

Report of a Pilot Inspection  
Dungannon Primary School

May 2024



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# **1. INTRODUCTION**

## **A. BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Dungannon Primary School is a controlled co-educational primary school in the centre of Dungannon, situated beside South West College and Dungannon Nursery School. Most of the children attending the school come from the town and the surrounding areas.

The school's enrolment has increased significantly from 284 children in 2020 to 321 children in 2024. This rise is due in part to the establishment of two additional Specialist Provision in Mainstream classes in the school. Currently, there are two Learning Support Classes (LSC) for children with moderate learning difficulties (MLD), one for children with severe learning difficulties (SLD) and two social and communication classes for children with a diagnosis of autism. The key stage 2 social and communication class and the LSC for children with SLD were established in September 2022. There are 238 newcomer children in the school, accounting for almost three-quarters of the total school enrolment, spanning 16 different ethnicities. An after-school club is available from 2.00 pm to 6.00 pm.

The school has held an Eco-School Green Flag for a number of years and is proud to have gained recently the Silver: Rights Aware' level of the UNICEF's 'Rights Respecting School' award and also accreditation as a 'Forest School'. Site safety has been enhanced this academic year with the completion of a new car park and traffic management system. The school has a long-standing shared education partnership with a local maintained primary school. With its diverse intake in terms of religious affiliation, cultural identity and learning ability, the school considers itself as being truly integrated, without the official management status.

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

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

Almost all (42) of the year 7 children responded to the questionnaire, nine of whom provided additional written comments. All of the children agreed that: the teachers and assistants help them when they find it difficult to learn; the teachers and other adults in the school treat them with respect; and everyone in their school is welcomed, valued and respected. Almost all the children stated that they have benefitted from opportunities to meet and learn with children from other schools, for example through shared education. In the written comments, most of the children highlighted their enjoyment of the after-school football club.

Inspectors met and spoke with groups of children from years 4, 6 and 7, including representatives from the school council, and digital leaders. The children reported that they are happy and safe in school and that their rights and the rights of others are respected. They are grateful for the wide range of experiences the school provides them including, for example, taking part in the school musical production, educational trips, and the Dungannon Music and Drama Festival. The children reported that they would appreciate further opportunities to be involved in decision-making in the school.

Just under ten percent (22) of the parents responded to the online questionnaire; the responses were very positive. All of the parents indicated that: their child is happy at school; is making good progress in their learning; and, the staff have explained to them how to help their child with their learning. Almost all (21) of the parents know the school's vision and would recommend the school to other parents/carers. The seventeen written comments were very complimentary about the life and work of the school. In particular, the parents highlighted: the high level of support given to the children, especially in the specialist provision; the inclusivity; the benefits to their children of attending a multi-cultural school; and the approachable, helpful staff.

The group of parents who met with an inspector spoke very positively about how their children are supported by the school. They highlighted the benefits for their children of attending a multi-cultural school, where diversity is embraced and celebrated. They spoke also of how they appreciate the dedication of all the staff and the wide range of experiences given to the children, both within and outside of the classroom. The parents emphasised that their children are thriving and achieving individual success, in some instances for the first time in an educational setting.

Almost three-quarters (14) of the teachers responded to the online questionnaire. All agreed that: they are clear on the school's vision and contribute well to achieving the vision; staff wellbeing is promoted effectively; and their views and ideas are sought, valued and acted upon. The six written comments from teachers emphasised the warm, welcoming atmosphere in the school.

A majority (12) of the classroom learning support staff and all (8) of the support staff responded to the online questionnaire. All agreed that their views, skills and knowledge are valued by the school. The small number of written comments expressed how much they enjoy working in the school.

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

The Education and Training Inspectorate (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

- The leadership and staff are committed to the realisation of the school's vision: 'Preparing Children, Enriching our Community, Shaping Futures'. They work tirelessly to ensure the children are supported, educated and cherished in a nurturing and inclusive environment, in line with the school's ethos. The successful outworking of the vision is visible in every aspect of school life.
- All of the lessons observed were effective. The staff know the children very well and foster a positive and supportive learning environment for all children, built on caring and respectful relationships and well-embedded routines that empower the children to be independent learners. The school has identified appropriately the need to develop further the long-term planning for progression in play across the Foundation Stage.
- A key strength of the school's provision is the inclusive learning environment in which diversity is embraced and celebrated. The children have a clear understanding of their rights and the rights of others, and benefit from being part of a multi-cultural community of learning; this prepares them well for life. The children's behaviour during the inspection was exemplary.
- Across the school, including the specialist provision, the staff respond flexibly, creatively and compassionately to the children's diverse learning needs. The staff model acceptance of difference in their attitudes and interactions, which the children replicate. There is a caring and calm environment which enables the children to learn, develop, belong and succeed.
- The health and wellbeing of all, and keeping everyone safe, is given a high priority. The outdoor learning environment is of a high quality and is used to promote connections with the natural world, which benefits the children's emotional health, physical development and their readiness to learn. The preventative curriculum is cohesive and addresses local and contemporary issues with sensitivity. There is a good range of targeted support and early interventions for children who have social and emotional needs. These are equipping the children with strategies they can use to manage their feelings and build their resilience.
- Through continuous monitoring, evaluation and review, the school leadership aligns well the planned professional development to whole school priorities. As a result, the staff professional learning impacts positively on the learning experiences, outcomes and wellbeing of the children.
- The school is proactive in forging highly effective links across education partners and the community, including the local theatre and businesses, which are enhancing the children's creativity, communication and digital skills, and raising the children's awareness of career pathways.



- 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.

Areas for consideration:

- continue to develop further the long-term planning for progression in play across the Foundation Stage.
- extend the opportunities for a wider range of children to participate in decision-making.

### **3. MAIN REPORT**

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

The leadership, including the governors, and staff are committed to the realisation of the school's vision: 'Preparing Children, Enriching our Community, Shaping Futures'. They work tirelessly and collegially to ensure the children are supported, educated and cherished in a nurturing and inclusive environment, in line with the school's ethos. The successful outworking of the vision is visible in every aspect of school life, from the staff welcoming the children to school in the morning, to the structured, inclusive activities at break and lunchtime and the joyful, inspiring assemblies where the children are happy to celebrate each other's successes.

The leadership of the school at all levels is open and reflective; the very effective self-evaluation processes are informed by consultation with staff, children, parents and collaborative partners. The views of all are sought and are incorporated into the appropriate priorities for improvement. These priorities take very good account of the unique profile of the school's enrolment, the starting points of the children, and the full spectrum of their learning needs.

The model of curricular teams is a further example of the school's vision. This concept of distributed leadership is building capacity in staff and gives them ownership of the improvement work undertaken.

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

Senior leadership and staff aim to live out the vision every day in their approaches and decision making. There is a focus on collaborative working and promoting consistency across the school to ensure there is an appropriately tailored curriculum and progression in learning for the children.

The school takes a thematic approach to learning across the key stages and within the specialist provision, which stimulates the children's imagination and increases their engagement. The staff's individuality and creativity are apparent in the range of the themes. Examples include: Berries; the Tudors, arising from involvement with Ulster University; and those which the children suggest such as, the Blue Green Planet.

All of the lessons observed were effective. There are excellent caring and supportive relationships evident across all of the classrooms. The staff know the children very well and foster a positive and supportive learning environment for all children, built on caring and respectful relationships and well-embedded routines that empower the children to be independent learners. Where teaching was particularly effective, the staff follow the interests of the children and are highly creative in using active learning approaches and information and communication technology (ICT) to develop the children's language and promote exploration and problem-solving. The classroom assistants are highly skilled in supporting the children with their learning and with managing their emotions. Planning shows effective baselining of the children's current knowledge and skills and there are opportunities for more connected learning across the curriculum in, for example, outdoor play where the flexibility in the planning, layout and strategies used allow for good opportunities for investigative play and for the children's imaginations to flourish.

The emphasis placed on active learning for example, using geoboards to explore properties of 2-D shape, has resulted in a good range of opportunities for investigative play and problem solving. The school is reviewing appropriately the long-term planning for progression across the curriculum, given the changing profile and needs of the children post-pandemic, and the adverse impact of industrial action on the monitoring and evaluating role of the curriculum teams.

The whole school focus on guided reading has increased the children's enjoyment of reading and the teachers are skilled in encouraging the children to be critical, curious readers for meaning. ICT is a priority on the school development plan and the ICT team has developed clear whole-school planning for progression in the desirable features of presenting and coding/computational thinking skills. The children use software to create, for example, litter pickers.

Every child is valued; their health and wellbeing and keeping them safe is a high priority for the school. The action plan for 'Health Wellbeing and Keeping Safe' is focused on the promotion of the emotional health and wellbeing of staff and pupils. The staff have introduced an extensive range of appropriate and helpful resources and strategies to support this improvement work including, where necessary, links with external agencies. For example, an external mentoring service from the Christian charity 'Reach Mentoring', is offered to children struggling in school or with issues such as family breakdowns or mental illness. The school reports that these interventions are decreasing successfully the numbers of children who need to access statutory services for mental health and wellbeing support.

The outdoor learning environment sustains further the children's personal wellbeing. It is of a high quality and has a sensory garden which encourages the children to connect with the natural world and benefits their emotional health and physical development. The preventative curriculum is cohesive and addresses local and contemporary issues with sensitivity and in an age- and stage-appropriate manner.

## **C. BUILDING EQUITY**

The school's vision underpins and promotes diversity, inclusion and equality, which is borne out in the varied pupil profile. Across the school the staff respond flexibly, creatively and compassionately to the children's diverse learning needs. They model acceptance of and value difference in their attitudes and interactions, which the children replicate, forming positive mindsets for the future. The caring and calm environment created enables the children to learn, develop, belong and succeed.

The staff have extensive knowledge of the children and their learning needs. They know their individual starting points and use this information to inform areas for staff professional learning, empowering staff to deliver tailored interventions and reduce gaps in the children's learning. Staff professional learning, as well as having a clear focus on early intervention, is impacting positively on the pupil outcomes.

There is a clear strategic focus on providing equitable learning opportunities across the school for the children within the specialist provision. The children's curriculum experience is broadened through their participation in mainstream classes, for example in art and science and technology. Within the specialist provisions, the use of skilled classroom assistants to provide small group support and sensory activities is enabling the children to engage with their learning and experience success. The school is responsive to the needs of the children through the use of sensory corridors, which have floor activities to develop motor skills, and reasonable adjustments, such as the removal of the school bell, are in place to support the children to participate in their learning. The staff are focussed on implementing changes to the children's learning environment to enable meaningful participation and inclusion.

Children with complex learning and medical needs are shown care, respect and dignity and are integrated regularly with the mainstream classes, which has resulted in good friendships with their peers.

The sharing of practice by Education Authority (EA) staff who support children accessing Education Other Than at School (EOTAS) provision is providing opportunities in the school for staff professional learning in behaviour management and is building their capacity to try new strategies and build relationships. This is work that could be expanded further through capacity building in nurturing approaches and trauma informed practice.

The gender imbalance within the specialist provisions is a key consideration for the staff. They are mindful of the potential impact on the social learning experiences for the children and the need to plan further inclusion opportunities between specialist and mainstream provisions.

The leadership is committed to ensuring children have equitable access to opportunities and there is a strategic overview of the mechanisms that are in place to overcome educational disadvantage and underachievement, and there is good analysis of the impact of the interventions. The school supports families experiencing financial hardship, whilst maintaining the dignity of those who access the support. Measures include heavily subsidised trips and after school activities, and the recent opening of the school uniform shop.



## **D. EMBEDDING SUCCESS**

The interventions for overcoming barriers to learning are monitored well to show the children's progression from their starting points. The children are involved in setting personal targets and have a good understanding of how to achieve success at their individual level.

The reward structure in the school is based on a House system and the children are recognised for more than academic achievements. They are rewarded, for example, for their participation in internal and external events, being kind to their peers, or for showing good manners and respect for others.

The older children have very well-developed listening skills and good dispositions for learning. They show readiness for the levels of independence required for the next stage of their learning in post-primary school. In discussions with the children in the class, and in the focus groups, they engage readily and confidently with adults and are able to discuss and explain their learning. Across all the lessons observed the children are adept at taking turns, work well together and have well-honed skills of independence and self-management.

Success is celebrated in a more public way with events such as the school production "Mary Poppins" and the 'Fly Your Kite' day'. These events have given the children special memories of accomplishments that they will carry into adulthood. The musical in particular has clearly been the standout event of the school year and has given the children a wonderful opportunity to perform in public on a professional stage. Almost all of the children in key stage 2 had a role in the musical which allowed them to grow in confidence, develop technical, creative and digital skills and forge stronger relationships with their peers.

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

The extensive range of collaborative networks the school has developed is supporting effective comprehensive provision to be put in place for the children and is building well the capacity of staff to meet the children's needs.

Collaboration through the Area Learning Community, and working with the Amma Centre, has led to increased opportunities for the children to develop their coding and computational skills using a wide range of block-based coding apps and resources. They are developing well their critical thinking and problem-solving skills and are able increasingly to apply those skills when coding and debugging programmes. In the most effective practice, the children are developing and applying their coding through exploratory play-based learning in groups in relevant contexts.

The links with the local Bardic Theatre is supporting well the children's creativity and broadening their awareness of careers within the creative skills industries.

Ongoing input from the EA's Specialist Setting Support Team has improved the quality of provision in the specialist class and the strategies are being disseminated appropriately.

## **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**

In Dungannon Primary School the children learn successfully and happily within a multi-cultural, inclusive, enriching environment where everyone is valued and respected. The school is an ambassador of diversity and is an excellent example of how difference is celebrated as an enabler of success, with no limitations.

Dungannon Primary School is well placed to take forward the areas for consideration detailed above in the body of the report. ETI, through the engagement of the District Inspector, will continue to work with Dungannon Primary School, including to share the example of highly effective practice from which others may learn. The aspect of practice which should be shared more widely includes:

- creating and sustaining a learning environment where diversity is embraced and celebrated.

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