

Report of a Primary Inspection  
Cooley Primary School

October 2024

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# **1. INTRODUCTION**

## **A. BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Cooley Primary School is a controlled, co-educational school, located on the outskirts of the village of Sixmilecross and two miles from the village of Beragh in County Tyrone. The children in the school come from both villages and the surrounding rural areas. Over the past three years, the enrolment has decreased slightly and stands currently at 94 children in the school and nursery unit. Fifteen percent of the children have been identified as having special educational needs (SEN) and a small number of them have a statement of SEN. Almost 16% of the children have free school meals entitlement.

The teaching principal took up post in November 2022.

The school runs a breakfast club and a range of after-school activities. A parent and toddler and baby group, organised by parent volunteers, is hosted by the school one morning each month.

The school is in a shared education partnership with a local primary school and participates with three other primary schools in the Education Authority's (EA) 'Pathways into Partnership' programme.

## **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/carers in advance of the inspection.

All year 7 children responded to the questionnaire; over one-half of whom provided written comments. All of the children indicated that they feel safe in school and that there is someone they can talk to if they are worried or have a problem. They also reported that they are proud to belong to the Cooley Primary School community and that they are treated with care and respect. Almost all of the children reported that they benefit from opportunities to meet and learn with pupils from other schools, for example, through Shared Education.

In the written comments the children told us about: the afterschool activities and the outdoor resources that they enjoy; the respect that the children in school have for nature and the work they do for the environment; and the helpful and caring staff.

Almost all of the staff responded to the questionnaire; six of whom provided written comments. Nearly all of the staff indicated that they are clear about, and contribute well to, the school's vision; there is someone they can talk to if they are worried or have a problem; and that they enjoy working in the school. In the written comments, the staff reported that Cooley Primary School is a great place to work and that staff work very well together for the benefit of all of the children.

Twenty-two percent of the parents/carers responded to the questionnaire and just under one-half provided written comments. All of the parents/carers indicated that: their child is making good progress in their learning; the school has informed them what to do if they have a concern about safeguarding or child protection; and the school encourages their child to eat healthily and take regular exercise. In the written comments, parents indicated that the children are at the heart of Cooley Primary School and that the teachers are friendly and approachable. They commented positively on the school's warm and welcoming atmosphere and the positive focus on health and wellbeing.

A summary of the responses was shared with the principal and representatives of the board of governors; any issues raised in the responses were also discussed.

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

The ETI worked alongside Cooley 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**

- Cooley Primary School's vision to "educate, nurture and inspire" its pupils within the school's Christian ethos is wholly evident in the day-to-day life of the school.
- The children are proud to be members of Cooley Primary School and have a strong sense of belonging to the school community.
- The ongoing review of the curriculum is resulting in learning experiences that are well matched to the children's needs and abilities. It will be important that the school continues to review the provision of all areas of learning, as planned, to build on the improvements in, for example, numeracy and information and communications technology (ICT).
- Healthy lifestyle choices are promoted very well through, for example, breakfast club, breaktime healthy eating choices offered by the school, the 'daily mile' initiative and opportunities for afterschool sports activities.
- There is a range of effective interventions in place to help any child who requires additional support with aspects of their learning and development. Some of these strategies would be beneficial to all children if they were implemented more consistently across the school.

- The staff use well a range of appropriate assessment tools alongside their observations of the children's learning to monitor the children's progress, set targets for them, evaluate the outcomes and plan effectively for successful learning.
- The strategic approach to wellbeing throughout the school is creating the right conditions for the growth and development of an effective community of learning.
- The children are developing well their skills, knowledge and understanding of the environment and their responsibility to protect it and make sustainable choices.
- The children in the nursery unit are well settled, have good levels of independence and are supported by effective transition routines and a skilful staff team who build on the children's ideas and interests to extend their learning.
- 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 consideration:

- the continued review of the provision of all areas of learning; and
- how strategies that have been identified as working well in addressing low and underachievement might benefit all children if implemented more consistently across the school.

### **3. MAIN REPORT**

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

Cooley Primary School's vision to "educate, nurture and inspire" its pupils within the school's Christian ethos is wholly evident in the day-to-day life of the school. The holistic development of every child is prioritised in the vision and through the promotion of the school values which include trust, faith and honesty. As a result, the children are happy, motivated and work very well together.

Due to recent significant staffing changes, including the appointment of a new principal, staff are preparing to review the school's vision in consultation with the whole school community.

A rigorous process of self-evaluation is underpinned by effective analysis and interpretation of relevant qualitative and quantitative data; in turn, appropriate priorities for development have been identified. A well-developed action planning process guides well the work of the staff.

The governors are very well informed about, and understand, the school's self-evaluation processes and how the school's development priorities have been identified. They have a clear understanding of the school's vision and values and work hard to promote the school in the local community. The governors contribute regularly to the whole-school assemblies.

The parent teacher association actively supports the work of the school and through its fundraising activities has helped facilitate recent improvements, including the purchase of interactive smart boards.

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

The children enjoy and value their learning experiences, and are keen to learn. They are attentive, engage well in their learning and are comfortable and content in their classroom environment. The learning is supported well by all the adults who provide opportunities for the children to develop their vocabulary across all the curricular areas. A range of effective teaching strategies, such as questioning, active learning and well-planned opportunities for the children to work together, is encouraging the children to think critically and is helping to develop their creativity and confidence.

The school's ongoing review of the curriculum includes recent work around numeracy and ICT to establish the school's own lines of progression in learning and benchmarks for assessing the children's learning. This, in turn, has allowed the staff to use their knowledge of the children to plan for learning experiences that are very well matched to the children's needs and abilities, and to monitor the progress the children make from their individual starting points.

The school plans to continue the review of its provision to reflect the improvements made in numeracy and ICT across other curricular areas. The current review of the content of the curriculum for the World Around Us offers an opportunity to incorporate more of the children's interests and ideas into the planning.

The use of ICT has been linked clearly across the curriculum and is supported by appropriate professional learning and resources. Consequently, the children's digital skills are developing well. Across the school, mental mathematics sessions are well planned and incorporated into daily mathematics lessons. The children's enjoyment of these sessions was evident through their good humour, camaraderie and team spirit while looking for solutions to the mental mathematical problems. By year 7, the children use, and can justify confidently, a range of appropriate mental mathematics strategies to solve problems.

Healthy lifestyle choices are promoted well for the children through, for example, breakfast club, breaktime healthy eating choices from the school kitchen, participating in the 'daily mile' initiative and afterschool sports activities. The children report that they feel safe and cared for and have a sound awareness of keeping safe online.



The children in the nursery unit are extremely well settled for the time of year and are very familiar with the daily routines and transitions. Most of the children are developing their independence very well and choose where they want to play and what they want to explore. The skilful staff are extending the children's thinking and learning by asking pertinent questions to help them develop their own ideas and interests.

### **C. BUILDING EQUITY**

The staff respond very well to the needs and abilities of all of the learners. Teachers and classroom assistants use well a range of appropriate assessment tools and gather information from classroom observations to identify and provide for children who may require differing levels of support with particular aspects of their learning.

The short-term literacy intervention sessions focused on reading, have had a significant impact on the progress and confidence of the children who require support with reading. The parental programmes provided by the school which focused on literacy and numeracy have guided parents in supporting their child and offer opportunities for parents and others from the local community to engage with, and support, the children's learning.

The staff have a very clear understanding of the needs of children who have been identified as having SEN and set appropriate targets for their learning and development, including through collaboration with outside agencies when required. The progress made towards targets on the individual education plans is monitored regularly, and staff gather evidence of progress made and use well their knowledge to inform the next steps in the child's learning.

The staff review continually how best use can be made of available time, staffing and resources to build on the effective range of interventions in place to assist children who require some extra help with their learning. The strategies that they have identified as working well in addressing low and underachievement, for example, visual timetables, approaches to make spelling fun and strategies around behaviour support, would benefit all children if implemented consistently across the school at an individual and whole-class level. Re-establishing the opportunities for staff to share practice will support this improvement.

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

The teachers have worked hard to review long-term planning across core curricular areas and have developed frameworks which help inform the medium-term planning. As a result, staff have the tools to identify progress more accurately.

The staff take very regular opportunities to celebrate the children's successes within class, at whole-school assemblies and in wall displays throughout the school. The presentation of in-class and whole-school awards reflects the importance placed on celebrating the children's individual efforts and perseverance. Across the school and nursery unit, the adults use praise successfully to encourage positive behaviour for learning in a meaningful, intentional way. The children enjoy the regular opportunities to sing together as a whole school and the opportunities, as they

progress through the school, to learn to play the bagpipes, drums and a range of string instruments and to perform. The children also enjoy the regular opportunities they have for art lessons. Around the school the children's artwork is celebrated, with a particular focus in the displays on different artistic styles and techniques to spark creativity and imagination. The children particularly enjoy group art projects and are proud of the collaborative pieces that have won awards at local events.

Through the work of the eco-council, the children are developing their skills, knowledge and understanding of the environment and their responsibility to protect it by making sustainable choices. The school has achieved the Eco-schools 'Green Flag' award for the sixth time and the children are very proud of their work in this area.

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

The children are proud to attend Cooley Primary School and articulate a strong sense of belonging to the school community. Each classroom provides a supportive nurturing learning environment where the school's values of teamwork and friendship are lived out and where children are encouraged to do their best.

Significant progress has been made in building and maintaining a collaborative working relationship within the staff team despite significant changes in staffing in recent years. There is a very effective, strategic and systematic approach to supporting the health and wellbeing of the whole school community. The relationships and communication with the parents have been enhanced by the use of online communication platforms, the school newsletter and opportunities for families to visit the school regularly for a range of educational and social events.

The staff are reflective in their practice and enthusiastic to seek out opportunities for professional learning and collaboration with other teaching professionals through 'cluster' work and partnerships with other primary schools. These opportunities help staff to: continue to reflect upon their own practice; support the current priorities for school improvement; and review the provision for the children leading to improved learning experiences and outcomes.

In keeping with the inclusive ethos, the school works closely with sporting and cultural organisations to provide the children with a wide range of enriching learning experiences outside the classroom, including experiences based on Ulster Scots music and culture, as well as lessons in Mandarin language and culture.

The children reported that they have regular opportunities to offer their opinions in a range of ways and especially through the school and eco councils and gave examples of how their views are valued and acted upon, such as, around fundraising activities and choosing charities to support. The children have a good understanding of how money can be used to support good causes and how the school vision and values are reflected in this work.



## **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**

Cooley Primary School's vision to 'educate, nurture and inspire' its pupils within the school's Christian ethos is wholly evident in the day-to-day life of the school. As reflected in its mission statement, the wide range of learning experiences provided by the school helps the children to develop as individuals and to contribute meaningfully to the school community and beyond.

Through the work of the district inspector, ETI will monitor the progress of Cooley Primary School in addressing the areas for consideration as laid out in this report.

## 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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