

# Report of a Primary Inspection

Mountnorris Primary School

DE Ref No 501-1161

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Education and  
Training Inspectorate  
Empowering Improvement

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

# **1. INTRODUCTION**

## **A. BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Mountnorris Primary School is a controlled, co-educational school situated in the village of Mountnorris in County Armagh. The children attending come from the village and the surrounding rural area. The enrolment is currently 113 children, a small number of whom are in the reception composite class with the year 1 children. There are three composite classes in the school and two classes which comprise children from a single year group. The school has a teaching principal and five assistant teachers. At the time of the inspection, a substitute teacher was in place in one of the classes.

Almost 22% of the children have free school meals entitlement and 14% have been identified as having special educational needs (SEN). The school offers a breakfast club and a variety of after school clubs for the children, which are very well attended. The school have a longstanding Shared Education partnership with the neighbouring school, St Theresa's Primary School, Tullyherron.

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

The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) issued online confidential questionnaires to year 7 children, all staff and parents/carers in advance of the inspection.

All of the year 7 children responded to the questionnaires. They highlighted that they feel safe in school and that they know who to talk to if they have a concern. In discussions with inspectors, the children also spoke positively about their frequent use of digital technology to help them with their learning and how much they enjoy their leadership roles on the school council and eco school committee.

One-third (33%) of the parents responded to the questionnaires. Their responses were wholly positive regarding their child's progress in learning, the encouragement given to their child to eat healthily, and the available range of after school activities and clubs. One-half of the parents also provided written comments in which they highlighted the safe and caring environment, and the high level of pastoral care provided for their child. In conversation with inspectors, a small group of parents praised the provision for children with SEN and the vital role of the school within the community.

Almost all of the teaching staff (83%) provided responses to the questionnaire; their responses were wholly positive. They reported that they enjoy working at the school and are treated with respect. All of the support staff (100%) in their responses indicated that they are aware of the safeguarding and child protection procedures, and that their wellbeing is promoted effectively.

A summary of the questionnaire responses, including a small number of issues raised by parents, was shared with the principal and the chair of the board of governors.

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

ETI worked alongside Mounthorris 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**

- Mounthorris Primary School community is wholly committed to realising its longstanding vision of “Maximising Potential Success” underpinned by Christian values and a strong family ethos.
- Appropriate key priorities for development have been agreed upon by all staff and in consultation with governors and parents.
- The most effective lessons observed incorporated the seamless use of assessment for learning strategies and promoted active learner participation.
- The staff are developing well a curriculum that integrates connected learning, real-world application, digital literacy and values-based education to prepare effectively the children for the next stage of their learning.
- The school provides an inclusive ethos where all of the children are cared for, valued and supported to achieve their learning goals.
- The skilful staff make effective use of a wide range of suitable strategies to support very well those children who have SEN.
- Most of the children achieve well in their learning across the curriculum.
- The children’s writing is of a consistently high standard across the school; they write imaginatively, creatively and with purpose.
- Recent health and wellbeing initiatives have fostered positive relationships and created a happy and caring environment for the children, staff and wider school community.

- The staff live out their Christian values by promoting active citizenship through the children's engagement in environmental projects and charitable works.
- 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 share the existing effective practice across the school to promote greater consistency in teaching and assessment for successful learning.

### **3. MAIN REPORT**

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

The vision for the children in Mountnorris Primary School is captured the school's motto "**Maximising Potential Success**". A recent review of the school's vision, which involved consultation with parents, staff and governors, re-affirmed the school's commitment to ensuring that every child is supported holistically and encouraged to reach their full potential.

The children have been involved in exploring the faith-based values prioritised by the school which underpin the school's vision. The staff have identified appropriately the importance of exploring further the school's vision with the children, to deepen their understanding of it and ensure that their views are sought and inform all aspects of school life.

The importance of good working relationships within the school community is identified by the school leader and governors as being fundamental to achieving the vision for every child. Consequently, the school has invested significant time to build strong, collaborative working relationships in the best interests of the children. The priorities within the transitional school development plan have been informed appropriately by a thorough analysis of a wide range of assessment information. The priorities include a focus on the mental health and wellbeing of the children and staff, developing the children's digital skills and the provision of numeracy in outdoor learning. The school leader has reinstated monitoring and evaluation processes following the period of action short of strike to monitor the impact of the ongoing improvement work on the children's learning experiences and the outcomes they attain. The school leader has identified the need to develop further the use of other evidence available within the school, including observations of learning and teaching, as well as reviewing the progress in the children's work, to inform the priorities for improvement moving forward.

The board of governors is in a period of transition and reconstitution, with a small number of new governors in the process of being appointed officially. The longstanding governors are highly committed to the school; they hold a long-term vision for building on the current provision to secure appropriate pathways and opportunities for all the children of the school community. They are highly supportive, visible, well-informed and an important part of the close-knit community of Mountnorris Primary School.



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

The teachers' medium-term planning is comprehensive for all areas of learning. There is good evidence of connected learning across the curriculum, with topics and themes being carefully selected to provide meaningful contexts for the children to develop their reading, writing, numeracy and research skills. During the majority of the lessons observed, where the lessons were most effective, the children engaged in purposeful group work with appropriately pitched learning activities and had opportunities to articulate their thinking both during lessons and in the well-managed plenary sessions. To build upon the work of the co-ordinators in monitoring and evaluating the learning and teaching, there is a need to identify and disseminate the most effective learning and teaching throughout the school to ensure consistently high-quality learning experiences and progression for all children.

The curriculum reflects the values of respect and global awareness, as demonstrated through initiatives such as 'No Desk Day'\* and international charitable projects. The school's ECO Code, "Our world is a gift from God, let's look after it," is reinforced through the children's active participation in environmental and wellbeing activities, such as 'Face up to Climate Change'\* and horticultural activities. The school prioritises preparing children for the next stage of their education both emotionally and practically. The Year 7 children spoke to the inspectors of their appreciation at being taught important life skills, such as reading bus timetables and tying school ties.

Recent efforts to enrich the children's learning beyond the classroom are evident, through the increased use of the school's outdoor space to support the children's numeracy skills. The children are provided with meaningful opportunities to apply mathematical concepts in real-world contexts, such as measuring tree circumferences, calculating the perimeter of the school building and working out the area of the playground. The staff also make effective use of community expertise and the well-established shared education partnership to enrich the children's learning experiences. These collaborative networks include creative literacy workshops and well-planned educational trips.

The children are encouraged to eat healthily and there is a wide variety of sporting and extracurricular activities which appeal to the children's differing interests and talents. The children have a good awareness of how to stay safe online and have opportunities to engage in online safety training. Wellbeing Wednesday\* is also successful in equipping the children with strategies to support effectively their mental health and wellbeing. The health and wellbeing of staff is promoted and supported by the school's designated wellbeing champion, and regular planned opportunities to meet and engage informally with each other are valued by all of the staff.

## **C. BUILDING EQUITY**

The school fosters an inclusive ethos, ensuring that all children are valued and encouraged to achieve their individual learning goals. This commitment is evident in the active participation of all children in learning activities and class discussions. The children all show good support and respect for each other. The school reinforces inclusivity through themed awareness days such as Epilepsy Awareness Day, 'Blue Day' for Diabetes, 'Odd Socks Day' for Autism Awareness, and 'No Pens Day' for Speech and Language Needs Awareness.

The use of Personalised Learning Plans (PLPs) has been implemented successfully across the school last year. These plans, developed with input from both the parents and children, outline clear intended outcomes and identify tailored support for the children with SEN. The learning support co-ordinator works closely with all staff to create the PLPs and review the children's progress against their intended outcomes. Evidence from these plans indicates that children with SEN are making good progress.

The staff are proactive in accessing external support from a wide range of agencies to meet the diverse needs of the children. They also make effective use of every available accommodation within the school to provide well-resourced spaces to deliver the targeted support for individuals and small groups. In response to the increasing number of children with complex needs, all of the staff have engaged in professional learning to support children with autism. As a result, strategies such as visual timetables, sensory pathways, movement breaks, and sensory spaces have been introduced, benefiting significantly the children who require this support. The classroom assistants play a crucial role in supporting children with additional needs and demonstrate both compassion and skill in working with the children. The commitment of all staff has been recognised through the school's achievement of the Autism Northern Ireland Impact Award\*.

The staff also make reasonable adjustments to accommodate the needs of individual children, such as offering alternative lunch arrangements for children who may struggle to cope with the hustle and bustle of the main hall environment. Additionally, the staff monitor closely the children's attendance and work collaboratively with the parents to address any concerns.

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

The staff use a wide range of assessments to: monitor the children's progress; identify those who require additional support in their learning; and inform the identification of the whole school areas of improvement in the curriculum. Most of the children are making good progress in communication, using mathematics and using information and communication technology (ICT). The children listen well in class and communicate their ideas using an expanding vocabulary. This progress is evident in the high-quality podcasts that the children create and the excellent standard of writing they produce. The children write imaginatively and creatively and, where appropriate, use digital technology very effectively to edit and present their work.

In numeracy, the children use a good range of mental mathematics skills and, when given the opportunity, can explain clearly their reasons for using particular strategies. When learning outdoors, the children apply their mathematical skills across a range of real-life contexts. The school's assessment information and the work in the children's books show that the children achieve good standards in mathematics.

Digital learning is integrated well from the foundation stage, with children using a variety of digital apps to support their learning in areas such as numeracy and digital art and design. As they progress through the school, the children become increasingly proficient in using technology for research, writing, multimedia

presentations and creating podcasts. To strengthen further the children's digital skills, the school has identified appropriately the need to develop a Digital Leaders Programme as a means of using the children's views to develop technology-enhanced learning across the school.

Within Mountnorris Primary School, success for the children is defined not only academically but also holistically. In line with the school's vision, the staff encourage and support children of all abilities to build upon their talents. These talents are recognised through class and whole school award systems, including the Principal's Award. The children's achievements are recognised and shared regularly through digital communications with parents, newsletters, the school website and social media pages. All key stage 2 children are involved currently in preparations for a dramatic production of 'The Lion King'. This opportunity showcases the talents of all children and is developing well their artistic and musical talents, building their confidence and promoting their self-esteem through performing for an audience.

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

The children engage enthusiastically in their leadership roles on the School and Eco Councils and prioritise helping others less fortunate than themselves. The long-standing shared education partnership provides a vehicle for the children and the staff to work together on curricular areas and has impacted positively on the children's knowledge and skills, most recently in developing their creative literacy.

All of the staff have opportunities to engage in a wide range of opportunities for professional learning linked strategically to priority areas within the development plan. In addition, several of the staff access independently further professional learning, including research on aspects of SEN to develop further their knowledge, skills and strategies to meet the needs of all the children. The strengths, interests and talents of all of the staff are recognised and utilised to good effect, providing further evidence of the school's vision to maximise the potential success of everyone.

The parent support group work in partnership with the staff to help improve and develop the school environment to enhance the educational experiences for all children. This work includes practical support, with the development of the outdoor play area and the raising of funds for resources through fun activities for the children including, for example, a Christmas fun day with a Santa's Grotto. The importance of the Christian faith underpins all of the work of the school. The guest speakers and Pastors are involved regularly in the school assemblies in order to highlight the core value of respect that the school cherishes.

## **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 staff, governors and parents of Mountnorris Primary School share a commitment to “**Maximise Potential Success**” for every child. The school is at the very heart of the rural community and is highly valued and respected. The school is well placed to take forward the area for action identified in the report.

The ETI, through the engagement of the district inspector, will continue to work with the school on its journey of improvement.

## 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

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#### **No Desk Day**

No Desk Day is a school initiative to help children appreciate how privileged they are to have desks in school, compared to many children in Uganda.

#### **Face up to Climate Change**

Face up to Climate Change is a school initiative where children engage daily in 28 days of climate awareness activities during the month of February.

#### **Wellbeing Wednesday**

Weekly mental health and wellbeing assemblies to promote resilience and the importance of good mental health

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#### **Autism Northern Ireland Impact Award**

The Autism NI Impact Award for Education is a CPD certified training package that supports schools of all sizes to provide an inclusive and welcoming environment for autistic pupils and staff.



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