

# Report of a Primary Inspection

St Eithne's Primary School, Derry  
DE Ref No 203-6473

February 2026



Education and  
Training Inspectorate  
Empowering Improvement

## Contents

1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
A. BACKGROUND INFORMATION .....	1
B. VIEWS OF CHILDREN, PARENTS AND STAFF .....	1
C. THE PROCESS OF INSPECTION .....	1
2. MAIN REPORT .....	1
A. SETTING THE VISION.....	1
B. IMPLEMENTING AND IMPROVING TO ACHIEVE THE VISION.....	2
C. BUILDING EQUITY .....	3
D. DEFINING, CELEBRATING AND EMBEDDING SUCCESS.....	4
E. GROWING A COMMUNITY OF LEARNING .....	5
F. CHILD PROTECTION .....	6
3. NEXT STEPS.....	6
4. APPENDICES .....	7
APPENDIX 1: QUANTITATIVE TERMS .....	7
APPENDIX 2: NOTES .....	8

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

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

### **A. BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

St Eithne's Primary School is a co-educational, Catholic-maintained primary school situated in the Ballymagroarty area of Derry city. The children who attend the school come from the surrounding area. The school's enrolment stands at 327 children. Just over 51% (167) of the children have free school meal entitlement and 22% (72) have been identified as having special educational needs (SEN). There are a small number of newcomer children who attend the school. The staffing complement consists of the principal and teaching vice-principal, 13 classroom teachers, 26 classroom assistants, and the wider staff team. The school has achieved several awards over recent years including its second Eco Schools Green Flag\* Award, the Digital Schools Award\* and the CyberFirst Schools Award\*.

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

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

The responses to the questionnaires are referenced, where relevant, within the main body of the report. A high-level summary of the questionnaire responses, including any concerns raised, was shared with the principal and a representative of the board of governors.

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

ETI worked alongside St Eithne'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 define, celebrate and embed success; and
- grows and develops an inclusive community of learning.

## **2. MAIN REPORT**

### **A. SETTING THE VISION**

The shared vision of the school community for high quality education in St Eithne's Primary School is wholly child-centred and rooted firmly in a commitment to the ethos of Catholic education. It is shaped by high expectations across all aspects of school life and deeply held values that permeate leadership, classroom practice,

teamwork and day-to-day decision making. A review of the vision, ethos and associated values in the last year provided a meaningful opportunity to reflect, renew and reaffirm a collective commitment to 'fostering an inclusive, faith-filled environment where every child is valued, inspired and empowered to reach their full potential'.

All of the teaching and non-teaching staff who responded to the ETI questionnaire affirmed that they understand the school's vision and contribute actively to its realisation. Their responses reflect a sense of ownership, and a collective understanding that the needs, well-being and progress of the children remain the central priority for all.

The processes of whole-school self-evaluation and school improvement are extensive, thorough and embedded securely into practice. The new three-year school development plan is vision-led and evidence informed, with associated actions plans which are detailed, succinct and child-centred. Through sustained consultation with the school community, well-considered analysis of qualitative and quantitative data, and careful evaluation of first-hand evidence of learning and teaching, the leadership team have identified appropriate priorities for improvement. These include: developing further the children's ability to problem-solve in numeracy; supporting the development of spelling; continuing to strengthen whole school approaches to meeting special and additional educational needs; and the continuing development of digital skills. Staff professional learning is closely aligned with the identified priorities and as a result, staff development is focused and impacts positively on ongoing improvement work and classroom practice. There is a sharp focus on continually improving the outcomes for learners, while enriching their lived experiences and those of the wider school community.

The governors bring a broad range of knowledge and experience, providing both support and appropriate challenge to the leadership team. Through regular meetings, effective communication with senior leaders and established monitoring processes, they are well informed and maintain a clear oversight of standards and contribute meaningfully to the school's strategic direction.

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

The highly strategic and well-co-ordinated approach to school improvement is having a significant impact on the children's learning and achievement across the curriculum. The curriculum co-ordinators work collegially to ensure there is appropriate progression and challenge in the learning. The whole school planning for learning is highly effective. It provides a coherent and inclusive curriculum framework that supports very well the learning and teaching across the school and is responsive to meeting the needs of all of the children.

The learning environment is well maintained, well-organised and attractive. The children's work is celebrated throughout the school, and all spaces are used effectively to enrich the children's learning experiences. Across the key stages, successful learning is supported by positive relationships and characterised by: the

effective use of assessment for learning strategies; well-planned opportunities to connect learning across the curriculum; purposeful paired and group work; and well-established routines within the classrooms. The staff use skilful questioning and highly effective 'at-elbow' support to ensure that all of the children are challenged appropriately and able to achieve.

Through the process of self-evaluation, the school has identified the opportunity to make greater use of the outdoor environment to enhance further the children's learning experiences. The inspection endorses this as an appropriate area for action moving forward.

There are highly strategic, collegial approaches to promoting the emotional and physical health, safety and well-being of the children. These approaches are embedded systematically within the school's culture, policies and daily practice. The impact of this work is evidenced in the feedback from the children. All of the children who responded to the ETI questionnaire and, the children who spoke with inspectors in focus groups, agreed that teachers and other adults treat them with care and respect and they indicated that there is an adult they can talk to if they are worried or have a problem.

The school is proactive and preventative in its promotion of healthy lifestyles. Healthy eating is reinforced through practical initiatives such as the daily fresh fruit provision at break time; all of the children who responded to the ETI questionnaire affirmed that the school encourages them to eat healthily. Health and well-being messages are further strengthened through well-planned, purposeful whole-school initiatives such as Wellbeing Week. These initiatives move beyond awareness-raising to active participation, engaging the entire school community in tangible lifestyle choices such as walking to school, healthy eating and physical fitness. As a result, children are supported not only to understand healthy living, but to practise it. Online safety is an embedded feature of the provision for learning, with pupils across the school participating in well-planned learning experiences, including a whole-school Internet Safety Week led in part by the digital leaders from year 6.

The emotional health and well-being of all children is enhanced through a coherent Personal Development and Mutual Understanding (PDMU) curriculum and carefully structured whole-school approaches to supporting the children's emotional regulation. Additionally, the staff work alongside parents to identify children who may benefit from the school counselling service. This service provides a vital early intervention, helping children build their resilience and grow in confidence, and it supports the school's commitment to responding to the needs of the children holistically.

### **C. BUILDING EQUITY**

The school provides a warm and welcoming environment for every child and their family. The staff model high standards of behaviour and mutual respect. Each child is known, valued and affirmed, and both the children and the staff have a strong sense of belonging to the school community. All of the children benefit from highly inclusive practices and can participate meaningfully in school life.

The staff maintain consistently high expectations for all, working proactively and collegially to remove barriers to learning. Extended schools funding\*, alongside strategic partnerships with local businesses and community groups, enable the school to provide a free breakfast club, after school care and uniform initiatives, offering practical and meaningful support to the children and their families.

The leadership has established a strategic 'in-school first' approach to inclusion. Early identification of need is informed very well by a comprehensive range of assessment tools and high quality, tailored professional learning. This equips the staff with the skills, knowledge and understanding required to identify and address additional needs and SEN very effectively. The graduated response to delivering SEN provision across the school is fluid and responsive to the children's needs, prioritising high-quality classroom practice and timely, purposeful in-school interventions before referral to external agencies.

In responses to the ETI questionnaire, all of the teaching staff and the classroom assistants agreed that they have benefitted from professional learning and feel well equipped to understand and respond to the needs of individual children. Monitoring, evaluation and review extend beyond tracking children's progress to include reflective consideration of the effectiveness of interventions and how they may be strengthened further. Individual education plans are informed very well by in-class observations, assessments information and detailed knowledge of the children's interests and needs. The parents are valued partners in the planning process and meaningful input from the children ensures that their voice is heard at every stage. The children are actively engaged in setting personal goals for themselves and evaluating the progress they have made with the support of the staff.

The principles of nurture\* are embedded well across the school and are reflected in the quality of the relationships, consistent routines and carefully managed transitions throughout the school day. For example, the school's 'Umbrella room' is used very effectively by staff to deliver the PDMU curriculum and to support whole class groups in developing emotional regulation strategies. Targeted, well-planned interventions such as sensory circuits, Theraplay\* and the school's own reading programme, 'Monster Readers,' are underpinned by high-quality staff professional learning and have a measurable impact on the children's learning and readiness to learn.

The school promotes good attendance through rewards, incentives and collaboration with parents and external agencies. The success of this work is supported by the strong culture of belonging, and the strength of the inclusive and nurturing environment.

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

The children's attitudes and dispositions for learning are consistently positive. They understand what successful learning looks like. They speak confidently about their learning, take great pride in their work and celebrate their achievements. The high expectations that permeate the school community are reflected in the children's exemplary behaviour and their high levels of engagement in learning throughout the school.

The school's internal data shows that most of the children are making good progress in their learning. Systematic evaluation of the children's work enables the staff to monitor progress effectively at key transition points and ensures the children are well prepared for the next stage of their education journey.

Across the school the children are immersed in a literacy rich environment where a love of reading and writing is nurtured consistently. The significant impact of the strategic and ongoing whole-school improvement work in language and literacy is evidenced in the clear progression in the children's books, the high standards of writing from the foundation stage and, in the creativity and flair that the children display in their beautifully presented work. The children read with confidence and expression, write to a high standard for a variety of purposes and audiences, and articulate their ideas with clarity. In numeracy, the children engage confidently with mental mathematics and numeracy; they apply problem-solving strategies accurately, and work at appropriately challenging levels through differentiated activities.

The cross-curricular approach to planning maximises the learning opportunities for all of the children. At Key Stages 1 and 2, novels are used very successfully to strengthen thematic connections across the curriculum, further enriching learning and inspiring creative, artistic and expressive responses from the children. The teachers' use of digital technology is underpinned by coherent schemes of work that set out opportunities to enhance learning and develop the children's digital proficiency across the curriculum and in real-life contexts. As a result, the children develop their digital skills to a high standard by year 7.

The Arts curriculum plays a vital part in the life of the school and impacts positively on the children's holistic development and confidence. The children talked animatedly about their experiences in the school's musical productions such as Matilda and The Little Mermaid. The school choir performs to a high standard and has achieved notable success in competitive events.

The teachers regularly celebrate the personal achievements of the children in their class with "Proud Cloud" and "Wow Wall" and the children's successes, both academic and pastoral, are shared and celebrated at the whole school assembly with the 'Star of the Week' award. The children spoke with great pride about when their work is selected by the school principal for display in the school foyer.

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

The learner voice is embedded meaningfully, with the children consulted routinely and enabled to contribute purposefully to school life and curriculum development. Leadership opportunities, through the eco and school councils and as digital leaders, foster confidence, responsibility and sense of agency. For example, the school council has enhanced the school's provision through inclusive events and initiatives that promote kindness and positive play in the playground. The year 6 digital leaders, supported by a structured training programme, provide knowledgeable and confident support to both the staff and the children, enhancing further the school's digital capacity. An extensive range of extra-curricular activities including sign language, Minecraft and cookery, enrich the children's holistic learning experiences and enable them to develop new skills, grow in confidence and achieve success.

There are strong and purposeful partnerships with parents, the community and a range of external agencies. Well-embedded partnerships strengthen very effectively the school's community of learning, broaden the opportunities available to the children, and support the school in realising successfully its vision. The children actively participate in the local community through for example the monthly provision of music and reading in the local church. The school is an active member of the Ballymagroarty Hazelbank Community Partnership Hub which co-ordinates local groups providing family support and other relevant community services. Through the hub, the school accesses a range of valuable services including family support work and the 'Read and Feed' initiative.

Monthly newsletters, information booklets, the school website, text messaging service, social media and iClass all ensure that parents have access to timely, accurate and relevant information. Clear guidance and practical resources support parents in reinforcing learning at home. Initiatives such as the 'Bring Your Grown-Up' mathematics programme exemplify the school's commitment to strengthening parental engagement in learning. Post-programme evaluations reflect highly positive outcomes with all of the participating parents reporting that the sessions improved their attitudes towards mathematics.

## **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.

## **3. NEXT STEPS**

In St Eithne's Primary School, success has been embedded through the commitment to vision, collegial work practices, a reflective culture of self-evaluation, and by keeping the needs of the children to the fore. The children are empowered to make progress, achieve and develop their character through all aspects of school life, and to live out the school's motto: "Dream, Believe, Do.... Repeat."

As set out in the school's current development plan, the next step for St Eithne's Primary School is to take forward the following area of action: to make greater use of the outdoor environment to enhance further the children's learning experiences. The district inspector will monitor the school's progress in addressing this area for action as part of ETI's normal monitoring processes.

Inspectors have identified aspects of highly effective practice from which others may learn. The aspects of practice which should be shared more widely are:

- the vision-led, strategic approach to the development of a highly effective community of learning, underpinned by high expectations;
- the strategic and well-co-ordinated approach to school improvement; and
- the 'in-school first' approach to identifying and addressing SEN.

## 4. 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

### Page 1

#### **Eco Green Flag\***

The Eco Schools Green Flag is an internationally recognised award for excellence in environmental action and learning.

#### **Digital Schools Award\***

The Digital Schools Awards is a national awards scheme to promote, recognise and encourage a whole school approach to **the use of digital technology in schools.**

#### **CyberFirst Schools Award\***

The CyberFirst Schools Award is led by the [National Cyber Security Centre \(NCSC\)](#) and certifies schools and colleges demonstrating excellence in, or commitment to, cyber security education.

### Page 4

#### **Extended Schools funding\***

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.

#### **The principles of nurture\***

NurtureUK define the six principles of nurture as:

- Children's learning is understood developmentally.
- The classroom offers a safe base.
- The importance of nurture for the development of well-being.
- Language is a vital means of communication.
- All behaviour is communication.
- The importance of transition in children's lives.

#### **Theraplay\***

A play-based child and family therapy that aims to foster secure attachment, self-esteem, and trust.

© CROWN COPYRIGHT 2026

This report may be reproduced in whole or in part, except for commercial purposes or in connection with a prospectus or advertisement, provided that the source and date thereof are stated.

Copies of this report are available on the [ETI website](#).

Follow us on  [@ETI\\_news](#)  [@ETInews](#)  Empowering Improvement  
Stepping Forward Together