

development of any topic; posters, toys, art materials, songs, web sites etc. The pre-school room has an interactive whiteboard. Each room displays children's activities in digital photographs and high-quality children's art work. Learning plans are also written up on the whiteboard in each room; for reference, additions and parents' information.

Experience

Carole Westcott is the senior team leader working in the three and a half to four-year-olds' room, having been an NNEB for many years, and this shows – in the nicest possible way! She has the gloss of calm that comes through high professional competence and respect for children. She has done every topic before, in many ways, but each time finds a new angle that suits a particular child or group. Children are from many faith and racial groups, and in this nursery we see a true integration.

Ms Westcott is keen to celebrate all faiths and festivals. For recent Eid celebrations, she and the team wore beautiful saris (dressed by one of the grandmothers), Indian delicacies were made and eaten, photographs taken and yet another book produced.



She records children's experiences in words and pictures to make the book meaningful. As part of the home/nursery liaison, parents write any home achievements on speech bubble post-its and children bring them to post in their own achievements pocket, identified by a photo.

Vital issues: boys

Although children's welfare and educational needs are highly individual, Ms Thompson's experience has shown her that the needs of boys' can really differ from those of girls. Boys tend to need more rules and definition of boundaries. Generally speaking, they focus intensely on single short tasks, and require a great deal of physical involvement, whereas girls tend to be more contemplative and can approach longer tasks. Therefore, boys may need more time outdoors, or to carry out more practical tasks if needed for a group project or individual play.

The day I visited, a group of the pre-school boys were building a space rocket outdoors. Deputy manager, Amanda Twigley (who has a floating role) was manning a Fire Station outside with some little boys, and was there for the long haul.

Apart from enjoying play, Ms Twigley has a Foundation degree in Early Years and Childhood studies and is working on a BA, encouraged by Ms Thompson, who needs a highly qualified deputy. Ms Twigley finds children very interesting, 'You can go wild with your ideas, then the children want to be involved. I like seeing the children achieving more and more. When you see what they can do after a time here, it is amazing.'

Vital issues: safeguarding

Safeguarding is a fundamental requirement for Ms Thompson and her team. All staff are trained in Paediatric First Aid and everyone will be taking a new LEA course on Safeguarding this year. Children are constantly supervised, all entry to the nursery's two-story building is by invitation only, and visitors have to have advanced disclosure.

Webcam

As part of safeguarding, there is a webcam in each room, which transmits still pictures, refreshed every ten minutes. This can only be viewed by parents with a unique password and they can also speak to their children on the phone for any reason. Both could be seen as unnecessary refinements, but not only does this reassure parents during the day, it also reaffirms the setting's commitment to quality care, which can be seen at all times – transparent accountability.

The children

Bright as buttons. Delightful, interested in everything, approachable but that little bit wary of a stranger, politely confident, energetic, totally happy.

The building

To die for. State of the art, it is bright and colourful, very

clean, and very organised. Each room is spacious with its own sleep/quiet areas, bathroom, play areas with separate outdoor play areas for the toddlers and babies and pre-schoolers. There is a basket of fresh fruit at the reception for anyone, anytime and very warm greetings from Janet Mellor, the receptionist. The 'Harrods' of settings.

Connecting with parents

Ms Thompson and her staff are especially good at relationships. She knows that, as the children spend a huge part of their time with nursery staff, parents must be confident that they are treated with kindness and love by people that they feel they can relate to. It is this rapport that Ms Thompson has with parents; she appreciates how precious their children are.

A message to the minister for education

I ask Ms Thompson, if she could speak to the minister, what would she say? Her answer is passionate: 'Do not change the *Early Years Foundation Stage*. It has given a consistency and continuity to the way we teach children from birth to five-years-old, and improved everyone's way of thinking about children.'

Simply quality

The staff in this setting could relax, doing the minimum while still caring for the children very well, but they do not; they want to develop the children to their fullest potential, they want to improve their own knowledge and delivery, and do their jobs better.

Is this setting a world of privilege? No, it is a world of the highest quality care from committed professionals who enjoy their work immensely.

Rhona Whiteford, teacher and author.