighted that generally, there were no direct links to nominated professionals in the local community. Instead, professionals were accessed on an ad-hoc basis, in response to the particular needs of the child or family. For example, if the team wanted support for a child’s speech and language communication need, the leadership team would refer the case accordingly and be allocated a different professional case by case. This method of ad-hoc operation applied to the broad range of professionals who typically work in the early years sector across the local authority. As a result, building professional relationships between the wider community and Burmantofts Community Nursery was not evident and is recognised as a challenge.

To better understand these challenges, a professional conversation with an informed leader in the local early years community was undertaken. The professional has a far-reaching oversight into all the early years provision and family services in the surrounding areas of Harehills, Richmond Hill and Burmantofts. In this discussion, several factors that impact providers in the LS9 postcode area were identified and an overview of these key findings are provided below.

1) Funded Early Education Entitlement (FEEE) - 2-year-olds

It was reinforced that there are multiple settings in the area that offer places for 3-year-olds, so competition is always high for that age group. In contrast, there are only a few settings that have provision for 2-year-olds, with Burmantofts Community Nursery being one of these providers. In the area, 2-year-old FEEE sufficiency data in 2021-2022 highlights that there are currently only 51% of children accessing 2-year-old funding in the area, with an average take up of eligible children living in Burmantofts at 64%, in Harehills 45%, and in Richmond Hill 68% (Leeds City Council, 2022). One of the main factors of this low uptake is the lack of provision in the area that takes 2-year-olds, which is driven by the costs of supplying the welfare requirements for 2-year-olds. These key issues include staff:child ratio compliance, as outlined in the EYFS statutory framework (DfE, 2021), with staffing costs and managing daily routines outweighing the funding allocated.

The local outreach work plays a key role in enabling and following up the 2-year-olds that are eligible for funding and a nursery place. Using data from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and performance intelligence team, the follow up process by the outreach team includes a letter sent by post, families are sent an email and Family Services do a home visit. The barriers faced by the outreach team include transient communities, English as an Additional Language (EAL) difficulties, and some parents not wanting to engage. In the follow up process outlined above, Burmantofts Community Nursery is one of the settings signposted as a nursery destination.

2) Marketing and location

The professional commented that Burmantofts Community Nursery has very limited marketing. They believed that people living in the local area do not know it is there, or what it offers. The professional suggested that the location of the nursery and being positioned by the ring road, sets it apart from the wider Burmantofts community.

As a selling point, it was highlighted that Burmantofts Community Nursery offers a good space, with both an indoor and outdoor environment. Outdoor space is especially important in a community where housing is largely made up of high-rise flats and limited access to green spaces.

3) Family engagement

The professional observed that Burmantofts Community Nursery do not engage with the families locally and do not host any of the local sessions led by Family Services (Leeds City Council, 2023). As a model of good practice, events led by Family Services were discussed and how they offer a host of sessions that support families prior to coming to nursery. These sessions target 0–2-year-olds and their families and include baby groups, infant massage, parenting courses, stay and play sessions, Healthy Start, story and rhyme time, and support services for families with children under 5. Developing these positive early relationships, between families and settings, was described as a critical and fundamental aspect to building future partnerships.

In addition, Ebor Gardens (the school next door) have just started Peep training - Peep Learning Together Programme (LTP) (Peep, 2023). Peep-trained practitioners share the Peep Learning Together Programme (LTP) with families through conversations and joint

activities focusing on aspects of children's learning and development. Peep sessions raise awareness and model how singing, talking, playing and sharing books and stories together help strengthen relationships and develop children's listening, talking and later literacy. Families also consistently report that Peep sessions are fun, increase their confidence (both adults and children) and provide an important source of ideas and support from the practitioners and other families (Peep, 2023). The professional highlighted how the Peep programme can be used as multi-agency approach to working with families and will create even more competition for Burmantofts Community Nursery, in recruiting the local families.

In terms of the local community, the professional identified that due to a variance in socio-cultural factors, some families do not recognise the value of early years education. For example, in the Polish home culture, the children do not go to school until they are 5.

Conclusions and recommendations

Following consideration of the findings drawn from the staff survey, focus groups with parents, and the conversations with professionals in the local community, we have compiled a series of recommendations for the nursery based around three themes: 1) Marketing and External Communication, 2) Relationships with Parents, and 3) Diversity and Inclusion. Under each theme we have highlighted specific areas for further development.

1) Marketing and external communication

From our own observations, comments made during the parent focus groups and by the local professional, we consider this theme to be particularly pertinent and an easy win in terms of incorporating meaningful change to the nursery in a short space of time. Under this theme we have identified three key areas which the board of trustees and nursery managers may wish to develop further. These are i) the website, ii) the nursery environment, and iii) establishing links with professionals and services in the local community.

i. Website

Government guidance stipulates that best practice involves practitioners establishing clear and open lines of communication with parents and seeking to understand their perspectives and priorities (DfE, 2021; Early Years Coalition, 2021). Practitioners should share information with parents about their child's learning and development and seek to involve parents in the process of planning and evaluating learning experiences (DfE, 2021; Early Years Coalition, 2021). Nursery websites are considered vital for communicating effectively and involving existing parents in their child's learning. Websites are also acknowledged to provide essential information for prospective parents and create long-lasting first impressions regarding the quality of care on offer.

A review of the burmantoftsnursery.co.uk URL indicates that it has not been updated since 2021. Comparative analysis of other nursery websites in the local area have highlighted several areas where the current website could be enhanced to attract new parents and to better communicate with existing families. These include 1) frequent updating of the website to include important information about the nursery, any upcoming events and any activities that parents in the local community may wish to join, 2) provision of information in multiple languages to support families with English as an Additional Language (EAL) to

access information in their first language, and 3) password protected communication pages for existing families to access daily updates about their child's time at the nursery.

It is widely acknowledged that a frequently updated website that includes all relevant information about the nursery can improve parental engagement and, in turn, cut down costs associated with more expensive methods of communication such as text messaging and newsletters. Including provision of this information in multiple languages would also ensure that all families have access to this information and feel included within the nursery community. The provision of a password protected parent only space within a website can also facilitate the sharing of important information for each child, including the documentation of their learning throughout the day/week so parents can see what their children have been doing, what they are learning, and why this is important.

ii) Nursery environment

Burmantofts nursery is one of very few nurseries in the local community which has access to an outdoor space. Yet very little is made of this in terms of the marketing of the nursery to families within the local community. Indeed, there was a general lack of recognition of the added value that the outdoor space at Burmantofts brings to the nursery observed throughout the staff surveys and parent focus groups. This was particularly surprising given that many families in the local community have limited to no access to green spaces, and there is a huge body of research that highlights the significant benefits of outdoor play on learning and development (Ouvry and Furtado, 2019; Leeds for Learning, 2023a). We recommend that in addition to promoting this outdoor space in marketing materials, it is used as the location for family events and wider community engagement activities.

We noted that parents particularly valued the everyday, informal communication with staff at pick-up time. This is currently constrained by the cramped and narrow space at the entrance to the nursery. If there were sufficient funding to make physical alterations to this space, we would recommend considering how it could be reconfigured to provide better opportunities for these conversations to take place.

iii) Establish links with the professionals and services in the local community

It was noted through informal conversations with the nursery managers and the board of trustees that there are limited opportunities for the management team and the general staff team to engage with wider networks of professionals within the local community. It is widely acknowledged that participation in networks and local community forums serves to improve knowledge and practice. Given the level of competition in the local area there is a significant need for Burmantofts staff to remain abreast of relevant research and policy so that their practice remains current and in line with standards of best practice.

Where possible, we encourage the board of trustees to make time to allow staff to establish and maintain links with local early years forums, and to engage with relevant training and opportunities offered through the [Early Years Learning Improvement Team](#) (Leeds for Learning, 2023b) or the [National Days Nursery Association](#) (NDNA, 2023). This will sustain personal development so that staff can remain up to date with the latest developments in early years provision and can establish relationships with relevant professionals. Such

activities may serve to enhance the reputation and visibility of the nursery amongst local and relevant services, as well as leading to the development of new initiatives and collaborations with other providers. This will, in the long-term, enhance the overall quality of provision within the nursery and increase its reputation amongst the local community.

2) Family Engagement

Establishing positive partnerships with parents is considered the bread and butter of running an effective nursery. The parents who took part in the focus groups were very complimentary of the staff, commenting that they were warm, welcoming and friendly towards families and their child. As detailed earlier, the nursery staff provide support to their families through the offering of childcare, the FareShare initiative, and supporting parents to complete paperwork. However, in terms of opportunities, the nursery appears to have limited engagement with parents outside of these routine day-to-day interactions. Answers to the staff survey suggested that there were a few areas where, through further investment, Burmantofts can enhance their provision and create a collaborative partnership with their families.

As previously noted, there are many opportunities where the nursery can engage families prior to attending the nursery through adaptations to the website. In addition to this, we identified two additional areas for further development: i) establishing parent-nursery relationships through outreach activities, and ii) supporting the transition to nursery for new families.

i) Establishing Parent-Nursery Relationships through Outreach Activities

The Early Years Statutory Framework (EYFS), Development Matters and Birth to Five Matters are frameworks for early childhood education in England that provides guidance and support for practitioners working with children from birth to age five (DfE, 2021a; DfE, 2021b; Early Years Coalition, 2021). A key principle of all these frameworks is the importance of positive relationships with parents as a key component of high-quality early childhood education. It is acknowledged across research that positive relationships with parents are essential for promoting children's learning and development (Callanan et al., 2017). Early years policy also emphasizes the importance of creating a welcoming and inclusive environment for parents, where they feel valued and respected as partners in their child's learning. By working in partnership with parents, practitioners can support children's learning and development in a holistic and meaningful way.

We have already suggested changes to the nursery website and methods of communication which may increase parental engagement and enhance relationships between the nursery and existing families. Other methods to build relationships with parents includes investing in opportunities to establish links with future families through the provision of outreach activities that take place outside of normal nursery hours. For example, the nursery could be engaging with families prior to starting nursery (from birth – 2) through the provision of targeted programmes to support parents. An example of this would be family support work as led by the Harehill's Children's Centre, with a timetable of weekly sessions that target the parent and child. Such activities could include parent and child language and play groups, baby clubs, parenting workshops provided by outside agencies, or music groups. The inclusion of such activities within the nursery would raise the profile and reputation of the setting as a

hub of support for local families, thereby reducing the need for families to access support outside of their immediate community.

ii) Supporting the Transition to Nursery for New Families

In addition to establishing relationships through outreach activities, further improvements could be made to support the transition of new families to the nursery environment. Staff and parents indicated that the current transition model for children entering the nursery was to have a one-off session for a couple of hours to allow them to become acquainted with the nursery. Additional sessions were offered to children who found it difficult to settle on the first visit. These sessions were not compulsory for all children, with many parents choosing to opt out of this: the nursery could consider making these sessions compulsory so that all children and their parents/guardians benefit from the time to settle and become familiar with the staff and the setting.

Guidance of best practice provided by Birth to 5 Matters (Early Years Coalition, 2021) stipulates that periods of transition should not be seen as an event but as a process, and that transition points should afford opportunities for professionals and parents to engage in dialogue that includes all individuals who may have worked with the child, for example parents, speech and language therapists, health visitors. Only through these conversations are early years professionals able to plan and adequately prepare to support the child's individual needs within the setting. It was indicated through the staff surveys that the nursery currently does not offer home visits to incoming children. Best practice encourages practitioners to facilitate the transition to nursery by visiting children in familiar settings where they feel most secure. It is here that children can then observe parents and practitioners developing warm and positive relationships. Based on this guidance, we encourage the board of trustees to support the nursery managers in developing a clear transition programme that tracks the child's learning journey prior to joining the setting. Parents and practitioners bring different types of knowledge and expertise to the table. Parents have knowledge about their child's unique needs and experiences, while practitioners have expertise in child development and early years education. By working together, parents and practitioners can share their knowledge and create a more comprehensive picture of the child's needs and abilities well in advance of the first day.

3) Diversity and inclusion – language and culture

A common theme throughout the staff surveys and focus groups was that the nursery is home to a range of children from a variety of backgrounds, many of whom do not speak English as their first language. Based on the combined findings we have identified two key areas for the nursery to consider as part of their future provision: i) the need for specialised staff with expertise in diverse languages and SEN, and ii) the adoption of regular family events which speak to the celebrations of key religious or cultural events commensurate with the needs of the families that attend Burmantofts.

i) Specialised staff

Practitioners should recognize and celebrate the diversity of families and cultures in their setting and seek to create an inclusive environment where all families feel welcome and

valued (DfE, 2021; Early Years Coalition, 2021). Practitioners should involve parents in decision-making about their child's learning and development and seek to understand and respect their preferences and values. (DfE, 2021a; Early Years Coalition, 2021). Developing a positive view of oneself is fundamental to every child's ability to learn and engage effectively with their world (GOV.UK, 2023a). A critical part of developing our identity comes from understanding both ourselves and the people around us. A more inclusive approach to diversity within the nursery would enhance the service, making it feel welcoming and familiar to a range of diverse groups through the environment and everyday practice (GOV.UK, 2023b). Where possible, new staff should have the ability to speak multiple languages and/or have expertise in supporting SEN to meet the requirements of the nursery. We also consider it preferential for the nursery to establish its own internal process for managing SEN referrals, so that children are receiving timely and appropriate support.

ii) Family events

The parents spoke passionately about wanting to be part of the nursery, commenting that they would value the provision of events that were tailored to key cultural festivals and celebrations of the local community that they could join. To enhance the multicultural environment of the nursery, planned and regular opportunities for the parents to come into the setting or provide feedback through the establishment of a parent committee would allow the practice and pedagogy of Burmantofts to recognise and promote multiculturalism without being tokenistic. The development of these events, activities and celebrations would also allow the creation of a community of inclusion within the nursery itself and across the wider community.

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