

Report of a Pilot Inspection
Clea Primary School, Armagh

May 2024

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1. INTRODUCTION

A. SCHOOL INFORMATION AND CONTEXT

Clea Primary School is located in a rural area two miles south of the town of Keady. The school has an enrolment of 122 children, including nine in a reception class. The teaching principal is supported by a staff team of five teachers, five classroom assistants and three support staff.

The children have access to a stimulating, well-organised learning environment enhanced by the refurbished accommodation. Around 25% of the children require additional support for their learning and 35% have free school meals entitlement. As part of the school's extended schools programme, the children can access breakfast, after school, gardening and cookery clubs. The children and staff benefit from a shared education partnership with Foley Primary School and Faughart Community National School, Dundalk.

B. VIEWS OF PARENTS, PUPILS AND STAFF

The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) issued online confidential questionnaires to parents and staff in advance of the pilot inspection. A summary of the questionnaire responses was shared with the principal and chair of the board of governors.

One-half of parents responded to the questionnaire and their responses were wholly positive. The written comments provided by over two-fifths (43%) of these parents indicated that their children are happy and enjoy learning in a welcoming, supportive, child-centred school. They appreciate the work of the dedicated and diligent staff and the opportunities for their views to be listened to and acted upon.

Almost all of year 7 children (94%) responded to the questionnaire. Their positive responses highlighted how they value being treated with care and respect. They all believe they are progressing in their learning and know there are staff to talk to if they have a problem. The children recognised that the school encourages them in healthy eating and physical activity. Almost all of the children provided written comments which reflected well the school's focus on including the children's views on the ways they can bring about improvements.

All of the teaching staff responded to the questionnaire and their positive responses highlighted their appreciation of the ethos of care for children and staff that pervades the school, the wide range of opportunities for professional learning and how their views are acted upon. Almost all non-teaching staff responded to the questionnaires and their responses were wholly positive.

C. THE PROCESS OF INSPECTION

The ETI worked alongside the 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

A child-centred vision drives improvement work across the curriculum which supports well the children's learning, wellbeing and holistic development. The school's self-evaluation process is informed by tracking the children's progress into post-primary to inform ways to prepare them better for transition. With decisions focused on the children's best interests, they:

- thrive in the high-quality and inclusive learning environment; in the foundation stage (FS), they respond with enthusiasm and curiosity to outdoor learning;
- develop well as individuals, who contribute positively to their local community and environment through their caring, positive and empathetic dispositions with emotional intelligence and resilience;
- progress well from their differing starting points, needs, abilities and aspirations through their needs identified by staff early and met with appropriate interventions;
- benefit from staff professional learning (SPL) and reflective practice to develop skills in talking, listening, inference, critical thinking and problem solving in real-life contexts;
- relish the varied opportunities to work and learn from others in differing contexts across and beyond the school; and
- succeed through the highly effective working relationships with staff and parents, the community, other providers and multi-agencies.

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 consideration:

- Develop the more systematic integration of outdoor learning across all key stages that builds upon the highly effective FS provision.

3. MAIN REPORT

A. SETTING AND ACHIEVING THE VISION

Clea Primary School achieves well its vision for 'every child and adult to reach their full potential in a nurturing and encouraging atmosphere'. This child-centred vision drives improvement work across the curriculum to support the children's learning, wellbeing and holistic development. Using research-informed and evidence-based analysis of the children's progress across the key stages, staff engage in regular professional dialogue to inform their action plans. Through critical reflection, they review the impact of the improvement work on the children's learning. The school's self-evaluation process is informed by monitoring the children's progress into post-primary to prioritise ways to prepare more effectively the children for transition from year 7 to year 8. Appropriately, given the high quality outdoor learning experiences in FS, staff have identified the value of developing further the planning and provision for outdoor learning across key stage 1 and 2.

The governors provide effective support to empower the staff in their professional learning to realise the school's vision. The co-ordinators provide the governors with regular updates on the children's progress. Some governors help with fundraising, assemblies and visiting classrooms to observe the classroom provision, and support extra-curricular learning in music, public speaking and drama. Consequently, the governors are well informed about the life and work of the school.

B. IMPLEMENTING AND IMPROVING

The curriculum is planned in an interconnected way and meets the children's needs and interests well, drawing inspiration from the local community and the wider Armagh culture and heritage. The staff create engaging learning experiences for the children that promote critical thinking, reflection and inquiry. The children benefit from innovative learning opportunities such as, entrepreneurial initiatives, sports coaching and a wide range of other charity-linked and community endeavours.

Effective interconnected planning for learning informs the teaching well. In all lessons observed, staff built on prior learning in well-structured lessons in which they developed skilfully the children's language, talking, listening, inference and problem solving in real-life contexts. The children apply well their digital skills to support their learning through, for example, exploring different perspectives to generate original ideas. Consequently, the children enjoy their lessons and respond well to the positive feedback from staff.

The whole-school focus on emotional health and well-being (EHWB) has impacted positively on all the children. In responding to the views of the parents, children and staff, the school has put in place an extensive EHWB programme to help the children stay safe, happy and well. The EHWB provision is strengthened by highly effective external support and the use of a sensory hub. As a result, the children's readiness to learn is supported by calming routines, and they are able to manage their emotions through talking about their feelings, and engaging in play and art therapies.

C. BUILDING EQUITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

The children, with their differing needs, abilities and aspirations, progress well from their starting points and are included in all aspects of school life. The staff have excellent working relationships with outside agencies. They identify the children's needs early and plan for appropriate interventions, using targeted approaches to meet the children's complex needs. These include: literacy and numeracy focus groups, reading partnerships and talking partners. A specialist teacher also provides effective short-term literacy intervention sessions focused on reading. The success of these early interventions is evident in the number of children who move off the special educational needs (SEN) register due to the progress they have made.

The children have benefited from shared education learning to explore their own identity and identities of others. The children's skills in inference and their wider knowledge and understanding of different cultures and identities enables them to challenge assumptions, prejudices and celebrate the diversity of other cultures.

D. EMBEDDING SUCCESS

The children develop well as individuals who contribute positively to their local community and environment. They possess caring, positive and empathetic dispositions and show emotional intelligence and resilience. The children converse with adults comfortably and speak with a joy about their learning in a confident, well-informed and articulate manner. In all classes, they engage actively in age-appropriate conversations, are supportive of their peers and participate enthusiastically in their learning. They are developing well their skills in using digital devices, critical thinking and problem solving in real-life contexts. The children in the reception class are making good progress across all the areas of learning in the pre-school curriculum.

The children acquire and use their advocacy skills in caring for each other and in raising issues with the staff. With a notable proportion of children participating in the school council, eco committee and as wellbeing buddies, these children develop their communication and leadership skills. In discussion, the children showed noteworthy levels of social awareness, empathy and a sense of responsibility for making their school a better place for all. They enjoy success through frequent oral praise, encouragement, feedback and rewards while being provided with appropriate stretch and challenge in their learning. They are motivated and energised by impactful assemblies, awards presentations and class prizes, and they are proud of their contributions to the school's Eco green flag award.

The children experience success through extra-curricular opportunities. Both competitive and non-competitive sporting opportunities and other enrichment activities allow the children to learn and play together, encouraging a sense of belonging and loyalty to themselves and their school.

E. GROWING A COMMUNITY OF LEARNING

A key strength of the school is its development of a community of learning. The personal and professional learning of all staff is a key priority, reflected in the breadth of the stimulating and innovative SPL programme which includes numerous accredited courses. The strategic leaders self-evaluate robustly the children's work to inform feedback to the staff on priorities for improvement. The staff benefit from sharing ways to support the teaching of literacy and numeracy with each other, particularly in relation to effective reading interventions.

Through a wider community of learning, staff and parents learn from each other at key points of transition. At pre-school, staff work with external agencies to support the children and parents in play and sensory work. The school works well with other primary schools through cluster groups, and the learning partnership with the local post-primary school helps to prepare the children better for the transition from year 7 to year 8. The school relishes its community support for the children's moral, physical and spiritual development, to enhance the extra-curricular provision, to fund resources and for the children to have opportunities to fundraise for others.

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

Clea Primary School enables its children to thrive through a high quality inclusive learning environment. Its child-centred vision drives improvement work across the curriculum to support the children's learning, wellbeing and holistic development.

ETI will continue to work with Clea 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 include:

- the innovative SPL programme and robust self-evaluation of the children's work to inform feedback to staff on priorities for improvement;
- the effective early identification of children's needs and the provision of appropriate interventions; and
- the high quality outdoor learning in FS.

Clea Primary School is well placed to take forward the area for consideration in the body of the report.

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