

Report of a Primary Inspection
Gaelscoil & Naíscóil Neachtain, Dungiven

December 2024



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

1. INTRODUCTION

A. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Gaelscoil agus Naíscóil Neachtain is a controlled Irish-medium school and nursery unit located in the town of Dungiven. Nearly all the children come from the town and its surrounding area. The school enrolment has been increasing steadily over the last number of years and currently stands at 125 children in the Gaelscoil with an additional 26 children in the part-time naíscóil, 14 of whom are in their pre-school year. Twenty-one per cent (29) of the children have been identified as having special educational needs (SEN) and almost thirty-four per cent (43) have free school meals entitlement.

The school is awaiting the provision of new on-site accommodation for their nursery unit which is situated currently one kilometre from the school building.

The school runs a breakfast club and after school clubs daily. The school also holds the Eco-Schools Green Flag Award*.

B. VIEWS OF PUPILS, PARENTS AND STAFF

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

All Primary 7 children responded to the questionnaire and a small number made a written comment. All of the children who responded report that they feel safe in school and are treated with care and respect by the adults. In discussions with children from year 3, 5 and 7, they all spoke about how happy they are in school, how the school helps them to be physically well and how much they enjoy being able to speak Irish.

Sixty-three per cent (62) of the parents/carers responded to the questionnaire and 20 also provided written comments. All of the parents indicated that their child was happy in school and nearly all of them reported that their child is making good progress in their learning and that they would recommend the school to others. The written responses were highly positive. The parents/carers wrote about being proud of the school in the community, the excellent pastoral care provided for the children and the positive attitude towards learning that the children are developing.

Nearly all (16) staff responded to the questionnaires and a small number provided additional written comments. Their responses were wholly positive. All staff indicated that they are clear on the school's vision, feel respected and enjoy working at the school. In the written responses, the teaching staff wrote about how they value the support for their wellbeing and the opportunities they have to avail of professional learning and development.

Inspectors met with groups of children from years 3, 5 and 7, as well as representatives from Cairde Gael (Irish language buddies), the school council and the eco committee. The children were friendly and confident and spoke fluently in Irish with the inspectors. They talked positively about their leadership roles in the school, their love of school and the importance of the school healthy eating policy to their overall wellbeing.

Inspectors also met with a small number of representatives of Cairde Neachtain (friends of Neachtain) parents' group who were entirely positive about the life and work of the school and their children's happiness in, and enjoyment of, the school.

C. THE PROCESS OF INSPECTION

The ETI worked alongside Gaelscoil and Naíscóil Neachtain 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

- Gaelscoil agus Naíscóil Neachtain fosters a collaborative, inclusive environment underpinned by a strong Christian ethos where diversity and cultural heritage are valued. Its vision to nurture every child in a safe and supportive bilingual setting permeates every aspect of the life and work of the school.
- The children are confident, articulate and engage fully in their learning; they take great pride in their school and value the opportunity to learn through the medium of Irish. Throughout the school the children speak Irish competently and confidently with their peers and with adults.
- The school's self-evaluation process is informed well by consultation with relevant stakeholders. Priorities for improvement are identified and supported by an appropriate programme of staff professional learning. There is a need to develop further a better understanding of, and more robust system for, action planning for improvement across the school.

- Planning is in place for all areas of learning across the pre-school and primary curriculum which informs appropriately the provision ultimately leading to good outcomes for the children. A whole-school review of planning is required to connect the learning more meaningfully across the curriculum and to provide a wider range of opportunities for the children to develop further their thinking skills and personal capabilities.
- The staff implement effective wellbeing programmes as part of the school's personal development and mutual understanding (PDMU) curriculum which help children to develop self-awareness and regulate their emotions.
- The school uses well a blend of standardised and their own assessment tools to baseline and monitor the children's progress in Gaeilge, English and numeracy. The data is used to good effect to identify children who would benefit from targeted support in literacy and numeracy.
- The children who have been identified as having SEN are fully included in the school, supported well in their learning and development, and make good progress from their individual starting points.
- The school motto Ní neart go cur le chéile ('strength in unity') embodies the centrality of the school in the local Irish speaking community and reflects the positive relationships at all levels within the school. Effective partnerships with parents/carers and the strategic approach to collaboration with a wide range of external organisations and professionals support the school well in achieving its vision.
- 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. The most recent version of the child protection policy should be agreed and ratified by the governors and the updated summary shared with parents/carers as a priority.

Areas for action:

- further development of action planning for improvement across the school; and
- a whole-school review of planning for learning to connect the learning better across the curriculum and to provide a wider range of opportunities for the children to develop further their thinking skills and personal capabilities.

3. MAIN REPORT

A. SETTING THE VISION

The vision of Gaelscoil agus Naíscoil Neachtain is well understood and embraced by parents, staff and governors and is central to the work of the school. The school motto Ní neart go cur le chéile embodies the collaborative spirit among staff and governors working together with the parents to create a learning environment where children are nurtured and cared for and where 'each child achieves his/her potential as a confident bi-lingual in a safe and caring environment.'

The staff and governors are deeply committed to the child-centred vision and have a clear understanding of their role in bringing it to life. The governors have a diverse skillset which benefits greatly the life and work of the school; they offer relevant insights and guidance and are well informed about the school's current challenges and opportunities.

Staff reflect regularly and collegially on the impact of their work. The school's self-evaluation process is informed by consultation with relevant stakeholders. Coordinators work diligently to lead on key curricular areas. Further enhancing their understanding of action planning for school improvement will enable them to drive meaningful progress. Similarly, leadership at all levels can benefit from adopting a more strategic approach to support effective development and ensure sustainable improvements within the school.

B. IMPLEMENTING AND IMPROVING TO ACHIEVE THE VISION

The staff provide a highly supportive and nurturing learning environment where children are well settled and display a genuine enjoyment of school. A strong sense of friendship among the children contributes to a positive and inclusive atmosphere throughout the school. Classrooms are well organised and calm, with smooth and efficient transitions between activities. The children respond positively to the high expectations for their behaviour, both individually and collectively, which fosters an environment where they are consistently ready and eager to learn.

The children are proud of their school and of the Irish language and those who met with us spoke about how speaking and learning through Irish is what they enjoy most about school. Throughout the school, the children speak Irish competently and confidently, reflective of their age and stage of learning, both during lessons and socially. The older children, particularly those who have been appointed as Cairde Gael (Irish language buddies), support well and encourage the use of Irish among their own classmates and the younger children.

Planning for learning is in place for all areas of learning across the pre-school and primary curricula which informs appropriately the provision leading to good outcomes for the children. A whole-school review of planning is required to connect the learning more meaningfully across the curriculum and to provide a wider range of opportunities for the children to develop further their thinking skills and personal capabilities.

The characteristics of the most effective classroom practice included ensuring that the intended learning was very clear to the children and a good range of active-learning activities were provided to ensure that the children could both progress and consolidate their learning. The focus was clearly on the intended learning and not on the completion of a task. Where the learning was most successful, the adults' questioning techniques promoted critical thinking and encouraged peer- and self-assessment.

The staff promote a holistic approach to health and wellbeing, incorporating initiatives that encourage healthy eating, regular exercise, and the development of sports skills. The 'Daily Mile'* initiative, ensures that the children engage in regular physical activity, contributing to their overall fitness. Participation in matches and blitzes, including hosting an annual sports blitz in memory of a founding governor, fosters community spirit and teamwork, while providing children with valuable competitive experiences. The children's emotional health and wellbeing are supported across the school through the provision of a well-integrated social and emotional learning programme, as part of the school's Personal Development and Mutual Understanding curriculum, that equips the children with essential self-regulation skills. Overall, the comprehensive focus on physical and emotional wellbeing underpins the school's dedication to nurturing well-rounded, healthy, and resilient children.

The children who responded to the questionnaire and those who met with inspectors told us that they feel safe and well cared for in school and know who to speak to if anything is worrying them. The appropriate suite of school Safeguarding and Child Protection policies is in place, however, at the time of the inspection, aspects of some safeguarding policies were out of date. The school should consider introducing a schedule of review to ensure a more systematic approach to the review of policies.

C. BUILDING EQUITY

The quality of the relationships at all levels is a strength across the Gaelscoil agus naíscoil, building on the school's inclusive ethos where all children and staff are treated with fairness, equity and respect.

The children who have special educational needs are supported well in their learning and development and are included in all aspects of school life. The targets and associated support strategies in their personal learning plans (PLPs) are clear and appropriate; they are agreed and shared with parents, and guide well the individual provision for each child. The school has strategically prioritised the development of the children's role in the creation of their PLPs and as a result there are now meaningful opportunities for children to contribute to setting and reviewing their own targets. The teaching and support staff are responsive to the needs of the children as they arise, implementing appropriate strategies to support the children's learning. They select, and avail of, professional learning opportunities which help them to meet the individual needs of the children.

Partnerships with parents and a range of external agencies and other professionals, including RISE NI*, education psychologists and speech and language specialists, support the staff very effectively in identifying, at an early stage, the children who may need additional support and putting in place for them a range of appropriate interventions and resources.

D. EMBEDDING SUCCESS

The children across the naíscoil and Gaelscoil are happy and very well behaved. They are respectful of one another and of the adults, and of their school environment and learning resources. During lessons, almost all children respond well to their teachers' expectations of them; they contribute confidently to whole-class discussions and complete willingly and promptly the work given to them. Their creativity and thinking skills could be further enhanced through the provision of more child-led and open-ended learning experiences. When given an opportunity, the children work well with one another in pairs and small groups and are developing well their communication skills. The children have a very good understanding of Irish and are using Irish with increasing fluency, accuracy and confidence as they progress through the naíscoil and Gaelscoil.

The school uses internally devised assessment tools to good effect to baseline all children's standards in literacy and numeracy at the beginning of each academic year and to monitor their progress on a half-termly basis. Almost all of the children are making, and continue to make, progress from their individual starting points in the aspects assessed in numeracy and Gaeilge and in English at key stage 2. This data is used effectively to select children who would benefit from attending targeted booster support groups, delivered by teachers before school starts three mornings each week. The children engage very well in these enjoyable, active and dynamic sessions and their confidence, understanding and skills in numeracy and literacy are progressing as a result. The staff should make better use of the information collated from these assessments, along with their own observations and evaluations of learning, to better inform their short-term planning for learning.

The children's leadership skills and their sense of social responsibility are developing well and they carry out with pride a number of important roles, for example the daily helpers in the naíscoil, and the Comhairle na nDalta (school council), Ceannairí Digiteacha (digital leaders) and Cairde Gael (Irish language friends) across the Gaelscoil. Their hard work, wide range of achievements, and contributions to school life are appreciated, recognised and celebrated regularly through, for example the daily tionól (assembly), range of awards, certificates and house points, and the positive verbal interactions of the teachers and the encouraging comments in their books. It is timely for the school to now review the whole-school approach to marking for improvement to ensure that teachers' written comments also guide and support the children to improve their work.

E. GROWING A COMMUNITY OF LEARNING

The school has cultivated a vibrant community of learning, where collaboration, communication, and continuous development are central to its ethos. Staff engagement in professional learning is a key strength, with planned professional development opportunities which align to the school's development priorities and are responsive to emerging needs within the school. Good relationships ensure smooth transitions for the children moving from nursery to Rang 1 and through the school. The children in Rang 7 participate in a transition programme with the local Gaelcholáiste (Irish-medium post-primary school), to which most of the children transfer. These strong transitions, provide continuity and support throughout the children's educational journey.

Effective communication with parents is maintained through various platforms such as newsletters, digital apps and the school website, ensuring that parents are updated appropriately about school activities and upcoming events. The school supports parents through workshops such as 'CyberPal',* providing them with tools to aid their children's learning. Initiatives such as 'Getting Ready to Learn'* and 'Bring Your Own Grown-Up'* actively involve parents in the life of the school. Cairde Neachtain (Friends of Neachtain/Parent-Teacher Association) plays a significant role in fundraising and organising events, recently contributing to the acquisition of new digital devices for the school.

Community engagement is strong, with extensive links to the local parish, clusters with other schools and collaboration with outside agencies such as Dry Arch Children's Centre* and Glór Dhún Geimhin* (The Voice of Dungiven), partnerships which enrich the learning experiences and provide additional support to meet children's diverse needs.

Overall, the school demonstrates a robust commitment to creating a thriving community of learning, where collaboration, communication, and continuous improvement are integral to its success. This holistic approach ensures that all members of the school community with whom inspectors met report that they feel supported and valued, contributing to a positive and inclusive environment.

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. The most recent version of the child protection policy should be agreed and ratified by the governors and the updated summary shared with parents/carers as a priority.

4. GOING FORWARD

Gaelscoil agus Naíscóil Neachtain is successfully living out its motto Ní neart go cur le chéile and fostering a community of learning where everyone is welcome and included. With a dedicated focus on bilingual learners the school is equipping the children with invaluable skills for their futures while supporting the revival of the language locally and enriching the cultural fabric of the local area. The children are proud of their school and of their ability to speak Irish.

Through the work of the district inspector, ETI will monitor the progress the school makes in addressing the areas for action 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: NOTES

- Page 1** **Eco-Schools Green Flag**
The Eco-Schools Green Flag is an internationally recognised award for excellence in environmental action and learning.
- Page 5** **Daily Mile**
The Daily Mile is a health and wellbeing initiative that involves children taking part in social physical activity to reduce health inequalities and improve fitness, mental wellbeing, resilience and self-care.
- Page 5** **RISE NI**
RISE NI is a regional early intervention service which supports children in pre-school educational and mainstream primary school settings by working closely with parents and education staff to help children develop the foundation skills for learning, that is, speech, language, communication, sensory-motor, visual perception, social, emotional and behaviour skills.
- Page 7** **CyberPal**
The CyberPal Online Safeguarding and Digital Resilience Workshop is designed to help children and young people navigate the complexities of social media, apps, devices, and gaming.
- Page 7** **Getting Ready to Learn (GRtL)**
The Getting Ready to Learn project seeks to support pre-school education providers with DE-funded places to encourage and develop parental involvement in children's early learning. It is focused on improving outcomes for children in pre-school by engaging and empowering parents to help them create and sustain positive home learning environments.
- Page 7** **Bring Your Own Grown Up**
A programme funded by the Department for the Economy and delivered by experienced teachers, the Ulster University School of Education programme aims to engage adults, including parents, to build their confidence and competence in numeracy through a series of collaborative classes and tasks demonstrating how numeracy relates to everyday life.
- Page 7** **Dry Arch Children's Centre**
Dry Arch Children's Centres offer a range of programmes and services including wrap-around childcare provision, youth mentoring and programme support, family support, outreach support and home visiting services for children, young people and their families.

Glór Dhún Geimhin

Glór Dhún Geimhin provides a range of Irish language, artistic and cultural activities for the local community. Irish language classes, art workshops, céilithe, events for young people and concerts all take place throughout the year. The facility also provides a weekly youth club and annual summer camp through the medium of Irish.

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