

# Bolton School Nursery

The staff at Bolton School Nursery in Lancashire are passionate, caring, and committed wholeheartedly to the children under their care; one of the driving forces perhaps, behind the reason it was rated 'Outstanding' by Ofsted. Rhona Whiteford investigates.

## Where little stars shine

The single quality that distinguishes excellent settings from the average or poor, and which all great settings have in abundance, is the enthusiasm and expertise of their staff. Although this nursery has a breathtaking building and every imaginable facility, it would be nothing without the people who run it and love every second of their work. On the front of the building is the setting's name, 'Bolton School Nursery', and beneath that is the strap line, 'Where little stars shine'—no exaggeration, thanks to its outstanding staff.

## Massive reputation

Bolton borders the West Pennine Moors and catches chill winter winds. It is a busy Northern town with a large population of British Asians as well as people from Western Europe. The nursery, however, has a very wide catchment area, due to its reputation. It caters for 84 children from birth to four-years-old. Although it is a private day nursery, and so comes under Ofsted as well as the Independent Schools Inspectorate, it is part of Bolton School, a large Independent School of high academic repute, pre-eminent in the Northwest. It has an infant school and separate sex junior and senior schools on its beautiful 32-acre site on the outskirts of town. An ISI inspection in May 2010 classified the nursery, Beech House (the Infant school) and Kidzone (the out-of-school club) as 'Outstanding', offering 'highly effective teaching' that 'nurtures lively, independent minds, personal confidence and respect for

others'. Although nursery children do not automatically transfer to the Infant School, this is undoubtedly the vital foundation of their future learning. If they do, they join a massively popular school that consistently inspires very high achievement. It all begins in the nursery.

## The inspiration

Claire Thompson has been the nursery manager since 2001 and has every quality you would want in such a post; she loves young children, she can really communicate with them and, just as importantly, with parents and staff. Her enthusiastic vision means she is constantly broadening horizons for children and staff. She believes in empowering people by giving them responsibility for, and ownership of, the environment they work in, and believes passionately that continued professional development fires such commitment. Staff constantly update their knowledge and skills, inspired by her enthusiasm for learning. She has two young boys of her own, she is young, smart, very well educated and, as well as a BA in Professional Development, she has a Foundation Degree in Management of Early Years, EYPS, Child Protection Management, First Aid, and more.

## Respect and confidence

She is keen to give staff a chance to shine themselves, saying, 'The most important thing in any establishment, despite all the fantastic resources and tools, is the staff. They are worth their weight in gold. You

cannot manage without the support of an enthusiastic and knowledgeable team,' adding, on a personal note, 'If you love your job, like I do, you put everything into it each day, for the benefit of others'.

This sort of vision does inspire close team work, and enthusiasm is contagious. Her staff have the knowledge and confidence to speak out about anything, knowing, through mutual respect, that opinions will be studied and valued.

Ms Thompson is passionate about training and has booked several courses for the spring, some delivered in-house by her, and others outsourced. Courses include Leadership and Management, Critical Thinking and Perception, Early Years Training and Development.

## Approachability and keen minds

In many settings, the quality of the staff varies, but not here.

They are all beyond excellent. Each of the five age-grouped rooms has a team leader and a deputy and several nursery nurses, and, after an initial tour and introductions, Ms Thompson allowed me to talk to all of the staff. Every one of them was extremely approachable and spoke eagerly about their charges and their work. They varied in age and experience, and there was a young man on staff too.

All knew a great deal about their children and had up-to-date knowledge of individuals' care and educational plan, as well as a detailed familiarity with the learning plans for the group. Each team plans topics weekly, but responds daily to any child-led ideas, and there is much evidence of such ideas being cleverly developed to meet the Early Learning Goals. One nursery nurse, Paula Mason, is project coordinator and her job is to find resources and ideas for

