

Report of a Pilot Inspection
St Mary's Primary School, Pomeroy

May 2024

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1. INTRODUCTION

A. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

St Mary's Primary School is a maintained, co-educational primary school situated in the rural village of Pomeroy. Most of the children attending the school come from the village, with a growing number coming from the surrounding rural and wider area. The enrolment has increased gradually over the past four years and stands currently at 195 children, including the children attending the foundation stage specialist provision (the Butterfly Room), which was opened in September 2022.

Fifty-one (26%) of the children are on the special educational needs register, 20 of whom have a statement of educational need. There are currently 19 newcomer children. Approximately 31% of the children have free school meals entitlement.

The acting principal and acting vice-principal have been in post since September 2021.

The school is part of a well-established shared education partnership with the neighbouring controlled primary school and collaborates, through the Education Authority's (EA) 'Pathways into Partnership' programme, with two other primary schools (one controlled and one maintained).

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 inspection. A summary of all the questionnaire responses and the small number of individual concerns were shared with the principal and representatives from the board of governors.

All year 7 children responded to the questionnaire and their responses were very positive. All of the children indicated that: everyone is welcomed, valued and respected; there is someone they can talk to if they are worried or have a problem; they are making progress in their learning and get support when needed; they benefit from learning with pupils from other schools, and are proud to belong to their school community. Almost all of the children provided written comments which were wholly positive about their school experience. The children said that they enjoy seeing their friends and have lots of fun at school. They shared their favourite memories, for example, competitions and class trips and highlighted their pride in helping others, particularly the younger children, by carrying out important leadership roles.

All of the teachers responded to the questionnaire and their responses were wholly positive. Almost one-half of the teachers provided additional written comments which emphasised their support for one another, and their focus on nurturing the children, listening to them, and their delight in seeing the children succeed.

Almost all of the support staff responded to the questionnaire and their responses were mostly positive. A very small number provided additional written comments, highlighting the teamwork and how well children are supported.

One-quarter of the parents responded to the questionnaire. Their responses were very positive. The written comments provided by almost one-half of these parents highlighted how happy their children are at school, the progress they are making and the support their children receive from the staff.

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

- The school is achieving its vision well through the high quality and innovative learning experiences provided for the children in a nurturing, inclusive environment; the children make progress and achieve, their voices are valued, and their successes are celebrated.
- The children benefit greatly from the whole-school, collaborative approach to school improvement. Meaningful consultation with the children allows them to express their views in a variety of ways and enriches their learning experiences.
- The children are curious and enthusiastic learners who enjoy working with others and show resilience when carrying out investigations and problem-solving activities.
- The children's thinking skills are particularly well developed across all areas of learning; they explain their thinking confidently and listen and respond maturely to the ideas and views of others.
- The older children are role models for the younger children and contribute to making their school a happy and safe place for all; they carry out an extensive range of responsibilities which develops their confidence, leadership skills, empathy towards, and understanding of, the needs of others.

- The staff have high expectations for the children and for themselves. They are empowered to: embrace new and creative ways of learning; use their own skills and expertise to enrich the curriculum; and be proactive in seeking collaboration and opportunities to learn with, and from, others.
- There is a highly effective, strategic approach to, and rationale for, internal and external collaborative working which is used well to improve the quality of the children's learning experiences and the outcomes they achieve.
- 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 shared vision to provide a happy secure and stimulating learning environment where all children will achieve their full potential socially, emotionally and academically and will be well equipped to meet the challenges and opportunities of later life is manifested in the school motto, **Today's Child, Tomorrow's Future**. The school's success in living out and achieving its vision is evident in the highly effective and robust self-evaluation that informs the school's priorities for development. The staff set high expectations for themselves and share a common goal to do the best for all of the children, keeping them at the centre of all decision making. The children benefit greatly from the whole-school, collaborative approach to school improvement. They are nurtured in a supportive and inclusive environment, their views are sought, valued and acted upon, and the creative learning experiences provided by the staff lead to success for all.

The governors are clear about how, through their support and challenge function, they contribute to school improvement. The governors who met with inspectors expressed their appreciation of the work of the staff and their joy in seeing the children thrive.

B. IMPLEMENTING AND IMPROVING TO ACHIEVE THE VISION

The children engage with enthusiasm and curiosity in the well-planned, innovative and fun learning experiences which enable them to apply their skills and knowledge across the curriculum and build their resilience. They have high levels of self-management and willingly help and support one another. The children are supported and challenged to think critically, pose and solve problems, collaborate with others, try new ways of working and take risks in their learning. The staff ask effective questions to stimulate and develop the children's thinking skills and extend their oral responses. Consequently, the children explain their thinking confidently and listen and respond maturely to the ideas and views of others.

The staff are empowered by the leadership to embrace new and creative ways of learning to make the school vision a reality. The staff deliver a vibrant curriculum, enriched by meaningful experiences beyond the classroom, notably outdoor learning, and through effective partnerships with others in the local and wider community. The staff use their own skills and expertise confidently and take careful account of the needs and interests of the children and their culturally diverse backgrounds.

The use of the quiet nurture spaces and sensory areas throughout the school and the highly effective use of the outdoor learning environment support well the children's health and wellbeing. The older children play an important role in caring for the younger children; during the inspection, the year 7 children, supported by the staff, were observed keeping their year 1 buddies safe as they walked through the village to the local forest. In discussions with inspectors, the children reported that they know what to do if they have any concerns about their safety and wellbeing.

C. BUILDING EQUITY

The children are nurtured in a safe, inclusive well-organised learning environment, where all members of the school community are welcomed and valued. The collective responsibility for the wellbeing and progress of the children with special educational needs, including those in the Butterfly Room, enables all children to experience success, and is underpinned by whole-school and individually tailored professional learning. The learning activities for children who require additional support with their learning are informed effectively by the targets and strategies set out in their personal learning plans, which are monitored on a regular basis.

The individual schedules for the children in the Butterfly Room encourage the children to choose their learning activities, based on their interests and abilities. The children transition smoothly from the Butterfly Room to join their peers at break and lunch time, for outdoor learning and physical education. During the inspection, the children from the Butterfly Room were observed engaging enthusiastically in sensory play, supported sensitively by the year 7 children.

The newcomer children are very well integrated into all aspects of school life. They appreciate the many opportunities to share aspects of their language and culture, though, for example, food tasting and the celebration of different festivals. The newcomer children who met with an inspector all reported that they made friends very quickly when they joined the school and that they are supported very well by the kind, caring staff.

D. EMBEDDING SUCCESS

The children are respectful in their interactions with one another, staff and visitors. They celebrate enthusiastically the success of others, and their behaviour is exemplary. The school encourages and acknowledges the children's success and achievements both in and outside school and their work is celebrated in attractive displays throughout the school. In discussions with inspectors, the children were keen to talk about personal successes, including in sport, music and dance and in their wider learning.

In addition to curriculum provision, the school provides a range of extra-curricular activities to develop further the children's confidence, self-esteem and wider skills and learning. Through an after-school programme, provided by the Department of Education's Extended Schools funding, children can participate in a wide range of activities including football coaching, running club, drama club, Comhaltas music tuition and garage band.

The older children are role models for the younger children and contribute to making their school a happy and safe place for all; they carry out an extensive range of responsibilities which develops their confidence, leadership skills, empathy towards, and understanding of, the needs of others.

The children are enabled to plan and evaluate their work through self- and peer-assessment. Marking and feedback from the teachers recognises what the children are doing well and gives the children helpful strategies and prompts to improve their work. A range of data is used well to monitor the children's progress, inform planning and practice, and set targets.

E. GROWING A COMMUNITY OF LEARNING

There is a highly effective, strategic approach to, and rationale for, internal and external collaborative working which is used well to improve the quality of the children's learning experiences and the outcomes they achieve. The staff are proactive in seeking collaboration and opportunities to learn with, and from, others, and professional learning is linked well to the priorities in the school development plan.

During the inspection, the year 1 children enjoyed storytelling and art in the local forest with their shared education partners. Both schools have worked with Rural Action as part of the Connecting Pomeroy project, funded as part of the European Union's Peace IV programme, to develop the Pomeroy Forest school and the children played an important role in creating the forest trail. This wonderful resource is being used increasingly to support the children's learning across all areas of the curriculum. The staff continue to develop effectively outdoor learning, as identified in the school development plan, in collaboration with others through the EA 'Pathways into Partnerships' programme.

The year 6 children participate in play experiences with the neighbouring pre-school children throughout the year. The school reports that this collaboration alleviates fears and anxiety for the playgroup children and aids smooth transitions to their chosen primary school, as well as establishing friendships which are consolidated in year 1. The leadership roles, for the year 7 children to work with the younger children, contribute significantly to developing positive relationships within the school community.

Parents are actively encouraged to become involved in the life of the school through the establishment of the parent support group. This group organises many successful fundraising activities, with the proceeds helping to provide additional learning experiences and resources to enhance effectively the children's outdoor learning experiences. The school has also established good communication with parents through their website, regular newsletters, information leaflets and various meetings throughout the year.

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 children in St Mary's Primary School are progressing and achieving in a nurturing, inclusive learning environment. The staff set high expectations for themselves and for the children and share a common goal to do the best for all of the children. As a result, the school is successful in living out and realising its vision.

ETI will continue to work with St Mary'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 include:

- the high quality and innovative learning experiences provided for the children through a vibrant curriculum both inside and beyond the classroom; and
- the meaningful and creative collaboration and learning with and from others, informed by the needs, interests and views of the children.

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