

Report of a Primary Inspection
Oakwood Integrated Primary School

November 2024



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

1. INTRODUCTION

A. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Oakwood Integrated Primary School and Nursery Unit is situated in The Cutts, in Derriaghy, between Belfast and Lisburn. The total enrolment is 213, which comprises of 190 children in the primary school and 23 in the part-time nursery unit, which was granted statutory status in 2019. A minority (14%) of the children have been identified as having special educational needs (SEN) and one-third have free school meals entitlement.

Oakwood Integrated Primary School was the first primary school in Northern Ireland to achieve the Inclusion Quality Mark (IQM)*, and the first school in Northern Ireland to receive the subsequent IQM Flagship and Flagship 2* status. It is a recognised hub school for Teaching and Learning Schools Northern Ireland* (TLS) and is one of only five schools recognised as a Designated OLEVI* Centre of Excellence for Northern Ireland. It has an active parent council, pupil council and eco committee in operation and was awarded its 10th Eco Schools Green Flag* award in 2024. All teaching staff across the primary school and nursery unit have completed their Forest School training and the school received recognition as a Northern Ireland Forest School Association (NIFSA)* accredited Forest School in 2021. The school has been involved in a Shared Education partnership with a local controlled and a Catholic maintained school for almost 15 years.

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 in advance of the inspection. Inspectors also spoke with groups of children from years 3, 5, and 7 and met with members of the school's parents' council.

All of the year 7 children responded to the questionnaire and a minority provided written comments. All of the children reported that they feel safe in school, that there is an adult they can talk to in school if they are feeling worried or have a problem, and that the teachers and other adults in school treat them with care and respect. In their written comments, the children spoke positively about their friends in Oakwood Integrated Primary School.

Almost all of the staff (82%) responded to the questionnaire, almost one-quarter of whom provided written comments. Their responses were very positive and they commented in particular on the supportive ethos that exists within the school.

Just over one-third of parents (35%) responded to the questionnaire and almost two-thirds (64%) of those who responded provided written comments. Almost all of the responses were very positive. In particular, the parents reported that they are happy with the quality of the pastoral care provided by the staff and that their child is happy in the school and is making progress in their learning.

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

C. THE PROCESS OF INSPECTION

The ETI worked alongside Oakwood Integrated 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 vision, 'Learning, working and playing together for a better tomorrow' agreed by the founders almost 30 years ago is regularly revisited, and continues to drive all aspects of the daily life and work of the inclusive community in Oakwood Integrated Primary School and Nursery Unit.
- Whole-school strategic planning for improvement is underpinned by a collegial and robust process of self-evaluation which identifies relevant priorities for improvement and informs a bespoke and innovative programme of staff professional learning.
- There is a consistent and shared understanding among all staff of what constitutes high quality learning and teaching which is impacting very positively on practice and on the children's holistic development, learning experiences and outcomes.
- Whole-class inclusive and adaptive teaching approaches and highly impactful small group interventions, enable all children to experience success and make progress from their individual starting points.
- The children are inquisitive and confident. They engage enthusiastically in their learning and have well-developed communication and leadership skills that enable them to contribute meaningfully to wider experiences and decisions across the school.
- There is a highly effective and strategic approach to, and rationale for, the wide range of well-considered internal and external collaborative networks that are empowering the school to realise its vision and live out its five key values of inclusion, high quality learning and teaching, leadership, partnerships and achievement.

- 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

Learning, working and playing together for a better tomorrow was agreed as the vision statement for Oakwood Integrated Primary School by the founding pupils, parents, staff and governors when the school was first established in 1996. This vision has been regularly revisited and consulted upon, through the robust processes of self-evaluation that are well-embedded in the school, and it continues to resonate with the whole-school community and drive all aspects of the life and work of Oakwood Integrated Primary School and Nursery Unit.

Whole-school strategic planning for improvement is informed through meaningful consultation with a wide range of stakeholders and insightful analysis of an extensive range of quantitative and qualitative information. Appropriate priorities for improvement inform the creative and bespoke approaches to staff professional learning and support the staff very effectively to achieve their child-centred aims underpinned by their five key values of inclusion, high quality learning and teaching, leadership, partnerships and achievement.

The dedicated governors have a wide skill set and carry out effectively their support and challenge functions in the best interests of the children, staff and parents/carers within the ethos of integrated education. Through their individual roles as ‘champion governors’ they have developed effective partnerships with staff who hold key responsibilities, and they keep abreast of any new developments, opportunities and challenges across all aspects of the life and work of the school.

B. IMPLEMENTING AND IMPROVING TO ACHIEVE THE VISION

Across the primary school and nursery unit, there is an ongoing, intentional focus on developing and maintaining consistently high-quality learning and teaching which is integral to the school achieving its vision. The school participates in an accredited programme focused on continually developing and reflecting upon the quality of leadership, learning and teaching. Through this programme, teachers have accessed training and support, enabling them to reflect on, and share, their classroom practice. As a result, the staff team are well placed to take forward the planned re-establishment of opportunities to share effective practice within and beyond the school community following the period of industrial action by the teaching unions. As a result of this on-going work, the staff have a shared understanding of the characteristics of effective learning and teaching, and the use of assessment for learning strategies is well embedded across all classes and in all curricular areas.

Across each key stage, the learning activities are well paced and the teachers make connections with, and build effectively on, previous learning. They role model learning processes very skilfully and as a result, the children understand and can see the progression in their learning and the impact on their outcomes. There is

detailed, comprehensive long- and medium-term planning in place across all areas of the primary curriculum. Planning for key curricular areas incorporates progression across different ability levels and is responsive to the interests and needs of the children. The progress made by the children is monitored and evaluated regularly by the teachers, and the provision, strategies and approaches used are amended to meet individual needs.

The success of previous school improvement work, for example the focus on the development of writing skills across the curriculum, has led to children in the nursery unit engaging in purposeful mark making across the pre-school curriculum, and children in the primary school being able to talk confidently and knowledgeably about different genres of writing, the key features of each genre and the key language they would expect to see.

The provision for the physical education (PE) area of learning is being developed very effectively across the school by the creative use of individual staff expertise. Planning for progression is in place across all aspects of the PE curriculum and the children in Years 4 to 7 also benefit from swimming lessons. Opportunities for teachers to deliver PE lessons together has developed the capacity of all staff to deliver the full breadth of the PE curriculum, ensuring that children are developing their skills, confidence and competence and experiencing a sense of enjoyment and challenge as they progress through the school. During PE lessons children are encouraged to be creative and imaginative and their learning is linked to other curricular areas such as mathematics and numeracy and language and literacy.

The bespoke, detailed whole-school planning for digital skills, includes: clear skills development and progression; a balanced allocation of resources across the school; and a comprehensive system for monitoring and recording the children's progression. As a result, the children make good progress through the school and are developing well their Information and Communications Technology skills and competencies using a variety of platforms, which promotes effectively their readiness for the next stage of their learning, including transfer to post-primary level.

A culture of keeping safe is evident across the school. The health and wellbeing of the children is carefully considered in curriculum planning and the children's experiences in school places a strong emphasis on developing healthy lifestyle habits, for example, encouraging them to take part in the Daily Mile initiative. Specialist interventions are used effectively to support small groups of children with their emotional health and wellbeing and sensory needs.

C. BUILDING EQUITY

The staff have high expectations for all of the children in their care. Whole-class inclusive and adaptive teaching approaches ensure every child has equitable access to learning opportunities and resources best suited to their individual needs.

The school has made significant investment in developing its SEN provision, including building the capacity of all staff to meet the individual needs of the children. Early identification of SEN by the highly vigilant staff, in partnership with parents and external agencies, is prioritised and well-constructed individual educational plans

(IEPs) are in place and are reviewed, monitored and updated regularly, and guide very well the children's learning journey. A range of very effective, well-planned small-group support interventions, delivered by highly skilled staff, are impacting very positively on the children's outcomes, wellbeing and self-esteem. These include, targeted literacy and numeracy support, social and communication support, focused sensory sessions, peer-support groups, and Lego therapy. Immersed in this calm, caring, respectful and inclusive environment, the children are happy and engage well with their learning and are making progress.

D. DEFINING, CELEBRATING AND EMBEDDING SUCCESS

The whole-school overarching rules of Be safe, be kind, be respectful are embraced and lived out by all. Relationships between the adults and the children are caring and supportive. The children know their opinions are valued.

The strategic priority that the school places on the development of the children's emotional intelligence and the intentional focus placed on developing the children's confidence and communication skills, is impacting very positively on the children's self-esteem and their ability to build relationships and interact with others. As a result, the children across the primary school and nursery unit are inquisitive and confident and have well-developed communication skills. During their lessons, the children engage enthusiastically in the challenging and interesting learning activities and produce work of a high standard. They work and play very well in pairs and small groups, are attentive and respectful of one another's opinions, and are able to explain their thinking and to give reasons for their answers. Across all key stages, the children are actively developing their use and understanding of subject-specific vocabulary and are able to make meaningful links in their learning across the curriculum.

Individual progress is recognised and celebrated on many levels across the school. The children respond well to the teachers' use of positive verbal feedback in class and the affirming and supportive written feedback in their books. Their efforts and successes are shared and celebrated, for example, via a home-school communication app, through achievement of individual targets, and through assemblies that celebrate progress made in reading. A wide range of qualitative and quantitative information, including assessment data, demonstrates the progress children are making in their learning across the curriculum, including their digital skills. This data is used to tailor the provision to support the children's ongoing progression and smooth transitions at each stage, from nursery to year 1, from year to year across the primary school, and from year 7 to year 8 when the children transfer to one of several post primary schools.

The children's wider skills, experiences and leadership opportunities are developing well through their participation in, for example: school shows and the choir; learning musical instruments; and taking on roles of responsibility as members of their class council, school council, eco-committee, and as 'buddies' for the nursery and year 1 children.

E. GROWING A COMMUNITY OF LEARNING

There is a highly effective and strategic approach to, and rationale for, the wide range of well-considered internal and external collaborative networks that empower the school to realise its vision and live out its five key values. Across the provision for learning, there are professional learning opportunities with external providers that are enhancing the staff's knowledge and skills and enabling them to provide positive learning experiences for the children. These include, for example, the Shared and Integrated Education clusters, the OLEVI Teaching and Learning School (TLS) Northern Ireland programmes, and the Forest School experiences. Local businesses are involved in programmes such as, Time to Read, Time to Count, and a number of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) initiatives. The parents/carers are invited to engage regularly with the school community through, for example, participating in stay-and-play sessions and the super learning days. The active parents' council works along with the children on the school council to support a local foodbank.

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

All members of the inclusive and dynamic community of Oakwood Integrated Primary School and Nursery Unit are fully committed to the aims and values of integrated education and are passionate about their vision, Learning, Working and Playing Together for a Better Tomorrow.

The ETI will continue to work with Oakwood Integrated Primary School and Nursery Unit, including to share examples of highly effective practice from which others may learn.

The aspect of practice which should be shared more widely is:

- the strategic and flexible approaches to utilising staff expertise, and the creative use of curriculum time, to build capacity across the school and ensure all children have access to a broad and balanced curriculum that is responsive to their individual needs.

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%

APPENDIX 2: NOTES

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Inclusion Quality Mark (IQM)

This award recognises the ongoing commitment by schools to provide the very best education for all children irrespective of differences.

IQM Flagship and Flagship 2 status

Schools who have held IQM Centre of Excellence status for at least 3 years and played a strong leadership role in developing inclusion best practice across a network of schools.

OLEVI/TLS

An external commercial programme the aim of which is to provide opportunities for mentoring or coaching teachers to improve their practice and to recognise, articulate and model best practice.

Eco Schools Green Flag

An Eco-Schools' accreditation that acknowledges, rewards and celebrates the ecological achievements of young people in schools.

Northern Ireland Forest School Association (NIFSA)

NIFSA is a Forest School programme provider for schools, nurseries and Universities across Northern Ireland.

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