

**Report of a Primary Inspection**  
Silverstream Primary School and Nursery Unit, Greenisland

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**

Silverstream Primary School and Nursery Unit is a controlled co-educational school in Greenisland in its fifty-fifth year. The enrolment has remained steady over the last four years, with 122 children in the primary school and a further 27 in the nursery unit (NU). There are four composite primary classes in the primary school and one for a single year group.

The proportion of children who have free school meals entitlement stands at 40% (49). While the proportion of children identified as having special educational needs (20%) has not changed significantly over the last four years, the number of children (9) who have a statement of educational need has more than doubled. There has also been a significant increase in the number of Newcomer children attending, giving the school an increasingly multi-cultural ethos.

Important changes affecting the school include the appointments of a new principal and a vice-principal. Recent enhancements to the school buildings include a new entrance area with controlled access, new administrative accommodation and a refurbished staffroom.

## **B. VIEWS OF PARENTS, LEARNERS AND STAFF**

Before the inspection, confidential online questionnaires were issued to the children in year 7 and to all parents/carers, teachers, learning support staff and other support staff. All of the year 7 children responded to the questionnaire and all added written comments. Their responses were consistently positive and they expressed their appreciation of their welcoming school, the support of their teachers, their enjoyment of their learning, their roles as 'buddies' to the younger children, and their participation in after-school clubs. In their responses to the online questionnaire and in discussions with the inspectors, all of the children expressed clearly that they feel safe and secure in school. They are confident that the staff deal with issues immediately and they know who they can go to if they have any concerns about their safety or wellbeing.

All of the teaching and support staff responded to the online questionnaire: their responses were also highly positive. Two-thirds (14) of the staff added written comments in which they commended: the teamwork and supportive relationships at all levels within the school; the open channels of communication with parents; and the warm welcome for children and staff from all backgrounds and nationalities. They stated that they feel valued and enjoy their work at Silverstream Primary.

Almost three-quarters (45) of the parents/carers responded to the questionnaire and their responses were consistently positive. Fourteen included written comments in which they expressed their appreciation of the helpful and approachable teachers, the warm relationships between all staff and children, and the benefits for families of the free breakfast club and after-school clubs. A summary of all the questionnaire responses was shared with the principal and representatives of the governors.

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

The ETI worked alongside Silverstream Primary School and Nursery Unit 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 reflected clearly in the welcoming, inclusive ethos for children from a wide range of nationalities and backgrounds.
- The school development plan and associated action plans identify clear and appropriate targets for improvement informed by an effective use of available data and teachers' professional judgement.
- The senior leaders recognise the need to develop further the role of the middle leaders to support them in monitoring and evaluating robustly their respective areas of responsibility.
- The teachers and classroom assistants know the children well and work collaboratively with external agencies to meet their learning needs effectively.
- The children's physical, mental and emotional health is promoted and supported well by staff through the well-planned personal development and mutual understanding curriculum.
- Partnerships with local community groups enhance the children's wellbeing and learning experiences, enabling them to experience success in a range of contexts.
- The children in the nursery unit are developing well their independence, creativity and fine motor skills through periods of sustained play. Most of the children in the primary school engage readily in their learning; the work in their books is well presented and demonstrates their progress over time.

- The senior leaders have identified appropriately the need to review the long-term planning to ensure that there is appropriate and consistent progression in the children’s learning across the curriculum.
- 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 further action include:

- to review and update the long-term planning and schemes of work for all areas of the curriculum, taking greater account of the wide range of abilities in each class and supporting the children’s progression; and
- to extend the curricular co-ordinators’ capacity to monitor and evaluate robustly their respective areas of responsibility in order to extend the ongoing improvement work in key areas of the curriculum.

### 3. MAIN REPORT

#### A. SETTING THE VISION

The vision in Silverstream Primary School and Nursery Unit prioritises successfully the fostering of **‘a welcoming, safe and inclusive learning environment’**. This aspect of the vision is realised in the welcome given to children of all abilities and from a diverse range of ethnic backgrounds, all of whom are fully integrated in every aspect of school life. The school is literally located **‘at the heart of the community’**, as expressed in the vision statement, and it also plays a central role in the lives of children and their families. The school provides a basis for establishing meaningful relationships within and beyond the immediate community which have a positive impact on the children, their holistic development and their progression.

The school’s vision is captured concisely in the motto: **‘Share, support, succeed’** which is visible throughout the school and is well understood by the members of the school community. The acronym, STREAM, articulates the values underpinning success at the school: Sharing, Teamwork, Resilience, Encouragement, Aspiring, Motivation. The motto and values are evident in the positive interactions between children and staff, as well as between the children and their peers, in classrooms, in communal areas and in the playground.

The Education Authority’s (EA) School Development Service has provided support to the senior and middle leaders over the last two years as they enhanced further aspects of leadership, the management of staff, and the provision in literacy and numeracy. As a result, the senior leaders have made effective use of a range of assessment data and the teachers’ professional judgment to identify clear and appropriate targets for improvement in the school’s provision and the outcomes for the children. The senior leaders recognise the need to extend their use of first-hand evidence, including a review of the work in the children’s books and direct observations of learning and teaching, to inform better the school’s programme for staff professional learning.

The job descriptions in place for the middle leaders set out clearly their roles and responsibilities. The middle leaders have drawn up clear and practical action plans for improvement in their respective areas of responsibility. They are at the early stages of reinstating monitoring and evaluating processes to enable them to gather evidence to monitor closely the children's progress in their learning. The senior leaders have identified appropriately the need to develop further this aspect of the middle leaders' work to ensure greater consistency in all aspects of self-evaluation.

The governors have a wide range of expertise which they use purposefully to support the senior leaders. They are informed directly by both middle and senior leaders; as a result, they are developing further their understanding of the progress being made in the school's current provision and improvement work.

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

There are positive, supportive working relationships at all levels in the classrooms: the staff know the children very well and respond sensitively to their needs. The characteristics of the most effective planning, teaching and assessment for successful learning include the children's active engagement in well-planned tasks which help them to develop resilience and solve problems both independently and collaboratively. The teachers and classroom assistants work closely to help individuals and small groups of children start, persevere with and complete tasks successfully. They use observations of the children's learning, regular marking and evaluations to assess accurately the children's progress. Where aspects of their learning are less effective, the children will benefit from a faster pace in their lessons and more extensive opportunities to write independently.

There is detailed and comprehensive planning in the nursery unit (NU) for the key areas of the pre-school curriculum. The NU staff are reviewing strategically their approach to planning and moving from a thematic approach to develop continuous planning to extend further the children's learning. The half-termly planning in the primary school provides guidance for the teachers on the content to be covered and the most suitable strategies for learning and teaching. The planning needs to take greater account of the wide ability range within each class. The senior leaders have identified the need to review the long-term planning to include greater detail and ensure appropriate progression is outlined in all areas of learning in the primary curriculum.

The staff have worked hard to create attractive and purposeful indoor and outdoor learning environments to engage the children fully and stimulate their interest in topic work. Well-planned active outdoor learning allows the children in the NU and in the foundation stage to explore the wooded area, work together and improve their investigative skills, confidence, communication and thinking skills.

The whole staff prioritise the children's mental health and emotional wellbeing; they work collaboratively with suitable community partners to help the children recognise their emotions and regulate their behaviours. Mindfulness techniques in the nursery unit, for example, are working well to help the children understand their own emotions and show kindness to others. The children in the primary school learn how to keep themselves safe and well through their lessons in personal development and

mutual understanding which are delivered by their teachers and by visiting presenters. For example, a local football club provides sessions for year 7 children to support their mental and emotional health, followed by physical education (PE) lessons. In their responses to the online questionnaire and in discussions with the inspectors, the children articulated their enjoyment of these experiences and the practical skills they had learned. At break and lunchtime, the children's physical wellbeing is further enhanced by taking part in organised team games and energetic creative play activities. A range of suitable equipment is available in the playground to help the children develop gross motor skills and interact constructively with others.

The focus groups of children who met with the inspectors are very aware of how to stay safe online and know what to do if they have any concerns about their safety.

### **C. BUILDING EQUITY**

The staff are committed to ensuring equity, diversity, and inclusion across the school and supporting effectively children from diverse backgrounds. Approximately one-tenth (9%) of the students are newcomers, and around one-quarter (27%) represent various ethnic backgrounds, reflecting the school's diversity. The children for whom English is an additional language benefit from tailored withdrawal sessions provided by a classroom assistant which enhance their literacy. The staff use appropriate assessments to monitor the children's progress in developing their English language skills. The 'Respecting Difference'\* programme which was developed by the Early Years Organisation and the Peace Initiative is used effectively by the staff in the NU to promote respect, inclusion and equality.

Additionally, the staff raise awareness and knowledge of the cultures that make up the school community through planned events which celebrate diversity and directly engage the parents in sharing their cultural backgrounds. The children's sense of social justice is enhanced through their regular support for child-centred and other charities, including recent and substantial fund-raising for the re-building of a local church.

There are individual education plans (IEPs) in place for the children identified as having special educational needs. The IEPs have clear, specific targets and practical guidance for teachers and parents to support the children in making progress. The process for monitoring the children's attainment at transition points is not applied consistently; as a result, the targets in a significant minority of the IEPs are not always adjusted accurately. The children in the well-planned withdrawal programmes engage readily in their learning, are happy and are making progress relative to their respective starting points. Reading mentors from a local post-primary school have also provided additional opportunities for individual children and small groups to extend their reading skills; their support is valued by the children, who spoke about their greater confidence in reading, and by their parents.

The classroom assistants play an important role in supporting the children in learning, notably by helping them start tasks, be organised and stay engaged in their work, and by using the relevant strategies they have acquired through their professional learning.

The sensory room is used well to help individual children or small groups when they need time to regulate their emotions so that they can re-engage successfully in their learning. The children appreciate the availability of the sensory room and the positive impact it has on their mental and emotional health. Importantly, a counsellor funded through the Extended Schools\* cluster is available to the children on one afternoon per week. The children understand clearly how they may access this service and know how to seek help if they have any concerns about their safety and wellbeing.

The free breakfast club which begins at 8am is well attended and ensures that all children have a healthy and sociable start to the day. In discussions with the inspectors, the children expressed their appreciation of the after-school clubs in, for example, cookery and art. When meeting the inspectors, the parents emphasised the impact of these clubs on the social and life skills of their children, as well as the value of this wrap-around care to working families. It is notable that the children who are keen to learn a musical instrument also benefit from free lessons, funded through the Extended Schools initiative, in violin, flute and clarinet.

Raising the level of the children's attendance, which stood at just over 90% in 2023-24, has been identified as an appropriate priority for all staff. Appropriately, the school has introduced a new initiative, 'Strive for 95'. It encourages the children to aim for at least 95% attendance and is underpinned by earlier, more direct communication with parents and rewards which the children value. Specific children in year 7 are proud of their new roles as attendance ambassadors and role models for other children throughout the school. It will be important for senior leaders to assess the impact of this initiative at specific points throughout the year and adjust it accordingly.

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

Throughout the school and NU, the children are happy, confident learners. Most of the children communicate confidently with the staff, adult visitors and each other, using a widening range of vocabulary as they progress through the year groups. They are very welcoming to visitors and have the confidence to ask if the visitors need help. Most of the children engage readily in their learning; the work in their books is well presented and demonstrates their progress over time.

Most of the children in the NU can concentrate for long periods of time, engaging in sustained and purposeful play and building friendships. They are developing very well their fine motor skills and hand-to-eye co-ordination as they use kitchen equipment and art and craft tools to create, for example, Christmas playdough cakes and wrapping paper. As a result, they are becoming increasingly independent; for example, they make a good attempt to put on and take off their coats and welly boots.

Throughout the school and NU, the children respond well to praise and understand the positive behaviour system; additionally, the senior classes have participated in drawing up their own class charters. There are meaningful incentives to inspire the children such as: stickers, table awards and golden time for good behaviour, effort and kindness in individual classes; and, at whole-school level, pupil of the week and head teacher awards, as well as certificates for achievements in online reading and mathematics programmes.



The children's achievements and successes inside and outside school are celebrated in class and in school assemblies. They are also shared effectively with parents orally and with a wider audience through a digital app. Musical productions for the senior classes and the Christmas presentation by the junior classes enable all children to develop performance or production skills, grow in confidence, feel part of the school community and share their achievements with family and friends.

The school makes effective use of data to assess the children's progress which is monitored regularly across the year. The school has identified the need to address a higher level of under-achievement in numeracy than in literacy and has established appropriately a programme of numeracy withdrawal support for individuals and small groups of children. There are clear and rigorous processes for monitoring the impact of this intervention on the children's progress throughout the year.

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

Silverstream Primary School has forged extensive and meaningful links with its local community and beyond. The senior leaders have fostered successfully a collegial culture in which staff work closely together. As indicated in their responses to the online questionnaire, the staff value opportunities to learn from one another and have the confidence to ask for support and guidance from colleagues. The programme for staff professional learning is closely linked to the curricular priorities in the school development plan, to the needs of the children and to staff wellbeing. The staff have also benefitted from professional learning led by a wide range of external providers in, for example: literacy; numeracy; autism awareness; positive playgrounds; and behaviour support.

There is a shared focus on leadership development, with staff participating in such suitable initiatives as the EA's 'Great Strategic Leader Programme'\*. Additionally, the senior leaders play an active role in a well-established and supportive association of local primary school principals which facilitates the sharing of common concerns, possible solutions and practical guidance for further school improvement.

The parent-staff association had been re-established following the principal's appointment and is active in raising funds for additional resources in school and to help subsidise educational visits which enhance the children's learning experiences. The school holds curriculum information meetings for the parents, including a recent and timely session on how children can stay safe online. By listening to parents' concerns and through ongoing communication with parents, the school has been able to raise attendance levels at these important events and helped equip parents to support their children in their learning. A 'mothers and tots' group is accommodated in the school hall one morning per week, further strengthening the school's connection with local families.

The school's extensive engagement with the wider community includes links with: local businesses to sponsor special events in school; Mid and East Antrim Borough Council to provide a sports programme for children in KS 2; the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) and the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service to promote the children's safety; a community-based mentoring service which works closely with children in year 7; and joint events with another local primary school.

The children in year 7 appreciate their opportunities to take on additional responsibilities and develop leadership and other skills. For example, their competence in digital skills is enhanced by becoming 'Dream Space Ambassadors'\* in association with W5. They also value their roles as, among others, playground buddies who support the children in year 1. The school has identified appropriately the need to re-establish the school council and review the role of the children in making decisions which affect them and their education.

## **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 school's vision to be '**at the heart of the community**' is understood clearly and underpins the work of the whole staff team. There is an inclusive ethos in which children from all backgrounds and abilities are welcomed and supported: they play a full role in all aspects of school life. The senior leaders have clearly identified strategic priorities for school improvement and the staff work collegially to realise the targets in the curricular and pastoral action plans.

ETI will monitor, through the engagement of the District Inspector, the progress of Silverstream Primary School in addressing the areas for action as 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

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#### **Respecting Difference**

The MIFC (Media Initiative for Children) Respecting Difference Programme is an intervention programme aimed at improving long term outcomes so that children, practitioners/teachers, parents and communities become more aware of diversity and difference issues and positively change attitudes and behaviours to those who are different.

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#### **Extended Schools**

The Department of Education's Extended Schools programme aims to improve levels of educational achievement for disadvantaged children and young people by providing the additional support that they might need to help them reach their full potential.

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#### **Great Strategic Leader Programme**

This programme now forms an important part overall of the Education Authority's Game Changing People suite of programmes. The aim is to develop strategic leadership skills to support the delivery of organisational priorities, thus creating the best services for our children and young people.

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#### **Dream Space Ambassadors**

This programme, provided by W5, aims to make science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) and digital learning more meaningful and inspiring by equipping children and young people to apply knowledge and skills to complex real-world problems that require initiative and creativity.

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