

Report of a Primary Inspection
Donegall Road Primary School

November 2024



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Throughout the report the use of an asterisk * denotes further information included in Appendix 2.

1. INTRODUCTION

A. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Donegall Road Primary School is a controlled co-educational school situated in the Village area of South Belfast. The children who attend come mainly from the surrounding local area.

There are nine classes in the school. The enrolment stands currently at 200 children; 56% of whom have free school meals entitlement. Fifty-two children have been identified as having special educational needs (SEN) and nine of them have a statement of SEN. The number of newcomer children has increased significantly over the past four years and currently stands at 65 children, which is almost one-third of the school enrolment.

There have been several significant changes to staffing structures, roles and responsibilities in the last year. The principal, vice-principal, head of foundation stage, and the literacy and numeracy coordinators took up post in September 2024. The SEN and information and communication technology (ICT) coordinator roles are currently being filled in an acting capacity. Of the sixteen teachers in the school, five are employed on a temporary contract.

Through charitable funding and business donations, the school operates a breakfast club and a key stage (KS) 2 'Homework Club'. The Department of Education's (DE) Extended Schools funding is used to provide counselling services for the children on one day per week.

B. VIEWS OF CHILDREN, PARENTS AND STAFF

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

A summary of all the questionnaire responses, including the small number of individual concerns raised, was shared with the principal and the chair of the board of governors.

There were no responses received from the year 7 children to the online questionnaire.

Twelve percent of the parents/carers responded to the questionnaire and seven provided written comments. Nearly all of the parents/carers indicated that their child is happy at school and most report that their child is making good progress in their learning. A small number of parents/carers wrote about their appreciation of the support provided by the staff.

Just over 50% of the staff responded to the questionnaire, eleven of whom provided written comments. All of the staff indicated that they are clear about and contribute to the school's vision and enjoy working in the school to varying degrees. The staff praised the new leadership of the school and highlighted the importance of their support for one another in working together to meet the needs of all of the children.

C. THE PROCESS OF INSPECTION

The ETI worked alongside Donegall Road 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

- The staff and children are committed to living out the value of respect in all aspects of school life as they continue their work to review and revise the school's vision '**to provide a safe, secure, welcoming and nurturing environment where everyone is valued equally**'.
- The new leadership team place great value and importance on engaging with staff, children, governors and parents to seek their feedback and inform decision making and the identification of priorities for development.
- The children are friendly and welcoming; they understand and articulate confidently why the revised school rules '**be ready, be respectful, be safe**' are important in all aspects of school life.
- The children report that they feel safe and know what to do if they have any concerns about their safety and wellbeing.
- As the school continues to prioritise a culture of keeping safe, a small number of pastoral care policies still need to be established and a number currently need to be reviewed, and risk assessments carried out where required.
- The staff have identified appropriately the need to review and develop the long- and medium-term planning to ensure that all children make progress in their learning in line with their abilities.
- The staff have identified the children with additional learning needs and are starting to monitor and evaluate the impact of the support strategies being implemented currently.
- The work of the school is enhanced by the parent teacher association and other community links which support the children's health and well-being.

- The length of the school day needs to be reviewed to ensure time is managed to maximise learning opportunities for all and to adhere to statutory guidance.
- At the time of the inspection, the evidence provided by the school demonstrates that the arrangements for child protection do not align sufficiently to the current statutory guidance.

Areas for action:

- to build the confidence and skills of staff through a programme of staff professional learning which will equip them in meeting better the needs of all of the children; and
- to review the processes for recording and reporting child protection issues within the school in line with statutory guidance.

3. MAIN REPORT

A. SETTING THE VISION

It is appropriate that given the significant changes in staffing structures, roles and responsibilities the principal and staff are reviewing the school's vision **'to provide a safe, secure, welcoming and nurturing environment where everyone is valued equally'**. Part of the work includes re-visiting the school's values and mission through appropriate consultation with children, parents and staff.

The consultation process, supported by the Controlled Schools' Support Council (CSSC), has identified respect as a key value to be developed across the school. The focus of the school community during term one is on developing children's understanding of self-respect and is linked well to the revised school rules and the new rewards children can achieve across the school. The KS 2 children who met with us explained confidently the school rules: **'be ready, be respectful, be safe'** and the positive impact these are beginning to have on their behaviours and choices in school and in the playground.

The school ethos has also been reviewed recently and staff are committed to working together to ensure that this informs their current work on revising the school's vision and mission statements to ensure: **'all children are valued, nurtured and celebrated in a safe environment, where they are encouraged to succeed to the best of their ability and develop as citizens of the community'**.

The one-year interim development plan includes appropriate key priorities that have been informed through an analysis of data and in consultation with the staff. The school's senior leaders recognise the need to focus on re-engaging the full range of self-evaluation processes, including consultation with children and parents and first-hand evidence of practice, for all staff to ensure high-quality learning experiences are provided which enable all children to succeed and **'develop as citizens of the community'**.

The governors have an understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing the school and are using well their wide skill set to support the school's new leadership. They are proud of the school's important place in the local community and are committed to raising aspirations for all and developing further positive working relationships between the children, their families and the school.

B. IMPLEMENTING AND IMPROVING TO ACHIEVE THE VISION

Medium term planning across the classes follows a consistent structure and reflects the statutory requirements of the Northern Ireland Curriculum. The impact of the evaluation of planning is variable. In the more effective practice the evaluation is detailed, reflects specifically on the children's progress in their learning and is used to inform future plans. The planning identifies the children's starting points and outlines clearly how to support their attainment. To improve the short-term and meet effectively the broad range of needs within the classes, the teachers need to identify more clearly the intended learning and outline the adapted learning opportunities. The staff have identified appropriately the need to develop long-term planning to ensure progression and continuity.

The characteristics of the most effective learning and teaching observed included the staff giving children time to reflect on their learning and having high expectations for the children's behaviour. They make effective use of learning time to ensure that the children can attain and make progress. To improve further the quality of the children's learning experiences, it is important for the staff to reflect critically on their practice, and in particular the level of challenge within the planned activities, in order to actively engage the children, maintain their focus and develop their thinking skills and personal capabilities.

The governors and school leaders need to review the length of the school day to ensure time is managed to maximise learning opportunities for all and that it is in line with statutory guidance (as per Department of Education Circular 2013/09).

The staff employ a range of strategies to promote the positive behaviour of the children. The current review of the positive behaviour policy and procedures is timely, allowing staff to reflect upon the effectiveness of their current strategies. This review is aiming to establish clear and consistent approaches to promote more positive behaviour and is in line with the key priority of establishing a culture of respect where all children are supported to learn and achieve.

The preventative curriculum and other initiatives such as the introduction of 'fruit Fridays' and community partnerships with, for example, the Greater Village Regeneration Trust* (GVRT) are beginning to encourage the children to make healthy food choices, know the benefits of being physically active, and to have a good awareness of how to regulate their emotions. In discussions with inspectors, the children reported that they feel safe and know what to do if they have any concerns about their safety and wellbeing.

As the school continues to prioritise a culture of keeping safe across the school, there is a need for the safeguarding team and governors to: establish policies for pastoral care and whistleblowing; review the online safety policy; establish risk assessments for educational trips and visitors to the school; and establish risk management plans for individual children with specific needs.

C. BUILDING EQUITY

The children requiring additional support are identified early and receive tailored assistance provided by teachers, classroom assistants, and external agencies to help them to overcome their barriers to learning. For some children, these support measures include intervention programmes and targeted withdrawal sessions. The children identified as having SEN, including those with regulatory and sensory needs, use successfully a range of strategies to enhance their learning and manage their emotions. The staff are dedicated to meeting the children's needs by implementing tailored strategies to support them in their learning and by monitoring their progress. Going forward, the strategies need to be applied more consistently across the school.

The school has recently re-established a school council and eco-committee to encourage learner participation. The leadership team acknowledge the need to listen to and act on the views of the children to enable them to participate more fully in school decision-making. The children welcome the opportunity to assume roles of responsibility through for example the 'buddy system' which provides older children with an opportunity to support effectively new children joining the school.

D. EMBEDDING SUCCESS

The children's achievements are acknowledged and rewarded regularly through a range of strategies including the distribution of class points, verbal feedback and praise from staff and through whole school celebrations, such as, the weekly assemblies and parental news sheets. Through the review of positive behaviour and focus on respect, the leadership team is reflecting on the current rewards system with a view to identifying additional ways to celebrate children's individual success within and outside school.

The staff collate a range of quantitative and qualitative information on the children's progress in learning. The leadership team use the information to identify the children who require additional support to achieve in line with their ability. The staff acknowledge the need to make more effective use of this range of information to support them in the planning for and delivery of a suitably adapted curriculum in order that all children can make progress and attain in line with their ability.

When provided with effective learning opportunities most of the children engage well in class, work collaboratively and reflect enthusiastically on their own work and that of their peers. They welcome the chance to contribute to their learning which is impacting positively on their independence and enhances and broadens their interest in learning.

E. GROWING A COMMUNITY OF LEARNING

The leadership team is focusing appropriately on creating a positive and supportive learning environment for all the school community. The staff readily and enthusiastically assume areas of responsibility, appreciate opportunities to work more collaboratively and value the care and consideration shown to them by the senior leaders. The staff have established, and are developing further, links with

allied health professionals (AHP) and Education Authority (EA) support services to support them in meeting the diverse needs of the children. The senior and middle leaders attend the recently established cluster groups which support them in their roles, and which provide useful opportunities for the sharing of effective practice. The school leadership team is committed to aligning the programme of professional learning with the school's priorities, to support staff in meeting the needs of all children and to ensure high quality outcomes for all.

The school is well-connected to the local community, with links to local community and charity groups such as Greater Village Regeneration Trust, and Northern Ireland Alternatives*. Workshops for the children are facilitated by organisations such as the Police Service of Northern Ireland, The National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, Dogs Trust and Cats Protection. The free breakfast club, funded by a local business and supervised by volunteers, is well attended and supports a smooth transition for the children to their learning. The school has recently forged links with the local football club and are availing of its facilities to support the well-being of the school community. The school has begun to collaborate with a charitable organisation to enhance the staff's understanding of how to manage behaviour and create a more conducive learning environment for all children.

The staff have recently engaged in nurture training which has enhanced their knowledge and understanding of the importance of ensuring the children are supported to develop positive relationships, build resilience and improve their social, emotional and mental health and wellbeing. The full implementation of the principles of nurture is required to meet effectively the needs of those children who require the intensive, focussed, tailored support to ensure they are able to settle and are ready to learn.

The Parent Teacher Association organises events for the children and has been instrumental in acquiring funds to develop the outdoor play area. The school is exploring how to support the parents' engagement in their children's learning and provide opportunities to celebrate cultural differences and diversity within the community and foster a sense of belonging and mutual respect.

F. CHILD PROTECTION

At the time of the inspection, the evidence provided by the school demonstrates that the arrangements for child protection do not align sufficiently to the current statutory guidance.

The action to take this work forward is:

- to review the processes for recording and reporting for child protection within the school in line with statutory guidance.

A child protection progress inspection will take place within six working weeks.

4. GOING FORWARD

Donegall Road Primary School promotes well its school ethos where **‘all children are valued, nurtured and celebrated in a safe environment, where they are encouraged to succeed to the best of their ability and develop as citizens of the community’**.

The ETI will monitor the progress in addressing the areas for action within the body of this report to enable Donegall Road Primary School to achieve its vision more fully.

Donegall Road Primary School will require sustained external support to help it address the areas for action. There will be a progress inspection, including a six-week progress inspection for child protection.

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: NOTES

Work of the local community and charity groups

Page 4 **Greater Village Regeneration Trust** - is an urban regeneration charity based in the Village area of South Belfast. It delivers a range of programmes that seek to improve the quality of life for local residents.

Page 6 **Northern Ireland Alternatives** - is a government accredited restorative justice programme that aims to promote and develop non-violent community responses to the issues of low-level crime and anti-social behaviour in areas across Northern Ireland, of which Greater Shankill is one.

ADDENDUM TO THE REPORT ON THE INSPECTION OF DONEGALL ROAD PRIMARY SCHOOL, DECEMBER 2024

Child Protection

The Education and Training Inspectorate carried out a child protection progress inspection of Donegall Road Primary School on 13 December 2024. The focus of this inspection was to monitor and report on the school's progress in addressing the areas for action relating to the arrangements for child protection which were identified at the time of the initial inspection.

Key Findings

- The safeguarding team and the governors have reviewed the school's processes for recording and reporting child protection.
- The child protection training for all staff and governors has been updated and robust monitoring processes are in place to identify further professional learning needs relating to child protection and wider safeguarding.
- All current staff and volunteers have been vetted and there are processes in place for future vetting as part of the arrangements for staff recruitment and supervision of volunteers. A visitors' code of conduct and a staff induction policy have been produced and ratified by the governors.
- The systems and procedures for recording and reporting child protection complaints relating to staff are now in place.
- Relevant risk assessments are now in place, including for the management of site security and educational visits.

Conclusion

At the time of this child protection progress inspection, the evidence provided by the school demonstrates that the arrangements for child protection now align to the current statutory guidance.

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