

CREGAGH PRIMARY SCHOOL & DEAF UNIT

• Aspire • Believe • Belong • Achieve •



Friday 6th September 2024

**“Each day of our lives, we make deposits
in the memory banks of our children.” ~ C.R. Swindoll**

1. Parents & Teachers Together Meetings (Meet the Teachers Meetings)

We were delighted to see a good number of parents attend our *Parents & Teachers Together Meetings* on Wednesday afternoon. During the first session, Mrs Pearson shared important information on Special Educational Needs (including what a learning difficulty is and what it isn't) & also Safeguarding. This was followed by a talk from Mr Heggarty on the changing character of the Cregagh area. Using data from the recent census, information was shared that demonstrated:

- that while the immediate Cregagh estate area had “grown old” with only c.18% of its population aged between 0-14 years of age;
- the demographics just beyond our doorstep had changed & was changing much more quickly;
- parents were also interested to see that 11% of Cregagh Primary pupils came from Catholic backgrounds, while 13% came from other ethnicities “other than white”;
- the slow decline of school enrolment was also addressed & is clearly linked to the lower number of babies being born, along with the consequent number of young children and adolescents living in the immediate estate area;
- there is a lack of available family-housing in our local area;
- in years gone by, the Cregagh estate had enough children to fill the school single-handedly (400+); this is clearly no longer the case and won't be the case in the future;
- there are 7 primary schools in close (within 2 miles) proximity to Cregagh Primary competing for an ever-decreasing number of children;

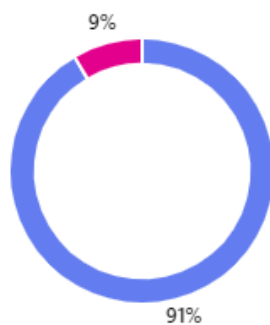
Three clear things emerged from the presentation:

- a) Cregagh Primary welcomes & cares for all children who come through its doors regardless of their background or home address.
- b) beyond our school's doorstep, there has been much greater demographic changes than inside the estate;
- c) **Cregagh: the local area & the primary school need to take action to future-proof our school!**

What actions are being considered ?

1. **Controlled Integrated status** - one option that may be worth exploring is that of 'transformation' into what's called a controlled integrated school. We are already a mixed, integrated school (as the data shared on Wednesday afternoon shows) but transforming into a controlled integrated school would send a message of intentionality to a wider range of families living beyond our doorstep. While welcoming children from all backgrounds & respecting cultural & religious differences, our school has a broad Christian ethos. I have worked hard with others to develop & at times, protect this. This would not change. What would change is that we would get one or two new school governors who would represent the Catholic community – they may even be someone from the 11% of our school families who identify as Catholic & already attend our school!

At the time of writing (Friday morning 6/9/2024), parents have responded to the anonymous survey question: ***“Having listened to today's presentation on the changing character of the Cregagh area & what this potentially means for our school (falling enrolment) would you in principle be in support of Cregagh PS & Deaf Unit pursuing controlled integrated school status?”***



Remember, this question really only asks if this is a journey that parents would be supportive of.

As the chart adjacent shows, 91% of parents said they would support Cregagh PS & Deaf Unit pursuing controlled integrated school status in principle (that's the early stage we are at ... it's only an idea); with the remaining 9% responding No.

2. **“Have you thought about pre-school?”** Yes, every day! Despite all kinds of rumours & half-truths, Cregagh Pre-school closed because of low numbers which led to low finances which led to its closure in June 2024. This was a very sad event for us, as it was Cregagh Primary School who led the setting-up of the pre-school in the first place - so, it was a double 'slap in the face' for us! In the parents' survey sent home after Wednesday's meeting, a few parents mentioned the pre-school & how it is a great loss. We agree. However, when it was there fewer of its children came from the Cregagh estate & more & more came from further away ... usually because parents didn't get a place closer to where they lived. Ten years ago, the pre-school next door had 24 funded places, it lost funded places every year because it couldn't fill them: not because they weren't doing a great job (they were!) but because the number of local children has declined so much.

Let me be very clear with all school parents: I want to see a pre-school (preferably a teacher-led nursery class) established in Cregagh Primary School as soon as possible. But before this ever happens, we need to grow the school to prove demand.

3. **Wrap-around care** – wrap-around care is very expensive. Why? Because people have to be employed & paid to do it. It can't be provided for free. Cregagh Primary School has lots of working families but not that many who can afford high childcare prices. We also have many families who do not need this service; for example, only 6 families responded to the most recent survey, with only one family saying they would use it every day & four other families saying they would use it a few times a week. It isn't really possible to run after-school care based on such low numbers.

However, we are going to pilot after-school care between now & the New Year to see how it goes. We are aiming for it to start at the beginning of this October. Breakfast Club will also start opening earlier (8am instead of 8:15am each morning to help working parents especially); this change starts Monday 9th September. This means that from the start of October, we can offer 'wrap-around care' from 8am to 5pm Mondays-Thursdays & 8am to 4pm on Fridays (term-time only). More information about this will be sent home in due course. Thanks.

4. **Pre-loved school uniforms**

Cregagh Primary School has redistributed pre-loved uniforms (must be in good condition) for around ten years now. For the past couple of years, local charity **#TeamDot** have helped provide pre-loved uniforms to some of our own Cregagh Primary School children but also other local primary and secondary schools.

After a busy few days, most (but not all) of our pre-loved school uniform stock has gone. If your family have any items of school uniform but are still in good condition (preferably washed & dried), please send the items of uniform into the school office for redistribution to another family who could use them. Thank you!

5. **School Fund**

School fund remains unchanged at £20 per family for the school year. School fund is a really important source of additional income for our school and enables us to provide 'nice' things for the children that we otherwise could not do.

6. **Healthy breaks**

Mondays through to Thursdays – children must bring in a healthy, non-sugary snack for break.
Fridays – children can bring in a sweet treat if they wish

Drinks – the best drink your child can have is water. We do however, allow children to bring in diluted juice. Energy drinks, high-sugar drinks or caffeinated drinks are not permitted & will be removed & sent home to parents after school is over. It is important that all parents teach their children to follow simple & sensible school rules. Thank you for your support with this.

7. **Parent School Association (PSA)**

If you would like to join with other mums & dads in helping support our school in practical ways, why not join Cregagh Primary's PSA? If you'd like to know more about this, let Miss Murphy in the office know & she will get some information to you 😊

8. **Have you changed your contact number recently?**

Don't forget to let Miss Murphy (school secretary) know if you change your telephone number or home address. We can't contact you in an emergency, if we don't have your most up-to-date details!

9. Applying for Free School Meals (2024-25)

When working out school budgets, government takes into consideration how many children in a school are **entitled** to free school meals (not the same thing as, how many children actually take them!) If you are entitled to free school meals, please do register for them with the EA (Education Authority) as this is the only way we can receive the additional funding available. It really does make a significant difference to the amount of money we have to spend to benefit the children.

If you need help or advice with applying or you want to know could you be eligible, speak to Miss Murphy in the school office or phone school on 028 90 401246.

Applying for Free School Meals & Uniform Allowance

If you require help...

www.eani.org.uk/fsm

028 9041 8044

mealsanduniform@eani.org.uk

1. Are you eligible?

You must be:

 - In receipt of a qualifying benefit OR
 - be an Asylum Seeker supported by the Home Office Asylum Support Assessment Team (ASAT).

Qualifying Benefits:

 - Income Support;
 - Income Based Jobseeker's Allowance;
 - Income Related Employment and Support Allowance;
 - Guarantee Element of State Pension Credit;
 - Child Tax Credit or Working Tax Credit with an annual taxable household income of £16,190 or less;
 - Universal credit and have net household earnings not exceeding £15,000 per year.
2. What documentation do you need?

You will be asked to upload proof that you are receiving a qualifying benefit:

 - Tax Credits Award Notice
 - Universal Credit Payments breakdown or
 - Proof of Benefit letter (if you are in receipt of Income Support, Income Based Jobseeker's Allowance, Income Related Employment and Support Allowance or the Guarantee Element of State Pension Credit).
3. What else do you need?

 - National Insurance Number
 - Children's names
 - Dates of Birth
 - Schools they will be attending
 - Address
 - E-mail and telephone number
 - Bank or building society account and sort code details.
4. Where do you apply?

Apply for Free School Meals and Uniform Allowance for the new school year beginning September, through the Education Authority's online portal, EA Connect. If you haven't already registered an EA Connect account, it's quick and easy to do. Information can be found on the EA website.
5. What happens next?

We aim to process applications within 4 weeks. However, in the busy period of June to September, this can take up to 5 weeks. Please do not contact EA for an update on your application within the 5 weeks of submitting your application. If you have provided incorrect or insufficient supporting documentation, you will receive a tailored email advising you to resubmit your application with details of the correct documentation you need to provide.

You will receive an email from EA once your application has been approved and processed.

eacconnect

You can find out more by scanning this QR code with your mobile phone or tablet.



*** IMPORTANT FUTURE DATES FOR YOUR DIARY / CALENDAR ***

Monday 9th September	Breakfast Club starts opening at the earlier time of 8am
Monday 16th September	After-school clubs (hockey, football, etc) restart
Friday 6th December (morning)	Christmas Nativity at Mount Merrion Parish Church Details TBC.
Wednesday 11th December (evening)	P4 to P7 Christmas Carol Service at St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church. Details TBC.

