

Report of a Primary Inspection  
Drumhillery Primary School, Armagh

December 2024

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Throughout the report the use of an asterisk \* denotes further information included at Appendix 3.

# **1. INTRODUCTION**

## **A. BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Drumhillery Primary School is a controlled, co-educational school situated approximately eight miles south of Armagh city. There are 79 children enrolled who all come from the local, rural area, 14% of whom have free school meals entitlement. Thirteen per cent of the children have been identified as having special educational needs and a small number have a statement of educational need. There are four classes in the school, three of which are composite classes.

The school operate a breakfast club facility for all of the children and an after-school provision for children in P1- P3, allowing them to remain in school until the end of the day. The school also organise and facilitate a monthly mother and toddler session, 'Tots N Tea' for parents in the local community to meet and socialise while their child has an opportunity to play with children of a similar age.

A shared education partnership with two local primary schools has been re-established in this school year, and the school is also involved in the Education Authority (EA) 'Pathways into Partnership'\* school cluster programme with nine other primary schools in the wider locality.

## **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 the questionnaire responses, including any issues raised, was shared with the principal and a representative of the board of governors.

Fifty-five percent (28) of the parents took the opportunity to respond to the questionnaire, 17 of whom provided additional written comments. All of the parents indicated they were happy with the learning experiences their child is receiving in the school and that their child is making good progress, is happy at school and is encouraged to eat healthily and take regular exercise. In the written comments the parents highlighted and praised the strong Christian ethos of the school and how the staff are responsive and supportive to the needs of every child. They also commented positively on the pastoral care for the children, the range of after-school opportunities available and the very good levels of communication with parents.

Almost all (9) of the children in year 7 responded to the questionnaire and they all indicated that they feel safe in school and that there are adults they can talk to if they are worried or have a problem. In discussions with the inspectors, the children spoke very positively about the friendships they have in school, the opportunities for sports and music that are provided and the after-school clubs that are available. The children in the older classes indicated that they really enjoy opportunities to have leadership roles, for example, as 'house captain' and that they would welcome the opportunity to be involved further in similar opportunities such as, a school council.

Almost all of the staff responded to the questionnaires and a small number provided written comments. The responses indicated that everyone working in the school feels respected and valued and that they enjoy working there.

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

ETI worked alongside Drumhillery 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**

- Drumhillery Primary School have a well-embedded, shared vision where children are learning, caring and achieving.
- The dedicated and committed staff and the respectful relationships across the whole school create an environment where the children feel safe and happy.
- The current areas of focus within the one-year development plan are appropriately informed by professional judgement, are well-paced, and are beginning to impact positively on the learning experiences for the children in numeracy problem solving and using Information and Communication Technology (ICT).
- The children are enthusiastic and motivated about their learning and are respectful and supportive of their peers.
- The staff have a clear understanding and oversight of the barriers to learning faced by some children. The strategies put in place to support the children are successful in ensuring that they can integrate fully into their class and experience success in their learning.
- The pastoral and academic successes of the children are acknowledged, recognised and celebrated well across the school and within the wider community.
- When provided with the opportunities to participate in creative and engaging learning activities, the children respond enthusiastically and are developing their thinking skills and strategies for learning.

- More planned opportunities to engage in professional dialogue and learning would develop further the internal community of learning and empower all staff.
- The school is well respected and valued as an integral part of the local community and the dedicated 'Parents of Drumhillery' support group organise highly successful events and play a valuable role in supporting the school in achieving its vision and aims.
- 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:

- to identify and disseminate the effective practice within the school to develop further the children's thinking skills and strategies for learning; and
- to provide opportunities to develop further a vibrant and focused community of learning within the school which empowers all staff with the confidence and skills to meet the needs of all the children.

### **3. MAIN REPORT**

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

The strong Christian ethos, evident in all aspects of school life in Drumhillery Primary School, underpins the school's vision for every child to learn and develop within a safe and happy community. The values of respect, kindness and recognising the achievements of others, all permeate the work of the school where the staff aim to ensure each child is 'learning, caring and achieving'. These values are aligned to the high expectations for the children and the rewards systems within the school which consistently recognise when children demonstrate these values. All of the children know the school vision and understand what it means and, notably, the younger children in discussion with inspectors, could articulate clearly the vision and values of the school and what it means to them.

The board of governors have demonstrated a long-term commitment to the school and are kept well informed of the priorities for improvement. They are proud of the central role played by school within the small, rural community and are fervently committed to the sustainability and continuing growth and progress of the school.

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

The children are enthusiastic about their learning and respond eagerly when presented with imaginative and creative tasks. They enjoy opportunities to investigate, research, use their imagination and develop their thinking skills. The characteristics of the most effective planning, teaching and assessment for successful learning included establishing clear learning intentions and building well on the children's prior learning. There are carefully planned opportunities for the



children to develop well their thinking skills and they are equipped with strategies to succeed, and have very good opportunities to engage in reflective plenaries and self-assessment. Where assessment for learning strategies is well-embedded the children: show confidence in their learning; engage in peer and self-assessment; reflect on how to improve their work; and are provided with constructive written and verbal feedback and time to make improvements to their work.

The identification and dissemination of the highly effective practice across the key stages will support a more consistent implementation of approaches to develop the thinking skills and creativity of the children and provide important opportunities for professional learning for all of the staff.

The current areas of focus within the one-year development plan in relation to numeracy and ICT are well informed and based on professional judgement and consideration of a range of evidence including an analysis of the school's data. The development of digital skills is strategically paced to build upon previous work and provide an opportunity to embed the children's digital skills and enable progression in their learning. The focus on developing ICT has been underpinned by a significant investment in digital hardware throughout the school to enhance the children's learning experiences in ICT. The professional learning opportunities for the teachers to increase their knowledge and understanding of using ICT and of problem solving within numeracy is empowering the staff and as a result is having a very positive impact on the development of the children's digital skills and their problem solving in numeracy.

The school achieved the 'Digital School Northern Ireland Award'\* in 2022 which is further testament to the investment and commitment of the staff to the development of the children's digital skills. The children are knowledgeable about how to keep safe online and the parents have also had opportunities to attend parent workshops in relation to online safety. The importance of healthy eating and exercise is consistently promoted, and the time dedicated to the 'Daily Mile'\* is enjoyed by the children in all of the classes.

### **C. BUILDING EQUITY**

The children identified as having Special Educational Needs (SEN) are well integrated into their classes. They are coping well with the routines in school and engage well with their teachers and classroom assistants. Almost all are attentive and with support from the classroom assistants they stay on task during their lessons.

There are individual education plans (IEP) in place for the children identified as having SEN. The IEPs outline some measurable targets; however, these could be linked more closely to the range of strategies that are being implemented and the children's progress monitored and evaluated more closely with ongoing evidence of their achievement towards their targets. There is a need to ensure that there is a consistent approach by all staff to identifying the needs of the children and the support provided.

There is appropriate differentiation within the medium-term planning to meet the needs of all children and ensure that they are making progress from their individual starting points. The staff have identified the need for further professional learning to develop the skills to support better those children with SEN and in particular the children with social, behavioural, emotional and wellbeing needs.

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

The school motto of 'caring, learning and achieving' is evident in the school through the focus on celebrating the children's success within and beyond school. The monthly 'Achievement Assemblies' are highly valued by the children and recognise a different pastoral or academic theme each month. The children also respond very positively to the use of the 'House Points' system which recognises both academic and pastoral progress. Their successes are shared externally with the parents through a communication app and on the school website.

The school has identified the need to develop further the opportunities for the children to share their ideas and their views on the learning experiences and other aspects of school life. The inspection endorses as an appropriate next step, engaging more formally with the children on developing, for example, their environmental awareness and building further the range of opportunities for the older children to take on leadership roles and support the younger children.

Throughout the school the children are confident and articulate. During their lessons they take turns, listen well to instructions to progress their work and are eager to ask questions. They are cheerful, friendly, well-mannered and are respectful of the adults and of each other. They share willingly and when given the opportunity work well in pairs and small groups. The children are confident in performing and clearly enjoy music and singing in their school choir and performances. Their attendance is valued and successfully promoted in the school resulting in high levels of attendance (96%) being achieved.

The teachers use a range of assessments alongside their professional judgement to monitor and evaluate the children's progress and to identify those children who may need more targeted support in their learning. The staff plan to re-introduce the scrutiny of children's work through a formal review of their books and work in class as an important step to ensure that there is appropriate progression in learning across the school and to focus on raising further the standards for all children.

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

The community of learning within the school and the classrooms is characterised by respectful relationships, positive affirming language and consistent use of praise. The courtesy and respect which underpins relationships are also evident through the interactions with guest speakers and visitors to the school. The beliefs and cultures of others are valued and the established shared education partnership with two local primary schools provides an opportunity to develop further mutual respect and understanding of other traditions.

The staff engagement in professional collaboration through the EA 'Pathways into Partnership' programme has had a positive impact on the professional learning experiences for the teaching staff in the school. The classroom assistants have accessed training to ensure the safety and wellbeing of the children and have expressed a keen interest in engaging in further professional learning in relation to supporting the children with their learning. As the school moves towards the development and implementation of a new three-year school development plan there is a valuable opportunity to engage in whole school self-evaluation, involving all staff members, to identify further professional learning opportunities for everyone, aligned to the priorities of the school and the needs of the children.

The 'Parents of Drumhillery' support group have been very successful in raising significant funds for the school which have been strategically invested in digital resources for the school, to support the development of the children's digital skills. The recent Christmas Fair was an enormous success, not only financially, but also in continuing to build upon the vibrant community spirit that centres around Drumhillery Primary School.

## **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**

Drumhillery Primary School is an integral part of the local community and successful in providing a safe, happy and inclusive learning environment for all the children. The Christian ethos underpinned by core values and high expectations for all children ensures that each child is 'Learning, Caring and Achieving'.

The school is well placed to take forward the areas for action set out in this report. Through the work of the district inspector, ETI will monitor the progress of Drumhillery Primary School in addressing the areas for action.



## 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.

## APPENDIX 3: NOTES

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#### **Pathways into Partnership**

This is a programme run by the Education Authority that seeks to support primary and nursery schools on their journey to being part of a Professional Learning Community.

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#### **Digital School Northern Ireland Award**

Digital Schools Awards Northern Ireland is a national awards programme which promotes, recognises and encourages best practice use of digital technology in primary schools.

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#### **Daily Mile**

The Daily Mile is a social physical activity, with children running, wheeling or walking, at their own pace, in the fresh air with friends. The aim of The Daily Mile is to improve the physical, social, emotional and mental health and wellbeing of children, regardless of their age, ability or personal circumstances.

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