

Report of a Primary Inspection
Annalong Primary School and Nursery Unit

September 2024



Contents

1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
A. BACKGROUND INFORMATION	1
B. VIEWS OF CHILDREN, PARENTS AND STAFF	1
C. THE PROCESS OF INSPECTION	2
2. SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS.....	2
3. MAIN REPORT	3
A. SETTING THE VISION.....	3
B. IMPLEMENTING AND IMPROVING TO ACHIEVE THE VISION.....	3
C. BUILDING EQUITY	4
D. DEFINING, CELEBRATING AND EMBEDDING SUCCESS.....	4
E. GROWING A COMMUNITY OF LEARNING	4
F. CHILD PROTECTION	5
4. GOING FORWARD.....	5
5. APPENDIX.....	6
APPENDIX 1: QUANTITATIVE TERMS	6

1. INTRODUCTION

A. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Annalong Primary School and Nursery Unit is a controlled co-educational school located in the small coastal village of Annalong near Kilkeel in County Down. Enrolment has risen over the last four years and currently stands at 211 children including 26 children in the nursery unit. Around 15% of the children have free school meals entitlement. Forty-five children (21%) have been identified as having special educational needs (SEN), 14 of whom have a statement of educational need.

A new principal was appointed to lead the school two years ago.

The school has established close links with the local community including churches, businesses and other organisations, and has 'Elder Award' status, accredited by the Northern Ireland Forest School Association.

B. VIEWS OF CHILDREN, PARENTS AND STAFF

Before the inspection, confidential online questionnaires were issued to children in year 7, parents and all staff. All of the children, almost all of the staff and around 20% of parents completed the questionnaires; all of the responses were highly positive.

The children's responses indicated very high levels of appreciation for the support they receive from their teachers and other adults in school. The children's written comments expressed their pride in belonging to the school and their appreciation of the additional activities on offer, such as sports, music and drama.

The parents' responses indicated very high levels of satisfaction with the work and life of the school and referenced their appreciation of the staff's work, the importance of the school's Christian ethos and the improvements made to the learning experiences and the school's accommodation in recent years. The few issues raised through the parental questionnaires have been discussed with the principal and representatives of the governors.

Teaching, learning support and other staff expressed very high levels of satisfaction with the work and life of the school.

Inspectors met with groups of children from Years 5 and 7. The children spoke confidently and enthusiastically about how their teachers and classroom assistants support their learning and how the rewards systems encourage them to give of their best. In addition, they spoke very positively about the supportive role the older children provide for their younger peers.

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

- A caring, supportive and inclusive environment is evident throughout the school which demonstrates very well the school's Christian ethos and the commitment of the school community to its vision of 'achieving potential and success'.
- There is an embedded child-centred approach in the school which celebrates the wider achievements and successes of the children and focuses on developing the whole child.
- Early identification, support and interventions are meeting well the children's needs within the classroom and additional, effective interventions are provided as appropriate, including a range of initiatives and programmes to support the children's emotional health and wellbeing.
- The school's self-evaluation processes have led to improvements in the provision. Senior leaders recognise the importance of gathering first-hand evidence to monitor the impact of the actions taken, and a review schedule is in place.
- In the most effective practice observed during the inspection, the children were ready for learning, actively engaged and making progress. The children would benefit from more opportunities to develop their creativity and extend their learning.
- The school has established strong partnerships with families and the wider community which enrich the children's learning experiences.

Area for consideration:

- To develop further the self-evaluation processes to support clearer progression and greater consistency in the children's learning experiences.

3. MAIN REPORT

A. SETTING THE VISION

The school is clearly committed to its vision for every child, 'achieving potential and success'. The staff and children create a very welcoming and inclusive environment which is based on the Christian faith. The staff are committed to providing high quality classroom, outdoor and additional learning experiences to progress the learning and holistic development of each child. The spiritual and moral development of the children is particularly important to the whole school community.

The school's commitment to improvement is evidenced in their effective self-evaluation processes, which identify key areas for improvement. Governors, school leaders and staff work collaboratively to develop further the classroom practice and extend the children's learning. In recent years, improvements have been made to the arrangements for child protection and the processes for identifying and supporting children with additional learning needs. Currently, the school is focusing on developing its planning for literacy and numeracy to create more focused learning intentions so that the needs of individual children and groups within the classes are met more fully. The school has identified the need to carry out first-hand observations of learning; this inspection endorses this as an appropriate priority in supporting the school to realise fully its vision.

B. IMPLEMENTING AND IMPROVING TO ACHIEVE THE VISION

There are appropriate plans in place to monitor and evaluate the impact and effectiveness of the work to bring about further improvement. The work to develop the planning is already impacting positively on the learning and teaching across the classes.

The teachers make good use of the surrounding rural, seaside environment to connect the children's learning to real life. In the most effective lessons, there was a clear focus on developing the children's skills, their understanding of concepts and their critical thinking. Investigative work and active, experiential learning, underpinned by appropriate resources and skillful staff questioning, promoted the children's thinking and enabled them to make progress. The learning support assistants provided helpful individual and group support. Going forward, the school plans to embed the processes for self-evaluation to support clearer progression and greater consistency in the children's learning experiences across all classes.

A range of initiatives and programmes are used to support the children with their emotional health and wellbeing. The school safeguarding team meet regularly to identify and address individual children's needs. The development of the 'Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies' programme, the promotion of physical development, and the use of sensory breaks and formal support sessions are all supporting the children well.

C. BUILDING EQUITY

Inclusion and equality underpin the school's ethos and staff work relentlessly to identify and respond to the learning and pastoral needs of the children. Special educational needs are recognised at a very early stage through assessments and observations of learning, and support is provided through in-class individual and small group sessions including bespoke support, such as, play and other therapies. Additional support is provided by external agencies such as the Health and Social Care Trust's Regional Integrated Support for Education in Northern Ireland (RISE NI) in areas such as speech, language and communication, and the Education Authority's Behaviour Support and Autism services. The staff support well the pastoral needs of the children and their families.

In the effective practice, the individual education plans (IEP) set clear targets with well-considered strategies for improvement. Going forward, the school has identified that the strategies within the IEPs need to be reviewed to be more impactful and to support the effective monitoring of the children's progress.

D. DEFINING, CELEBRATING AND EMBEDDING SUCCESS

The school has an embedded child-centred approach to the celebration of the wider achievements and successes of the children which focuses on developing the whole child. Appropriately, the school defines success as the progress the children make from their various starting points. Achievements in music and in sport, including hockey and soccer at local and regional level, are celebrated well by the school community.

The school community is particularly proud of its recent musical production of 'Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat,' in which all children from Primary 4 to Primary 7 participated. The children spoke enthusiastically about the event which showcased their confidence, creativity and ability to work well together and has been a highlight for the school and the wider community.

The children are respectful in their engagement with the staff and visitors. There are many opportunities for the older children to take on roles of responsibility such as school council representatives and supporting the younger children. These roles develop well the children's leadership skills, confidence and empathy towards others.

E. GROWING A COMMUNITY OF LEARNING

One of the key strengths of the school is its emphasis on building strong partnerships with families and the wider community. The school welcomes and encourages engagement with parents and carers, including through the use of digital platforms to share key information and the children's achievements and successes. The school has well-established partnerships with local churches, businesses and other organisations which enrich the children's learning and development and enhance the school environment. The children benefit from the school's links with services such as the Police Service of Northern Ireland, the Royal National Lifeboat Institute and Mourne Mountain Rescue as well as other local partners, which support very well the children's understanding of interdependence and the importance of community.

The staff participate in tailored professional learning opportunities which are linked to the school's priorities. This work builds the staff's capacity and is impacting positively on the children's experiences and outcomes. Appropriately, a focus has been placed on the professional learning of the middle leaders to enable them to monitor and evaluate more effectively the school's provision.

The school is committed to listening to and acting upon the views of the children and has recently set up a School Council which is generating ideas for further improvement.

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

Annalong Primary School and Nursery Unit demonstrates a clear commitment to living out its vision aligned to its Christian values; this is evident in the caring, supportive and inclusive ethos. The leadership team are well placed to continue to embed the changes made to date and bring about further improvement.

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