

Report of a Primary Inspection  
St Colman's Primary School, Lisburn

October 2024



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# **1. INTRODUCTION**

## **A. BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

St Colman's Primary School is a Catholic maintained co-educational primary school situated in the Derriaghy area of Lisburn. There are currently 392 children enrolled in the school, almost all of whom come from the surrounding Parish of Derriaghy. Almost one-tenth (9.4%) of the children have free school meals entitlement, a decrease of approximately 5% from previous years. A minority of the children (15.6%) across the whole school have been identified as having special educational needs (SEN); 40% of whom are in specialist provision in mainstream schools (SPiM) classes. There are fourteen mainstream year 1 to year 7 classes and three SPiM classes. The school has a long tradition of supporting children in key stage 1 and 2 with moderate learning difficulties in their two well-established SPiM classes, and at the time of inspection, a programme of induction was underway to support children with severe learning difficulties who will be joining the newly built SPiM early years and foundation class, The Acorns.

The school has achieved a number of awards over the last three years including: their third Eco Schools' 'Green Flag' Award; Spirit of Catholic Education Award 2021; Sentinus Technology Award 2021; Eco School of the Year 2022/23; Sustrans Active Travel Award; and Nominet Micro:Bit Award 2024.

The school has a long-established, active Shared Education partnership with two controlled schools in the Lisburn area.

## **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. A summary of the questionnaire responses was shared with the principal and a representative of the board of governors. Inspectors also spoke with groups of children from years 3, 5, 6 and 7.

Almost all of the year 7 children responded to the confidential questionnaire and almost all of their responses were wholly positive. They all reported feeling safe in school and said that they are treated with care and respect, receive help with their learning when needed, and use often digital technology in school to support their learning. One-half of the year 7 children also provided written comments outlining: their pride in being part of the friendly school community; the care and understanding of the teachers; the range of sporting and extra-curricular opportunities available to them; and the opportunities for them to take on roles of responsibility as school council members and buddies to the year 1 children. In their discussions with inspectors, the children from years 3, 5, 6 and 7 also shared similar positive opinions about the school.

Almost one-half of the parents (45%) responded to the questionnaire and more than one-half of those who responded (59%) also provided written comments. Almost all of the responses were overwhelmingly positive. In their written comments the parents praised the 'fantastic' school which is characterised by: the caring and dedicated staff; the visible, personable and approachable leaders; the holistic educational and extra-curricular opportunities available to the children; and the effective communication with parents.

All of the staff responded to the questionnaire and their responses were highly positive. Just over one-third (36%) provided written comments in which they expressed how they feel proud and privileged to work in a happy, vibrant school where the children are at the heart of everything they do. They praised the quality of the working relationships at all levels, the nurturing ethos and the attention given to their wellbeing.

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

The ETI worked alongside St Colman'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 vision for every child to 'thrive spiritually, academically and socially in a supportive, inclusive environment' is achieved through the robust and collegial self-evaluation and development planning processes which places value in, and is informed by, the views of the children, staff, parents and governors.
- Children of all abilities benefit from a meaningfully connected curriculum which enthuses, excites and challenges them.
- Exploring financial capability through learning about the environment, society and the economy, equips the children from an early age with skills to manage money and understand the importance of good financial wellbeing.
- There is a comprehensive and strategic approach to equality, diversity and inclusion which is underpinned by the school motto 'Joined by faith, encouraged to succeed' and is evidenced in the commitment of the whole school community to cherishing each child and enabling them to flourish.

- The fundamental role of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is embraced in the school through their strategic bespoke programme, UICT Development Pathway, which ensures a continuity and progression of skills and prepares the children to become digital citizens and digital workers.
- The children are caring, confident and articulate. They are making very good progress in their learning across the curriculum and are developing very well their creative and critical thinking, and their understanding of contemporary ethical and moral issues.
- The focus on wellbeing across the school, along with the very positive working relationships built on respect, trust and mutual support, provides a solid foundation for the innovative and vibrant community of learning that drives continuous improvement.
- 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 vision for every child to thrive spiritually, academically, and socially in a supportive, inclusive environment is shared by all at St Colman's Primary School and is informed by the values of Catholic education, honest and robust self-evaluation processes, and a collegial commitment to continuous improvement. Through faith, collaboration, and compassion, leaders and staff at all levels strive to build a community where all children feel valued, capable, and empowered to succeed. This is achieved to a consistently high standard through the longstanding and continually evolving process of development planning which strategically informs appropriate priorities for improvement and is underpinned by a strong culture of mutual respect, a holistic and child-centred ethos, and a dedication to lifelong learning.

The well-established board of governors is very involved in the life and work of the school and the members bring a wide range of skills and experience to their collective role and also to their individual roles as curricular-link governors. They value the vital role that the school plays in the Parish of Derriaghy and share the passion of the school leaders and whole staff to providing the children of St Colman's Primary School with a safe, inclusive, child-centred and Christian learning environment where each child is nurtured to grow and develop their full potential.

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

Whole-school planning for learning is well-developed, detailed and comprehensive. It provides all children with equitable access to a broad, balanced and connected programme of learning and reflects fully the overarching aim and key objectives of the Northern Ireland Curriculum. A wide range of appropriate quantitative data is used to very good effect, in conjunction with the skilful observations and evaluations of the teachers, to identify the children's individual starting points, inform whole-class and individual planning, and monitor and review progress.

The staff provide extensive well-considered and meaningfully connected learning opportunities which enable children of all abilities to participate fully in the stimulating, well-planned and appropriately resourced lessons. In the best practice, the skilful interactions of the teachers and classroom assistants, and appropriately challenging and open-ended activity-based learning opportunities, support very well the development of the children's independence, critical thinking and creativity. Across the school, the teachers maximise every opportunity to set the learning in real life and relevant contexts and develop, for example, the children's financial capability, physical fitness skills, and knowledge and understanding of local and global issues. The children's learning experiences are further enhanced through the range of purposeful relationships that have been built with local businesses and employers, creating pathways for children to gain real-world insights and experiences that contribute to their holistic development.

The senior leaders fully comprehend the fundamental role of ICT in preparing children for the future. They have been strategic in establishing an ICT team to build teacher confidence and to lead the review and planning for the development of provision; a continual process of monitoring and review has also been established. Priorities were identified arising from consultation with staff and children and consequently a bespoke programme is now in place entitled the UICT Development Pathway which addresses continuity and progression and reflects curricular guidance. The children across the school are provided with stimulating opportunities to learn and apply their ICT skills; they use a range of relevant hardware and software with increasing confidence and independence and are familiar with using, for example, Artificial Intelligence (AI) and QR codes in their work.

The health and wellbeing of the whole school community is of paramount importance and intentional steps are taken to create and maintain an environment that promotes wellbeing, such as having dedicated times for reflection, prayer, or mindfulness practice, and the regular promotion of physical activity and mental health awareness throughout the school. The recently established wellbeing team has devised a thematic whole-school overview of the preventative curriculum which identifies connections across for example, the Religious Education (RE), Personal Development and Mutual Understanding (PDMU) and e-safety programmes to ensure the children across the school have access to comprehensive and continuous provision that equips them for life.

## **C. BUILDING EQUITY**

The school's motto 'Joined by faith, encouraged to succeed,' underpins the commitment of the school community to valuing and meeting the needs of each child. The staff know the children and their families very well; they appreciate the children's strengths and understand well the challenges they may face. There is a well-developed, comprehensive and strategic approach to promoting equity, diversity and inclusion which is reflected very well in the high expectations for the children and the commitment of the staff to enabling each child to thrive.

The staff work hard to identify and address any barriers at a very early stage. A range of quantitative and qualitative evidence, including the views of the children and their families, enables the staff to develop appropriate support plans for individual children. The personal learning plans provide well-considered targets, strategies and resources and the children's progress is monitored meticulously as they move through the school.

The staff provide a very caring environment which is reciprocated by the children who are supportive of one another, accepting of diversity within the school and beyond, and display very high levels of respect and kindness. Leadership roles, such as the playground buddies, develop the children's empathy for others while active, experiential lessons on contemporary, ethical issues develop the children's sense of social justice.

The classroom assistants carry out a valuable and much-valued role. Literacy approaches such as reading partnerships, assistive technologies and effective classroom organisation all help the staff to address successfully the learning, physical and other challenges the children face. Nurturing approaches, including the provision of 'calm spaces' in classrooms, support well the children in learning to manage their own emotional wellbeing.

A strength of the school is the detailed and carefully thought-out arrangements for children from different classes, including those in the specialist provision classes, to work together and develop knowledge, skills, friendships and confidence through shared physical, sensory, pastoral and spiritual experiences.

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

Throughout the school the children are articulate and are developing very well their thinking skills and personal capabilities. They work well in pairs and groups to manage information, problem solve and think creatively. The teachers use very effectively a wide range of information, assessments and professional judgement to monitor closely the children's progress and inform individual, class and whole-school academic and pastoral targets for improvement. The children have ownership of their targets, which they set along with the teacher, and they speak confidently about what they are trying to improve. As a result, the children are making very good progress in their learning from their individual starting points.

The positive and supportive relationships across the school, the effective and consistent use of praise and encouragement by the staff, and the wide range of awards encourage the children to do their best and to support each other. The children recognise one another's successes, reflecting a classroom environment underpinned by respect and kindness. The attractive wall displays around the school celebrate the children's work and through school assemblies, the school website and communication app, the children's achievements and their successes are shared with parents and the wider community. The children's work in their books is always marked supportively, and their achievements clearly identified. The school is in the process of reviewing and updating their assessment policy to continue to build on the existing good practice within the school.

The children's opinions are sought, listened to and valued and used to inform the school development planning process. The cross-curricular focus groups, led by the numeracy, literacy and ICT co-ordinators, empower the children to reflect on their experiences of the curriculum, highlight the areas they feel are successful and offer any suggestions for improvement. The children in the school council are clear about their role to be the voice for their peers and are proud of the ideas that they contribute. They spoke with confidence and pride about their role in the bio-diversity project to develop the outdoor learning classroom and the importance of participating annually in the Sustrans 'Big Walk and Wheel' week which encourages them to make active journeys to school to reduce the use of cars and improve the air quality in their local environment.

There are good opportunities for all the year 7 children, including those in the specialist provision classes, to take on roles of responsibility including, digital buddies and playground buddies who, as well as working with children at break and lunch times, welcome and support the year 1 children in the morning when they arrive to school and play with them in the classroom. They are proud of the roles and how they can support the younger children. The year 7 children act as reading buddies for year 1 children, they enjoy reading with the younger children and recalled fondly the impact that their buddies had on them when they were in year 1. The children in year 6 and year 7 also take on 'Digital Buddies' roles to support the children in the foundation stage.

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

Collaboration among the children, staff, and families is a key strength in St Colman's Primary School and is enabled by the open and honest communication and the importance placed on nurturing relationships built on respect, trust, and mutual support.

The school works well with the parents and there is an active parents' association who organise regular fund-raising events. There are also good opportunities provided through the shared education partnerships for parents to attend workshops hosted by the partner schools on areas such as helping to support their child with maths or the importance of internet safety. The children spoke about shared sports events and trips which afforded them the chance to widen their friendship groups and learn about others. The partnerships with other schools have also provided opportunities for highly effective staff professional learning which have impacted very positively on the learning and teaching across the school.



The school has good links with the adjacent pre-school who visit the school regularly to use the hall and the outdoor area and to watch school assemblies or shows. The foundation stage staff visit the pre-school to get to know the children and have also developed proactive links with all the local pre-schools to aid the children's transition into year 1. Transition pathways for the key stage 2 children are considered in year 6 and there are also well-established links with all the post-primary schools to where the children will transition.

The staff actively role model the value of lifelong learning and their achievements and successes are shared and celebrated. They set and share their own targets along with the children in their classes. There is a range of opportunities for professional learning available to the staff based on their interests and needs. A bespoke leadership programme for co-ordinators is being developed, which is encouraging and supporting aspiring leaders in the school to develop their leadership skills through, for example, sharing best practice and observing elements of practice which are relevant to the school's development plan. In addition, there is a comprehensive non-teaching staff professional development programme, delivered by the co-ordinators, and focusing on the cross-curricular skills, resulting in skilled and confident classroom assistants who play an integral role in supporting the children with 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**

The staff and governors of St Colman's Primary School are successfully building a community where all children feel valued, capable, and empowered to succeed and develop their character through an ethos of respect and tolerance guided by faith, collaboration and compassion.

The ETI will continue to work with St Colman's 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 are:

- the school's strategic and meticulous approaches to promoting equality, diversity and inclusion;
- the use of the UICT Development Pathway to facilitate continuity and progression of skills and prepare the children to become digital citizens and digital workers; and
- the development of a well-connected and responsive curriculum which equips the children for life.

## 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%

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