

Report of a Post-primary Inspection
Killicomaine Junior High School

November 2024



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1. INTRODUCTION

A. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Killicomaine Junior High School is a controlled, co-educational, all ability, junior high school which caters for pupils aged 11 to 14. The school is situated in Portadown and operates within the two-tier system of post-primary education known as the 'Dickson Plan', where pupils leave primary school and transfer to a junior high school for a three-year period. The school draws almost all its pupils from the Portadown area. Pupil enrolment has remained consistent over the last three years and is 620 currently. Fourteen percent of pupils (87) are identified as having special educational needs (SEN) and a similar proportion have free school meals entitlement. There are 49 newcomer pupils (7.9%) in the school.

There have been changes in the senior leadership of the school in recent years; the principal has been in post since July 2021 and the vice-principal was appointed in July 2022.

In addition to collaboration within the Craigavon Area Learning Community (CALC), the school works closely with the other six post-primary schools in the Dickson Plan and has partnerships with a wide range of outside agencies.

The accommodation has been updated over the last two years to include: refurbished toilets; new cloakrooms; and a two classroom extension which includes a dedicated SEN space.

B. VIEWS OF PUPILS, PARENTS AND STAFF

The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) issued online confidential questionnaires to pupils, parents and staff in advance of the inspection.

Forty-three percent (270) of pupils responded to the online questionnaire, with 49 providing additional written comments. Almost all pupils feel cared for and respected, and appreciate the regular opportunities they have to exercise in school. Nearly all of the year 8 and year 9 pupils who responded to the questionnaire highlighted how well they were helped to settle in when they started the school. In addition, just over one-half of the pupils reported that their ideas are listened to and responded to when the school is making policies and decisions, and a similar proportion of the pupils find the provision for Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) useful to them.

Almost one-third (184) of parents/carers responded to the questionnaire, 85 of whom provided additional written comments. Nearly all parents/carers reported that: their child is happy in school; they know about the school's vision and aims; and value the opportunities their child has to take part in activities outside the classroom. Just under three-fifths of parents reported that the staff ask for their views and take them into account.

Most (88%) of the teachers responded to the questionnaire, with over one-half (21) of them providing additional written comments. Almost all of the teachers feel that they contribute well to achieving the school's vision and report that they are proud to work in the school. In addition, almost two-thirds of the support staff responded to the questionnaire and all report that they have the resources they need to do their job effectively. Overall, almost all the teaching and non-teaching staff were highly positive about the benefits of recent staff professional learning.

A summary of the questionnaire responses was shared with the principal and five representatives of the board of governors, including a small number of issues arising relating to communication and assessment.

C. THE PROCESS OF INSPECTION

The ETI worked alongside Killicomaine Junior High 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 pupils and staff successfully live out their school vision and Christian ethos in a highly respectful and supportive environment.
- Planning, teaching and assessment were effective in promoting successful learning across almost all lessons observed; the pupils apply their learning confidently in real-life contexts across the curriculum and develop well their thinking skills and personal capabilities.
- The pupils enjoy a suitably broad, balanced and flexible curriculum which enables them to progress and achieve well.
- There is an agreed approach to action planning which aligns well to the whole-school priorities; the effectiveness of the arrangements for monitoring and evaluation is variable.
- The school has undertaken significant work to support well the emotional health and wellbeing of the pupils.

- The provision for Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance (CEIAG) prepares the pupils well for moving on to key stage (KS) 4.
- The wide range of tailored interventions and bespoke programmes support well those pupils who face barriers to their learning, including those with SEN.
- The well-established and effective links with primary schools and the senior schools in the Dickson Plan ease transition for all pupils including those pupils with SEN and support continuity in their learning.
- The meaningful links and creative collaboration with others extend the pupils' learning and impact positively on their outcomes.
- The school is exploring and developing a range of strategies to enable the parents/carers to support their children's learning, and to strengthen and enhance their contribution to the life and work of the school.
- The pupils value the opportunities provided for them to carry out a range of roles and the school has identified appropriately the need to include the pupils' views more meaningfully in all aspects of school life.
- 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 strengthen the arrangements for monitoring and evaluation through greater consistency in action planning and more meaningful consultation with all pupils.

3. MAIN REPORT

A. SETTING THE VISION

The pupils and staff in Killicomaine Junior High School live out their school vision '**Working together for excellence in a caring community**' in a highly respectful and supportive environment. The school vision is complemented and reinforced regularly through the Christian ethos and the school motto **Servire Honore**, to serve with honour. This is reflected in how the pupils and staff relate to one another and the high expectations they have of what they can achieve and contribute to, within and beyond the school community, through their learning, sport and charity work.

The development planning process is informed by consultation with all stakeholders and the ongoing analysis of a range of quantitative and qualitative data. There is a consistent approach to action planning across departments and areas of responsibility. The action plans, which align well to the clear and appropriate whole

school priorities in the one-year interim plan for 2024/25, will benefit from concise, measurable targets as identified by the school, alongside more meaningful consultation with pupils and parents/carers to support better the monitoring and evaluation processes in the school.

The broadening of the senior leadership team for the 2024/25 academic year, to include responsibilities informed by the current priorities of the school, demonstrates further how the school is committed to realising its vision and to building the capacity of the middle leaders in the school.

The governors have an extensive range of complementary skills. They are kept well-informed through regular pupil progress and pedagogy updates and have a clear understanding of the life and work of the school. They are highly supportive of staff professional learning and are committed to the successful transition of the pupils to the next stage of their education.

B. IMPLEMENTING AND IMPROVING TO ACHIEVE THE VISION

Planning, teaching and assessment were effective in promoting successful learning across almost all lessons observed. The most effective lessons were characterised by: a consistent planning structure and clear intended learning; pupils engaged actively in well-paced learning; effective use of thinking frames to guide and deepen learning; and a range of effective self-, peer- and teacher assessment for learning strategies to inform planning. The pupils were given good opportunities to apply their learning in real-life contexts across the curriculum and to develop well their thinking skills and personal capabilities and the cross curricular skills of communication, using mathematics and using information and communications technology. Where the promotion of learning was less successful, there was over direction by the teacher and insufficient planning for differentiation to meet the needs of all the pupils in the class. The inspection supports the school's identification of the need to challenge further the very high-attaining pupils.

Staff professional learning is well-planned and aligned to the whole school priorities; the school is developing a '**Thinking School**' pedagogical approach including a range of thinking frames and other metacognitive tools to help the pupils with planning their learning and developing their independent study skills. A 'drive' team, consisting of a range of staff across a majority of curricular areas, has been established to lead this learning and teaching strategy. The 'drive' team have: updated the learning and teaching policy with a common vision for learning in Killicomaine Junior High School; led on staff professional learning; and initiated learning walks to monitor the quality of the provision for learning and teaching across the school. In discussions with the pupils, they articulate well how they learn best, through, for example, the opportunities they have to use strategies to improve their work and engage in practical learning activities. They talked positively about how their teachers help them learn and support them when needed.

The pupils benefit from a broad, balanced and flexible curriculum which meets their needs and the statutory requirements of the Northern Ireland Curriculum at key stage (KS) 3. A well-planned assessment schedule enables the school to monitor closely the pupils' progress and ensure that all have an appropriate curriculum that

prepares them well for transition to KS 4. The school is developing further their processes for communicating expectations of the assessment schedule to parents at information evenings. It is also timely that the school is reviewing its curriculum, assessment, homework, marking and recording policy to develop further the aspects of homework, marking and recording.

Curriculum planning is informed by impactful collaboration with the CALC and regular communication and departmental links with their counterparts in the senior schools. On entry to year 8 the pupils complete baseline testing which provides data which helps to identify those pupils who need additional support. By the time the pupils reach year 10, the reviewed and updated year 10 curriculum provides clear progression pathways to support the pupils in the range of options available to them. The curriculum is enriched by a broad range of extra-curricular activities including sporting, creative arts and support activities before, during and after school.

The curriculum and assessment team provide staff professional learning and work closely with all staff to ensure the use of data is consistent and effective across the school to monitor the progress of all pupils, including more recently, the development of subject profiles and individual learner profiles. The target setting process is not informed sufficiently by the views of the pupils and the school has identified appropriately the need to develop further the effective use of data to set individual pupil targets, and to standardise the assessment process across all areas of learning.

The school's preventative curriculum is mapped well across the year groups and ensures progression in the essential topics of keeping safe, self-awareness and developing the pupils to be responsible contributors to society. External agencies are engaged appropriately to support the delivery of the statutory curriculum, providing expertise and appropriate resources to enhance the programme's effectiveness. Additionally, bespoke sessions are delivered by youth workers, tailored to the specific needs and concerns expressed by groups of pupils. These sessions provide a responsive approach to ensure that the curriculum remains relevant and impactful. It is important that staff continue to monitor the effectiveness of the delivery of aspects of this programme to ensure that pupils receive high quality provision, enabling them to make informed decisions about their health and wellbeing. There are a range of appropriate policies to support the school's safeguarding practices, and the school are currently in the process of consulting on and reviewing the RSE policy in light of the statutory guidance.

C. BUILDING EQUITY

The pupils who face barriers to, and challenges in, their learning and those at risk of disengaging or underachieving benefit from a range of strategies, tailored interventions and bespoke, flexible support and mentoring programmes. The pupils told us that they are enjoying the small group support and that it is giving them increased confidence and helping them progress. An attendance and engagement officer, employed by the Dickson Plan Junior High Schools through charitable funding has been in post since November 2023 and works closely with the school pastoral team to identify early those pupils in need of additional support, and to provide the support to those pupils to engage more fully in their learning. In addition, pupils have access to a counsellor who provides emotional health and wellbeing support and the school has self-funded a second counsellor to offer support to both pupils and staff.

The school encourages the participation of all pupils in aspects of school life through the offer of a diverse range of extra-curricular activities and is prioritising further leadership opportunities for more pupils.

The school places high priority on timely communication and engagement with all who are involved in supporting pupils with SEN. Parents have regular planned and incidental opportunities to discuss their child's learning, interests and needs, and there are well-established links between the feeder primary schools and the senior schools to ease transition and support continuity in the pupils' learning. Whilst the pupils' personal learning plans (PLPs) include a range of strategies to support the pupils learning and pastoral needs, the targets need to be sharper and more measurable; the school has already identified the review of target setting as an area for further development.

The newcomer pupils are integrated fully into all aspects of school life and are generally supported well to develop their talking and listening skills through clear instruction, effective questioning and scaffolding. They enjoy the opportunities they have to share aspects of their culture and heritage with their peers. The school's own analysis of data shows that the newcomer pupils and pupils with SEN are making good progress in their learning.

D. EMBEDDING SUCCESS

The pastoral team meet regularly to monitor how broader pupil issues impact learning, including attendance, the merit system and the whole school focus on intentional 'positive noticing'. The behaviour of the pupils is exemplary; they are helpful and compassionate towards one another and are eager and ready to learn. The skilful use of 'positive noticing' by staff in class encourages and rewards positive behaviour for learning.

The provision for CEIAG supports the pupils well in their personal career planning. The careers advice provided is appropriate and includes mentoring and information sessions by external stakeholders, including local business and industry representatives, past pupils, senior schools, third level education providers and statutory bodies during a curriculum pathway week for year 10. Entrepreneurial skills are developed well through engagement in the Young Enterprise NI programme and the school has achieved a Gold status award for Excellence in Enterprise in June 2024. Almost all of the year 10 pupils who responded to the online questionnaire reported that they get useful careers advice and all reported that the school is preparing them well for moving on to KS 4.

The school's internal assessment data indicates that most (85%) of the pupils are making progress from their starting points and in line with the school's expectation across the last three years.

The pupils who met with inspectors spoke about their opportunities to participate in the wide range of extra-curricular activities and fundraising events in the school and talked enthusiastically about reward systems, such as full attendance badges and the awards through participation in a digital literacy programme. The year 10 pupils spoke positively of the development opportunities for those appointed as school

prefects, and are proud to represent the school at, for example, the recent year 8 parents information event. Through additional leadership roles, the pupils spoke about how they have opportunities to produce match reports to share at assembly and others spoke about how they enjoy volunteering at the KilliKabin (hospitality hut) at weekend sporting matches. The school has recently developed 'wellbeing' ambassadors' to support further the development of leadership skills and the promotion of positive mental health opportunities amongst the pupils. The pupils told us that they would like earlier opportunities for leadership from year 8. The school plans to develop further its approaches to pupil participation, and to include the views of the pupils from across the school more meaningfully in all aspects of school life.

The school celebrates the achievements of pupils through, for example, assemblies, the school website, social media platforms and the local press. The recently renamed Riley Hall provides an inspirational central space in the school to acknowledge the wide range of participation and successes within the school community.

E. GROWING A COMMUNITY OF LEARNING

The staff work together as a team, in collaboration with a wide range of external partnerships, to prioritise the provision of high quality learning experiences for the pupils both inside and outside of the classroom. These experiences enhance the wellbeing and holistic development of the pupils. Almost all of the parents/carers who responded to the online questionnaire reported that the school has good links with community organisations and clubs. The pupils also told us how they benefit from a wide range of support mechanisms in place during and after school, in addition to their school's strong connections with local sports clubs, such as, Aztecs Volleyball Club, Portadown Rugby, Football and Hockey Clubs and Annagh United Football Club.

The school is committed to building on and extending shared learning experiences, in partnership with a local maintained post-primary school. Furthermore, the school is exploring and developing a range of strategies to enable the parents/carers to support their children's learning, and to strengthen and enhance their contribution to the life and work of the school.

Collaboration within the CALC is impacting positively on the learning experiences and support provided for the pupils. The pupils told us about their work in helping to address bullying with other pupils in schools across the CALC and, while the work is at an early stage of development, it is already giving the pupils the confidence to better support and care for their peers in school.

There has been greater collaboration between the junior and senior schools within the Dickson Plan over the last three years, with a focus on strengthening curriculum links to improve pupil outcomes and to support a smooth progression to KS 4. Eleven subject departments in Killicomaine Junior High School are now working with their counterparts in the other schools. They share practice and course content, and identify areas to take forward together, in the interests of learner progression and success.

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. The pupils who met with inspectors reported that they feel safe and well cared for in school and know what to do if they have any concerns about their wellbeing.

4. GOING FORWARD

The pupils and staff in Killicomaine Junior High School live out their school vision **'Working together for excellence in a caring community'** in a highly respectful caring and supportive environment in collaboration with a wide range of partnerships. The pupils are helpful and compassionate and are eager and ready to learn alongside one another in their school community.

Through the work of the district inspector, ETI will monitor the progress of Killicomaine Junior High School in addressing the area for action as laid out in this report.

5. APPENDIX

APPENDIX 1: QUANTITATIVE TERMS

In this report, proportions may be described as percentages, common fractions and in more general quantitative terms. Where more general terms are used, they should be interpreted as follows:

Almost/nearly all	-	more than 90%
Most	-	75% - 90%
A majority	-	50% - 74%
A significant minority	-	30% - 49%
A minority	-	10% - 29%
Very few/a small number	-	less than 10%

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