

Report of a Primary Inspection  
Ballycastle Integrated Primary School

October 2024



## Contents

1.	INTRODUCTION.....	1
A.	BACKGROUND INFORMATION.....	1
B.	VIEWS OF PARENTS, LEARNERS 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 .....	4
C.	BUILDING EQUITY .....	5
D.	DEFINING, CELEBRATING AND EMBEDDING SUCCESS.....	5
E.	GROWING A COMMUNITY OF LEARNING .....	6
F.	CHILD PROTECTION .....	6
4.	GOING FORWARD.....	6
5.	APPENDIX.....	7
APPENDIX 1: QUANTITATIVE TERMS .....		7

# **1. INTRODUCTION**

## **A. BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Ballycastle Integrated Primary School and Nursery Unit is an integrated, co-educational primary school situated in the coastal town of Ballycastle in County Antrim. There are currently 196 children attending the primary school and full-time nursery unit. Almost all of the children come from the town and surrounding area. At the time of the inspection, there are nine teachers employed in the school and nursery unit. The principal has been in post since November 2021 and co-ordinators for literacy and assessment are due to be appointed.

Ten percent of the children have been identified as having special educational needs (SEN); 8 of whom have a statement of educational need. Approximately one-quarter of the children have free school meals entitlement.

The school operates a breakfast club and after-school club for the children. The school is part of a well-established shared education programme with a local primary school and has been accredited their Eco-Schools 'Green Flag' award and is an accredited 'Forest School' through the Northern Ireland Forest School Association.

## **B. VIEWS OF PARENTS, LEARNERS AND STAFF**

The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) issued online confidential questionnaires to year 7 children, all staff and parents in advance of the inspection.

Almost all of the children in year 7 completed the questionnaire and their responses were mostly positive. One-half of the children included additional written comments. The children reported that they are treated with care, valued and respected and are encouraged to set targets that help them to improve their work.

Inspectors spoke with groups of children from years 3, 5 and 7, including representatives from the school's 'Pupil Parliament' and Eco-Council. The children reported that they enjoy taking part in activities with the children from the other local school as part of the Shared Education partnership, such as scavenger hunts on the beach. They also said that they feel safe and supported by their teachers in school.

Just under one-quarter (23%) of the parents responded to the questionnaire and most of their responses were positive. Sixteen parents included additional written comments: these comments included praise for the support their child receives with their learning both pastorally and academically; and a small number of parents provided suggestions for more communication on the progress of their child through more meetings and curriculum progress updates. A small group of parents met with an inspector and spoke positively about the support their child has received from teachers to help them settle into school. They reported their child is more confident both socially and emotionally and this has impacted positively on their family life as their child felt valued in school.

All of the teachers responded to the questionnaire and a small number provided additional written comments which were positive. Over one-half of the support staff (57%) completed the questionnaires. The responses were mostly positive.

A summary of the questionnaire responses, including the issues raised and suggestions from the parents, was shared with the principal and a representative of the board of governors.

### **C. THE PROCESS OF INSPECTION**

The ETI worked alongside Ballycastle 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**

- Ballycastle Integrated Primary School and Nursery Unit is in the process of reviewing its vision to support children's "progress through partnership". Further collaboration with all stakeholders is planned to ensure that a shared vision continues to underpin the school values.
- All of the children are respectful and well-mannered in their engagement with each other and with adults. Almost all of the children engage readily in their learning and work effectively both independently and collaboratively.
- The school leadership are at the beginning of their journey of change and improvement and are aware of the need to establish effective self-evaluation strategies to identify key priorities and inform the school development planning process.
- The middle leaders are committed to and accept with enthusiasm their curricular responsibility and would welcome more opportunities to engage in further professional learning to develop their leadership roles.
- The children in the nursery unit are beginning to develop their independence; become more confident in their interactions with the adults; and enjoy looking at books in small groups with adult support.

- The children with special educational needs are supported effectively with appropriate strategies to help them progress in their learning.
- In the best practice, staff use a range of information to identify the children's starting points to plan for and meet successfully their needs. Further review is needed of the planned learning opportunities to ensure that all children experience an appropriately challenging curriculum that includes play-based learning.
- The school has effective partnerships with parents and families, local schools and businesses and the wider community to broaden the children's learning experiences and appreciation of their local environment.
- 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.

Areas for action:

- for all staff to access professional learning to develop effectively the leadership roles within the school and support the school in developing its development planning processes; and
- to develop further aspects of planning and teaching, to ensure progression in learning and appropriate levels of challenge for all of the children.

### **3. MAIN REPORT**

#### **A. SETTING THE VISION**

The vision for Ballycastle Integrated Primary School and Nursery School is at the early stages of review. The school is initiating the process of collaborating with all stakeholders to establish a shared vision which will help the school community live out the school motto, "progress through partnership." The existing school values articulated in the school acronym, 'BIPS': Brave, Integrated, Proud, Successful, are promoted effectively and ensure that all the children feel happy, safe and valued within the school community.

The recently appointed school leadership and reconstitution of the board of governors are beginning to set out their plan for change and improvement. They acknowledge that the key priorities for improvement need to be identified, and monitoring and evaluation processes developed to focus clearly on children's learning and the development of their skills.

The middle leaders are committed to developing their curricular roles through further professional learning and development to ensure continuity across the curriculum, building upon the children's prior skills and ensuring development and challenge in their learning.

## **B. IMPLEMENTING AND IMPROVING TO ACHIEVE THE VISION**

The long-term planning provides a clear overview of the curriculum to be delivered. Further detail is required in the teachers' medium- and short-term planning to ensure a broader development of the children's skills, including meaningful and purposeful inclusion of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and connected learning opportunities. In addition, planning for indoor and outdoor play for the foundation stage requires review to maximise the use of the learning environment to provide the children with a breadth of learning opportunities across the curriculum.

The children settle quickly to their learning and work well in groups and independently. Across the classes most of the children are developing positive attitudes to their learning. In the most effective practice, learning has been carefully planned to connect across the curricular areas. The lessons are well structured for the children, and together with a range of creative resources and adaptations to the learning, support well the needs of the children. The recent focus on mathematical reasoning has enhanced the children's confidence to articulate and explain their thinking. Further opportunities are needed for the children to reflect on their own and others' work across the curriculum to promote their critical thinking, build their resilience and better support both the children and the teachers to identify achievement and how improvements can be made.

A range of initiatives promotes effectively the children's knowledge about and development of their physical and emotional health and wellbeing, for example, the National Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Children's (NSPCC) 'Talk PANTS' programmes, farm and beach safety and the school's anti-bullying forum. All of the children have an opportunity to participate in the 'Daily Mile' initiative and the healthy break routine is well established. The teachers have accessed mindfulness training and deliver weekly sessions to all of the children. In addition, a small number of classroom assistants have completed professional learning to support children's emotional health and wellbeing and have successfully disseminated it to all staff. The approaches have impacted positively on the development of the children's self-awareness, their ability to focus on their work and their readiness to learn.

The Parent Teacher Association (PTA) was instrumental in the funding for the creation of the sensory room which provides a valuable space for those children in need of time to manage their emotions and support to refocus on their learning. All staff are committed to the care and welfare of the children and have created an environment where all children feel safe, valued and respected. The school's policies to support the children's health and wellbeing require updating to set out clearly these effective approaches. 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 teachers know the children well and use a range of information to plan the provision to meet the needs of the children. Classroom assistants are valued members of the school staff and support effectively the children with whom they work. They use their knowledge and skills to adapt their provision and use a range of strategies, approaches and resources to meet the specific needs of the children. The parents, staff and the children contribute to the creation and regular review of individual education plans (IEPs). In the most effective practice, all relevant information is included and the regular reviews allow targets to be modified to ensure the child experiences success in learning and their progress is monitored efficiently and effectively.

The nursery staff have identified children who may benefit from additional support and are implementing a range of strategies that are assisting the children in accessing the curriculum.

## **D. DEFINING, CELEBRATING AND EMBEDDING SUCCESS**

In the nursery unit, the children are developing their confidence and independence and follow routines and transition well between the learning environments in the school. The children interact confidently with their peers and adults, show a particular interest in accessing books and listen well to stories. For the time of year, the children's attention and listening skills are developing well. The staff need to establish effective planning for outdoor play in order to develop fully the creativity and investigative skills of the children.

All of the children in the school and nursery unit are happy, pleasant and well mannered. They show respect for each other in their conversations and interactions and are welcoming towards new children and school visitors. The children understand and know the school values and are motivated to live out the values through their whole-school house point award system. All of the children's achievements are acknowledged publicly at the weekly assembly, which is dedicated to celebrating children's success, both for academic and non-academic achievements. The children reported that these awards make them feel proud and raise their aspirations. School display boards and "Wow Walls" in each classroom provide an opportunity for a range of children's work to be celebrated and to recognise the talents and achievements of the children across all curricular and extra-curricular areas, in particular, sports, art and music.

The children in years 4 to 7 are given the opportunity to take on leadership roles as part of the school's 'Pupil Parliament' and Eco-Council. These roles have developed the children's collaborative skills to assist them on reaching agreement on important decisions on school improvements, for example, the recent revamping of the book lending system for all children. The Eco-Committee have discussed their plans to develop environmental awareness actions in the school community and they are actively supported in their role by the staff.

## **E. GROWING A COMMUNITY OF LEARNING**

The school has established an effective partnership with parents and operates an open-door policy with parents, where they feel welcomed and valued in the school community. The well-established induction processes support effectively the children when they join the nursery and when they move to post primary school. School information, events and children's achievements are celebrated regularly on the school's website or digital application to keep parents up to date about the life of the school.

The school has created good partnerships with local businesses which has supported the enhancement of the outdoor learning environment, for example, providing playground resources and additional outdoor local facilities. The PTA is very supportive in their fundraising efforts and organisation of events to develop further the provision for all children and build relationships with families and within the community.

The school has a long-standing Shared Education Partnership with another local primary school. The shared education lessons are held weekly, and teachers and children from both schools actively learn from each other. The teachers plan together the shared education lessons and have developed good working relationships to share effective practice. The children's knowledge and awareness of wider environmental issues are increased through their shared education experiences and very good use is made of their seaside, forest and river location to encourage the children to learn, discover and explore the environment and understand the importance of conserving the environment and wildlife.

The staff have also fostered an effective partnership with staff in the local shared post-primary campus, who facilitate art and music workshops for the year 3 and 4 children to work collaboratively with post-primary pupils. The children benefit by developing appropriate skills, knowledge and understanding in music and art and expanding their awareness of different career pathways.

## **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**

Ballycastle Primary School and Nursery Unit promotes well its school values and provides a nurturing and caring ethos where all the children are safe and happy at school. The school is at an early stage of creating a new shared vision together with all in the school community.

The inspection has highlighted a number of areas for action to enable the school to achieve its vision more fully.

ETI will monitor the progress of Ballycastle Integrated Primary School and Nursery Unit in addressing the areas for action. There will be a progress inspection.



## 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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