

Report of a Primary Inspection

Newtownards Model Primary School
DE Ref No 401-1345

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Education and
Training Inspectorate
Empowering Improvement

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

1. INTRODUCTION

A. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Newtownards Model Primary School is a controlled, co-educational school with the majority of the 380 children attending coming from the town. Almost one-third (32%) of the children have free school meals entitlement and a minority (14%) have been identified as having special educational needs (SEN). The school offers wraparound care, a breakfast club and an extensive range of afterschool clubs, all of which are very well attended. They have re-established recently the shared education partnership with Londonderry and St Finian's primary schools and work is underway to provide learning opportunities for children from year 4, 5 and 6 during the coming term.

B. VIEWS OF PARENTS, LEARNERS AND STAFF

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

Almost all of the year 7 children responded to the questionnaire; over one-half of those who responded provided written comments. All of the children who responded indicated: they knew who they could speak with if they were worried; the teachers and other adults in the school treat them with kindness, care and respect; and their teachers and assistants help them when they find it difficult to learn. The written comments and the feedback received from the groups of children who spoke with inspectors, indicate that they enjoy school and the range of responsibilities they assume. They feel safe and know who to talk to if they have any worries or concerns.

Twelve per cent of families (31 parents) responded to the online questionnaire and 12 of them also provided written comments. The majority of the parents indicated that their child is making good progress in their learning, they receive helpful information about the planned learning for their child and are happy with their child's learning experiences in the school.

Most of the teaching staff (85%) responded to the online questionnaire. Most of the responses were positive, and almost all reported that they had benefitted from recent professional learning opportunities. Just over one-half of the support staff (54%) responded to the questionnaire. They all indicated that they are aware of the school's safeguarding and child protection procedures, and almost all of them had benefitted from recent professional development opportunities.

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

C. THE PROCESS OF INSPECTION

The ETI worked alongside Newtownards Model 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 define, celebrate and embed success; and
- grows and develops an inclusive community of learning.

2. SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

- A collegial process of reviewing the school's vision is well underway and appropriate plans are in place to complete this process through further consultation with children and governors.
- A one-year interim development plan is in place and work has commenced on the 3-year School Development Plan (SDP) informed by further consultation with the staff, parents and children. The leadership recognise the next step is to identify and prioritise key areas for improvement and it will be important that they are linked intrinsically to the children's holistic development.
- In the most effective practice, the learning experiences for the children are appropriately challenging, build on prior learning, are well connected across the curriculum, and provide opportunities for the children to develop their thinking skills and personal capabilities.
- Writing across the school is a strength, characterised by the high-quality emergent writing in the foundation stage and the independent writing the children produce by the end of key stage 2.
- There are effective and engaging tailored interventions which are supporting those children who require additional support with their literacy and as a result they are making progress in their learning and developing in confidence.
- The children have opportunities to take on a range of responsibilities through the wide range of leadership roles available to them. The school has identified appropriately the need to develop further the remit of these roles to provide more meaningful opportunities for the children to contribute to school life.

- 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 continue to identify, strategically and collaboratively, key areas for improvement which are linked intrinsically to the children's holistic development; and
- to identify and disseminate the effective practice within the school to reinforce consistency in planning, learning and teaching.

3. MAIN REPORT

A. SETTING THE VISION

The principal and staff are reviewing currently the school's vision which includes re-visiting their values and mission. The consultation with parents and staff has begun and is supported by the Controlled Schools' Support Council (CSSC). Initial consultation with the board of governors has been undertaken and further consideration of the vision will follow when the board is fully reconstituted. A key focus of the school is to enhance the voice of the children within the life and work of Newtownards Model Primary School and appropriate plans are in place to involve them in defining and agreeing the vision.

Work has begun on the 3-year SDP and consultation with the staff has provided a range of baseline qualitative and quantitative information. The views of parents and children have been sought, and it is now timely for the school leaders to reflect upon and use the information to identify and prioritise the key areas for improvement and link these intrinsically to the children's holistic development.

B. IMPLEMENTING AND IMPROVING TO ACHIEVE THE VISION

The senior leaders recognise the need to focus on re-engaging the full range of self-evaluation processes, including first-hand evidence of practice and have re-introduced observations of learning which have been undertaken by curriculum co-ordinators. Further development of this process will provide the co-ordinators with an opportunity to identify and share effective practice across the school.

The recent whole school focus on reading has impacted positively across the curriculum and, in particular, on the development of writing. Emergent writing is well developed in the foundation stage and most of the children are acquiring good phonological awareness and are developing well their writing skills as they progress through the key stages. All staff have availed of professional learning on the development of reading. Specific reading strategies and approaches are being implemented in a consistent manner across the school and support effectively the development of the children's reading skills. The medium-term plans in place for

literacy guide well the children's development of skills and understanding through a range of connected learning opportunities. In the more effective practice, the teachers' evaluations of the learning and teaching across the curriculum are detailed, reflect on the children's progress in their learning and are used to inform future planning and adapt the provision when required.

The recent staff professional learning accessed from the Regional Integrated Support for Education in NI (RISE (NI))* and the initial introduction of strategies gained through the Education Authority (EA) Calm Plan Training* are being used well by the staff to promote the emotional health and wellbeing of the children. Each year, the school hosts a 'RUOK?' day which emphasises the importance of mental health awareness and assists the children to develop skills to manage their emotions in a positive manner. In addition, the children were aware of the 'worry box' in each classroom through which they knew they could confidentially raise their concerns, and access, if required, the school's counselling service. In discussion with inspectors, the children spoke positively about the wide range of structured activities in which they enjoy participating at lunchtime and they understand well the benefits of being physically active. The school's breakfast club offers a secure space where children can start their day with a nutritious meal, engage in social activities, and play games with friends.

C. BUILDING EQUITY

The children identified as requiring additional support with literacy, access tailored support interventions individually and in groups, which are regularly monitored to evaluate their impact. This support is effective in building the children's confidence, and the specific strategies employed are successful in enabling each child to make measurable progress and experience achievement and enjoyment in literacy.

The school policy for children with special education needs (SEN) articulates the aim to meet the specific learning needs of all the children, supported by individual education plans (IEPs). Several targets are set for each child, and these are reviewed on a regular basis with input from the child, teacher and classroom assistant, and suggestions for parental support at home are included. Where the IEPs are most effective, the targets are very specific and measurable to enable the children to make good progress and experience success in their learning. To improve the quality of all the IEPs a more consistent approach is needed to ensure that the individual targets for children are effective in building on each child's progress in learning and enabling them to experience successful learning.

Support is provided for the mental health and wellbeing of children, through a school counsellor and referrals to external agencies and this has been welcomed and appreciated by children and parents. The school has developed a bespoke intervention programme, iSocial, which together with the use of sensory spaces support effectively the emotional health and wellbeing of the children.

D. DEFINING, CELEBRATING AND EMBEDDING SUCCESS

Almost all of the children are making progress, from their individual starting points, across all areas of the Northern Ireland Curriculum. The strategic importance that has been placed on language and literacy, over recent years, has impacted positively on the children's achievements in literacy; in particular, on their phonological awareness and emergent writing in the foundation stage, and on their ability to plan, draft and present independent pieces of writing with increasing confidence as they progress through the key stages. The children take pride in their work and their handwriting and presentation is mostly of a good standard across the school.

Where learning was more effective, the children are motivated to learn, respond positively to their teachers and classroom assistants and contribute confidently to whole-class discussions. In these sessions, the children engage enthusiastically in the stimulating and appropriately challenging work set and are developing a good range of thinking skills and personal capabilities, as they make decisions about their own learning, work effectively in pairs and small groups, and explain their reasoning. The children are developing well their knowledge of digital technologies, as they use for example, assistive technology, Quick Response (QR) codes, iPads and Artificial Intelligence (AI) to support and enhance their learning. The children across the key stages are aware of how to stay safe online.

Attractive classroom and corridor displays of the children's artwork celebrate the children's ability to use a range of media, materials and tools to create drawings, paintings and 3D models linked to, for example, their learning in the World Around Us. The children also have opportunities to explore and respond to the work of well-known and local artists and produce representational artwork of a good quality.

Children's individual progress and achievements are acknowledged and celebrated across the school in a variety of ways. The teachers provide positive and constructive verbal feedback to the children during the lessons; the work in the children's books is marked regularly and supported, on most occasions, with written comments that guide the children appropriately on how to best improve their work. The children are encouraged to self- and peer-assess their own and each other's work and, as a result, are becoming increasingly aware of their own strengths and how they can improve. Staff have trialed successfully, with small groups of children, the introduction of target setting. To build on this effective practice, and to extend the children's ownership of, and contribution to their own learning, all children would benefit from opportunities to set their own learning goals.

E. GROWING A COMMUNITY OF LEARNING

The staff have created a clear progression map for the operation of the preventative curriculum across all year groups. This includes the use of external organisations, such as, the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service (NIFRS) and Chest, Heart and Stroke Northern Ireland which enhance and enrich the learning experiences of the children.

There are well-established links in place with the pre-school providers and the local post primary schools which support the children's smooth transition both as they begin and continue their education journey. The senior choir welcome the current opportunity to perform in public with Regent House School choir which has developed further the children's love of music and enhanced the links with the local post 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

Newtownards Model Primary School provides a warm, welcoming learning environment where each child can feel happy, safe and make progress in their learning.

Through the work of the district inspector, the ETI will monitor the progress of Newtownards Model Primary School in addressing the areas for action set 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

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Regional Integrated Support for Education in NI (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.

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Education Authority (EA) Calm Plan Training

Training based on nurture principles and trauma informed practice which assists practitioners recognise dysregulation in children and supports the development of positive approaches and strategies to help children manage their emotions.

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