

BEHIND THE INSPECTION RATING

Nails and bug-hunts win approval

Broughton Pre-School, Broughton, Lancashire | early years provision inspection | October 2011

By Tristan Donovan

Handing real hammers and real nails to under-fives? It might sound like a recipe for disaster, but for Broughton Pre-School it's part of a recipe for Ofsted success. The Lancashire pre-school landed full marks when Ofsted visited last October and its belief in using real-life objects played an important role in that success.

"We do this with lots of resources," says Elizabeth Hanson, deputy lead early years educator at Broughton. "We have real hammers and real nails and, obviously, it's supervised and risk-assessed but they are the real tools that children see adults use and they take to it. It's more sensory and engaging for the children."

The same philosophy also means they use real one- and two-pence coins when encouraging the children to play "shop", an approach to which Ofsted gave an approving nod. "It has more meaning to the children because that's what they see being used," says Hanson.

Forest school learning

Broughton's commitment to the real is also reflected in its use of forest school ideas, which the pre-school believes encourages children to be more responsible for each other and themselves.

Twice a week in winter and more often in the summer months, children are taken out to a wooded area that is just a short walk from its building.

"We operate forest school learning within our nursery," says Hanson. "It's a very informal way of learning that a lot of children respond to. There's no sitting down – it's learning through the environment: we do a lot of bug



Outdoor education offers children a chance to explore their environment

hunting and we have little fires. It's a real hands-on experience."

She adds that even though Broughton has a garden of its own, the woods add value to children's learning.

"We do have a little garden here but in the woods the bugs are really in their natural habitat," she says. "It's not staged – it's real."

Hanson says it's vitally important to make staff comfortable with such outdoor activities: "It's no good having staff thinking it's too dirty or too cold or whatever. We have suitable clothing for the staff so they don't feel uncomfortable – we've got waterproof trousers and wellies for them to wear. We find that

FACT FILE

- Location: Broughton, Lancashire
- Number of children: 79 on roll, up to 30 per session
- Description: Broughton Pre-School is run by its own pre-school committee and has been operating for more than 40 years in the village of Broughton, near Preston. Its single-storey building is used by other community groups outside its opening hours of 7.45am to 5.30pm during term-time weekdays. It caters for all children including those with special educational needs, disabilities and for those who have English as a second language.
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if something is too onerous a task it usually doesn't work."

Ofsted's praise wasn't confined to Broughton's direct work with the children – the inspector also praised the pre-school's "meticulously detailed" learning journals.

The journals provide a daily record of the individual journey of each child. As well as comments from staff they include photographs of what the children did and allow parents and children to add comments.

"After seeing learning journals in other nurseries I think we do ours quite thoroughly," says Hanson.

"We print proper-sized photographs on photo paper and it creates a nice document to look at. I don't think parents want to read reams of writing, they want to look at a nice picture that tells a story. It's expensive to create but we feel it's invaluable. A lot of children have come back and said they still look at theirs as a reminder of their time here."

HELPFUL HINTS

- **Treat children as individuals and tailor activities to suit their needs.** "Every child is an individual and they do need different paths," says Hanson. "We identify children's interests and learning styles through observations, their learning journey and parent partnerships."
- **Share expertise with other settings.** Broughton encourages staff to visit and learn from other settings and lets other local nurseries come to see the work it does. All of which helps make training cheaper and quicker while

helping staff come back with fresh ideas to implement at the pre-school. "It's good for staff too," adds Hanson. "They enjoy going to look at other nurseries."

- **Double-up on key workers.** Each child is assigned one of Broughton's seven employees as their key worker but the pre-school also assigns a deputy keyworker to each child. This means that more staff have a deeper knowledge about each child and that there is always a key worker available.