

# Report of a Primary Inspection

Mary Queen of Peace Primary School

February 2025



## Contents

1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
A. BACKGROUND INFORMATION .....	1
B. VIEWS OF PARENTS, LEARNERS 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.....	3
C. BUILDING EQUITY .....	5
D. DEFINING, CELEBRATING AND EMBEDDING SUCCESS.....	5
E. GROWING A COMMUNITY OF LEARNING .....	6
F. CHILD PROTECTION .....	7
4. GOING FORWARD.....	7
5. APPENDICES .....	8
APPENDIX 1: QUANTITATIVE TERMS .....	8
APPENDIX 2: NOTES.....	9

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

# **1. INTRODUCTION**

## **A. BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Mary Queen of Peace Primary School opened in September 2016 as an amalgamation of Glenravel Primary School, Martinstown, and St Mary's Primary School, Cargan. The school operates currently on two sites located approximately three miles apart in the villages of Martinstown and Cargan between Ballymena and the Glens of Antrim. The children in the school come from both villages and the surrounding rural areas. While a new build has been approved by the Department of Education work on it has not yet commenced. Over the past three years, the enrolment has remained steady and there are currently 223 children. Thirteen percent of the children are identified as having special educational needs (SEN); and 15% of the children have free school meals entitlement.

The school provides a breakfast club and there is an extensive range of after-school activities for children in years 4 to 7. There is a well-established shared education partnership with a local controlled primary school.

The school has won a number of recent sporting tournaments, including: the camogie county championship in 2024; the girls' county football in 2023; and the girls' cross-country team are the current Causeway District champions. The year 6/7 quiz team are 'Credit Union Chapter Champions'\* and reached the All-Ireland primary schools final in 2024. The year 6/7 class won the 'Cumann na mBunscol' quiz in January 2025.

## **B. VIEWS OF PARENTS, LEARNERS AND STAFF**

The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) issued online confidential questionnaires to year 7 children, all parents and staff in advance of the inspection. Twenty-six percent (38) of the parents responded to the questionnaire, 26 of whom provided additional written comments. Nearly all of the parents indicated that they receive helpful information about the planned learning activities for their child and almost all reported that their child is making good progress at school and that they would recommend this school to others. In the written comments the parents highlighted and praised the high-quality pastoral care provided by the staff. They commented positively on how happy their children are attending school, how well the staff know each child and strive to meet their individual needs.

Almost all (18) of the children in year 7 responded to the questionnaire and their responses were highly positive. They all indicated that they feel safe in school and are treated with care and respect by the staff. Inspectors also met with children from years 3, 5 and 7 who spoke confidently and enthusiastically about their varied learning experiences through the wide range of after-school activities and the opportunities to participate in school plays, sporting and musical events.

Nearly all of the teaching and support staff responded very positively to the questionnaire and thirty-one percent (10) provided written comments. The written responses indicated that the staff enjoy working in the warm, welcoming, supportive environment of the school where they feel valued and respected.

A summary of the questionnaire responses, including any issues raised, was shared with the principal and a representative of the board of governors.

## **C. THE PROCESS OF INSPECTION**

The ETI worked alongside Mary Queen of Peace 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 define, celebrate and embed success; and
- grows and develops an inclusive community of learning.

## **2. SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS**

- The school's vision of each child reaching their full potential is evident through the children's extremely positive dispositions for learning, the very good progress they make and the range of skills they acquire and apply.
- The children are happy in school; they are confident, engage very well in their learning and are making the expected progress across the key curricular areas.
- The holistic development of the children is evident through the range of learning opportunities both within and beyond the classroom. The commitment to developing the full range of each child's talents is reflected in curriculum content that is informed and enhanced by the ethos, culture and traditions of the school and the local area.
- The consistently high-quality learning experiences across the key stages is developing very well the children's oracy and very effective questioning by the teachers encourages deeper thinking and meaningful discussions.
- High levels of care and the positive working relationships across the school underpin the key priority placed on ensuring the wellbeing of the children; as a result, the children report that they feel valued, respected and enjoy their learning.
- The well-embedded, caring approach to inclusion is evident in how each child is cherished by the whole school community and the extensive work to support the children enables them to flourish.

- The pro-active strategic focus on building the capacity of the leaders and staff at all levels ensures that all the staff are highly skilled and work very effectively to meet the children's individual needs.
- Partnerships with parents, the community and other organisations greatly enhance the children's learning experiences and extend further the staff's knowledge and skills.
- 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.

### **3. MAIN REPORT**

#### **A. SETTING THE VISION**

The Mary Queen of Peace vision of 'each child reaching their full potential' within a Catholic ethos is having a very positive impact on the lives of the children. This is reflected in the children's high levels of confidence, self-esteem and their excellent attitude towards learning. The staff and governors are fully committed to achieving the vision and are currently reviewing the school's aims, supported by the Catholic Schools Trustee Service, to ensure that they are appropriate and relevant to help develop each child holistically. Collaborative engagement with the entire school community is actively sought and valued by the school leaders throughout this process.

The board of governors is supportive of the principal and staff, and they use their combined skillset, professional expertise, and educational knowledge very effectively to guide the work of the school. They are well informed about the work and successes of the school by the senior and middle leaders and are currently developing further their role as link governors for specific areas of learning.

The school development planning process works well; the three-year school development plan is in the final year of this cycle and is comprehensive. The associated action plans contain appropriate priorities for improvement based on effective self-evaluation, including regular consultation with staff, parents and governors. Consequently, the staff and governors have a good understanding of the current priorities and there is clear evidence of improvement through the high standards achieved by the children throughout the school.

#### **B. IMPLEMENTING AND IMPROVING TO ACHIEVE THE VISION**

The holistic development of the children is prioritised across the curriculum and is clearly evident within and beyond the classroom through extensive outdoor learning and the range and impact of after-school activities. The commitment to developing the full range of each child's talents is reflected in a well-planned curriculum which is informed and enhanced by the ethos, culture and traditions of the school and local area. The school's approach to implementing an interconnected curriculum fosters the children's enjoyment, and deeper understanding of the concepts they are learning. For example, music, digital technology and science are integrated regularly to enhance literacy and numeracy lessons, encouraging critical thinking and expression while supporting to good effect writing, research and investigations.



All of the learning experiences are extremely well planned, coherent and connected. Consequently, the children benefit from consistently high-quality active learning experiences enabling them to progress their knowledge, skills and understanding across all areas of learning. Throughout the school, skilful questioning by the staff effectively develops the children's thinking skills and encourages them to participate in meaningful discussions and develop well their oracy skills and extend their vocabulary.

The school is very well-led; the leaders are dedicated to providing high-quality education and continuous improvement throughout the school. The success of the strategic leadership team in building the capacity and motivation of leaders at all levels is creating a culture of excellence. The clear commitment to building the capacity of middle leaders and equipping them with a vision for high quality, modern learning and teaching is impacting positively on all of the staff's confidence, knowledge and skills to teach every area of the curriculum. All of the middle leaders are clear on their role in leading the relentless focus on improving the learning experiences for the children and the outcomes they attain.

The contemporary and responsive programme of staff professional learning, which aligns well with the school's priorities, ensures that all of the teachers and classroom assistants are highly skilled and work very effectively together to meet the children's individual needs. The staff have realistically high expectations for the children which impact positively on their attitude towards school, their pride in the quality of the work in their books and the high standards they achieve. The learning environment within the classrooms is positive and respectful, rooted in mutual respect.

The children use digital technology confidently to support their learning. The development and progression of the children's digital skills is planned for incrementally, monitored closely and is impacting positively on their knowledge and level of skills, in particular using their digital skills to enhance approaches to research and creating animation films to present work and projects. A common feature of the lessons observed was the opportunity for the children to apply their digital skills to help solve problems and extend exploratory learning. The children have a sound knowledge and understanding of how to stay safe online and know who to talk to if they need help.

The priority given to the development of dance within the physical education curriculum and as an after-school club is reflective of the staff's commitment to enhancing the skills and talents of every child. During the dance lessons observed, the children are developing well their physical skills such as balance, flexibility, co-ordination and stamina alongside expressive, social and imaginative skills, and they are able to show a sense of rhythm and sensitivity to music. They also have good opportunities to deepen their cultural and historical knowledge and understanding as they learn and perform traditional céilí dances and dances from other countries.

The outdoor play provision has been developed well and there is clear evidence of the staff professional learning impacting positively on the role of the adult in facilitating the opportunities for children to think, co-operate and negotiate as they engage fully in well-planned opportunities for investigative play outdoors.

The school places a high priority on the children's wellbeing; this is underpinned by excellent levels of care and positive working relationships across the school. Purposefully planned provision, such as the personal development and mutual understanding (PDMU) programme, and 'Wellbeing Wednesday', together with the numerous opportunities to be involved in The Arts and sport greatly enhances the children's wellbeing. The children shared with us their appreciation of how the staff support their physical and emotional wellbeing through games, dance, mindfulness and the 'Take 5'\* strategies to enhance wellbeing. Consequently, the children report that they are very happy in school, feel valued and are well-disposed to learning.

### **C. BUILDING EQUITY**

Across the school, there is a tangible commitment by all staff to understanding the challenges children face, and to meeting their needs and enabling them to thrive. It is notable that the children are very supportive of one another and display high levels of respect, care and kindness. The staff have skilfully created an environment of equity and inclusion where each child is encouraged and supported to reach 'their full potential'. Attendance rates are high, and the children enjoy learning.

There is a clear focus on the early identification of children with additional needs and putting in place appropriate support. To this end, a judicious use of relevant quantitative and qualitative information enables the staff to implement carefully considered interventions and create individual education plans for the children who need additional support with aspects of their learning. This is underpinned by extensive staff professional learning. The learning support assistants are highly skilled and much valued; of particular note is their role in the 'Reading Partnership'\* programme which is helping children to develop confidence and fluency in reading aloud.

The impact of the additional support for children tracked meticulously and monitored robustly; the school's internal information on progress in learning shows clearly that the children benefit significantly from this work. These supports, together with the adaptive teaching approaches in the classrooms, means that the children with additional needs are making very good progress in their learning and development. The children's needs are being met very effectively within a highly inclusive school community.

### **D. DEFINING, CELEBRATING AND EMBEDDING SUCCESS**

Throughout the school, the children approach their work positively and are successfully developing and applying to good effect their skills in communication, teamwork and creativity. They enjoy working both independently and collaboratively and their behaviour is exemplary.

From the foundation stage, there is an appropriate and well-embedded emphasis on: maintaining the high standards in literacy and numeracy; connecting learning across the curriculum; and developing the social and emotional wellbeing of the children. Almost all of the children are achieving well and are making good progress relative to their starting point, as evidenced by the wide range of quantitative and qualitative information gathered by the teachers and co-ordinators.

The presentation of the children's work is excellent, which they take great pride in. They confidently write in different forms for a variety of purposes, and most can produce high quality pieces of extended writing as they progress throughout the school.

The children's development and acquisition of mathematical language, use of mental maths strategies and problem-solving are of a high standard. The children can apply their knowledge of maths to real life situations, such as: getting the best value for money comparing the price and weight of foods; reading timetables; and telling the time using a variety of devices. Almost all have a very good working knowledge of key mathematical concepts and are confident and flexible in their thinking. The well-connected, investigative active learning experiences in the World Around Us (WAU) are successfully developing the children's knowledge and enquiry skills.

The children in years 4 to years 7 enjoy participating in the extensive range of after-school clubs and are benefitting greatly from the staff expertise and well-considered external support that enhances their learning. The children participate confidently in the school choir, are very successful in local and regional quiz competitions and enjoy and achieve success in cross country running, Gaelic football, camogie and hurling competitions. The children are developing their ability to perform and express themselves in front of an audience through the regular opportunities for performances at festivals, Mass and school shows. In addition, the 'pupil of the month' award provides an opportunity to celebrate individual achievements, and each child is encouraged to compliment and celebrate the gifts and talents of their classmates. Consequently, the children are developing further their: confidence and self-esteem; curiosity and willingness to learn new skills; and respect for others.

## **E. GROWING A COMMUNITY OF LEARNING**

There are excellent relationships between the staff, children, parents and governors. Regular formal and informal communication is strong; for example, through the use of a digital application, the Sway newsletter and the school website, parents are kept well informed about their child's progress, achievements and successes, and special events. The active Parent Teacher Association (PTA) work closely with the staff, including applying for grants and fundraising for sensory equipment which is beneficial to meeting the children's needs.

How the children approach their learning demonstrates that their skills of communication, teamwork and creativity are being very well developed from an early age. The children are encouraged to take responsibility and play an active role in all aspects of school life, for example, looking after the environment and helping younger children play in the playground. The members of the School Council have a good understanding of their role and talk enthusiastically about projects they have been involved in.

The wide range of educational visits and visitors to the school are enhancing the children's learning experiences across the curriculum. The school has fostered strong links with the local community throughout the parish and is effectively building partnerships with the local Gaelic club to extend the children's learning experiences through use of their facilities and their coaching expertise in several sports.



The professional development of all staff is highly valued and is strategically linked to the school development plan. Recent training in play-based learning, dance and strategies to support children with spelling difficulties is impacting positively on the staff's knowledge and skills to develop further these areas. The staff and children in years 5 and 7 benefit from the well-established partnership with the school's shared education partner for: staff training in digital skills; developing computational thinking; mathematical investigations; and through wider learning opportunities for the children when they are visiting each other's schools. The year 7 children in both schools attend a well-planned joint transition day to prepare them for moving to post-primary school, which helps to alleviate any potential concerns they may have. In addition, they are acquiring new skills by participating in a business enterprise venture with a large company.

The school is a member of the Ballymena Primary Principals' Association through which the principals benefit from sharing their professional expertise, knowledge and learning relating to the development of common themes across school development plans.

The staff have recently developed lines of progression for dance with another local maintained primary school and have benefitted from dance workshops in the school for children and staff provided by students from St Mary's University College. The purposeful links with a local post-primary school are being used to extend the opportunities to develop the children's scientific knowledge and thinking skills through the facilitation of science investigations. There are well developed transition processes in place with a number of post-primary schools which support the children as they move to the next stage of their learning.

## **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**

Mary Queen of Peace Primary School is working successfully to achieve its vision for each child to achieve their full potential. The dedicated, skilful staff provide high-quality, stimulating learning experiences for all of the children in a warm and caring school environment and the holistic needs of the children are being met very well. The children are happy confident learners and are making the expected progress across the key curricular areas.

ETI will continue to work with Mary Queen of Peace Primary School, including to share examples of highly effective practice from which others may learn. The aspects of practice which should be shared more widely include:

- the holistic development of the children through a focus on wellbeing, well-planned connected learning and high-quality learning and teaching; and
- the commitment and work of the school to build the capacity of all staff, in particular the middle leaders.

## 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

#### **Credit Union Chapter Champions**

Chapters comprise of local area credit unions and the chapter can meet for common purposes including educational quizzes.

### Page 5

#### **Take 5**

The Take 5 Steps to Wellbeing in school is a Public Health Agency programme outlining simple ways for people to maintain and improve their emotional wellbeing:

1. connect with others;
2. be physically active;
3. take notice;
4. keep learning; and
5. give to others.

#### **Reading Partnership**

Reading Partnership is an approach to improve children's reading confidence which was developed at the University of London. It aims to help children to love reading and become enthusiastic about it. The children work one-to-one with a qualified Reading Partner tutor who may be a teacher or classroom assistant and will read and talk about a chosen text to increase their enjoyment and confidence in reading.

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