

Report of a Primary Inspection
Moneynick Primary School

November 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

Moneynick Primary School is a maintained, co-educational primary school situated in a rural area, close to the small village of Toomebridge in County Antrim. Almost all of the children come from the local parish, with a small number of children from the wider surrounding area. There are currently 67 children enrolled at the school.

Nineteen per cent of the children have been identified as having special education needs (SEN). Approximately 10% of the children have free school meals entitlement. The teaching principal was appointed five years ago and is supported by four teachers across three composite classes.

The school operates a breakfast club for the children and a range of after-school clubs throughout the week. There is a very well-established shared education programme operating with a local controlled primary school. The school has been accredited as a Rights Respecting School* and has achieved an Eco-Schools 'Green Flag' Award*. The school gained the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) 5-Star Award* and flag for its promotion of Gaelic football and hurling skills among the children. In addition, the school has been accredited as an Education Authority (EA) Take 5* school.

B. VIEWS OF PARENTS, LEARNERS AND STAFF

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

All year 7 children responded to the questionnaire and provided written comments. All of the responses were wholly positive, with the children indicating that they feel safe in school, are making good progress and have the opportunity to set targets for their learning. In the written comments, the children reported their enjoyment of: the extra-curricular activities provided for them; the special events that are celebrated; and their participation in the shared education partnership.

The inspectors spoke with groups of children from years 3, 5 and 7 who spoke highly of their enjoyable experiences at school, especially sporting and musical achievements, and the year 7 children also spoke positively about the responsibilities associated with their leadership roles within the school. The children reported that they feel safe and secure in school, know what to do and who to approach if they have any concerns about their safety or wellbeing. They also explained clearly how to stay safe online.

Nearly three-quarters of the parents/carers' (74%) responded to the questionnaire, the responses to which were wholly positive with 65% of them also providing additional written comments. The comments outlined the parents/carers' confidence in the school providing high-quality learning experiences for their children supported by the dedicated and caring staff team. They appreciate how the staff develop the children both academically and pastorally through the range of extra-curricular activities. A small group of parents met with the inspector and commented positively on the impact of the pastoral support given to their child and the families and how happy their child was to come to school.

Most of the staff, including learning support staff (82%), responded to the questionnaire with positive responses and 22% included written comments. They highlighted the strong school community that works together to support all the children to develop their talents and abilities and to support their individual needs.

A summary of the questionnaire responses was shared with the principal and a representative of the board of governors.

C. THE PROCESS OF INSPECTION

The ETI worked alongside Moneynick 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 school's vision and values are fully achieved within the inclusive and caring environment which nurtures the talents and abilities of all of the children.
- Following effective self-evaluation, including consultation with all stakeholders, the school leaders have identified appropriately key priorities which inform the development planning process. Going forward, the action plans for these key priorities need to be refined further to ensure they are manageable for the co-ordinators.
- The children are happy, well-mannered and confident learners who embrace the wide range of learning experiences which enable them to experience success.
- The support for the health and wellbeing of the children is a key strength of the school and the range of initiatives are impacting positively on developing the children's self-awareness, respect and mutual understanding.
- The children identified with SEN are consulted in setting their targets and provided with a range of strategies which is fostering a readiness to learn and enabling them to make progress in their learning across the curriculum.

- All of the staff are committed to furthering their professional learning and are developing their co-ordinator roles to support them in focusing on ensuring progression in learning across the curriculum.
- The school has very effective partnerships with the parents, another local controlled school and the wider community through which they provide a wide range of curricular and extra-curricular learning opportunities which are impacting positively on the children's 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.

3. MAIN REPORT

A. SETTING THE VISION

The shared vision of Moneynick Primary School is for each child to be supported to grow and develop their talents and abilities, in line with their individual needs. This aligns with the revised school values and the school motto, “**Share, Learn and Achieve**”. The staff all come from the local community and are highly invested in ensuring that the school is an integral part of the local parish and community. They support the spiritual development of the children through a monthly celebratory Mass and have gained the Spirit of Catholic Education* award for their commitment to the Catholic ethos in all areas of school life.

Through very effective self-evaluation processes, the leaders have identified appropriate key priorities to inform the school development plan. The current range of action plans is very extensive. Going forward, all co-ordinators need to reduce the number of targets and refine them so they are more specific, measurable and manageable within the context of the school.

The strategic programme for professional learning includes all members of staff, is responsive to the children's needs and is aligned closely with the school's priorities for improvement. The priorities include developing further the children's writing in literacy, embedding further their use of mental mathematics strategies in numeracy, and implementing thinking outdoors strategies in the foundation stage and key stage 1. The staff professional learning is having a positive impact on the children's learning experiences across the curriculum.

The governors use their professional skill set to support the school. They also have good links with the wider community which they use effectively to ensure the school is achieving its vision and providing the children with a wide range of learning opportunities and experiences. These experiences, within and beyond the school, support well the children both academically and pastorally.

B. IMPLEMENTING AND IMPROVING TO ACHIEVE THE VISION

The whole-school planning and schemes of work for all areas of the curriculum provide continuity and progression in the children's learning across the year groups and within the composite classes. Connected learning is a strength, with explicit connections being made between different areas of the curriculum, enabling the teachers to reinforce key concepts in different contexts. The teachers' two-weekly plans are detailed, and their evaluations of the children's progress are reflective and used to inform the next stages of planning. The school leaders are embedding further their monitoring and evaluation processes to focus on children's learning and skills across the curriculum.

The characteristics of the effective planning, teaching and assessment include the use of differentiated and adaptive teaching approaches which are well matched to the children's needs, abilities and interests. The teachers' skilful questioning encourages the children to articulate their thinking clearly, using increasingly sophisticated subject-specific vocabulary. The teachers and classroom assistants work seamlessly and pro-actively with the children; the classroom assistants know the children well and respond readily to their needs. The staff have engaged in professional learning for outdoor learning and regularly make effective use of outdoor lessons to extend the children's thinking and problem-solving skills. In addition, the children make good use of digital technology to record and revisit these learning experiences back in the classroom and further enhance their connected learning opportunities.

Almost all of the children have positive attitudes to learning. They work very effectively in pairs and groups, respecting and supporting each other in their composite classes. Across the school the staff use a range of creative resources to support and extend the children's learning. The children are provided with planned opportunities to peer- and self-assess their work, as well as to develop their thinking and reasoning to explain their thought processes during mathematical and creative literacy lessons. They are encouraged to set targets for their learning and during discussions with the inspector, they discussed their individual targets and how they review them termly.

The prioritisation of the emotional health and wellbeing of all of the children is a key strength in the school. The recently formed cross-country running club, attended by over 40% of the school, is supporting the children's physical and mental wellbeing. Outdoor learning and other sporting activities such as the Daily Mile* initiative, Gaelic games, football, soccer and fitness classes are all having a positive impact on the children's readiness to learn. A range of strategies such as the EA Take 5 programme, the Regional Integrated Support for Education (RISE) programme Fresh Little Minds*, and Roots of Empathy* training provided by an external provider, develops and supports very effectively the children's understanding of emotional behaviour, self-awareness and helps them make positive choices in school. During focus group discussions, the members of the eco-council discussed the importance of their roles in looking after their school environment through recycling, turning off lights and reducing the amount of waste in school. The staff participate actively in shared professional learning for safeguarding with the local shared education partnership school.

C. BUILDING EQUITY

The school's inclusive and welcoming ethos supports each child to achieve success both inside and outside of school which aligns to the rights respecting school status. The high attendance of 97% is a clear indication of how the children feel valued and want to attend school.

The well-planned shared education learning experiences encourage the children to explore similarities and differences in different cultures. In discussions with the inspectors, the children spoke enthusiastically about learning about Gaelic and Scots Gallic languages, as well as the history of Irish and Ulster Scots Ceilidh dancing and learning dances from both cultures.

The staff know and support all the children well in their learning. The children who require additional support are identified early and there is regular consultation with their parents. The staff provide a range of strategies, for example concentration breaks and the use of sensory activities and resources, to ensure the children are ready to learn. The staff have engaged in relevant professional learning, for example behaviour support and autism training, to build their knowledge and skills. As a result, the staff are providing appropriate support to maximise each child's learning experience.

The children with SEN are integrated well into the class and the skilful learning support staff play a valuable role in extending the children's learning in the classroom. The parents, staff and the children contribute to the creation of tailored individual education plans (IEPs). These are informed effectively by the child's prior learning and are monitored and reviewed regularly to ensure the child is progressing and experiencing success in their learning.

D. DEFINING, CELEBRATING AND EMBEDDING SUCCESS

The children are all very respectful to each other, the staff and all adults in the school including visitors. They are confident in their interactions, well-mannered and enthusiastic when talking about the various learning opportunities in the school. During discussions with the children, they spoke positively about the celebrations of their achievements, particularly the head teacher awards that are shared in the school during the monthly assembly. The children's artwork, linguistic, musical and sporting achievements are celebrated throughout the school on the noticeboards and shared with parents and the wider community on the school website and through social media.

The children's successes when using online reading programmes, motivates the children to have high aspirations in their learning, while their participation in performances at local speech and drama festivals from Year 1 upwards develops well their confidence, communication and creativity. In school, the staff promote further the children's musical skills through the opportunities to learn and play the tin whistle, taking part in seasonal events and showcasing their talents to their peers and parents. The children benefit from the after-school sports clubs and the opportunities to compete against other schools. They are proud of their recent successes in inter-schools' Gaelic football and cross-country championships, both as individuals and as team members.

The children articulated their pride in having the opportunity to make meaningful contributions in years 3 to 7, to decision making and extending their leadership skills in roles such as play leaders, safeguarding superheroes and anti-bullying ambassadors. They understand clearly the importance of their role in looking out for the younger children in the playground and around the school, and carry out diligently the practical responsibilities associated with their roles.

E. GROWING A COMMUNITY OF LEARNING

There is a strong commitment by the staff to enhance further their personal and professional development. The recent professional development in enhancing outdoor learning and training in wellbeing initiatives are having a positive impact on the children across the year groups. The additional focus on fostering effective links with post-primary schools is preparing the children well for the transition from year 7 to year 8. The staff's ongoing development of a child-centered ethos was recognised when the school reached the finals of the National Awards for Pastoral Care in Education 2024.

The school is proud of its well-established shared education partnership with another local primary school. This partnership has been very effective in facilitating shared learning opportunities between staff and children and fostering a greater understanding of different cultures. The parents who met with the inspector spoke very positively of the importance of this partnership in the community and how these friendships have been strengthened further through the joint-schools summer scheme and other wider community activities.

The school has established good links with the local GAA clubs and the children discussed enthusiastically their recent matches and successes. Through the school's membership of Cumann na mBunscol, the children have opportunities to participate in other games such as handball, rounders and cross-country running. The children understand and can articulate the importance of taking part in sports to develop their physical skills and teamwork while building up their stamina and coordination.

The parents play an important role in the life of the school. Their own knowledge and understanding of the children's learning is enhanced through the staff's provision of curriculum information evenings. They spoke of the very effective communication from the school through emails, text messaging services and an online App which helps keep them informed about their child's learning and school life. The Friends of Moneynick parent-teacher association is very supportive of the school, providing practical help at special events, such as sports day and the Ceol Agus Craic celebration of St Patrick's Day. Through their fund-raising initiatives, they help fund equipment to enhance the building, subsidise educational trips and visits for the children and have recently purchased a new interactive smart board for one of the classrooms.

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 staff in Moneynick Primary school are fully committed to living out their vision of growing and developing the children's talents and abilities in line with their individual needs aligned to their Catholic ethos and values. The school supports effectively the emotional health and wellbeing of children, so they are happy and engaged learners who can Share, Learn and Achieve.

The ETI will continue to work with Moneynick Primary School, including to share examples of highly effective practice from which others may learn. The aspect of practice which should be shared more widely is:

- the forging of a meaningful, wide-ranging community of learning which enriches the children's learning experiences and enhances their holistic development within a rural context.

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

- Page 1** **Rights Respecting School**
A Rights Respecting School is a school where children’s rights are learned, taught, practised, respected, protecting and promoted and recognised by the UNICEF Rights Respecting School Award.
- Page 1** **Eco Schools Green Flag**
The Eco-Schools Green Flag is an internationally recognised award for excellence in environmental action and learning.
- Page 1** **Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) 5-Star Award**
The GAA 5 Star Award is awarded to primary schools that undertake to deliver a programme of Gaelic Games activity that is age-appropriate and meets the developmental needs of children within the school.
- Page 1** **Education Authority Take 5 School**
A Take 5 school participates in the Take 5 programme which aims to improve the mental health and wellbeing of children through 5 steps which are Connect, Keep Learning, Be Active, Take Notice and Give.
- Page 3** **Spirit of Catholic Education Award**
The Spirit of Catholic Education Award is aimed at continuing to recognise the outstanding service and leadership within Catholic education throughout our Diocesan school communities, and Catholic Education Office.
- Page 4** **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 4** **Fresh Little Minds**
Fresh Little Minds is a program that helps children and adults develop emotional health and resilience through creativity and connection.
- Page 4** **Roots of Empathy**
Roots of Empathy is a classroom program that aims to improve social and emotional skills in children, reduce aggression and bullying, help children understand the feelings of others and themselves, and to be more caring and considerate.

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