

Report of a Primary Inspection
Fivemiletown Primary School and Nursery

October 2024



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1. INTRODUCTION

A. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Fivemiletown Primary School and Nursery is a co-educational, controlled school located in the village of Fivemiletown in County Tyrone. Almost all the children who attend the school live in the village and townland. The school's enrolment has increased over the past three years and is currently 217, including the 30 children in the nursery unit. Fifteen percent of the children are identified as having special educational needs (SEN), almost 14% have free school meals entitlement and, 8% of the children are newcomers.

The principal was appointed in April 2021; a statutory nursery unit was established in September of the same year.

Work has been undertaken recently to refurbish the library and to enhance the security of the school site and the quality of the outdoor learning environment.

The school holds an Eco-Schools' 'Green Flag' award and won the Families First 'Best School' award in 2023. The principal is nominated this year for the 'Most Inspirational Women in Teaching' award at the 'Mighty Women in Northern Ireland' Awards.

The school has a long-standing Shared Education partnership with a neighbouring maintained primary school.

B. VIEWS OF CHILDREN, PARENTS AND STAFF

The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) issued online confidential questionnaires to year 7 children, all parents/carers and staff in advance of the inspection. A summary of the questionnaire responses was shared with the principal and a representative of the board of governors.

Almost all (92.6%) of the year 7 children responded to the questionnaire, a majority (56%) of whom provided written comments as well. All the children said they feel safe in school, have an adult they can talk to if they feel worried, and the teachers and assistants help them when they have difficulty with their learning. In the written comments, the children were very positive about their experiences at school and on school trips and value in particular the opportunity to develop their leadership skills in the role of playground helpers.

In discussions with children from year 3, 5 and 7, they all spoke about how happy they are in school, how the school helps them to be physically well and how much they enjoy reading.

Almost one-half (43.9%) of the parents/carers responded to the questionnaire and thirty-four provided written comments. They all agreed they are happy with their child's learning experiences and that their child has opportunities to participate in activities outside the classroom. Almost all (96.7%) know the school's vision and

said their child benefits from opportunities to meet and learn with children from another school. The written comments emphasised: how happy their child is in school; the high quality of support given to their child; the importance of the school in the local community; and, the positive changes in parental engagement since the new principal took up post in 2021.

All of the teachers completed the questionnaire, and all provided a written response. They are clear on the school's vision, feel safe and respected in school and agree staff wellbeing is promoted effectively. The written responses indicated that the teachers value: working collegially; the measures taken by the leadership to support staff wellbeing; and the school's links to the community.

There were eleven responses from the classroom learning and support staff. They all enjoy working at the school and have benefitted from relevant professional learning. The six written comments were positive about the quality of the working relationships across the school and the benefits of the community partnerships.

C. THE PROCESS OF INSPECTION

The ETI worked alongside Fivemiletown Primary School and Nursery 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 staff live out the vision of the school to be “a community where children, staff and families learn together in a secure, inclusive and diverse environment”.
- The children's behaviour is exemplary. They have a real sense of belonging to their school, are friendly and welcoming and engage readily and respectfully with each other and with adults.
- The planning and teaching is effective in promoting successful learning. The teachers have high expectations for the children and their skilful interactions ensure that the children have very good levels of critical thinking, independence and problem-solving.
- The vision for inclusivity is evident in every aspect of school life.

- There is very good strategic oversight of the barriers to learning faced by the children; data is analysed robustly to identify children who would benefit from additional support, which is well-considered and bespoke to the child's individual needs. As a result, the children are making very good progress.
- The health and wellbeing of staff, children and their families is a strategic priority; an extensive range of initiatives is in place which support effectively the children's emotional and physical development.
- The outreach work of the school, including meaningful links with a range of education, business and social partners, is having a significant and positive impact on the quality of the provision for the children and the outcomes they achieve, and is enhancing also the opportunities for the local and wider community to improve physical health and form social connections.
- The children in the nursery class engage enthusiastically and with confidence in open-ended play opportunities, designed creatively to ensure very good standards of curiosity and investigation and to develop high levels of independence.
- The strategies for communicating and celebrating individual success should be more consistent across the school.
- 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:

- develop further the strategies to communicate and celebrate success.

3. MAIN REPORT

A. SETTING THE VISION

The school's vision to be a community where children, staff and families learn together in a secure, inclusive and diverse environment" is complemented well by the mission statement: "Learning How to Learn". The staff live out the vision of the school and provide a caring, trusting environment in which mutual respect and co-operation is encouraged in a secure, inclusive and diverse environment, which improves the self-confidence of the children. The ethos of the school is embedded firmly in Christian values and fosters successfully a spirit of respect towards others.

The vision is underpinned by school values such as, '**Be honest and trustworthy**' and '**Create positive relationships**', all of which are evident in the respectful relationships across the school. The vision is constructed in consultation with stakeholders and is informed by purposeful self-evaluation. A comprehensive three-year development plan is in place to plan for the long-term strategic direction of the school. The school is coming towards the end of the current cycle and following robust evaluation, the development planning process is being streamlined. The current priorities identified by the school are appropriate, link well to the school's vision and are informed by the analysis of the school's data.

The governors are well-informed and involved in decision-making around the improvement work of the school. They and the senior leaders articulate clearly the importance of allocating resources and implementing appropriate strategies to promote good health and wellbeing as a key foundation for successful learning. There is investment in good quality impactful staff professional learning to support better the holistic development of the children and their understanding of how they learn.

B. IMPLEMENTING AND IMPROVING TO ACHIEVE THE VISION

The children are successfully developing good classroom behaviours and dispositions to learning through the well-structured lessons where cross-curricular skills are developed effectively and coherently. In the nursery, the process of planning and observation is detailed and aligns with the pre-school curriculum and the specific needs and interests of the children. Across the school and nursery unit, the use of authentic and natural resources, including outdoor resources, is resulting in high levels of engagement and is improving the children's self-management, problem-solving and working together skills. The teachers' effective questioning allows for extended, well-considered responses from the children, and the development of their critical thinking. There is a real sense of the children's enjoyment of their learning.

The school curriculum meets well the children's needs. Monitoring of the provision is robust, with regular reporting to the curriculum link governors who support and challenge in equal measure. Raising further the children's literacy standards is an area of focus for the school. The school has introduced an online reading application to encourage the children's reading for enjoyment. There is great enthusiasm among the children for this approach and the school recognises the need to exploit further their enthusiasm by extending the reading initiatives. The curriculum is enhanced with a range of additional opportunities for the children to enjoy team sports, play music and sing, along with opportunities to learn about environmental and sustainability issues.

In numeracy the children's accurate use of mathematical language is encouraged, for example, when they are describing their thinking when solving a problem. The teachers use practical activities effectively to stretch and challenge the children's reasoning skills.

The year 7 children spoke about their enjoyment across a range of subjects and how much they value the opportunities they have to serve as leaders, playground helpers and in supporting the "little ones". They articulated clearly and maturely how these opportunities developed them holistically and recognised the qualities and skills that they were developing in preparation for the next stage of their education.

The health and wellbeing of staff, children and their families is central to the school's ethos and vision. Paramount is that the children feel safe and cared for and this is evident in the supportive relationships in the classroom and throughout the school. The teachers provide an extensive range of initiatives to support the children's emotional and physical development. The preventative curriculum is informed appropriately by local needs, such as, farm safety and the children benefit from

support from a range of external providers who educate them in how to stay safe and well. It also addresses effectively contemporary issues such as the misuse of social media and provides the children with strategies such as circle time and safe spaces when children have difficulty managing their feelings. The provision for physical education is enhanced further by a curricular link with the neighbouring post-primary school. The children are encouraged to make good food choices through, for example, the healthy break and their involvement in growing fruit and vegetables in the school garden. The activities provided by the staff in the breakfast club are developing well the children's creativity and their social skills.

The school participates in the Education Authority's 'Being Well Doing Well' programme to help achieve the vision of the whole school community being welcoming, inclusive and respectful. The wellbeing team is comprised of representatives from all staff in the school, not just the teachers; the team leads the programme with compassion and care. The staff report how much they value the range of initiatives to support their health and wellbeing particularly those that are of low cost such as, the special breaks and the 'random acts of kindness'.

C. BUILDING EQUITY

The school's recently created equality, diversity and inclusion policy reflects well the changing context of the school and the growing range of diversity within it and within the local community.

There is very good strategic oversight of the barriers to learning faced by the children; data is analysed robustly to identify children who would benefit from the range of well-considered interventions which are bespoke to the children's individual needs. The children identified as having SEN are supported effectively to make very good progress by empathetic and proficient staff who know them well.

The views of children who have physical and other additional needs are considered when making appropriate adjustments to the curriculum, including the use of assistive technology and modifications to the physical environment. These measures help the children to overcome any potential barriers to learning and ensure their full participation in all aspects of school life.

The programme for staff professional learning is well-conceived and adaptive to children's needs. Recent professional learning has focused on areas such as: supporting children with dyslexia; the value of nurture; motor sensory training; and, 'Theraplay'. The strategies staff have implemented through this professional learning have helped the children to develop coping mechanisms and manage successfully their emotions.

D. DEFINING, CELEBRATING AND EMBEDDING SUCCESS

The children experience success in the classroom through affirming relationships and interactions, complemented by adaptive, engaging lessons. A variety of assessments are used effectively to baseline, monitor and review the children's progress in learning across the school. The recent focus on developing play-based learning and outdoor play is improving the children's problem-solving, which was an

area for development identified by effective self-evaluation. The children's attention and listening skills are excellent. Their reading standards are improving also as a result of; the consistency of approach in the teaching of reading; the targeted support for reading; and, the enhanced profile and resourcing of reading for enjoyment.

There are very effective transition arrangements for the children to support them in moving from the nursery to foundation stage. The children in the nursery are proud of their work which is displayed and is retained in the "sparkle" folder for sharing with parents. Videos of their activities, and the activities of the children across all the classes, are shared regularly with the parents and wider community through social media.

The children are developing well their leadership and citizenship skills through, for example, opportunities to be a playground helper or membership of the Eco-club. They are confident in making presentations to their peers in assembly and can explain their decision-making. Music and dance are celebrated in the 'Fivemiletown's Got Talent' show and the children have gained prizes in the local Clogher Valley show for their artwork and handwriting.

E. GROWING A COMMUNITY OF LEARNING

The school has worked successfully to establish and support very good relationships internally and with the wider community for working and learning together, based on mutual respect. A key driver also for the school has been re-establishing the use of the school facilities by the wider community. The outreach work of the school begins with the families and extends across the generations to the grandparents. The school provides workshops on how to support the children's learning and to educate parents about online safety. The 'Stay and Play' and 'Rhythm and Rhyme' sessions provide social and educational opportunities for the community. Parents/carers learn about the importance of play and music for children's development and form social connections at the same time.

There are meaningful links with a range of education, business and social partners. The community engagement is having a significant positive impact on the quality of the provision for the children and the outcomes they achieve and is enhancing also the opportunities for the local and wider community. For example, workshops delivered by an external organisation has helped parents and children be more digitally aware. A science and technology programme run in conjunction with Queen's University, Belfast improved the children's investigative skills and creativity.

Of note also is the school's contribution to the running calendar in the area, enhancing the physical and emotional health of participants. The annual 'Fun Run and Family Walk' has grown in registrations beyond the school community and the 'Couch to 5k' fitness initiative is also well attended.

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 leaders and staff of Fivemiletown Primary School and Nursery Unit work tirelessly with integrity, resilience and care to realise the school's vision of children, staff and community working together in an inclusive environment. The school's place in the community has been transformed in recent years and it is now a central, welcoming hub for learning and development. The strategies and programmes to support the wellbeing of children and staff are providing affirming learning environments and improving the children's outcomes.

ETI will continue to work with Fivemiletown Primary School and Nursery, including to share examples of highly effective practice from which others may learn. The aspects of practice which should be shared more widely are:

- creating and sustaining a school at the heart of its community; and
- supporting effectively the health and wellbeing of the whole school community.

Fivemiletown Primary School and Nursery is well placed to take forward the area for action detailed in this report.

5. APPENDIX

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%

The Education and Training Inspectorate

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