

A series of stylized, colorful paper figures holding hands in a line, set against a dark blue background with a light blue and purple gradient. The figures are made of cut-out paper and are in various shades of blue, purple, and pink.

Report of a Primary Inspection

St Anne's Primary School
DE Ref No 203-6069

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Education and
Training Inspectorate
Empowering Improvement

Contents

1. INTRODUCTION	1
A. BACKGROUND INFORMATION	1
B. VIEWS OF PARENTS AND STAFF	1
C. THE PROCESS OF INSPECTION	2
2. SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS	2
3. MAIN REPORT	3
A. SETTING THE VISION	3
B. IMPLEMENTING AND IMPROVING TO ACHIEVE THE VISION.....	4
C. BUILDING EQUITY	6
D. DEFINING, CELEBRATING AND EMBEDDING SUCCESS.....	6
E. GROWING A COMMUNITY OF LEARNING	8
F. CHILD PROTECTION	8
4. GOING FORWARD	8
5. APPENDICES.....	10
APPENDIX 1: QUANTITATIVE TERMS	10
APPENDIX 2: NOTES.....	11

Throughout the report the use of an asterisk * denotes further information included at Appendix 2.

1. INTRODUCTION

A. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

St Anne's Primary School is a Catholic maintained primary school situated in Nassau Street in the Creggan area; the children attending the school come from the greater Derry City area.

There are 310 children enrolled at the school. Almost 41% (127) of the children have free school meals entitlement and 26% (81) have been identified as having special educational needs (SEN). There are a small number of newcomer children who attend the school.

The staffing complement consists of a principal who has been in post for eight years, a vice principal, 18 teachers, 24 classroom assistants and the wider staff team. There are two specialist speech and language classes in the school for children in years 1 and 2. The children who attend the speech and language classes are enrolled in other local primary schools (which are referred to as the child's 'home-school'); they attend the speech and language classes for four days per week and attend their 'home-school' for one day per week.

The school accommodates a Sure Start programme within the school grounds.

The school operates a breakfast club and was awarded the Education Authority (EA) School of Sanctuary Award* in 2024.

B. VIEWS OF PARENTS AND STAFF

Before the inspection, the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) issued confidential online questionnaires to the children in year 7 and to all parents/carers, teachers, classroom assistants and other support staff.

Most (79%) of the children in year 7 responded to the questionnaire, just over 25% of whom offered written comments. All of the children agreed that: they feel safe in school; there are adults they can talk to if they have a problem; and they are encouraged to set targets that help them to improve their work. In their written comments, the children highlighted their appreciation for the help they receive from their teachers and the classroom assistants.

Almost all of the teachers (95%) and a minority (26%) of support staff and classroom assistants responded to the questionnaire. All of the teachers agreed that: they are aware of the school's safeguarding and child protection procedures; their training is updated at least every two years; and the arrangements for monitoring pupils' progress are effective and manageable. Most (84%) of the teaching staff agreed that their ideas are sought, valued and acted upon; their professional skills and knowledge are valued; and they have opportunities to share their skills with others. Just over 30% of the teachers provided written comments in which they expressed their commitment to the children and their eagerness to seek out opportunities for their professional learning.

Just over 21% of the parents/carers responded to the questionnaire and all agreed that their child is happy at school and can take part in activities outside of the classroom and after-school clubs. Most (83%) of the parents/carers who responded agreed that they know about the school's vision and aims. Almost 40% of the parents/carers added written comments in which they expressed their appreciation of the learning experiences provided for their child.

A number of concerns raised by the staff and parents/carers, including around aspects of communication, were shared with the principal and a representative of the board of governors.

C. THE PROCESS OF INSPECTION

ETI worked alongside St Anne's Primary School to consider how well the school:

- has identified and articulates its vision;
- prioritises actions to achieve the vision;
- overcomes the main challenges it faces;
- monitors and reviews progression to identify, celebrate and embed success; and
- grows and develops an inclusive community of learning.

2. SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

- The leaders and staff of St Anne's Primary School are committed to the holistic development of every child, promoting equality of opportunity and encouraging engagement in a wide range of meaningful learning experiences.
- The school's strategic curriculum development is informed very effectively by robust data analysis and rigorous monitoring of the children's progress in learning.
- The school has identified aspects of communication to be developed further to achieve more universally the school's vision of 'Love to Learn, Learn to Love'.
- Teaching is well structured and responsive, building on the children's prior learning through active, real-life and multi-sensory approaches.
- All of the children engage regularly in self- and peer-assessment, set personal learning targets, and benefit from a comprehensive monitoring system that informs well the planning for learning and appropriate intervention programmes.

- Recent improvements in the curriculum for music, mental mathematics, and writing have enhanced the overall quality and breadth of provision, increased the children's engagement, and developed their skills, confidence and creativity.
- The specialist speech and language classes deliver highly effective provision, which supports well the children's receptive and expressive language development.
- Almost all of the children achieve well and make sustained progress in learning across the curriculum, as evidenced by the school's own assessment data and the teachers' evaluations of learning.
- The high standards of handwriting and presentation of work in the children's books reflect the consistently high expectations shared by the staff and children.
- The children are provided with meaningful opportunities to share their views on their learning experiences, contribute to decision-making and support their peers.
- Staff professional learning is aligned to the school's priorities and is having a positive impact on the children's learning experiences and outcomes.
- At the time of the inspection, the evidence provided by the school demonstrates that the arrangements for child protection align to the current statutory guidance.

Area for action:

- to review collaboratively the outworking of the school's vision and values, to foster an ethos and culture that empowers the whole school community as they move forward on their improvement journey.

3. MAIN REPORT

A. SETTING THE VISION

The leaders and staff of St Anne's Primary School are committed to the holistic development of every child, promoting equality of opportunity across the curriculum and nurturing the whole child. This commitment is captured in the school's vision, 'Love to Learn and Learn to Love'. Underpinned by a Catholic ethos, the children's learning and spiritual development is enriched through prayer and strong parish links. There is a shared commitment among all staff to valuing each child's individual strengths and to working in partnership with families.

The priorities within the one-year development plan are appropriate, well-considered and have a clear rationale. They include developing the curriculum provision in mental maths, writing, and music, while re-establishing a consistent approach to the role and responsibilities of middle leaders emerging from a prolonged period of action short of strike by the teaching unions.

The principal has undertaken professional learning in development planning with the EA to assist the school to return to a three-year development plan. The school's strategic curriculum development is guided very effectively by robust data analysis and rigorous monitoring of the children's progress. The evidence gathered is used well to inform school development priorities.

The governors and principal have identified appropriately the need for wider consultation with the whole school community as part of the current development planning process, to further strengthen aspects of communication within the school community and to broaden their shared understanding of, and continued commitment to, the school's vision. The school is currently collaborating with the Catholic Council for Maintained Schools (CCMS) to advance this work. It is now timely for the school to review collaboratively the outworking of the school's vision and values, to ensure they serve as meaningful and effective drivers of school improvement, guiding practice and improving decision-making as the school moves forward with a three-year plan.

The Board of Governors has recently been reconstituted. They are ambitious in their plans to support the staff team and take forward the school's development priorities.

B. IMPLEMENTING AND IMPROVING TO ACHIEVE THE VISION

Across the school, the classrooms are well organised, and lessons are inclusive, characterised by positive relationships, effective teacher questioning, and active listening. Teaching is well structured and responsive, building on the children's prior learning and clearly defined learning intentions. The children benefit from: the teachers' deep understanding of individual needs; the use of active, real-life and multi-sensory approaches; and the skilled support of classroom assistants. The children engage regularly in self- and peer-assessment, set personal learning targets, and benefit from a comprehensive monitoring system that informs planning and intervention programmes, enabling them to make sustained progress.

The co-ordinators across all curricular areas monitor, evaluate and review effectively the progress made by the children and the efficacy and impact of their ongoing work. The children benefit from a broad and balanced curriculum. The comprehensive curriculum planning, enhanced by recent improvements to the literacy planning, ensures a consistent approach to learning and teaching across the school. The staff have identified appropriately the need to reflect on the approaches to, and planning for, play-based learning to ensure it is better informed by observations of the children's learning and guided by the children's interests.

Writing across the curriculum has been strengthened by the recent reflection on, and development of, strategies and approaches to improve writing and spelling across the key stages. During the inspection, the children told us that they enjoy creative writing and value opportunities to express their ideas.

A strategic focus on developing mental mathematics has improved the children's understanding of key concepts and strategies. They are increasingly confident in applying these through regular engagement in mathematical investigations and problem-solving activities. Extension activities are well conceived, extending the

children's thinking and problem-solving skills. Effective interventions for the children who need additional support with their numeracy are having a positive impact, enabling them to engage more confidently in mental mathematics lessons in the classroom.

The school's curriculum has been further enriched by a recent and effective focus on developing the provision for music. The staff's expertise is used well to enhance the provision, and the children benefit from regular opportunities to sing, perform, and play musical instruments. The children told inspectors that they enjoy music, which helps them develop their performance skills, and provides opportunities for them to work collaboratively.

The children have good opportunities to develop progressively their coding, publishing, presenting, and data-handling skills using a broad range of digital technologies. By the end of key stage (KS) 2, the children apply their digital skills to manage data effectively. The children complete regularly Information and Communication Technology (ICT) tasks, articulate clearly the digital skills they are developing, and reflect meaningfully on how they can improve their outcomes. In recognising the need to develop further opportunities for the children to explore digital art and design, and music and sound, the school has made a significant recent investment in ICT resources. The consistent use of the school's e-safety mascot, 'Cyber Tiger,' helps reinforce key online safety messages in an age-appropriate and engaging manner. The introduction of the Safer Schools NI app* has strengthened further the school's approach to digital safety.

The children spoke positively about their enjoyment of art and physical education and expressed a desire for more opportunities to develop further their creativity and physical skills. They also talked enthusiastically about the wider curriculum, particularly the value they place on school trips, including residential trips, and school performances, which they recognise as important, enjoyable and memorable learning experiences.

The well-being of the children is supported very effectively through the positive relationships that exist between the staff and the children, the implementation of the PATHS* programme and the wider Personal Development and Mutual Understanding (PDMU) curriculum. All of the children in year 7 who completed the ETI questionnaire, and all of the children in the focus groups who spoke with inspectors, spoke positively about how the adults in the school treat them with care and respect and the teachers and assistants help them when they find it difficult to learn.

The children take part in regular physical activity, such as the Daily Mile Initiative*, and after-school clubs provide additional opportunities for swimming, games and sports. In the last year, the school has received the Sustrans Bronze Award* in recognition of its effective work in promoting active travel among the children and their families.

The senior leaders work with a wide range of outside agencies to ensure that the social, emotional and pastoral needs of the children are identified, understood and addressed by the staff.

C. BUILDING EQUITY

Within St Anne's Primary School, there is a strong commitment to inclusion and a clear respect for diversity, evident in classroom practice, whole-school events, and the work undertaken to achieve the EA School of Sanctuary award. Across the school, the teachers have a sound knowledge of the children's individual needs and abilities.

There are well-established processes for the early identification of children with additional and special educational needs; staff use a wide range of assessments and professional judgement to monitor effectively the children's progress, and the analysis of this information gathered is used to implement appropriate targeted support sessions and create well-considered targets within Individual Education Plans. The majority of children receiving additional learning support make measurable progress, as evidenced by the school's own assessment information, and appropriate steps are taken to secure external support when required.

The classroom assistants provide discrete, responsive support and are confident in their roles; they apply the skills gained from high-quality professional development to support effectively the children's learning, social development and emotional regulation. The classroom assistants, who met with inspectors, spoke positively about how opportunities for professional learning has supported them in meeting the needs of individual children. Their observations and insights contribute meaningfully to the children's progress and well-being.

The specialist speech and language classes are a key strength in the school's provision. The staff within the specialist classes work in strong partnership with external speech and language therapists, using a wide range of multi-sensory approaches to deliver highly effective provision which supports the children well in their learning and development. The regular communication with each child's 'home-school' supports the re-integration process, ensuring that communication strategies are maintained and embedded. The school's detailed monitoring and assessment information confirms that the children make good progress from their individual starting points.

D. DEFINING, CELEBRATING AND EMBEDDING SUCCESS

High expectations for achievement within the school are underpinned by the enthusiasm and work of curriculum co-ordinators and teachers who have developed clear planning for progression across the curriculum, supporting each child in experiencing success in their learning.

The children are welcoming, confident in engaging with adults and respectful in their interactions. They contribute well to class and group discussions and co-operate well with adults and their peers. Classroom environments are happy and inclusive with a positive ethos, and fun in learning is visible.

The high standards of handwriting and presentation of work in the children's books reflect the high expectations shared by the staff and children. By year 7, the children are methodical in their approach to setting out their work, preparing them well for their transition to post-primary education.

All of the children are praised for their efforts as well as their achievements.

The rewards systems within the school acknowledges the gifts and talents of all. Alongside the expectation for positive behaviour, the year 1 to year 3 'pupil of the week' and monthly year 4 to year 7 awards celebrate the successes and improvements made by the children across the breadth of the curriculum, building their confidence and self-esteem.

Almost all of the children achieve well and make sustained progress in their learning across all areas of the curriculum. The success of the ongoing school development work, aimed at improving the children's mental maths and writing skills across the key stages, is evident. Almost all of the children are confident in using mathematical language appropriately; they demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between numbers, are able to think flexibly, and use a range of strategies to solve problems.

From the foundation stage, independent writing is encouraged, developing effectively early literacy skills. The children write across a range of genres and opportunities for writing are enjoyable and purposeful. The teachers promote ongoing improvement by encouraging self-reflection during writing lessons. As they progress through the school, the children are able to write with increased fluency, self-correcting, re-drafting and improving their work, as well as using paragraphs and more sophisticated vocabulary and punctuation. An online programme adopted to promote independent reading in KS 2 is having a clear impact, successfully motivating children to read for enjoyment beyond the school's core reading scheme.

Music is a key strength of the provision and is highly valued in the school. The children are provided with numerous opportunities to develop their musical skills and talents. The strategic importance given to promoting music within the school reflects the value placed upon nurturing the potential of the whole child and allowing every child to develop interests that they can carry on beyond their primary school years. Participation in music classes throughout the year provides opportunities for the children to sing and perform, work creatively with sound, and to listen and respond to music. These opportunities help the children to enhance their sense of rhythm and pulse, supporting the development of pre-reading skills. They also contribute significantly to the children's confidence and resilience, whilst providing an outlet for emotional expression. Participation in school shows and other events give the children an opportunity to perform in front of an audience and the school has celebrated significant success in the sacred choir, instrumental, action song and band sections of the local Derry Feis earlier this year.

The children's success at the local swimming gala over recent years reflects the time and commitment given by the staff to the after-school provision. It offers the children an opportunity to explore and develop further their individual gifts and talents.

Recent engagement in a local history project on the 'Siege of Derry' also brought success in the Derry Feis competition and sparked great interest among the children through stories that were relatable, visits to local historical sites and participation in interactive activities such as creating a timeline related to their city. The school-wide project also provided extensive opportunities for connected learning across the curriculum. The children who discussed the project with inspectors displayed a real sense of pride in Derry and its heritage.

E. GROWING A COMMUNITY OF LEARNING

The children are provided with meaningful opportunities to share their views on their learning experiences which are, in turn, used to inform aspects of learning and teaching, curriculum development and priorities for staff professional learning. The children take on roles and responsibilities with confidence, pride and enthusiasm. As school councillors, 'digital leaders', 'PATHS pals'* and monitors, they make an important contribution to decision-making, supporting their peers and making their school and playground a welcoming and friendly place for every child.

Effective partnerships with the local and wider community, businesses and other schools enhance the provision and learning experiences for the children and develop their skills and confidence. In discussions, the children told us how much they had enjoyed engaging with their community through, for example, working alongside children in a local nursery setting, performing in local churches, competing with other schools and hosted by the local further education college, and visiting a supermarket to apply their budgeting skills.

During the inspection, we joined the incoming children from year 1 and their parents/carers as they were welcomed into the school community. The children enjoyed exploring their new classroom and meeting their new teacher.

The parents are kept informed about school events through a weekly newsletter and the school has a number of strategies in place to help parents support their children with their learning, including paired reading and numeracy activities and a mathematics newsletter which shares the topics to be covered, and tips and guidance for reinforcing the learning at home.

Staff professional learning in literacy and numeracy is aligned with the school's development priorities and is having a positive impact on the children's learning experiences and outcomes, as evident in the children's books and in the lessons. Staff reflections indicate their increased capacity and confidence in supporting learning in writing and mental maths.

F. CHILD PROTECTION

At the time of the inspection, the evidence provided by the school demonstrates that the arrangements for child protection align to the current statutory guidance.

4. GOING FORWARD

The Board of Governors, leaders and staff at St Anne's Primary School are dedicated to the children's learning and well-being and are fully committed to the success of the school going forward. The children are welcoming, respectful and achieve well as they progress through the school, growing in confidence as they participate in, and experience success, across a range of extra-curricular, sporting and musical events.

During the inspection, inspectors highlighted some highly effective practice from which other schools may learn, namely:

- the well-planned and highly effective provision for learning within the specialist speech and language classes.

ETI, through the work of the district inspector, will continue to work with the school to disseminate this work, and as the school takes forward the area for action set out in this report.

5. APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: QUANTITATIVE TERMS

In this report, proportions may be described as percentages, common fractions and in more general quantitative terms. Where more general terms are used, they should be interpreted as follows:

Almost/nearly all	-	more than 90%
Most	-	75% - 90%
A majority	-	50% - 74%
A significant minority	-	30% - 49%
A minority	-	10% - 29%
Very few/a small number	-	less than 10%

APPENDIX 2: NOTES

Page 1

The School of Sanctuary Award

A School of Sanctuary is a school that has received a Sanctuary Award from City of Sanctuary UK or a partner organisation in recognition of its good practice in fostering a culture of welcome, belonging and solidarity for those seeking safety.

Page 5

The Safer Schools NI app

The Safer Schools NI app is a partnership between the Department of Education and INEQE Safeguarding Group that provides online safety guidance, resources, and school information sharing tools for the entire school community.

The PATHS programme

The PATHS programme is an evidence-based, early intervention and prevention, social and emotional learning programme aimed at 2-14-year-olds that teaches pro-social skills, emotional understanding, social problem-solving, resilience and self-control.

Daily Mile Initiative

The Daily Mile Initiative is a social physical activity where children take 15 minutes per day to travel one mile. The initiative aims to improve the physical, social, emotional and mental health and well-being of children.

The Sustrans Bronze Award

The Sustrans Bronze Award, part of the Active School Travel Award, is a recognition given to schools that have made progress in promoting active and sustainable travel to school.

Page 8

PATHS pal

A PATHS pal is a pupil trained to support the PATHS programme within a school, specifically on the playground. They help younger students with social and emotional skills, using the PATHS language and strategies to promote positive interactions and problem-solving.



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