

Report of a Primary Inspection
St Caireall's Primary School, Aghyaran, Castlederg, County Tyrone

September 2024

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1. INTRODUCTION

A. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

St Caireall's Primary school is a maintained primary school, situated in Aghyaran, a rural area west of Castleberg in County Tyrone. The children attending the school come mostly from the surrounding area and a small number travel to the school from the town of Castleberg.

The school's enrolment has increased slightly over the past four years and now stands at 138 children. Approximately 17% of the children have free school meals entitlement. Just under one-quarter (24.6%) of the children have been identified as having special educational needs (SEN).

Over the past four years a teaching-principal, three classroom teachers and five classroom assistants have been appointed. Five co-ordinators have been appointed recently to lead key areas of the curriculum across the school. There are currently six classes in the school, including two composite classes. Ten classroom assistants are employed to support the children across the key stages.

Through well-established Shared Education programmes, the children engage in collaborative learning with children and young people from five primary schools and one post-primary school.

The school is currently undergoing significant building works to install a hygiene suite and office accommodation.

B. VIEWS OF PARENTS, LEARNERS AND STAFF

The Education and Training Inspectorate issued online confidential questionnaires to year 7 children, parents, and all staff before the inspection. A summary of the questionnaire responses, including any issues raised, was shared with the principal and the chair of the board of governors.

Nearly all of the year 7 children (24) responded to the confidential questionnaire, sixteen of whom provided additional written comments. All of the children that responded indicated that they feel safe and respected in school and that their teachers and assistants help them if they had difficulties with their learning. Almost all of the children reported that they are proud to belong to their school community. In the written comments, the children wrote positively about their school and how they are learning within a kind and fun environment.

During discussions with children from years 3 to year 7, they spoke positively about the opportunities they had to learn while working independently, in pairs and in groups, for example, designing and making creative models related to their thematic topics and in creative writing. They value the opportunities they have to learn during the after-school activities and also shared how they are encouraged to live healthy lifestyles. They discussed how they know that they were progressing in their learning through the feedback from teachers about their work, regular assessments, through the rewards system and through communications to their parents.

Nineteen (20%) of the parents responded to the questionnaire; thirteen of whom (14%) provided additional written comments. All of the parental responses were positive in their support for the work of the school. The parents reported that they are content with the progress their child is making, and the pastoral support provided for the children. They are aware of the arrangements for safeguarding children in school. In the additional written comments, the parents highlighted that their child is happy and enjoying their time in school, within a helpful environment which is conducive to learning.

All of the teaching staff responded to the questionnaires and their responses and written comments were wholly supportive of the work of the school, commenting on their opportunities for professional learning and how the achievements of everyone in the school community are recognised and celebrated.

Eight (67%) of the classroom learning and support staff responded to the questionnaire, a small number of whom provided additional written comments. They are clear about the school vision, are wholly supportive of the life and work of the school and feel respected in their work. They indicated that their wellbeing is promoted effectively, they feel appreciated and that they enjoy their work.

C. THE PROCESS OF INSPECTION

A standard piece explaining that ETI worked alongside the school/organisation to consider how well the school/organisation:

- 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 recently reviewed vision is realised through the effective opportunities provided for the children to participate in a range of purposeful learning activities across the curriculum within a supportive environment.
- The successful inclusion of all of the children is a central feature of the provision.
- The children engage well in the variety of learning opportunities which develop effectively their positive dispositions to learning and their wider thinking skills and personal capabilities.

- The wide range of professional learning and development opportunities supports staff to meet effectively the complex and diverse needs of the children.
- The staff use a range of assessment and pastoral information to build an accurate picture of the children's progress in learning.
- Going forward, the range information for each child should be used to enhance planning and ensure that all the children are appropriately challenged and stretched in their 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 well-considered school vision has been reviewed recently, with input from staff, governors and parents, in response to changes in school leadership, and the widening range of needs of the children. The vision is being realised through the effective range of opportunities provided for the children to engage in purposeful learning activities across the curriculum within a supportive environment. The children confidently use their acquired skills in thinking, communication and working with their peers to progress well their learning across the school.

The school development plan and associated action plan, in its final year, has guided well the school in meeting the needs of the children over the past three years. School leaders are engaging in self-evaluation and extensive consultation with the school community to inform the priorities for improvement over the next three years. To achieve its vision fully and in preparation for the future development planning, the school has identified appropriately the need to develop further the role of the middle leaders in self-evaluation.

The governors are aware of the school's strengths and challenges and use well their expertise and experience to inform their strategic thinking and to provide support and challenge. Middle leaders from across the school present progress updates to the governors on the improvement work in their areas of responsibility. Consequently, the governors are more fully informed to support the school to better meet the needs of the children and to realise the school vision.

B. IMPLEMENTING AND IMPROVING TO ACHIEVE THE VISION

Almost all of the lessons observed provided interesting and purposeful learning opportunities for the children. The children engage well, have a positive disposition to their learning and make good progress as they move through the school. In the most effective lessons, the children have opportunities to collaborate in paired work and group activities which extend well their thinking and improves further their

communication skills. The teachers use digital technology to good effect to support the children in carrying out learning tasks in researching, comparing and decision-making. Consequently, the children are developing well their digital skills to present their work confidently, create animations and share their learning with their peers.

Ongoing staff professional learning has empowered the co-ordinators and teachers to identify the need to review the planning to ensure appropriate stretch and challenge for all of the children in their learning. The inspection endorses this as an appropriate area for action.

Across the school a key feature of the provision is the skilful use, by the teachers and classroom assistants, of strategies to support the children to focus on their learning and manage their own behaviour. During discussions with groups of children from year 3 to year 7, they described how they value opportunities to keep healthy and are encouraged to participate in dance, football, athletics and cross country running. They also talked knowledgeably about the online safety strategies they had learned. The children report that they feel safe in school and know who they could go to if they have concerns about their safety or well-being.

C. BUILDING EQUITY

St Caireall's Primary school offers a safe, child-centred environment for all of its learners. Relationships at all levels within the school are positive, affirming and respectful and the inclusive atmosphere means that every child is valued and supported well in their learning.

The teachers and staff use well the principles of nurture to support the developmental and learning needs of the children. A growing number of the children have been identified as having special educational needs (SEN). The school leadership have focused strategically on identifying early the children with learning needs and support well the staff to provide appropriate learning and teaching strategies to meet effectively their needs.

Information held by the school shows that the early recognition of the children's needs and the well-considered intervention and support programmes provided by the staff ensure that most of the children make good progress in their learning.

D. DEFINING, CELEBRATING AND EMBEDDING SUCCESS

In discussion with a group of parents and during the meetings with the children, they spoke of how the children's achievements and positive contributions to school life are rewarded often through, for example: the distribution of class points; direct praise in class by their teachers; and written notes to parents. The children also spoke about how their achievements in class, in sport and other activities outside school are celebrated during regular school assembly events and how they feel proud when these celebrations are shared with their parents through an online communication platform.

Recently the school achieved the 'Active Travel School' award from the charity 'Sustrans', which is of particular significance given the rural location of the school and the fact that a large proportion of the children travel to school by bus.

The staff engage in professional dialogue with the staff in local pre-school settings to understand the interests and needs of the children and to support them as they make the transition from pre-school education to St Caireall's Primary School. There are also effective collaborative links to ensure effective transition for the children when moving to post-primary level.

The school makes effective use of data to assess the children's progress which is monitored at regular times across the year and indicates that most of the children make appropriate progress from their individual starting points.

The children talk enthusiastically about the opportunities to take part and regularly succeed in competitive inter-school sport. They value the opportunities to engage in developing their skills and learning during collaborative shared education events through which they develop their resilience, communication skills and confidence.

E. GROWING A COMMUNITY OF LEARNING

The school is a central part of the rural community and the parents who met with the inspectors highlighted how they are involved, through consultations, in setting the school vision and mission statements and how they work in partnership with the staff to ensure the school's sustainability and growth.

In developing a community of learning, the school engages well with the parents and adults in the locality and provides opportunities for them to attend classes hosted in the school, gain accreditations and upskill themselves with strategies to support their child in their learning.

There are well-developed links for teacher professional learning through for example, the 'Pathways to Partnerships' programme. The school collaborates with other schools to facilitate shared professional learning and opportunities for co-ordinators to network, engage in professional dialogue and to share practice.

To develop additional skills and understanding two of the middle leaders have engaged in a professional learning programme that supports teachers in reflecting upon their practice, evaluating their teaching and building further their understanding and use of contemporary learning strategies and pedagogies for learning. Appropriately, the school plans to disseminate their learning across the school to improve further the classroom experiences and to deepen the children's understanding. All of the teaching and classroom support staff also engage in ongoing professional learning to enable them to better meet the needs of the children in their care.

F. CHILD PROTECTION

At the time of the inspection, the evidence provided by St Caireall's Primary School demonstrates that the arrangements for child protection align to the current statutory guidance.

4. GOING FORWARD

St Caireall's Primary school is realising its vision for the education of its children by encouraging them to grow in their learning and giving them the confidence to blossom. The school is well placed to take forward the areas for consideration detailed in this report.

The Education and Training Inspectorate

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