

Education and Training Inspectorate PRIMARY INSPECTION



St Columban's Primary School, Kilkeel, County Down

Maintained, co-educational DE Ref No: 503-6706

Report of a Baseline Monitoring Inspection (Involving Action Short of Strike) in October 2019



The Education and Training Inspectorate
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Baseline Monitoring Inspection of St Columbans Primary School, Kilkeel, County Down (503-6706)

Introduction

The aim of the Baseline Monitoring Inspection is to evaluate the extent to which the leadership and management uses self-evaluation effectively to inform the development planning process to bring about improvement. The outcome of the inspection will inform future inspection activity. A Baseline Monitoring Inspection was conducted on 22 October 2019.

St Columban's Primary School opened in September 2018 as an amalgamation of the former Moneydarragh, St Joseph's and St Mary's primary schools. The school is operating currently on the site of a former post-primary school, which has been significantly upgraded. A new school building has been approved and plans are progressing. The school is an active member of the Mourne principals cluster group and is currently developing a shared education partnership with another local school.

The trade unions which make up the Northern Ireland Teachers' Council (NITC) have declared industrial action primarily in relation to a pay dispute, and also workload and other management issues. The industrial action includes non-co-operation with the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI). Prior to the inspection, the school informed the ETI that none of the teachers or the leadership would be co-operating with the inspection. The governors and the leadership co-operated with the inspection in relation to safeguarding responsibilities. The ETI has a statutory duty to monitor, inspect and report on the standards of education and professional practice among teachers under Article 102 of the Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 1986. Therefore, the inspection proceeded and the following evaluations are based on the evidence as made available at the time of the inspection.

Children's, parents' and staff questionnaire responses

A confidential, online questionnaire was issued to year 7 children, parents and staff in advance of the inspection visit. Almost all of the year 7 children completed the questionnaire; their responses indicated appreciation of the support provided by the staff and their enjoyment of their learning activities both inside and outside of school. A minority of parents completed the questionnaire; these responses were largely positive, with most indicating that the amalgamation is being well-led and managed. Over one-half of the staff responded to the questionnaire; all of these responses agreed that the staff work well together to plan for the children's learning and that they have professional development opportunities which have enhanced their confidence and expertise.

All of the findings, including the issues arising from the parents' written comments, have been shared with the senior leadership and a representative of the governors.

Focus of the inspection

Owing to the school's participation in industrial action:

- the inspection was unable to focus on evaluating action to promote improvement and its impact on learning and teaching and outcomes for learners;
- lines of inquiry were not selected from the development plan priorities; and
- the school did not demonstrate if and how the actions taken have led to improvement for the learners.

Key findings

- The group of year 6 children who met with the inspectors spoke positively about their experiences since joining the new school. They reported that arrangements were made for everyone to get to know one another and to settle in. The children are enjoying the educational trips and visits and are proud of the eco-council's involvement in creating a sensory garden. They feel part of their new school and are pleased with the new school crest, which the children had a part in designing.
- Due to the non-participation of the teachers and senior leadership in the inspection process, no other key findings can be reported.

Safeguarding

During the inspection, the school provided evidence that the arrangements for safeguarding children reflect broadly the guidance from the Department of Education. The children report that they feel safe in school and they are aware of what to do if they have any concerns about their safety or well-being. However, owing to the action short of strike, the ETI was unable to evaluate fully the outworking of the arrangements for safeguarding in the school.

Conclusion

Owing to the impact of the action short of strike being taken by the senior leadership and staff, the ETI is unable to assure parents/carers, the wider school community and stakeholders of the quality of education being provided for the children. The school is a high priority for future inspection with no further notice.

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