

Ofsted Inspectors EIF information (point 21/22) Leadership during Covid at The LJS Nursery School

21. Inspectors will seek to understand how leaders maintained an ambitious vision for providing high quality, inclusive care and education to all children and how they have supported their provision through the pandemic. To do this, they will need to determine how:

Support was put in place for children's learning at home.

Prior to closure for the first lockdown March 2020, we worked hard to support parents who were too nervous about Covid, to bring their children into nursery, despite our reassurance and stringent precautions. We kept in very regular touch with these families, listening and offering emotional support plus ideas and resources for play and learning.

The lockdown began just before the Easter holidays, but the staff team worked tirelessly through the holiday to set up a virtual school from scratch. We created daily online work groups for each class so they could continue to plan and create learning and play virtually, there were also regular meetings of the whole team to problem solve, share ideas and to and ensure staff well-being was maintained.

We obtained three new school laptops and a designated mobile phone to facilitate secure communication with parents and children by the headteacher and the deputy.

We set up a secure Vimeo account so parents and children could access a wide range of educational videos made by the team for contact and learning. This included greetings from the teachers, Music, Cookery, Storytime, exercise, Yoga, French, Spanish, outdoor learning, Science experiments, Festival celebrations and drama. The setting up, filming and editing of the videos took many hours at home and great ingenuity, but they were much appreciated by the parents and children. We have also used these videos since school reopened for face-to-face classroom learning in June 2020.

We sent out e-mail posts to parents every nursery day throughout the lockdown and beyond, many with visual aids such as how to set up your own nursery at home, psychological advice, potty training and home routine advice, Art projects, play themes, recipes, Maths and Literacy activities, Knowledge of the World, Science and nature learning. The Reception class were offered daily planned curriculum and phone and online support to continue their learning, plus the full range of materials available to the whole school. This later moved to live teaching online.

The nursery office continued to operate virtually for parent support and future admissions, the headteacher and deputy were on hand to speak to parents and play with children in supervised FaceTime or to have StarLeaf meetings, which we chose as it was more secure than Zoom. We continued to support the school applications process and had one of our most successful years in gaining places at the selective schools.

Not all the children were able to return when we reopened in June 2020 as some were outside the UK or in the countryside and some families were shielding. We continued to offer a virtual school up until April 2021, to stay in touch, FaceTime, meet online and join live lessons and Shabbat from the school building.

Vulnerable children including those with SEND were kept safe and encouraged to attend our provision.

All the children were encouraged to attend who were at home, special support was given to those shielding, single parents and children with extra needs. This included, adapted play and learning, regular personal calls and support from the head and one to one FaceTime and StarLeaf contact.

We continued to be in touch with parents, SEN therapists and Speech and Language services, this enabled us to continue our work and learning plans for the return.

All the children were supported with return and resettling, particularly those who had become nervous of touch and social contact because of the pandemic.

Parents and carers were kept up to date with developments and changes.

Our headteacher pre-empted the emerging pandemic in January 2020, she started to integrate precautions into our operation early, including a high level of barrier hygiene, health precautions for children and staff, a new food handling protocol, social distancing for staff prior to it being introduced and regular parent updates, useful information and our response to the pandemic.

Parents were kept in touch by personal calls and group e-mails all the way through an ever-changing situation and we were open about our rationale for introducing precautions to keep our community safe.

We required all parents and carers to agree to a clear home/school agreement for health, quarantine, distancing, mask wearing etc. We fully explained the changes we were required to introduce from the Department of Education and how that would impact our school operation.

Prior to our reopening in June 2020 and the start of the new school year in September 2021 we sent parents a detailed document covering everything from health precautions and keeping our bubbles separate to how we were going to support the children socially, developmentally and educationally.

We had detailed conversations to support the circumstances of each family and child regarding, health advice, travel, separation, parents working from home and the impact the pandemic had on mental health.

We arranged one to one short visits with children and a parent prior to reintegration to reassure children and parents.

How COVID-19 restrictions may have disrupted any development or improvement plans.

We have creatively surmounted all the challenges Covid brought to our school, using them as opportunities for our development and improvement plan by balancing the risks and rewards.

For instance, the amalgamation of Nursery 2 and Reception means our Reception teacher has been able to support early readers, phonics and circle time in Nursery 2 and our Nursery 2 leader has supported the Reception children with their return to play and socialisation.

Thorough ongoing risk assessment helped the staff have a clear idea of where the risks and the Covid boundaries lay. The rewards have included mastering technology more creatively, building strong partnerships with parents, learning virtual teaching skills, extending class 2 learning by amalgamating with Reception, staff taking training courses at home, a very high standard of cleaning and health and fantastic team working. We focused on completing essential training courses such as First Aid and Level 3 Safeguarding and Prevent for all.

How COVID-19 related staff absence may have impacted on the running of the provision.

The Nursery has very high staffing ratios and from June 2020 we kept all available staff on duty despite our numbers being lower, to cover any sickness or quarantine. We were very cautious with the staff and children's health keeping them at home if there was any health question. A few teachers caught Covid at the start of the first lockdown once school had closed and one in the school holidays from a flatmate. There was one bubble closure only in term time which was reported to Ofsted, so the two teachers concerned were able to return with the whole bubble after quarantine. Therefore, ratios were maintained at all times.

How staff and children's well-being have been promoted throughout this period.

Staff were supported both professionally and personally by the head teacher, special allowances were made for single parents, staff who lived alone and those with elderly parents, young children and family members who were ill. Very regular support calls and counselling were gratefully received, staff members with Covid were called every day and offered support including shopping, until they recovered. The whole staff team kept an eye on each other, and we met daily online. Two teachers who are from Europe were given time off to travel home (when permitted) and to quarantine afterwards at Christmas.

The children were our top priority and we worked closely with their parents to support them during lockdown, with advice from our psychologist, supervised playdates online with the head and deputy and our virtual school with daily posts and videos. We planned their gradual return with individual reintroduction visits, addressing any anxieties. The curriculum was kept play based and creative with extensive outdoor play and activities to make up for social and physical constraints the children had experienced.

The children have reached and exceeded our expectations for a normal school year, and this is testament to our whole community, children, teachers and parents who have worked together as a close team to support each other. We are now planning and rehearsing for a lovely outdoor graduation ceremony for our nursery leavers before the end of term.