

Report of a Primary Inspection
St Anne's Primary School, Corkey

December 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

St Anne's Primary School is a maintained, co-educational school located in a rural setting in the village of Corkey, in the parish of Loughguile. The children attending the school come from a wide catchment area across the surrounding rural area. The enrolment has increased by nearly one fifth (19.5%) over the past three years and there are currently 92 children in four classes. The attendance rate is high at 93%. The teaching principal is supported by 2 full-time teachers, 3 part-time teachers, 5 classroom assistants and 3 support staff. Just over one fifth (21.7%) of the children are identified as having special educational needs (SEN); and 14% of the children have free school meals entitlement.

The school partners with a local controlled primary school for shared education and all classes participate in this programme. The staff have developed strong links with a number of local sports clubs. The senior hurling team recently won the North Antrim 'Cumann na mBunscol' outdoor hurling championship and the 'Cumann na mBunscol' indoor hurling championship.

B. VIEWS OF PARENTS, LEARNERS AND STAFF

The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) issued online confidential questionnaires to year 7 children and to all staff and parents/carers in advance of the inspection. All year 7 children responded to the questionnaire and 29% provided written comments which were mostly positive. All of the children indicated that they feel safe in school and are cared for and respected by the staff. Almost all of the children reported that they benefit from opportunities to develop a healthy lifestyle through regular exercise and healthy eating. Inspectors also met with children from years 3, 5 and 7 who spoke positively about the many opportunities they have to widen their learning experiences taking account of their interests. They spoke enthusiastically about their roles in the Christmas production and are very proud of their recent sporting achievements in hurling.

Eighteen parents/carers responded to the questionnaire and most of their responses were very positive. Thirty-nine percent of them provided additional written comments. All of the parents/carers report that their child is making good progress and they are happy with their child's learning experiences. The parents who met with the inspectors commented very positively about all aspects of the school. In particular, they appreciate the caring approach of the staff towards their children; the welcoming atmosphere; and the excellent home/school communication.

Most of the staff (85%) responded to the questionnaire and a small number provided written comments. Almost all of the responses were positive, and the staff indicated that all enjoy working at the school; everyone is respected; and their wellbeing is promoted effectively.

A summary of the questionnaire responses, including any issues raised, was shared with the principal and a representative of the board of governors.

C. THE PROCESS OF INSPECTION

The ETI worked alongside St Anne's 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

- There are very comprehensive consultation processes underway to provide an opportunity for the whole school community to contribute to the current review of the school vision and ensure that it meets the diverse needs of all of the children.
- There is an inclusive, friendly learning environment in which the children enthusiastically participate in their learning and confidently express their ideas and opinions in a respectful way.
- In the best practice assessment for learning strategies are used effectively, and the children engage well with active and collaborative approaches to learning.
- The school has identified the need to distribute the coordinator roles across the teaching staff to develop the capacity of middle leaders to ensure ongoing improvement within the curricular areas.
- The health and wellbeing of the children is promoted very well throughout the school.
- Whole class and small group interventions are effective in supporting the children identified as having special educational needs (SEN) and are impacting positively on their learning outcomes.
- There is a vibrant culture of praise in the school and the children's successes and achievements are widely shared, valued and celebrated.
- The priority given to cultivating and building on external partnerships is enhancing the children's wider learning experiences.

- 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.

Area for action:

- to distribute coordinator roles and responsibilities more widely and to develop the capacity of middle leaders to ensure there is a consistent approach to promoting improvement in provision and standards across all areas of the curriculum.

3. MAIN REPORT

A. SETTING THE VISION

St Anne's Primary School's vision is currently being reviewed and a wide consultation process is underway with staff, governors, parents and the Catholic Schools Trustee Service* to ensure the vision remains relevant and appropriate to meet the diverse needs of all of the children who attend the school. Collaborative engagement with the entire school community is actively sought and valued by the school leadership. In addition to developing a new vision, the staff are also reviewing the school's values and mission statement. The current vision statement, 'Developing skills, nurturing aspiration and working together in a caring Catholic environment' is impacting positively on the children's holistic development.

The interim development plan and the associated action plans contain appropriate priorities for improvement based on effective self-evaluation processes and very comprehensive consultation with parents and governors. The action plan targets would benefit from being more specific and measurable to support the staff in monitoring and evaluating effectively the impact of the actions for improvement.

The board of governors play an important role in the life of the school and use their expertise, knowledge and skills to good effect providing valuable support to the leaders. They are committed to reviewing the school's vision alongside the entire school community and are keen to re-establish link governors to work with the curriculum coordinators. The governors who met with inspectors spoke with pride about the school's excellent reputation in the local community and the child-centred approach at the heart of the school.

B. IMPLEMENTING AND IMPROVING TO ACHIEVE THE VISION

Across all classes, there are very good working relationships between the children and their teachers and classroom assistants, and they are well supported in their learning. The staff use skilful questioning to stimulate and develop the children's thinking processes and to help them extend their answers. As a result, the children are comfortable speaking out in class and most of them contribute well to group and class discussions. Characteristics of the most effective planning, teaching and assessment include the good use of assessment for learning strategies to provide clear learning intentions and enable the children to self-assess and make improvements to their work. The children also benefit from active and collaborative approaches to learning and teaching using a variety of resources and strategies to extend their learning.

The medium-term planning for learning across the curricular areas, incorporates the development of thinking skills and personal capabilities and there is clear evidence of differentiation to meet individual need. The teacher's evaluations of learning are used effectively to identify the progress made and to plan the next steps for individual children who require additional support.

The leaders have correctly identified the need to review, update and develop schemes of work for most of the curricular areas. The timely, review of long-term planning is progressing well in literacy and numeracy, for example the writing scheme plans for skills development across each genre of writing. A whole school emphasis on the development on narrative, procedural and recount writing genres is impacting positively across the key stages and most children can identify the features of different genres.

A previous school improvement focus on developing comprehension skills and critical thinking through non-fiction reading is supported effectively by the development of a whole-school plan for progression, the use of a commercial online adaptive reading programme and access to a range of digital texts on the C2K news desk. As a result, most of the children are developing well their comprehension skills across a range of fiction and non-fiction texts.

Numeracy is a strength within the school. The children use a wide range of practical and concrete numeracy resources effectively to support and extend their thinking in investigative activities. The priority given to developing mental maths strategies supports the children as they develop their fluency and accuracy to solve problems, reason and make connections across their learning. The children's digital skills are being developed naturally across the curriculum and the teachers make good use of digital devices to enhance the quality of their teaching and to extend the children's learning.

The senior leaders have identified the need to develop the role of the coordinator at middle leadership level within the school. Planned work on reviewing roles and responsibilities of the coordinators and developing the capacity of middle leaders will support and empower the staff team to work together more effectively to monitor, evaluate and review the provision for learning consistently across the curriculum.

The emotional health and wellbeing of the children is carefully considered and promoted very effectively through participation in the 'daily mile'* initiative, a variety of sport and 'movement breaks' during lessons, and the planned Personal Development and Mutual Understanding curriculum which includes a focus on healthy eating and learning about healthy lifestyles. The children report that they feel safe in school and online, and they know who to speak to if they need help.

C. BUILDING EQUITY

There is a very welcoming and inclusive ethos in St Anne's Primary School. The staff place a great emphasis on developing positive relationships with the children that will support their holistic development and allow staff to respond appropriately in meeting their individual needs.

The school makes effective use of a range of data and information collected to monitor the children's wellbeing by measuring their sense of self-worth and contentment in school, alongside monitoring their progress in literacy and numeracy. The information gathered is used very effectively to identify children who would benefit from additional help. There is an appropriate range of interventions in place, including small group withdrawal sessions to support specific children and give them a boost with their learning. Staff take account of the needs of each child as they plan specific interventions to address their barriers to learning.

Children with special educational needs are fully involved in all aspects of school life, participating enthusiastically in school performances and sporting events. The impact of internal and external interventions to support children with SEN is monitored effectively and parents are regularly given updates on the progress made by their child along with the planned next steps.

The teachers and classroom assistants work together very effectively to support individual children. Through professional learning opportunities the staff team have successfully extended the range of strategies they use to support children with additional needs and promote their readiness for learning. Well-established routines and use of visual schedules ensure smooth transitions within each classroom and across the school day.

D. DEFINING, CELEBRATING AND EMBEDDING SUCCESS

The children are very aware of their personal achievements, both inside and outside of school and are eager to share their hurling, dancing and musical successes with their peers and with the school staff. They enjoy celebrating the accomplishments of others, and there is a culture of praise throughout the school that is building the children's confidence, raising their self-esteem and is enabling further success.

The staff have created a supportive, nurturing learning environment where the children are encouraged to be kind and respectful in their interactions towards each other, and with the staff and visitors. Most of the children are articulate speakers who engage confidently with their peers, express their opinions and support each other in a positive manner.

The children are motivated learners and most of them have good levels of concentration and resilience. Most of the children are making good progress in their learning and are acquiring appropriate skills, attitudes and dispositions which are preparing them well for the next stage of their learning.

The children in years 3, 5 and 7, who met with the inspectors, spoke enthusiastically about all aspects of their learning. They commented positively about the kind, supportive teachers and classroom assistants and of their enjoyment of participating in the Christmas show. They also reported that their ideas and opinions are valued and acted upon by the staff. The planned creation of a school council will offer greater opportunities to develop the voice of the child further to inform their learning experiences and to enable them to contribute to the school's broader decision making.

E. GROWING A COMMUNITY OF LEARNING

The children have a strong sense of pride attending St Anne's Primary School and understand that everyone plays an important role in building and developing the whole school community. They are developing their leadership skills as art monitors and digital skills monitors and the older children enjoy helping the younger children to play in the playground. In line with the ethos of the school the children are developing their understanding of wider global issues and social responsibility through their support of a school in Peru, whose principal is a local nun.

The staff are developing positive links with local businesses and sports clubs for sponsorship and sharing of expertise which is impacting positively on the children's wider learning experiences. The staff use skilfully their own expertise and work along with local camogie, hurling and football clubs, musicians, and authors to develop and extend the children's wider skills. The children spoke highly of these opportunities and of their enjoyment participating in local competitions and tournaments.

There is a close partnership with the local post-primary schools and a well developed transition process supports the children as they move to the next stage of their learning. The longstanding shared education partnership with a local controlled school widens the children's physical education experiences (PE) and personal development and mutual understanding (PDMU).

Cultivating relationships with parents is valued and the staff actively seek opportunities to engage with them through the 'Thursday Note', school website, a digital app and formal and informal meetings. The parent teacher association (PTA) organises a wide variety of fundraising activities raising significant funds to purchase resources to benefit the children's digital skills and outdoor play.

The staff value opportunities to participate in professional learning which is strategically linked to the needs of the children and the school development plan's priorities. They reflect on their professional learning and share their knowledge to empower all staff to use new strategies and develop consistent approaches.

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

St Anne's Primary School provides a caring, nurturing learning environment that prioritises the holistic development of each child and celebrates their individual gifts and talents.

ETI, through the engagement of the District Inspector, will continue to work with the school as it takes forward the area for action detailed in the body of 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: 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 3** **The Catholic Schools Trustee Service** provides support and guidance for schools in the Catholic managed education sector in Northern Ireland.
- Page 4** **Daily mile** The Daily Mile is a social physical activity, with children running, wheeling or walking at their own pace in the fresh air with friends. The aim of The Daily Mile is to improve the physical, social, emotional and mental health and wellbeing of children regardless of age, ability or personal circumstances.

The Education and Training Inspectorate

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