

Report of a Primary Inspection
Good Shepherd Primary and Nursery School

November 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

Good Shepherd Primary and Nursery School is a co-educational, Catholic maintained school situated in the Waterside area of Derry. The children come from the city and the surrounding areas. The school's enrolment stands currently at 440, comprising 388 children in the primary school and 52 children enrolled in the two full-time nursery classes. Almost 22% (85) of the children have free school meals entitlement and 9% (34) have been identified as having special educational needs (SEN). There are currently 55 newcomer children attending the school. The staffing complement consists of a principal who has been in post for four years, a vice principal, 16 teachers, 17 classroom assistants and the wider staff team. The school operates a breakfast club and an after-school club for foundation stage children who have an older sibling attending the school; both of these clubs are very well attended.

B. VIEWS OF PARENTS AND STAFF

The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) issued online confidential questionnaires to year 7 children, all parents/carers and staff 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. Inspectors also spoke with groups of children from years 3, 5 and 7.

Almost all (94%) of the year 7 children responded to the questionnaire and a majority (66%) of them provided written comments. Almost all of the children agreed that the teachers and assistants help them when they find it difficult to learn and there are adults in the school they can talk to if they are worried or have a problem. The written comments in the questionnaire, and the groups of children who spoke with inspectors, indicated a high level of enjoyment in their learning experiences across the curriculum and an appreciation for the wide range of extra-curricular activities provided for them.

A minority of the parents (17%) responded to the online questionnaire. All of the parents reported that their child is happy at school and that the school has informed them how to report a safeguarding concern. In the written comments (31), the parents were overwhelmingly positive about their child's experiences at school. They commented on the supportive and caring learning environment and how the school nurtures and extends family connections with parents and grandparents.

All of the teachers responded to the online questionnaire. They all agreed they are clear on, and contribute well to, the school vision and that staff wellbeing is promoted effectively within the school. The written comments from the teachers (12) affirm a shared understanding of a child-centred community of learning and a positive and supportive working environment. A significant minority of the classroom learning assistants, and other support staff responded to the questionnaire. They all are clear on the school's vision, enjoy working in the school and agree that their wellbeing is promoted effectively. The small number of written comments were also positive.

C. THE PROCESS OF INSPECTION

The ETI worked alongside Good Shepherd Primary and Nursery 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 school's vision for high quality, child-centred education is steeped in a well-embedded ethos and values which permeate all aspects of school life.
- The established culture of whole-school self-evaluation informs appropriate priorities for further school development. The current priorities for school improvement are appropriate and there is evidence of the impact of ongoing improvement work at this early stage of the three-year plan.
- The detailed and well-considered planning for progression across the curriculum is underpinned by high expectations for the achievement of all children.
- The robust system for monitoring children's progress is well-informed by a wide range of information and is used effectively to support each child's learning journey and plan for next steps.
- The health and wellbeing of the whole school community is promoted very effectively.
- Staff professional learning is used successfully to support a collegial approach to planning and ensure consistently high-quality teaching which enables all of the children to experience successful learning.
- Opportunities for the children to consolidate and use their literacy, numeracy and ICT skills across the wider curriculum are highly effective.
- The quality of the children's work, including the written presentation, is of a consistently high standard.
- The school fosters an inclusive culture through well-planned collaborative learning initiatives which encourage active parental engagement and contribute well to the children's learning.

- The school's strategic and collegial approach to professional learning is developing well the capacity of leadership at all levels.
- 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.

3. MAIN REPORT

A. SETTING THE VISION

Good Shepherd Primary and Nursery School's vision for high quality, child-centred education is steeped in a well-embedded ethos and values that are lived out, permeating all aspects of decision making and school life. Fundamental to the ethos of the school is open communication, involving parents and carers, encouraging them to participate actively in the life of the school to help improve the outcomes for the children.

The school has well-established procedures for monitoring and evaluating all aspects of the provision, as evidenced by the documentation relating to self-evaluation and school improvement work in recent years. The views of the board of governors, staff, parents and children have all been sought as part of an audit of the school's current provision, and the evidence gathered has been analysed thoroughly and used to inform the school's development plan. The current priorities for school improvement are appropriate and there is evidence of the impact of on-going improvement work at this early stage of the three-year plan. The board of governors is well informed about the work of the school and the progress the children are making.

B. IMPLEMENTING AND IMPROVING TO ACHIEVE THE VISION

The planning for learning across the curriculum is detailed and very well considered to ensure appropriate progression and high expectations for the achievement of all children. The plans are tailored to reflect the children's abilities and interests, with clear evidence of appropriate differentiation and adaptive learning strategies, and the development of thinking skills and personal capabilities. Ongoing professional development, including recent workshops sharing best practice around effective learning and teaching, supports a collegial approach to planning and consistently high-quality teaching and assessment for learning across the school. Opportunities for the children to consolidate and use their literacy, numeracy and ICT skills across the wider curriculum are highly effective. Across all key stages, children are encouraged to make connections and take risks in their learning within a supportive classroom environment. As a result, they engage confidently in opportunities to investigate, reason and problem solve. The teachers extend the children's thinking through effective questioning and check regularly for understanding as lessons progress. Ongoing strategic self-evaluation work in the foundation stage is impacting positively on the shared understanding of, and approach to, observations and assessments of play-based learning and on the further development of appropriate planning for progression.

There is clear long-term planning for digital skills development which addresses all elements of the information and communication technology (ICT) curriculum. By the end of key stage (KS) 2 the children are competent in using the core digital skills and a variety of digital platforms which prepares them well for the next stage of their learning and transfer to post-primary level. The teachers use well ICT resources to enhance the

quality of their teaching and to support the children's learning. Through their own development planning processes, the school has appropriately identified the need to further map the skills acquisition across the digital skills provision to ensure greater consistency in children's digital skills development as they progress through the school.

The children in the nursery unit are well settled, happy and engage well in sustained play. Routines in the nursery unit are well established, and the children's independence is fostered. The development of the children's early language and communication skills is a key strength in the nursery unit. The children mark-make with a purpose, access books independently during play and recount a story with enthusiasm, enjoyment and accuracy. The nursery provision is being developed continuously by the staff and, during both outdoor and indoor play, the children are developing their investigative and explorative skills through a range of well-considered activities which fire their curiosity.

Healthy lifestyles are promoted across the school through opportunities for the children to develop their physical wellbeing by participating in the 'daily mile' initiative and through their participation in the wide range of after-school clubs. Healthy break routines are well established and there are regular opportunities for children to play and be active. Taking part in initiatives such as Ditch the Dark Day* promotes road safety awareness among the children and families, and staff work alongside external agencies such as the NSPCC to support well the children's understanding of how to stay safe and speak out.

At important transition points during the school day, teachers use whole-class prayer time, alongside strategies that bring a sense of calm, to support the emotional wellbeing of the children. Consequently, the children develop well their resilience and confidence and are ready to engage with their learning. The children who spoke with inspectors said that they feel safe in school, know who they can talk to if they are worried or upset and know how to keep themselves safe online.

C. BUILDING EQUITY

The commitment to inclusion and building equity starts in the classroom. The staff know the children well and respond sensitively to their individual needs to help them overcome any barriers to learning. The children requiring additional support with aspects of their learning are identified early, from nursery age, and benefit from tailored support provided by the teachers, classroom assistants and external agencies, and from well-structured intervention programmes and targeted withdrawal sessions. Individual Education Plans (IEPs) are child-centred and monitored regularly, ensuring that each child's specific needs and goals are addressed.

The skilled team of classroom assistants and a volunteer from the Reading in the Community* project support very well the children's learning and development, including the newcomer children.

The staff engage in a programme of professional learning which is informed by the needs of the children and supports the commitment to building equity. Recent training has included training in trauma-informed practice and attachment awareness to support the children's emotional health and wellbeing. Targeted work with parents has also been a key component of the school's equity-building. By helping parents support their child with skills such as handwriting and phonics, the staff have created a more cohesive and supportive learning environment both in school and at home.

The school leaders and key co-ordinators have moved quickly to re-instate, and develop further, procedures for monitoring and reviewing the effectiveness of the curriculum and provision for learning, alongside the ongoing work undertaken to monitor and review robustly the progress of each child.

D. DEFINING, CELEBRATING AND EMBEDDING SUCCESS

All the staff are gentle, affirming and encouraging in their interactions with the children. They are quick to praise the children for their efforts and achievements and make effective use of assessment for learning strategies to ensure that the children understand their learning and know what they need to do to make progress. From the nursery, and throughout the school, the staff prioritise and nurture the development of the children's social, language and communication skills, and their oracy is developed very well across all curricular areas. High expectations for behaviour and learning are evident throughout the school. The children present as confident and articulate, and they co-operate well with their peers and the adults in the room. The children across all classes are well settled, attentive and engage fully in their learning. The quality of the children's written work and the presentation of work in their books is of a consistently high standard. Almost all of the children are making the expected progress, or better across key curricular areas.

The wider achievements of the children are also celebrated through assemblies and student of the week awards. Those children who spoke with inspectors said that they value the positive rewards system and believe that it motivates them to do their best. In line with the ethos of the school, the classroom environments are used well to display, and celebrate, the children's current learning and achievements.

As they progress through the school, the children are given increasing opportunities to take on responsibilities for important aspects of school life. The children in the focus groups who met with inspectors spoke about how the work of the Eco Council is encouraging energy saving and recycling throughout the school and making a difference to their community.

The priority given to ensuring the holistic development of the children is evidenced in, for example, the opportunities afforded through the music curriculum, where all children in the years 1, 2 and 3 access the Education Authority's Musical Pathways to Learning Programme* (MPL). Throughout the school, the children join in the choir at assembly, have opportunities to learn to play musical instruments, and perform in front of their peers and their parents. The whole-class MPL programme in years 1 to 3 is part of a wider early intervention strategy that aims to develop confidence in every child, to help each child to find their voice, and to support the development of pre-reading skills. By year 3, the children participate confidently and show enjoyment as they prepare for upcoming school performances.

E. GROWING A COMMUNITY OF LEARNING

The staff in Good Shepherd Primary and Nursery School are a committed team who communicate effectively with one another, support one another, and share accountability for delivering on the school's agreed priorities.

The school's strategic and collegial approach to professional learning is developing well the capacity of leaders at all levels to coordinate and lead their areas of responsibility. The contribution of each staff member is valued and there is a willingness to engage with and learn from others, and to work together to overcome challenges.

The staff are proactive in seeking out opportunities to involve and engage with parents/carers to support the children with their wellbeing and their learning. The parents/carers are kept updated through the school website, digital app and regular newsletters. They are invited to school assemblies, shows and events and are welcomed and encouraged to become part of, and celebrate, their child's school experience. Parental/Carer workshops focused on developing children's speech and language, early reading and gross and fine motor skills, provide support for them in understanding their child's learning and wider development. Resource packs provided to the parents/carers of the children in the early years help to link the learning between home and school. Online safety and mental health and wellbeing workshops also support parents/carers in looking after their own wellbeing and keeping their child safe. Feedback from parents/carers gathered as part of the school's own evaluation processes indicates that almost all indicated that they benefit from this partnership in reinforcing learning at home.

The school has developed and uses well a wide range of external links which enhance the children's learning experiences and holistic development and support the staff in meeting each child's individual needs. For example, during Maths Week Ireland 2024*, external professionals talked with the children about their jobs to develop the children's understanding of how mathematics is used in a variety of workplaces and in everyday life.

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

The Catholic ethos, values and vision of Good Shepherd Primary and Nursery School are core to everything that happens in the school and are overt in the long-term strategic decision making of the leadership and management. The collegial, strategic and well-paced approach to managing school improvement ensures that success is embedded and built upon as the school community continues together on their improvement journey.

The ETI will continue to work with Good Shepherd Primary and Nursery School, including to share examples of highly effective practice from which others may learn. The aspects of practice which should be shared more widely are:

- the strategic working of the school leaders to effectively create the right conditions for the growth and development of an inclusive community of learning; and

- the high quality of the teaching, characterised by the use of active learning strategies, a well-planned cross-curricular approach and the consistent use of assessment for learning strategies to support successful learning.

Good Shepherd Primary and Nursery School is well placed to take forward the priorities they have identified through their own development planning processes.

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 4** **Ditch The Dark Day** is organised as part of the Sustrans Active School Travel Programme aiming to increase the number of children walking, cycling or scooting to school.
- Page 4** **Reading in the Community Project.** A volunteer from the local community supports the teaching of reading through small group interventions.
- Page 5** **EANI Musical Pathways to Learning (MPL)** is a scheme which enables children to develop through music.
- Page 6** **Maths Week Ireland** is an all-island initiative promoting positive attitudes towards maths and highlighting the importance of maths in daily lives and has been in operation since 2006.

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