

Report of a Primary Inspection
Annsborough Integrated Primary School

November 2024

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1. INTRODUCTION

A. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Annsborough Controlled Integrated Primary School is situated in the village of Annsborough, approximately one mile from the town of Castlewellan in County Down.

The school has a unique context and history and identifies itself as a vital part of the community's educational heritage, playing a foundational role in the development of integrated education within the area. The school was founded in 1835 and has since been providing education for children of all faiths and backgrounds. In 1997, the school was granted a change in status to a controlled integrated school.

The children who attend the school come from the village of Annsborough and the surrounding rural areas and are taught in the original school building. The school's enrolment has remained steady over the last four years and stands currently at 34 children. Almost one-quarter of the children have free school meals entitlement. Twenty-nine percent of the children have been identified as having special educational needs (SEN). There are a small number of newcomer children. There are also children attending the school who have not yet reached compulsory school age at enrolment.

There are three composite classes in the school, one of which is taught by the teaching principal. The school is part of a well-established shared education partnership with Bunscoil Bheanna Boirche in Castlewellan. The school attained a fourth Eco Schools' 'Green Flag' award in May 2024.

B. VIEWS OF PARENTS, LEARNERS AND STAFF

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

All of the children in year 7 completed the questionnaire, almost three-quarters of whom provided additional written comments. All of the children feel safe, supported and respected in school. They know they can talk to adults if they are worried and are encouraged to eat healthily and take regular exercise. All of the children agree they benefit from the shared education partnership and are proud to belong to the school. In their own words, they describe the school as "home away from home" where they enjoy learning "fun and cool things" and feel happy.

Forty-six percent of parents/carers responded to the questionnaire. Their responses were wholly positive about their child's progress and overall school experience. All of the parents/carers agreed the school encourages their child to eat healthily and exercise regularly, provides helpful information about the planned learning activities, and offers opportunities for their child to learn outside the classroom and through

extra-curricular activities. In their written comments, one parent/carer described the school as “amazing”. The parents/carers emphasised the strong sense of community and belonging that their child experiences and how happy their child is in school. They praised the supportive and approachable staff who are committed to caring for their child, including those children with additional learning needs.

Most of the teaching and non-teaching staff responded to the questionnaires. Their responses were wholly positive about all aspects of the life and work of the school. One-half of the staff provided written comments in which they highlighted that they feel valued and respected. They appreciate the strong sense of teamwork fostered by the supportive leadership of the principal and enjoy working in a unique school which has a caring ethos and a positive working environment.

A summary of the questionnaire responses, including the very small number of issues raised by parents, was shared with the principal and representatives of the board of governors.

C. THE PROCESS OF INSPECTION

The ETI worked alongside Annsborough Integrated Primary 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

- All members of the school community embody the school’s vision of ‘working together in harmony’.
- The children have a strong sense of pride in and belonging to their school.
- The well-planned and connected curriculum is relevant, engaging and promotes effectively the holistic development of the children.
- The school promotes very effectively the wellbeing of all of the children.
- Inclusion and equality are at the heart of the school's ethos.
- The individualised approach to supporting all children enables them to make good progress.

- A strength of the school's provision is its ability to foster a learning community in a small school that maximises the learning opportunities for all children.
- 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 consideration:

- to extend the learning, particularly for the children with the highest level of attainment, by providing more opportunities to develop their thinking and problem-solving skills.

3. MAIN REPORT

A. SETTING THE VISION

The school's vision, articulated in its motto 'Ultima in Concordia' (Together in Harmony) is reflected in the collaborative and inclusive learning environment where the children and staff learn with and from each other. The school's ethos is warm and welcoming and encourages belonging and respect.

The staff's approach to self-evaluation is well-embedded in the school. The development priorities have been identified through a comprehensive consultation process involving the children, staff, parents and governors, and a robust analysis of the school's assessment information. Identified priorities are appropriate and demonstrate the school's commitment to providing a holistic learning experience for the children.

The governors are invested in, and are well-informed about, the work of the school through the comprehensive reports provided by the school leadership team. They are immensely proud of the school's history and staff and are dedicated to providing a high-quality education for current and future generations.

B. IMPLEMENTING AND IMPROVING TO ACHIEVE THE VISION

The teachers' planning throughout the school is comprehensive and evaluated regularly to ensure its effectiveness. Their observations and assessments of the children's learning are used appropriately to inform and adjust the planning to meet the wide range of needs within each class. The children benefit from and respond well to the carefully chosen learning activities, opportunities to engage in group work, and the excellent support provided by the teachers and classroom assistants. Consideration should be given to providing more opportunities to develop the thinking and problem-solving skills of the children, in particular, the children with the highest level of attainment.

The staff use effectively a thematic approach to make the learning across the curriculum relevant, engaging, and connected. For example, the children use their digital skills for coding of programmable devices to create stopwatches which they use in numeracy lessons to record their physical activity and create graphical representations. Well-chosen storybooks stimulate the children's curiosity, encouraging them to explore the world around them and develop their creativity.

The school has prioritised the development of digital skills which has enhanced significantly the children's digital literacy. From foundation stage, the children create high-quality digital art inspired by famous artists and are taught programming of digital devices. As they progress through the school, the children use technology to collaborate with their shared education partners, present their work, and engage in coding activities to develop their computational thinking. In discussions with us, the children expressed their enthusiasm for using technology and demonstrated a clear understanding of online safety practices.

The development of the children's wellbeing is a notable strength of the provision. Through the implementation of a range of successful initiatives to support the children's emotional health, the children are able increasingly to express clearly their feelings and use a range of strategies to manage their emotions. The importance of physical exercise is reflected in the regular opportunities for the children to participate in outdoor learning, the 'Daily Mile' initiative, and swimming lessons which are available to every child in the school. The school's 'Eco Council' is advocating currently for healthier breaks and council members have used their digital skills to produce a healthy eating pamphlet, encouraging the school community to make good choices.

A comprehensive range of safeguarding policies are in place and are reviewed regularly. The school has identified appropriately the need to update its Behaviour Policy to reflect the positive practice within the school.

C. BUILDING EQUITY

Inclusion and equality are at the heart of the school's ethos, with both children and staff showing respect for diversity. The staff know the children well and respond sensitively to their individual needs to help them overcome any barriers to learning. The children with SEN are identified early and benefit from tailored support provided by the teachers, classroom assistants and external agencies, and from well-structured intervention programmes and targeted withdrawal sessions. High-quality individual education plans are crafted in child-friendly language to ensure accessibility and are reviewed regularly, with input from parents and the child, to tailor the provision to meet each child's needs.

The school collaborates closely with a range of external agencies, including the Education Authority and the Health and Social Care Trust (HSCT), to help children overcome barriers to learning. Furthermore, the HSCT has also provided professional learning, in particular in relation to approaches to speech and language therapy, to enable teachers and classroom assistants to better support the children's development.

The school is dedicated to supporting children at each key transition point of school life, including the move to post-primary education, ensuring a smooth and supportive transition.

D. DEFINING, CELEBRATING AND EMBEDDING SUCCESS

The children are well behaved, friendly, articulate and keen to learn. They show care and respect towards others and express pride in their school community. The children spoke positively to us about their learning experiences in class. In particular, they spoke about their enjoyment of topic work, numeracy, learning through the use of technology, and the friends they have made through shared education.

The individualised approach to learning enables all of the children to make good progress from their individual starting points. During the inspection, the children shared how they use constructive feedback from the teachers to improve their work and “have a go”! A wide range of children’s work is displayed prominently in the classrooms and shared spaces, showcasing their developing skills and accomplishments. The school also offers a variety of extra-curricular activities, including Lego, karate and arts and crafts, which allow the children to explore their interests and develop new skills.

The teachers provide the children with leadership opportunities which enable them to become responsible and confident individuals. The year 7 children enjoy taking on leadership roles in the school- and eco- councils, where they contribute effectively to decision-making and take active roles in school initiatives. Additionally, the older children in the composite classes support the younger children, which helps create a positive and inclusive learning environment. The staff ensure that all children are included in special events, such as the annual Christmas play, which is an opportunity to celebrate each child’s uniqueness and individual talents. Successes are also recognised during school assemblies and shared with parents and the wider community via the school’s social media page.

E. GROWING A COMMUNITY OF LEARNING

A strength of the school’s provision is the supportive learning environment where the children and staff grow together. The teachers engage regularly in team teaching and share their expertise, cultivating a collaborative learning culture throughout the school. The teachers are also proactive in accessing professional learning, aligned with the school’s priorities, which has impacted positively on the children’s digital literacy and wellbeing.

The children’s voices are clearly valued. They spoke very positively with us about how they contribute to their learning and decision making in the school, for example, their input to the design of the new outdoor area. The children also learn from each other by sharing their creative writing across classes which develops their communication skills and builds peer relationships.

As a small school, the staff strive to provide meaningful opportunities for the children to connect with and learn from others. The strategic collaboration with the school's shared education partner not only increases the educational opportunities for the children, but also extends their friendship groups. The children spoke enthusiastically about their joint projects on 'community kindness' and the environment. The school enriches further the children's experiences through an intergenerational project with a local residential home and their participation in a wide range of external competitions. Additionally, the 'Friends of Annsborough' group strengthens the school community by the organisation of social events and raising funds which has enabled the school to purchase, for example, digital resources.

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

Annsborough Integrated Primary School takes great pride in its heritage and the education it has offered across generations. The school lives out its motto "Together in Harmony" by promoting a strong sense of community where the children thrive in a happy, inclusive and unique learning environment.

The ETI will continue to work with Annsborough Integrated Primary School, including to share an example of highly effective practice from which others may learn. The aspect of practice which should be shared more widely is:

- how to grow a community of learning in a small school in a rural setting to maximise the learning opportunities for all children.

5. APPENDICES

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%

APPENDIX 2: SMALL SCHOOLS

In all schools where the enrolment number is below the minimum number of 105 in a rural setting, as set out in the Department of Education's [Sustainable Schools Policy](#), it will be important that the employing authority, school governors and the staff plan for, and manage, issues related to the sustainability of the school provision and school budget, in order to address the current and future needs of the children and the staff.

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