

Report of a Pilot Inspection
Meadow Bridge Primary School, Hillsborough

June 2024

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1. INTRODUCTION

A. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Meadow Bridge Primary School is a rural school situated on the outskirts of Hillsborough in County Down. There are currently 289 children attending the school, just over ten percent of whom have been identified as having special educational needs (SEN). There are ten classes in the school.

There have been a number of significant changes to staffing structures, roles and responsibilities over recent years. The principal and vice-principal were appointed in 2021 and a head of foundation stage was appointed in April 2024. A learning support teacher was appointed on a part-time basis in August 2023 to support individual and small groups of children requiring additional support with their learning.

The school has been awarded a number of external accreditations and is a recognised Northern Ireland Forest School, an Eco-Schools Green Flag recipient and has been accredited as a UNICEF's Rights Respecting School.

B. VIEWS OF PARENTS AND STAFF

The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) issued online confidential questionnaires to year 7 children, all staff and parents in advance of the pilot inspection. A summary of the questionnaire responses was shared with the principal and representatives of the board of governors.

All of the year 7 children responded to the questionnaire and almost all of their responses were wholly positive. Almost one-half of the children included additional written comments in which they commented on: the supportive relationships in the school; the extensive range of sports, clubs and activities available to them; and the opportunities they have to take on roles of responsibility. They highlighted the examples of their leadership roles within the school, such as becoming a house captain, a digital leader, or being elected as a member of the school or eco council. Inspectors also met with groups of children from years 3, 5 and 7 who shared their similarly positive experiences of school.

A majority of the parents (65%) responded to the questionnaire and almost all of their responses were overwhelmingly positive. Over one-half of those who responded provided additional written comments in which they praised many aspects of their own and their children's experiences in Meadow Bridge Primary School. In particular, they expressed their appreciation of the approachable and personable senior leadership, the range of experiences available to their children, and the supportive and caring teaching and support staff. A group of parents also met with inspectors and spoke very positively about the school.

All of the staff responded to the questionnaire, one-half of whom included written comments, all of which were extremely positive in praise of the supportive relationships at all levels and the clear vision and purpose shared by all within the school community.

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 whole school community of Meadow Bridge Primary School is committed to the school's vision of creating an environment in which *"everyone feels happy, safe and valued"*, as evidenced through the Christian values and welcoming and inclusive ethos which permeate all aspects of the life and work of the school.
- Recent improvements within the school have been led very effectively. Senior and middle leadership are empowered to lead their areas of responsibility and, through effective self-evaluation processes, have made a discernible impact on the quality of the play-based learning, progression in numeracy, and the children's interest in and enjoyment of reading.
- Through self-evaluation, the school has identified appropriately the need to develop further aspects of the planning and teaching to ensure a more explicit focus on the intended learning and the acquisition of skills across all classes.
- The children engage readily in their learning, respond well to the high expectations of their teachers, work effectively both independently and collaboratively and are making progress from their individual starting points.
- The children's wellbeing is prioritised and their needs are met through, for example, the supportive relationships at all levels, appropriate staff professional learning including links with a range of external providers, and the work of the school's wellbeing team which provides timely and responsive intervention, support and counselling.
- There are robust processes in place for the early identification of, and targeted support for, children who have special educational, including wellbeing, needs. Individual education plans and pupil wellbeing passports are created through meaningful collaboration with the children, their parents and the staff. The highly effective monitoring of the children's progress shows that all children are achieving well.

- Through the wide range of purposeful partnerships with parents and families, local churches and businesses, the school community, in line with its motto, is *'opening doors of opportunity together'* for the children. This is exemplified through enhanced learning experiences, increased extra-curricular opportunities, and participation in competitions.
- 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 action:

- To develop further aspects of the planning and teaching, to include a more explicit focus on the intended learning outcomes and acquisition of skills across all classes, through for example, the identification, dissemination and embedding of best practice from within the school, and increased partnerships with other schools.

3. MAIN REPORT

A. SETTING THE VISION

Meadow Bridge Primary School's motto, *Opening Doors of Opportunity Together*, permeates all aspects of the life and work of the school and informs their vision that the school will be a place where everyone feels happy, safe, and valued and where all children will become well-rounded individuals who are ready to contribute positively to Meadow Bridge Primary School, their local community, their next school, and to wider society.

The school leadership has empowered, encouraged and supported skilfully all staff on a journey of change and improvement over recent years. Senior and middle leaders plan for improvement to good effect in their respective areas of responsibility and, through regular monitoring and evaluating of the provision, identify both the strengths of the provision and the aspects requiring further development. The impact of this is evident through: the high quality, investigative, child-led play in the foundation stage; the clear progression in learning in numeracy; and the increased levels of enjoyment and engagement of the children in reading. A whole-school team structure has been established with all staff now coordinating a curricular area and taking responsibility for leading a team and delivering continual professional learning and development across the school. As a result, there is a collective approach to school improvement and a shared commitment by all to enhance each child's educational journey and nurture their personal development, in line with the school's vision of creating an environment in which *"everyone feels happy, safe and valued"*.

The board of governors play an important role in the school. Their commitment to the vision and ethos of the school, combined with their collective experience and knowledge, provide appropriate support, encouragement and accountability to the school's leadership.

B. IMPLEMENTING AND IMPROVING TO ACHIEVE THE VISION

Through individual and collective processes of reflective practice and wider self-evaluation processes, changes have been implemented which have impacted positively on learning and teaching across the key stages. These changes include the development of short-term planning for literacy and numeracy, with a greater emphasis on lesson structure, meeting the learning needs of all of the children and evaluation of learning. As a result, the quality of the learning and teaching is effective across all classes and the children are making progress in their learning across the curriculum.

In the most effective practice, the planning and associated evaluations of learning have a clear focus on the intended learning and skills, rather than on activities, and the children's contributions are used meaningfully to inform future planning for learning. It will be beneficial to disseminate this practice across the school to ensure consistency and raise further the quality of the learning and teaching and the development of skills in each class. Long-term planning has been developed for numeracy which guides well the teaching and ensures progression in learning across all areas of the numeracy curriculum. This process has now commenced for whole-school long-term planning for literacy.

The children's wellbeing is nurtured and prioritised by all. A range of initiatives and programmes are used to support the children with their emotional health, through: the taught curriculum in class; the targeted individual and small group support by the wellbeing teacher and school counsellor; and the children's involvement in creating class charters, pupil passports, using the listening box, and taking on roles as school councillors and year 7 buddies. The school's commitment to providing the highest standard of pastoral care and wellbeing for the children is also evidenced through: the programmes of whole-staff training, for example on sensory approaches and trauma-informed practices; the formation of a diverse and highly-skilled wellbeing team; the appointment of a pastoral care and wellbeing coordinator, commencing in September 2024; and the planning that is underway to develop a mentoring programme.

C. BUILDING EQUITY

Meadow Bridge Primary School is committed to early identification of need and intervention for any child who requires additional support, in relation to both their learning and pastoral needs. In order to do this effectively, supportive and trusting working relationships are developed and maintained with parents and carers, beginning with the robust transition arrangements from pre-school to primary 1. A comprehensive, multi-disciplinary team approach involves school staff and external partners who provide a wide range of programmes and interventions, all of which are monitored and reviewed regularly. The staff have availed of professional learning opportunities to better understand how they can best meet the needs of each child and ensure consistency of quality and approaches for them as they progress through the school.

Individual education plans (IEP) are child-centred and set clear targets and associated strategies for improvement. Each child's progress is monitored regularly and amendments are made to the IEP as necessary. The parents and children are meaningfully involved in the creation and review of the IEPs and the child-friendly versions of the IEPs support transparency, accessibility and inclusivity for the children. The small-group targeted intervention sessions are very effective in supporting those children who require additional support with their learning. When needed, 'Pupil Passports' are created through collaboration with children, parents and staff to articulate a child's emotional needs and to ensure a collective awareness and understanding of each child's needs and a consistent approach to supporting each child.

D. EMBEDDING SUCCESS

The child-centred approach that is embedded in Meadow Bridge Primary School ensures that individual successes of all kinds are acknowledged and celebrated in order to build each child's confidence, lead to further success and prepare them for the next stages in their education and life.

The children are proud of their school. Throughout the school they are well-mannered and courteous and treat each other, the staff and visitors with respect. They engage readily in their learning, respond well to the high expectations of their teachers and work effectively, both independently and collaboratively. All of the children are making progress from their individual starting points, as evidenced by the range of qualitative and quantitative data gathered and monitored by the teachers and coordinators.

The children spoke enthusiastically and confidently with inspectors about their learning, the support they receive from their teachers and classroom assistants, and their enjoyment of school life in general. They enjoy the opportunities to compete in a range of external sporting events and internal competitions and talk positively about the many opportunities they have that help them to feel valued in the school. These include the opportunities they have to contribute to planning for learning and whole-school assemblies, to take on roles as digital leaders, school council members, house captains and buddies for the younger children.

E. GROWING A COMMUNITY OF LEARNING

A strong sense of community and common purpose to fulfil a shared vision is of the utmost importance to all in Meadow Bridge Primary School. A key strength of the school over recent years is the intentional emphasis that has been placed on developing further a community of learning at all levels to enable each child to thrive and reach their full potential. To achieve this, senior leadership has prioritised internal and external collaboration, timely and clear communication, and continuous professional learning for all staff.

Extending and improving learner participation across the school has been central to the development of a community of learning and the children spoke very positively to inspectors about the contributions they make to their learning and their involvement in the wider life and work of the school. Parents and carers are valued as partners in

their children's learning. Clear lines of communication are maintained with families, and their contributions to events and wider experiences are much appreciated and add greatly to the sense of community. Purposeful links with local businesses and churches are also impacting positively on the children's wider experiences and learning opportunities.

Staff professional learning and development is encouraged and facilitated in many ways, through for example, empowering all staff to lead on specific areas and deliver professional learning to their colleagues, and through the collegial work of the curricular and pastoral teams within the school. Purposeful links have been established with other schools, and the staff avail of a range of external expertise and training, all of which are building the knowledge, skill and confidence of staff and having a positive impact on the children's learning experiences and achievements.

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 whole school community of Meadow Bridge Primary School is committed to the school's vision of creating an environment in which "*everyone feels happy, safe and valued*", as evidenced through the Christian values and welcoming and inclusive ethos which permeate all aspects of the life and work of the school.

There is a clear, shared, child-centred and well-informed vision for the future of Meadow Bridge Primary School. The highly effective strategic leadership at all levels has sensitively and skilfully led a journey of change and improvement over recent years and is well placed to continue to embed the changes made and continue to plan for and effect improvement.

ETI, through the engagement of the District Inspector, will continue to work with the school as it takes forward the area for action detailed in the body of this report.

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