



Balnamill Little Learners

Est.2024

# PRE SCHOOL HANDBOOK



## Balnamill Little Learners

Est.2024



Welcome to Balnamill Little Learners, nestled in the heart of Balnamore village and situated in the grounds of Balnamore Primary School. We are thrilled to embark on our inaugural year and to extend our warmest welcome to you and your family.

At Balnamill Little Learners, our vision is simple yet profound: to provide a nurturing environment where children can flourish and grow, laying a solid foundation for their educational journey ahead. We are committed to seamlessly transitioning our pupils from preschool into primary one, ensuring a smooth and successful start to their formal education.

Our core purpose is to create a love for learning, curiosity, and creativity in each child. We believe in the importance of early years education as a critical stage in a child's development, shaping their cognitive, social, emotional, and physical skills. Through play-based learning, hands-on activities, and engaging experiences, we aim to ignite a lifelong passion for learning in our little learners.

At Balnamill Little Learners, our experienced team of staff and pastoral team are dedicated to creating a child-centered environment where every child is valued, supported, and celebrated. Our team is committed to understanding and addressing the individual needs of each pupil, ensuring that they feel safe, respected, and empowered to reach their full potential.

We take great pride in our strong links between the pre-school, Balnamore Primary School, and the wider community. These connections enable us to provide a holistic approach to education, enriching our pupils' learning experiences both inside and outside the classroom. By allowing collaboration, communication, and partnership, we create a supportive network that enhances the educational journey of every child.

We invite you to join us on this exciting adventure at Balnamill Little Learners. Together, we will lay the groundwork for a bright and promising future for your child.

Welcome to our preschool family!

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# Letter from Principal

**Balnamill Little Learners**

80 Balnamore Road

Balnamore

BALLYMONEY

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BT53 7PT

Dear Parent/Guardian,

I am delighted to extend a warm welcome to you and your child as you embark on this exciting journey with us at Balnamill Little Learners.

Our morning session, running from 9:00 am to 12:00 pm, promises enriching learning experiences within a nurturing environment for your child.

Enclosed within this prospectus, you will find essential information detailing our policies, procedures, and expectations. Additionally, an order form for school uniform is also provided should you wish to purchase any items.

Uniforms and induction packs will be available for collection from the pre-school. Further details regarding collection dates and times will be communicated to you in due course. Your child's induction time and start date will be included in the induction packs for your reference.

As we prepare for the new academic year, we plan to hold induction sessions at the end of August, providing an opportunity for you and your child to familiarise yourselves with our pre-school environment and meet our dedicated staff members.

I am eager to collaborate with you and your child, laying the foundation for a bright and promising future together. At Balnamill Little Learners, we are committed to providing a supportive and nurturing learning environment where every child can thrive and reach their full potential.

Once again, welcome to our pre-school family! I am excited to embark on this journey with you and look forward to getting to know you and your child better in the coming days.

Yours sincerely,

SWJ Mulligan  
Associate Principal  
Balnamill Little Learners



## Application Process

We are excited to announce that we are currently accepting applications for the academic year 2024/2025 at Balnamill Little Learners. Children eligible for enrolment must have a birthday falling between 2nd July 2020 and 1st July 2021 inclusive.

Parents can easily apply online using our dedicated application form, which is accessible on our website. This streamlined process allows you to register your child for a pre-school place conveniently from the comfort of your own home.

Additionally, we warmly invite families to attend our open day at Balnamill Little Learners. This event provides an excellent opportunity to explore our learning environment firsthand, meet our dedicated staff members, and learn more about our curriculum and approach to early childhood education.

Please note that we operate on a limited number of spaces, with only 10 fully funded pre-school places available at Balnamill Little Learners.

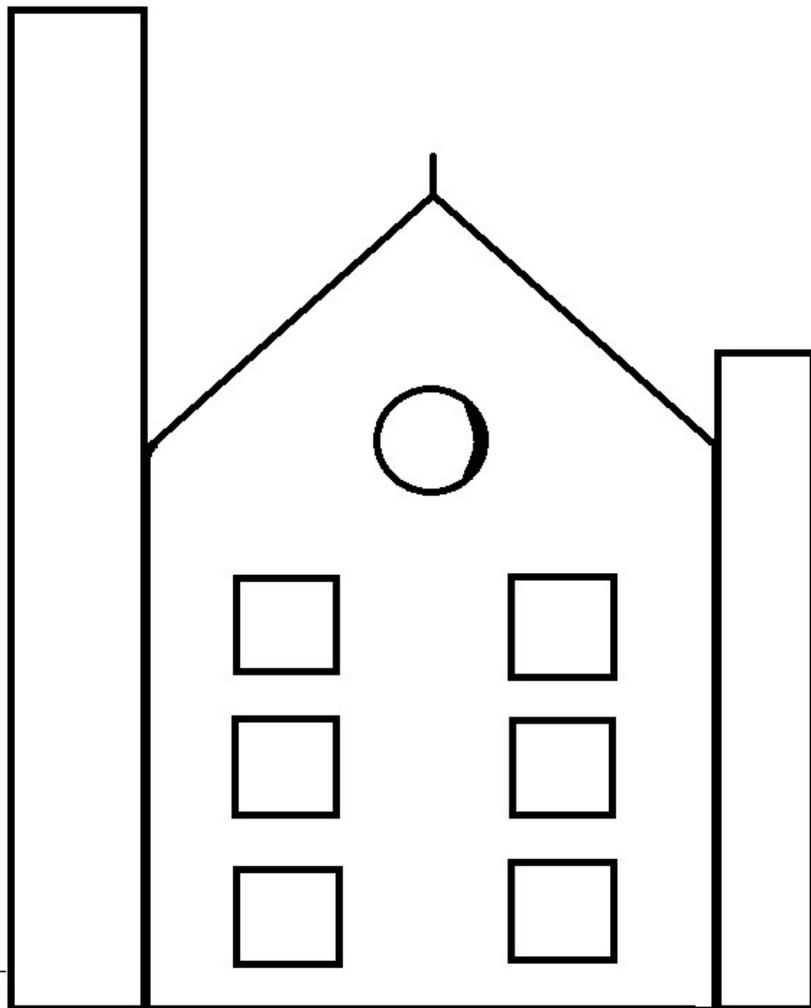


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We encourage interested families to submit their applications promptly to secure a place for their child at Balnamill Little Learners. Should you have any questions or require further information, please do not hesitate to contact us. We look forward to welcoming your child into our pre-school community and embarking on this exciting educational journey together.



# My Pre School Picture



We know that a school prospectus can be quite the adventure, so we've added a special activity just for you. Unleash your creativity and make this book your own!

On this page, you'll find our school logo waiting to be brought to life with your favourite colours. Whether you choose bold and bright hues or soft shades, let your imagination soar as you colour in our logo and make it uniquely yours. It's a fun way to start your journey with us and add some excitement to your first day at pre school. So grab your crayons and get started!





## Structure and Organisation

The Principal will oversee the overall management and operation of the pre-school.

Pre-school staff will be responsible for planning and implementing the curriculum, as well as helping with activities to improve the child's development.

## Type of Provision

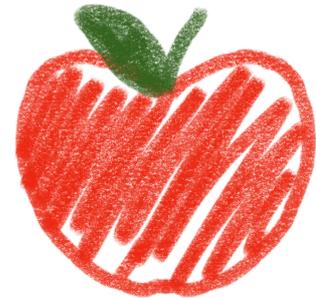
Pre-School

## Age Range

3-4 years old

## Numbers

10



The pre-school offers part-time sessions five days a week, providing flexibility for parents and ensuring regular engagement for children. With sessions running from 9:00 am to 12:00 noon, each morning is structured to maximise learning opportunities while accommodating the developmental needs and attention spans of young learners. This schedule allows for a balance of structured activities, free play, and social interaction in a nurturing environment.

At Balnamill Little Learners, our vision is to create a nurturing and inclusive environment where every child feels valued, inspired, and empowered to reach their full potential. We believe in creating a love for learning through play-based experiences that stimulate curiosity, creativity, and critical thinking skills.

### **Our Pre-School Values**

**Respect:** We value and honour the dignity, beliefs, and opinions of every individual within our school community, promoting kindness, empathy, and consideration for others.

**Resilience:** We encourage resilience, perseverance, and a growth mindset, equipping pupils with the skills and mindset to overcome challenges, learn from setbacks, and adapt to change with confidence and determination.

**Community:** We value community spirit, inclusivity, and active participation, creating a sense of belonging, pride, and responsibility for the well-being and success of our school community.

**Inclusion:** We embrace diversity and promote a culture of belonging where every individual feels valued, respected, and supported. We celebrate differences, cultivate empathy, and strive to create an inclusive environment where all pupils, staff, and families are welcomed, accepted, and empowered to participate fully in school life.

**Nurturing:** We prioritise the social, emotional, and holistic development of every child, providing a nurturing and supportive environment where they feel safe, cared for, and encouraged to explore, learn, and grow.

**Happiness:** We believe that happiness is essential for well-being and success in learning. We cultivate a positive and joyful atmosphere where laughter, play, and enthusiasm are encouraged.

### **Commitment to Equality and Diversity**

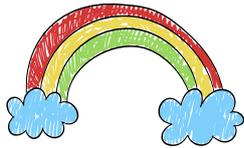
We are dedicated to promoting equality, diversity, and inclusion in all aspects of our community. We celebrate the uniqueness of each child and family, recognising that diversity enriches our learning environment and enhances our understanding of the world. We are committed to providing equal opportunities for all children regardless of their background, ethnicity, religion, ability, or socio-economic status. Our curriculum reflects diverse perspectives, cultures, and experiences, creating empathy, tolerance, and respect for others. Through our inclusive practices and partnerships with families and the wider community, we strive to create a welcoming and supportive environment where every child can thrive and succeed.



# Learning Environment

We pride ourselves on offering a new, bright learning space designed to inspire and engage young minds. With a focus on safety, care, and active participation, our qualified staff provide a wealth of support and appropriate resources to meet the diverse needs of each child. Through the medium of play, children are encouraged to take ownership of their learning experiences. Our carefully planned play activities create a stimulating environment where development flourishes and imaginations soar. Both indoors and outdoors, children have the freedom to investigate, explore, and share in the wonders of books, music, and drama. Success is celebrated, and a positive attitude towards learning is cultivated at every turn. Our preschool boasts a bright classroom, a recently opened sensory room, and a multipurpose hall area shared with the wider school community. In this space, activities such as music, physical development, and circle time come alive. Our outdoor learning spaces are equally valued, recognising the importance of nature in nurturing young learners. Here, budding gardeners, explorers, scientists, chefs, storytellers and more find inspiration both indoors and out, catering to the diverse learning styles and interests of all our pupils.





# Curriculum



We follow the Northern Ireland Pre School Curricular Guidance to ensure that our curriculum is broad, balanced, and developmentally appropriate. We believe in providing children with opportunities to explore and learn through play and other experiences, allowing them to make choices and develop essential skills across various domains. Our curriculum focuses on the following key areas:

**Personal, Social, and Emotional Development:** We prioritise the well-being and social skills of our pupils, building positive relationships, self-confidence, and emotional resilience through activities that promote sharing, cooperation, and empathy.

**Physical Development and Movement:** We provide opportunities for children to develop their gross and fine motor skills, coordination, and spatial awareness through indoor and outdoor activities, including active play, games, and structured movement sessions.

**The Arts:** We encourage creativity, self-expression, and appreciation for the arts through activities such as painting, drawing, music, dance, drama, and storytelling, allowing children to explore their imagination and develop their artistic talents.

**Language Development:** We support language acquisition and communication skills through engaging activities such as storytelling, rhymes, songs, and conversations, creating a rich language environment that promotes vocabulary development, listening, and speaking skills.

**Early Mathematical Experiences:** We introduce foundational mathematical concepts such as counting, sorting, patterns, shapes, and measurements through hands-on activities, games, and manipulatives, creating mathematical thinking and problem-solving skills.

**The World Around Us:** We encourage curiosity and exploration of the world, including nature, science, technology, and the local community, through hands-on experiences, experiments, class trips, and discussions, nurturing children's understanding of their environment and creating a sense of wonder and curiosity about the world.

Additionally, our curriculum remains flexible to incorporate any other relevant topics or interests that emerge within the classroom, ensuring that learning remains meaningful, engaging, and responsive to the needs and interests of our pupils. Through our comprehensive and holistic approach to curriculum delivery, we aim to lay a solid foundation for lifelong learning and success in our pupils' educational journey.

# Record Keeping/Assessment



At Balnamill Little Learners, we prioritise thorough record-keeping and assessment to ensure the individual needs and progress of each child are met. Our staff are continuously engaged in observing, recording, and evaluating children's development as they engage in play and learning activities. This valuable information guides us in planning suitable and enriching experiences tailored to their interests and developmental stages. We encourage open communication and collaboration with parents, welcoming their input and feedback on their child's growth and experiences. To facilitate this partnership, we hold parent liason meetings twice a year, providing an opportunity for in-depth discussions about each child's progress. Additionally, we utilise the school DOJO app as a convenient platform for recording children's achievements and activities throughout their time at preschool. With parental approval, this app offers an online learning journey for each child, allowing parents to stay informed, engaged, and involved in their child's educational journey by viewing and commenting on their experiences at Balnamill Little Learners. We adhere strictly to General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) guidelines to safeguard the privacy and security of personal data collected, ensuring that all information is handled confidentially and securely.



# Positive Behaviour



At Balamill Little Learners, we believe in building a positive and supportive environment where children can develop essential social and emotional skills while cultivating respect, responsibility, and self-discipline. Our approach to positive behaviour management is deeply rooted in research-based strategies and evidence-based practices, ensuring that every child receives the necessary support and guidance to thrive.

One of the cornerstones of our positive behaviour management strategy is the implementation of the Golden Rules. These rules, which are prominently displayed within our classroom and reinforced through daily interactions, provide clear expectations for behaviour and promote values such as kindness, and respect. By consistently modelling and reinforcing these rules, we create a culture of mutual respect and understanding where children feel empowered to make positive choices and take ownership of their actions.

Furthermore, our commitment to positive behaviour management extends beyond the classroom walls. We recognise the importance of collaboration and communication with parents and caregivers in supporting children's social and emotional development. To facilitate this partnership, we hold regular parent liaison meetings where we discuss each child's progress, strengths, and areas for growth. Additionally, we provide resources and guidance to parents on how they can reinforce positive behaviours and promote consistency between home and school environments.

In addition to our proactive approach to behaviour management, we also prioritise the use of evidence-based strategies for addressing challenging behaviours when they arise. Our staff are trained in techniques such as positive reinforcement, redirection, and conflict resolution, allowing us to effectively support children in developing alternative, more positive behaviours. We also recognise the importance of individualised support and intervention, tailoring our approach to meet the unique needs and circumstances of each child.

To further enhance our positive behaviour management practices, we regularly monitor and evaluate our strategies to ensure their effectiveness. We collect data on behaviour incidents, observe trends, and solicit feedback from staff, parents, and children to identify areas for improvement. By continuously reflecting on our practices and making data-driven adjustments, we strive to create an environment where all children feel safe, valued, and supported in their social and emotional development.

# Children With Additional Needs



At Balamill Little Learners, we are committed to inclusivity, ensuring that children with additional educational needs are welcomed and supported in every possible circumstance. Our Learning Support Coordinator plays a central role in coordinating provision for these pupils, but all staff members are dedicated to providing the necessary support to integrate each child as fully as possible within the group. This means ensuring access to the same materials, activities, and experiences as their peers in the class. With parental permission, we collaborate with outside agencies to tailor our approach and provide the most effective support for each child's unique needs.



We are proud to offer a range of resources and facilities to support children with additional needs, including our sensory room. This dedicated space provides a calming environment where children can explore and engage with sensory experiences that promote relaxation, concentration, and emotional regulation. Additionally, our preschool environment is designed to be inclusive and accommodating, with adaptable furniture, visual aids, and sensory materials available throughout.

If you have a child with additional needs, we encourage you to get in touch with us at the time of applying. This allows us to have an open dialogue about your child's individual requirements and any agencies currently involved with their care. By working together, we can ensure that your child receives the support and resources they need to thrive and succeed at Balamill Little Learners.

# Pastoral Care



At Balnamill Little Learners, we prioritise the well-being and safety of every child in our care through our comprehensive pastoral care approach. Our dedicated Safeguarding team, led by Mr. Mulligan (Associate Principal), ensures the implementation and adherence to our Safeguarding and Intimate Care policies. These policies are readily available for review on our school website and in our pre-school welcome pack, providing transparency and assurance to parents and guardians.

All staff and volunteers undergo rigorous background checks through Access NI, and clear guidelines are established to govern their interactions with the children. In instances where a child may require assistance with changing clothes due to a toileting accident, staff seek parental permission beforehand, as indicated on our Child Protection Permission Form.

To maintain the utmost standards of hygiene and safety, our staff follow current Education Authority guidelines, wearing appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) such as gloves, aprons, masks, and visors during intimate care procedures. We prioritise the comfort and dignity of each child, ensuring they are aware of these measures and their importance. On their first day of pre-school, we introduce these practices to the children, emphasising the importance of familiarity and understanding in promoting a safe and nurturing environment for all.

# Health & Safety



Ensuring the health and safety of your child is our top priority at Balnamill Little Learners. We maintain a clean and healthy environment where children can thrive and flourish. Our staff members are trained in anaphylaxis management and the use of inhalers to address any medical emergencies effectively. It's crucial for us to be aware of any medical issues your child may have to ensure their safety and well-being. Please don't hesitate to reach out to us if you have any concerns or wish to discuss your child's medical needs.

To create a safe environment for all, we operate as a nut-free school. This measure helps protect both our staff and children, especially those with known allergies, from potential risks. We appreciate your cooperation in adhering to this policy.



In the event of accidents, our permanent staff members are paediatric first aid trained to provide immediate care and support. We will inform parents about any minor accidents at the time of collection, and in the case of a major accident, we will contact you immediately. Your child's safety and well-being are paramount, and we are committed to maintaining a safe and nurturing environment at Balnamill Little Learners.



# Admissions

At Balnamill Little Learners, we understand the transition from home to pre-school can be a significant step for both you and your child, often accompanied by feelings of anxiety and worry. That's why we strive to make this transition as smooth and trouble-free as possible. We recognise the importance of providing support and reassurance during this time of change.

To help alleviate concerns and familiarise families with our pre-school environment, we organise induction sessions at the beginning of the new school year. During these sessions, parents are encouraged to bring their children to sample the preschool setting, meet other parents and children who will be in their class, and become acquainted with our facilities and routines. These sessions provide an opportunity for families to ask questions, address any concerns, and start building connections within our school community.

As part of our admissions arrangements, all families who have been allocated a place with us will receive updated information about these induction sessions closer to the time. Our aim is to provide a welcoming and supportive environment where both you and your child feel comfortable and confident as you embark on this new chapter together at Balnamill Little Learners.

## School Uniform



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We offer a school uniform option for children who wish to wear it. Our uniform consists of a blue school sweatshirt paired with a comfortable yellow polo shirt. These items are available for purchase directly from the school, providing families with convenient access to uniform essentials. While wearing the school uniform is optional, many children enjoy the sense of belonging and unity it brings to our preschool community. We believe that the uniform helps instill a sense of pride and identity among our pupils while building a cohesive and inclusive learning environment.

# Healthy Snacks



At Balnamill Little Learners, we prioritise promoting healthy eating habits among our pupils, recognising the significant impact it can have on their overall development and well-being. Research consistently shows that a balanced diet plays a crucial role in supporting children's growth, cognitive function, and behaviour.



Our pre-school ensures that appropriate healthy foods are readily available to the children, emphasising options rich in nutrients and low in added sugars and unhealthy fats. We offer choices like fresh fruits, vegetables, whole grain crackers, and dairy products, along with the option of milk or water for hydration. Water is also easily accessible to children within the classroom, allowing children to stay hydrated throughout the day.



We understand the importance of catering to children's individual dietary needs and allergies. Parents are encouraged to inform us of any allergies or dietary requirements their child may have, enabling us to accommodate their needs accordingly. Our staff members are trained to recognise and manage food allergies, and we take proactive measures to ensure the safety of all children in our care.

By providing healthy snacks and promoting nutritious eating habits, we aim to support children's physical health, cognitive development, and overall well-being at Balnamill Little Learners. We believe that instilling healthy eating habits from a young age sets the foundation for a lifetime of good health and wellness.



# Voluntary School Fund



At Balamill Little Learners, we are incredibly grateful for the private funding that has allowed us to waive a daily attendance fee for our debut start-up year. However, to sustain and enhance the quality of our preschool program, we kindly suggest a voluntary contribution of £30 for one child, and an extra £10 per additional child attending, towards our school funds. This contribution plays a crucial role in supporting various aspects of our preschool experience, including providing daily snacks for the children to enjoy with their milk, organising baking activities, hosting parties, inviting visiting entertainers, arranging treats for the children, funding outings, and contributing towards the operational expenses of the pre-school for the following year.

It's important to note that as an independent pre-school not funded by the state, we rely on the generosity of stakeholders and funders to continue delivering high-quality early years education. Therefore, we are always on the lookout for additional support and welcome any donations throughout the year.

Investing in early years education is vital as it lays the foundation for children's future success and well-being. Research consistently shows that quality early childhood experiences have a profound impact on children's cognitive, social, and emotional development, setting the stage for lifelong learning and achievement. By contributing to our school funds, you are directly investing in the future of our children and supporting the growth and development of our pre-school community.

We deeply appreciate your generosity and support in ensuring that every child at Balamill Little Learners has access to enriching experiences and opportunities that will shape their educational journey and beyond.



# Birthdays



At Balnamill Little Learners, we believe in celebrating the special milestones in each child's life, including birthdays. Birthdays are an opportunity for children to feel valued and cherished within our preschool community, creating a sense of belonging and connection.

We welcome families to mark their child's birthday by bringing in a cake to share with their classmates. However, to ensure the safety of all children, we kindly request that the cake be a shop-bought one in unopened packaging and nut-free. Additionally, please ensure the cake is not labelled with 'may contain traces of nuts'. This helps us maintain a safe environment for children with allergies.

If you plan to bring a cake, please inform a member of staff the day before so that we can adjust our snack plans accordingly. We want to ensure that every child can participate in the celebration while respecting any dietary restrictions or preferences.

We understand that some families may prefer their child not to have cake brought in by other pupils. If this is the case, please let us know at the beginning of the year, and we will ensure your child's preferences are respected.



Celebrating birthdays is more than just enjoying cake and treats. It's about creating lasting memories, building friendships, and acknowledging each child's uniqueness. Birthdays provide an opportunity to celebrate the individuality and growth of each child, reinforcing their sense of self-worth and importance within our preschool family.

By celebrating birthdays together, we strengthen our sense of community and create a warm and inclusive environment where every child feels loved, appreciated, and celebrated. At Balnamill Little Learners, birthdays are a time to shine, and we look forward to celebrating each and every one with our little learners.



# A Happy Start

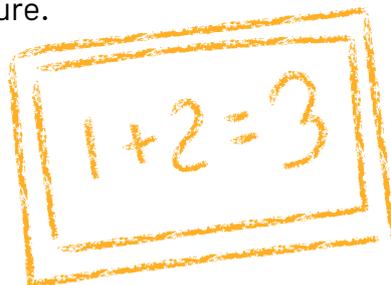


Starting school marks a significant milestone in your child's life, and it's our commitment at Balnamill Little Learners to ensure that this transition is a happy and fulfilling experience for both you and your child. Our foremost priority is the safety, well-being, and development of every child in our care.

You can rest assured knowing that your child is in the hands of qualified staff who are dedicated to their growth and learning journey. Our staff members are always available to address any concerns or issues you may have in a confidential and timely manner. If you have any worries about your child's experience at the pre-school, we encourage you to reach out to us. Together, we can swiftly resolve any concerns and ensure your child's happiness and success.

At Balnamill Little Learners, we maintain an 'Open Door' policy, welcoming parents to visit, communicate, and collaborate with us. Whether you prefer to visit in person, contact us via telephone, or communicate through email, we are here to support you every step of the way. Feel free to arrange meetings as needed.

We encourage you and your child to embrace this opportunity to attend Balnamill Little Learners fully. By working together, we can strive to provide the best quality education and experiences for your child, laying the foundation for a bright future.



**Please note that while the information in this handbook is accurate at the time of printing, there may be changes affecting any of the matters discussed within it. The Principal will ensure that any important updates or changes are communicated to you promptly.**

**Thank you for choosing Balnamill Little Learners as your child's educational partner. We look forward to embarking on this journey together, growing, learning, and happiness along the way.**



**Balamill Little Learners**

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