



Report on IQM Inclusive School Award



School Name: St Brigid's Primary School Downpatrick

School Address: Rathkeltair Road
Downpatrick
Co. Down
BT30 6NL

Head/Principal Ms Dolores Miller

IQM Lead Ms Kelly Rice

Assessment Date 18th June 2025

Assessor Mr Cormac Ua Bruadair

Sources of Evidence:

- School Website
- Learning walk with students
- Classroom visit to Early Years Special Learning Classroom
- Visit to outdoors learning area and playground
- Sample of Folder of Evidence
- PowerPoint presentation by Deputy Principal and Principal

Meetings Held with:

- Chairman of the Board of Governors
- Classroom assistants
- Senior Leadership Team
- Principal and Deputy Principal
- Acti-sport Representative
- Equine therapy specialist
- Speech Therapist
- Parents and Guardians
- Meeting with students



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Overall Evaluation

Saint Brigid's Primary School serves as an example of excellence in nurturing a welcoming environment, where diversity is celebrated, and every individual is valued as part of an inclusive, diverse community. Community was the word most used throughout the day of assessment by pupils, staff, parents, and external sub-contractors. The word 'community' is used to describe a school which occupies a central focus in the surrounding town of Downpatrick, in offering a purposeful, passionate education to each child at their own level. Throughout the day pupil, staff and parent engagement was honest and authentic and gave a sense of a school in which people were happy to work and students were happy to learn. The mission statement of the school reads:

"To provide excellence in education for all children, meeting them at their own starting point and enabling them to be happy, learn and achieve their full potential in an inclusive, nurturing and supportive environment."

Mission statements can often read as being aspirational or generic, however the student experience lived daily in St. Brigid's school accurately reflects the mission of the school. Each child is treated as an individual with potential; the work of the school is to help that individual to realise their potential. This is the priority for every staff member within the school. The staff all acknowledge and understand their role in this regard. The teaching and learning are discussed, planned, and delivered in a collaborative and collegiate way with everyone from teacher, classroom assistant, external therapists, leadership team, pupil and parents having a valued input into how this can be best achieved. In teaching pedagogy, in pastoral care, in student development and growth there is an emphasis on excellence in provision. Critical and crucial to this is the school leadership team and the staff.

From the moment of arrival on the day of assessment there was a sense of warmth, friendliness, and respect. This was not only felt by the assessor but also by the multitude of parents who were being met not only by students but by various members of staff who were on hand to assist students with different needs to enable them to come into a safe and structured school environment. There was a sense of routine and normality about this interaction. This daily routine is an example of exceptional practice and is impactful in setting the standard and expectation for purposeful, respectful interactions throughout the day. The availability of staff to the parents at the start of the school day brings an additional layer to health and safety at the school as it allows for parents to communicate up to date information on concerns they hold for their child and enables the staff to communicate to colleagues concerns which need an additional action or intervention. This in turn allows pupils to enter the school with confidence, feeling accepted and safe and ready to engage with the learning for the day. This process takes place daily for up to an hour including the breakfast club and in the view of the assessor is an exceptional beginning to the day.

The students at St Brigid's exude confidence in a nice way. Each pupil spoken with had positive experiences to relay to the assessor. They clearly felt at home in this school environment. They felt as if their needs were being met and their potential stretched. They felt as if they had a voice in all aspects of school life and that their opinions were valued and listened to. Throughout the day of assessment pupils were very keen to stop



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in the corridor and discuss their work and their achievements. Each pupil spoke highly about the buddy system in place and the many ways they could communicate with school authorities should they need assistance with any aspect of school life. Pastoral support is key to learning and the school ensures that support is offered to each pupil at the level they require to allow them to access their curriculum.

There is a sense that everyone is doing their best at St. Brigid's. This is true of the pupils, the support staff, the classroom assistants, the teaching staff, and the Senior Leadership team. Leadership in the school setting can be impactful, encouraging, enabling, fulfilling and strategic. It is true that the focus is on meeting the pupils and supporting them at their level, but it is also the case that the strategic thinking and leadership of the Principal and Deputy Principal, of a young and energetic staff, is very much also focused on meeting the needs of the adults within the school, enhancing their skills, and providing development opportunities for them at all levels. The passion and energy witnessed from the school leadership has undoubtedly transferred to the rest of the school team. They are passionate about their mission and are keen to progress and develop processes within the school to ensure success. Employment satisfaction can be indicated by the level of staff absenteeism and turnover of staff, both of which are not an issue at St. Brigid's. In meetings with the teaching staff, the classroom assistants, and the leadership team they were all keen to discuss their own development and the many and varied pilot programmes undertaken by the school through a distributed leadership model. Each staff member spoken to understood and embraced their leadership role with enthusiasm.

On the day of assessment many parents came forward to meet with the assessor although only one formal meeting with parents was held. However, the cleaning, teaching, support staff and classroom assistants in many cases are also parents. This adds to the sense of community. This school is embedded in service to the local community in Downpatrick. The high levels of expectation and the high standards in place have allowed this community to grow in many ways. Parents spoke of the open-door policy in place within the school from the Principal and Deputy Principal to the teacher and classroom assistant. They all felt that they had a voice and that it was valued and acted upon. At every level the parents gave the impression that the school had earned their trust, their collaboration, their support, and their respect. The many personal stories told by the parents showed that the school knew each pupil as individuals, were aware of their context, their needs and responded to this with personal interventions far beyond the realms of the classroom. The parents rate the school as exceptional in their support and the support of their children. This is inclusion at its best; the needs of such a diverse base in ability, nationality, and need being met and staff being recognised for recognising the need to address each child separately. This recognition led the school to submit a learning application for learning support in 2020. The Education Authority responded with a request for the school to open a Specialist Provision for Early Years and Foundation Stage for pupils with Severe Learning Difficulties. The school fully embraced this as an opportunity as the Principal explained: "The decision allowed whole families of siblings to attend the same school."

Inclusion is core to the mission at St. Brigid's. Looking at each child as an individual and providing for their needs is the drive behind the change agenda and the constant need to improve. This is not only an internal drive as the staff and Leadership look to others to



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improve their practice. Appointments to the Board of Governors are strategically guided. Governors who can act as links to Senior Leaders make up the Board. Before each Board meeting, meetings take place between Governors and link staff to discuss progress and planning. Such is the desire for improvement that once strike action had been removed the school put itself forward for Inspection and received a glowing report. This drive for school improvement and pupil development exemplifies what it means to be a truly inclusive school for every member of the community. The mission of the school is lived out on a daily basis fulfilling an obligation made to parents and pupils. Their practice is transformational in the lives of the pupils, and this was observed throughout the day.

I am of the opinion that the school fully meets the standard required by the Inclusion Quality Mark's Inclusive School Award. There are only minor areas requiring development and the school is aware of these. I recommend that the school be awarded the Inclusive School Award and be reassessed in three years.

I also recommend that the school should consider applying for Centre of Excellence status subject to the inclusion within its plans of the appropriate areas for development and the completion of the Centre of Excellence documentation. If the school chooses to pursue this status and it were to be awarded the school would be subject to annual review from this point forwards.

Assessor: Mr Cormac Ua Bruadair

Findings confirmed by Inclusion Quality Mark (UK) Ltd:

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Joe McCann MBA NPQH
CEO Inclusion Quality Mark (UK) Ltd.



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Element 1 - The Inclusion Values of the School

The Inclusion Values of St. Brigid's Primary School are a core element of the daily lived experience of the pupils and staff. The Chairman of the Board of Governors looks at success as every pupil learning together in the same school regardless of their context. He recognises the enthusiasm and the commitment of the teachers in embracing Inclusion and making it possible for the Specialist Provision for Early Years and Foundation Stage for pupils with Severe Learning Difficulties to open. Enabling all siblings to come to school together and to learn together is a huge support to the local families. On a recent visit from the Minister of Education to the school, he was enthused and delighted by the recent financial investment from his Department, and the impact it was having on Inclusion at the school. Inclusion as a value can be seen to be permeating through every action and policy at St. Brigid's. It is a conviction which is held by the entire community of the school, and which is delivered with respect, compassion, and empathy.

The staff of any school is its greatest resource, and this is particularly true of St. Brigid's. The young enthusiastic staff are keen to develop their pedagogy, their understanding of individual need and their support of each other. There is clear, well thought out and planned strategies in relation to Literacy and Numeracy across all years that are the result of a collegiate and collaborative process. The staff interactions with the Board of Governors are productive and purposeful. There are no misunderstandings or blurred lines between the executive function of the Leadership and the oversight function of the Governors. There is a mutual understanding of the importance of developing the whole child, of looking at each individual's needs and of putting in place the structures, the processes, the policies and the facilities needed to deliver this. It is an entirely collaborative engagement which exemplifies best practice.

The process of welcoming pupils to school each morning displays the conviction of the staff that it is their role to do whatever it takes to ensure that students feel safe to come to school. Students with emotional or attachment issues are met daily by staff or by a pupil buddy whose aim it is to ensure the pupil can make it to class to access the curriculum. This may simply involve playing football for ten minutes with a pupil to help the pupil relax and regulate before going into class. The buddies in the senior classes who do this maturely spoke about the way in which they help other pupils who need assistance to regulate their mood and behaviour so that they can learn in class. This is an example of how inclusive values are embedded in a community so that it is normal and just the natural thing to do. This also is a show of how staff are willing and understanding of the need, as they regularly go over and above the expectation to look creatively to overcome barriers to learning.

Pupils are not silent partners in their learning. They are confident and happy, eager to contribute and take responsibility for their learning and their progress. They spoke fondly about all of the staff and stated that their opinions were valued and listened to. This is evident in the reception area of the main school entrance where the largest notice board holds the heading "Pupil Voice Achieving Change". On the board is an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the school and an 'ideas for improvement' section which is regularly updated with student voice and contribution. Part of the pastoral care system of the school is the use of Wellbeing Ambassadors, where pupils in



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senior classes visit and play with those in the younger years and help to create a supportive and empathetic environment. It is these very ambassadors who proposed the school wide initiative of the "Listening Lamb". This initiative encourages pupils to deal with emotional issues they are experiencing or troubles within their friendship group which may have gone unnoticed. The action has been welcomed by the entire community and shows pupil power and creativity at its best. There are a wide range of councils and committees set up in school to provide formal structures for student voice. For example: School Council, Eco Council, Wellbeing Ambassadors, Digital Leaders, Active Ambassadors. There is a pupil voice action plan in place to promote the role of pupil voice and to encourage pupils to go forward for positions of responsibility.

St. Brigid's has fully embraced inclusion as a community. Part of the mission statement says, "Our Catholic values of respect, honesty and tolerance enable everyone to learn and grow together." Every intervention and initiative within the school seeks to make this a reality.

Next Steps:

- A huge amount of work is taking place at St. Brigid's Primary School under the inclusion banner. It is important to document all of these initiatives under 'Inclusion' as they would be of benefit to other schools beginning their journey towards full inclusion.



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Element 2 - Leadership and Management and Accountability

Leadership is embraced by every member of the community at St. Brigid's School. The Principal and Deputy Principal lead by example in providing an open-door policy for parents which provides them with the reassurance, in some cases the skill and the support to be able to assist their children as valued partners in education. The Governors offer financial planning and strategic investment to support the work of the leadership team. This collaboration and respectful relationships have allowed for a shared goal driven focus to be centred on each child as an individual. The facilities and resources are expertly managed to ensure maximum benefit is received from all of the schools' assets. This includes the forest learning area, the new playground, the astro pitch and much more. The regular meetings between the Governor links and the Leadership Team ensures that planning takes place and projects stay on target. Regular written and verbal updates are produced for the Governors by various members of staff in leadership. Accountability takes place in a well-managed respectful way, taking stock of the Chairman's comment that it is critical that the staff receive recognition and appreciation for all they have done and for where they have brought the school as an inclusive school where everyone can learn together under the one roof.

The meeting with the parents showed the diverse range of cultural backgrounds accommodated within the school. Each parent spoke of the positive relationships which exist between the Leadership and the parent body. They feel that the Principal and Deputy Principal make time for them individually and take time to listen and to understand their needs. One parent stated that when her children are happy, she is happy and when they are not happy the school is there to listen and to support.

Teaching staff and classroom assistants are encouraged to take responsibility for their own practice. Comprehensive CPD opportunities are in place for each member of staff, and everyone is encouraged to embrace lifelong learning. Teachers regularly observe each other's practice, and mentorship is provided for young teachers in a non-judgemental and supportive way. One teacher stated that team teaching allowed her to develop through observing a colleague. She found this to be supportive. Regular meetings are held each month to allow exchange of best practice to take place. Staff are encouraged to adapt their teaching style according to the students they have before them. Individualised plans for students highlighting their key strengths in learning and how they react to different teaching inputs are created for all staff to use.

It is evident that the Principal and Deputy Principal lead the community from a strong belief in inclusion and that every child must receive the best possible chance in life to thrive and realise their potential. Interventions for pupils are well thought out and planned using every resource available. They are creative in their thinking, strategic in their decision making and charismatic in their professionalism. They maintain their focus and the focus of the staff completely on the needs of the pupils. A focused community like this which has all of the partners in education on board is a product of many years of hard work and dedication. The practice of the school leaders of being reflective practitioners and embracing school self-evaluation adds accountability to their efforts and a desire to constantly improve. Their reliance on staff to take on leadership roles and to take responsibility ensures that staff feel valued, supported, fulfilled and appreciated.



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The Leadership of the school and the Governors of the school place safeguarding as a priority. They have integrated guest speakers and internal speakers into the curriculum to ensure that the pupils of the school understand the potential risks which are present and how best to keep themselves and others safe whether in person or online. With the development of the new special provision class, the new playground and the access points/ramps associated with it, a lot of time has been spent ensuring the safety of the pupils and minimising risk.

The dedication and strong leadership of the Governors, the Principal and the Deputy Principal has a hugely positive impact on the daily experience of staff and pupils within the school. They are approachable, available, and constantly seeking to improve opportunities for learning and growth.

Next Steps:

- A huge amount of work is taking place to promote the inclusion agenda. An inclusion policy has recently been written a natural step would be to follow up with an inclusion action plan.



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Element 3 – Curriculum: Structure, Pupil Engagement and Adaption

The staff at St. Brigid's Primary School have developed an inclusive, well sequenced curriculum which places an emphasis on active learning. This learning takes place both within the classroom and through the many outdoor learning spaces which have been developed at the school. Imagination and creativity were observed in the outdoor forest area where children were acting out stories they had composed as builders, horticulturists, and environmentalists. The learning needs of the school have changed significantly over the past number of years, but the staff have ensured that they have upskilled as needs were identified particularly when accommodating the needs of pupils with additional needs. This is evident through the long list of professional training courses which have taken place by teachers, leaders, and classroom assistants.

The school uses a wide range of tools and data to assess the needs of the students. They rely on both qualitative and quantitative evidence to plan and deliver a curriculum which results in a rich learning experience for the pupils. There is a blending of academic expectations with the need for personal growth evident throughout the curriculum and based on strong school values. This practical and academic mix allows for the curriculum to be connected to real world scenarios and applications which are age appropriate and relevant. The Arts plays a huge part in the life of the school. On the day of assessment, a string and voice concert entertained the school community. The choir of approximately 50 students were excellent, with each pupil giving their full attention to the conductor and following her direction to the note. Each pupil also has the opportunity to play an instrument whilst at school with the Education Authority providing lessons for 44 pupils weekly. A large number of students are involved in the school Glee Club. During the meeting with the parents, I was informed that if a student needs financial assistance to partake in cultural activities or classes, sponsors are found quietly and without a fuss. All sorts of barriers to experiences are being addressed at St. Brigid's.

A teacher holds responsibility for the data tracking and analysis of all of the students' development and those with additional needs in particular. Regular meetings are held with various staff groups in different year groups and the teachers were very adamant that there is a rigorous process in place not only to track the data but also to react to trends and challenges. Interventions over the past number of years have been based on the data and this has had a hugely beneficial impact on progress within the school community with SEN scores improving. There is a hybrid action plan in place which deals with literacy and numeracy in the world around the pupils. Both teachers and classroom assistants were keen to point out that the collaboration on literacy and numeracy is very evident and prioritised, with the Classroom Assistants working in tandem with the teachers to arrive at the desired results. A number of classroom assistants have completed training in reading partnerships, talk boost, and supporting pupils with dyslexia. As they are involved in the multi-disciplinary discussions on the pupils, they are also contributors to the planning and delivery of interventions which have seen huge improvements for the students. Although the spelling scores have improved the focus across different key stages has changed to writing style as the data has been interpreted to show that this is where the current need lies.



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Whether the pupil is new to the school midstream or from a different country the “Common European Framework Reference” is applied to determine their baseline. This is reviewed on a regular basis throughout the student’s time at the school and interventions are planned based on their identified needs. The tracking of progress is meticulous and again progress meetings are held across the staff to ensure interventions are appropriate.

On the day of assessment, meetings were held with different external supports which the school partners with. One such conversation took place with the speech therapist employed by the local Health trust and funded by the Education Authority. The S & L Therapist visits the school one day a week and tracks students from pre school entry all the way to leaving in P7. This allows the therapist to work collaboratively with the school, individual teachers and classroom assistants to support pupils with their communication levels. In her professional opinion this application of collaborative support works best and ensures continuity of care rather than the student missing school for an afternoon each week to attend the hospital session.

“The children are confident to take risks in their learning and have developed a ‘have-a-go’ attitude, as they understand that mistakes are part of the learning process.” - ETI 2024

Both staff and pupils throughout the assessment portrayed a school community that understood that from mistakes come learnings and opportunities. There was an understanding that taking risks and stepping out of the comfort zone brings about great rewards. The assistance, the training and the support enables this controlled risk taking to happen in a safe natural environment.

Next Steps:

- It seems like a natural next step to continue to develop curriculum needs around sentence structuring and the use of language.



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Element 4 - Teaching and Learning: Learning Environment, Planning Resources, Pedagogy.

Teaching and learning at St. Brigid's is led by, "The inspirational and creative staff who are passionate about providing excellence for all children; they recognise the children's unique starting points and provide well-chosen learning experiences to progress every child's learning." – ETI 2024

During every staff discussion staff were keen to express that every child was met at their starting point and supported by staff from there. It was evident throughout all of the discussions that inclusion was fully integrated into each classroom so that lessons were differentiated to accommodate progress for all. This was clearly articulated by the pupils as well who informed of the target sheets which they set for themselves, with input from the staff, so that they can see that they are achieving. There is an award system in place which supports this practice of achievement at every level.

The support staff in the school have a professional development plan in place just as the teaching staff do. Their development can lead to an integrated approach to literacy and numeracy development or to classroom management challenges such as dealing with pupils who have the need to manage their emotions, to de-escalate situations or indeed training in the medical needs of a pupil such as those who are peg fed. Their expertise is utilised in small group settings or on a one-to-one basis. They take guidance and link in with classroom teachers and the speech and language therapist. The staffroom welcomes all teachers, classroom assistants and any external partners at break and lunch times. It is here, as well as in structured meetings, that many informal conversations take place around students which then impact their PLP.

ICT is integrated seamlessly into every classroom. Each teacher is proficient in the use of interactive whiteboards which are in every classroom. They have access to class sets of iPads and for those students who need additional support with a specific need they have the use of a Chromebook. A look at the class plans showed how teachers used ICT to support learning effectively. Witnessing the delivery of a language class showed the integrated approach of ICT, music and questioning to support third language acquisition with P7 pupils. A number of different approaches, recognising the different learning abilities of the pupils in the classroom showed that the teacher knew the students well and was able to adjust and modify her approach as required. It was clear that the pupils were challenged and supported in their learning as they were engaged and focused. They were also delighted to express themselves in a different language.

The learning environment within the school is reflective of a progressive school. The walls of the classrooms and corridors are neutral yet displays reflect pupil success and achievement throughout. The school is consistently clean and tidy throughout helping to minimise overload for those within the community which require regulation. The staff and the students are thoughtful and empathetic as was the case when a pupil wearing ear muffs walked down the corridor: the noise level decreased and people made space, mindful of that pupils' needs. This was a small yet meaningful event which showed that inclusion was respectfully embedded within the school community as a normal and natural part of school life. Outside learning plays a huge part at St. Brigid's. The trail and forest allow for real life learning to take place, whether in the form of



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making mud pies in the outdoor kitchen or building an airplane in the building zone, there are experiences to be had.

The commitment of the entire staff to delivering a highly engaging and quality teaching and learning experience for the pupils is evident. There is a clear focus to the work of the leadership and the staff. They are open to feedback, regularly observing each other's lessons, relying on mentorship from established colleagues or colleagues with a specialist skill. Their own reflection and school self-evaluation processes give clear insights as to pedagogy which is working and other areas which need strengthening. The long list of completed training and the long list of ongoing pilot programmes and various initiatives points to the desire and willingness of the staff to get it right, to constantly improve and to develop teaching and learning within the school. A look at the minutes and actions of the monthly meetings demonstrates the adaptability of the staff and the level of detail and data analysis which informs their practice and a discussion on successful and unsuccessful pedagogy.

Next Steps:

- The outdoor learning space is invaluable. Look at ways to broaden opportunity and at the development of the forest area and the outdoor learning space. A number of schools with the IQM cluster could advise in this area.
- The sharing of pedagogy amongst the staff has proven to be a valuable practice. A number of schools within the cluster would be keen to work on initiatives which support pedagogy in the area of pupils with SEN.



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Element 5 - Assessment

St Brigid's Primary School uses a range of both formative and summative assessment to inform the planning process. These assessments support curriculum objectives and not only measure attainment but provide insights into student progress and pedagogy suitability. Ongoing formative assessment provides opportunities for staff to look at the specific needs of individual children so that they can all have an equal opportunity to fulfil their potential. Assessment makes a vital contribution to improving educational outcomes for all children.

St Brigid's monitors assessment data robustly to provide clear, specific feedback to help children to understand their progress and next steps. Assessments help parents to understand how their child is learning, what level they are at and how they may be in a position to help. Each week pupils have an assessment which they work towards. Parents are aware of this assessment and normally look forward to a conversation about how the weekly assessment has gone and how the personal rewards chart of each student looks.

Assessment is viewed as an aid to continuous improvement at St. Brigid's. A lot of time is set aside to interpret the data and to plan interventions leading from the data. A lot of data is obtained whether through online digital standardised testing or from inhouse testing, it is all purposeful and aimed at implementing the right strategies for the right students. Whole school tracking of attainment data is robustly monitored using CAT, PTE, PTM, NGRT and GL Assessments in primary 3 through to primary 7. Interventions based on the analysis of the data have significantly reduced literacy and numeracy underachievement in the past two years.

A book look showed that peer self-assessment takes place. This simple action is hugely beneficial for pupils in understanding the function of assessment and the need for it. They can also learn so much from peer self-assessment that they will be in a position to act and interpret what the teacher needs from them to improve on their next test. A new school policy on assessment is in place and the pupils are aware of the marking policy and how to react to the feedback from the teacher. Target boards which are displayed in each classroom allow students to set their own targets. This action allows all students to achieve at their level and to share in success as they are not always related to academic assessment. The target boards support a learning environment where holistic growth is encouraged and rewarded. All students are encouraged to achieve and to do better; feedback in this instance is on effort and progress in a number of growth areas rather than on outcomes alone.

Each student at St. Brigid's has a red folder in which all of the information gathered on each individual is collated. It forms part of the assessment and tracking process in that the information is used to create PLPs for pupils. What I viewed as exemplary practice was the way in which the staff group shared how a multi disciplinary team of support used that information and engaged with it in a productive way to advise on the best strategies for individuals.

True inclusion rewards all pupils for their improvement and a number of practices growing out of assessments allows teachers to promote and recognise the efforts of



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individuals. The target and reward system is exemplary, in that pupils are involved with the teacher in this process. The posting of videos and photos to parents via the Seesaw app allows achievement to be recognised in school and at home. Parents were particularly grateful for this and also commented on how these posts could often appear in the late evening or on a Saturday acknowledging that the teachers were going over and above the requirement. The interventions arising out of the standardised testing of maths, reading, writing, and spelling, involving a collaboration between teachers, Classroom Assistants and parents has led to a real sense of tangible school improvement in these areas. The use of assessment as a tool of school improvement is embedded within the practice at St. Brigid's. It is regarded as a diagnostic tool to inform practice and pedagogy and to address barriers to inclusion. It promotes both excellence and equity for individuals. What makes assessment at St. Brigid's exemplary is the respectful, reflective, and progressive way in which staff, pupils and parents engage with the data.

Next Steps:

- Consider how the assessment of non-academic interventions can be recorded / measured formally to contribute to future planning.
- Prepare for the tracking of supports introduced for EAL to inform future curriculum planning.



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Element 6 - Behaviour, Attitudes to Learning and Personal Development

High expectations are critical to successful outcomes. A positive school culture in relation to behaviour, learning and personal development is the bedrock on which all pupils learn at their best and staff can teach at their best. There is no doubt in my mind that attitudes towards these three important elements of school life are distilled from the Principal and the Deputy Principal. In each conversation held it was clear that they shared a common vision, that their focus was pupil centred and there was a clear Christian moral purpose driving and underpinning their practice. Throughout the day meaningful, respectful, values-based interactions were witnessed between all staff, parents, and pupils. Again, the welcome and open-door policy of a smile and a handshake, a personal conversation, and a connection at the beginning of the day sets the standard and the scene for meaningful and purposeful engagement throughout the day.

The special provision class from early years is a testament to the inclusive nature of the school and the value placed on each child as an individual. The classroom helps students with severe learning needs to be accommodated in the mainstream setting. It has a much greater impact on the pupils and staff of the school than might be expected. Pupils who work and who visit the special provision room experience growth in character. On the day of assessment, I listened to the pupils discussing pupils in this classroom and other pupils with learning needs. Their discussion came from a place of acceptance, of normality and from a place of care and compassion. If the attitudes and behaviours I witnessed within the school are carried beyond the school gates into the community the possibilities for children with additional needs to be accepted and included in other settings are endless.

Throughout the entire school, students were witnessed as being happy, engaged and learning. They are happy to discuss their learning, and they understand the need to achieve and to do the best that they can. The pupil focus groups spoke very proudly about the Maths certificate which they receive from their online testing when a target is reached. They spoke with a hint of competitiveness about their rewards chart and how well they are doing. They spoke with enthusiasm about the opportunities they have to engage with the choir or with lessons in various instruments. They spoke with fondness about the staff and the school leadership who they feel listen to them and support them. They also spoke about a number of students who need to regularly regulate their behaviour, but they spoke about these pupils not to reprimand them, to judge them or to criticise them but rather in light of how they have a collective responsibility to assist them. These conversations were remarkable but perhaps the most inspiring conversation of the day was one which demonstrated the personal growth of the students and the collective values they shared in supporting each other.

Wellbeing Ambassadors are drawn from the pupil body in the senior end of the school to support the pupils in the junior end of the school. They do amazing work in explaining and defining the expectations around behaviour, learning, and treating each other well. Out of this initiative the pupils have taken a lead in developing the 'Listening Lamb'. Each of the junior classes has a 'listening lamb', a teddy bear which students who are feeling low or left out can cuddle and which draws the teacher into a conversation with them. In addition, there are listening lambs placed throughout the school which allows pupils to place their concerns into a box beneath the lamb and which a teacher regularly checks. This to many



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may seem like a simple way of communicating with a teacher but it grew out of a much deeper conversation with the pupils around bullying, behaviour, expectations, experiencing emotions and knowing how to handle them or ask for help when confused, the presence of empathy and knowing how to inform an adult when concerned about someone else. What makes this such an important pupil led initiative is that the concerns are acted upon, and the pupils can see that their concerns are listened to, acted upon and hopefully resolved. Personal growth and so many life skills are experienced through these understandings. I was extremely impressed by the focus groups and the students who took me on a walking tour and who were able to discuss these facts of life so maturely and with the correct compassionate vocabulary. Inclusion is understood by the pupils and it is clear that the staff have spent time nurturing a sense of community responsibility which allows positive relationships to exist.

Buddies also have a role in encouraging other pupils to come to school even if they don't feel they are in a good place to do so. For some pupils who are Wellbeing Ambassadors their first job of the day is to encourage pupils to step across the threshold. With attendance increasing to 95% all of these initiatives are helping. One student told me that if the boy doesn't come into class, he can't learn so he plays football with him for ten minutes before leading him into school. This was an ambassador who understood what a good attitude to learning looked like and how every pupil needs to be included. He also outlined the fact that each class has a charter with golden rules that encourages every pupil to behave properly, to work at their best and to support each other.

Throughout the school are posters and displays which remind pupils of the school values, the high expectations in relation to their work and that they are part of a community in which they must nurture and foster positive relationships. The recent improvement in attendance the decrease in underachievement and the sense of community are all examples of a school where positive attitudes to learning are central to everyday activities, where issues around behaviour are constantly addressed and not allowed to develop and personal growth is championed.

Next Steps:

- Align the Code of Positive Behaviour with the Inclusion policy being developed.
- The buddy system is excellent. Training for Buddies and Wellbeing.
- Ambassadors at key stages throughout the year could add to the effectiveness of the initiative. Developing a handbook and a badge for Buddies and Ambassadors would give the role a bit of gravitas. This may also be a way of recognising the work of the buddies and the Wellbeing Ambassadors.



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Element 7 - Parents, Carers and Guardians

It has often been stated in education that communication is key. The Leadership at St. Brigid's acknowledges that the parent body is their single greatest partner in ensuring success for the pupils of the school. In supporting this they have put in place a number of key meetings throughout the school lives of the students and have undertaken to communicate regularly through Seesaw and weekly newsletters to the school community. The Principal and Deputy Principal are relentless in their desire to fully include each child and each family in personalised education provision. There are formal processes in place to achieve this but during the focus group with parents and guardians it was clear that the open door policy and the informal processes were as much a part of the success story as the formal processes.

Seesaw and the daily uploading and sharing of photos and video clips have helped to reinforce a positive and supportive connection between school and home. The regular updates offer an up-to-date immediate representation of life at school which offers a window for the parent into their child's classroom. This allows the parent to support the teacher with the work that is being covered and draws this important partnership, for the pupils, into a conversation. This has had the additional benefit of building trust within the parent body. The focus group commented on how they were happy and encouraged by their pupil's happiness to leave their child at school. One parent discussed how each of her three children are very different and each requires different levels of support. She was relieved and satisfied that the school treated each child as an individual and has a different plan and approach for each. This inclusive practice means that all three of her children can come to the same school and due to the Wellbeing Ambassador initiative one of her children was able to visit and help her other child who requires more specific assistance.

All of the parents were happy to guide me through the various interactions that they have had with the school. These typically began before pupil entry with open nights and the learning support coordinator on hand to discuss possible learning interventions. There were induction and Transition meetings for new students. The parents found two meetings of particular benefit and they were the meeting held after base line testing and the meeting held after Christmas to review students with SEN. There were also meetings held by classroom teachers which explained what they would be covering throughout the year in class. All of these meetings reassured the parents that their children would be cared for as individuals, stretched academically and helped to be the best possible version of themselves, in the holistic sense, at any given point in time. One parent who had a child already left the school commented on the transition programme in P7 which helped pupils get ready for life in secondary school. The Principal later stated that students were able to attend their next school for a day as part of this programme.

Grandparents are valued partners in this educational journey as well. I met with guardians of three children who attend the school who spoke of the immense support offered to them not just educationally but on so many different levels by the school. They were seeking a public way of acknowledging the personal, compassionate, and often practical supports which they had received from the school.

Another parent spoke of how she would be at a loss and perhaps unable to cope if it were not for the school having both the breakfast club and the after-school club running every



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day. She stated that families get so much from the school that she would love to give back. All of these examples point to lived mission of the school to meet each child at their current level and to work from there to learn and grow together. The parents are a very good indicator of inclusive practice and are very honest and open when it comes to the needs of their children being met. The focus group were so appreciative of the various levels of support offered by the school.

Communication is a two-way street, and the school is very forward in obtaining the views of the parents and their feedback. They regularly ask for parental feedback on many different aspects of school life and how changes can be brought about. In all discussions the parents felt that they have a voice and that the school reacts to their voice positively and respectfully. One parent was delighted that the suggestion from the Parents Association had been accepted to extend the buddy system from P7 and P1 to now include P6 and P2. He acknowledged that it probably involves additional work for the teachers but is grateful for them undertaking it.

The emphasis placed by the school leadership and the Governors on nurturing positive relationships with the parents has been of benefit to the entire school community. Building strong partnerships with parents allows for the inclusive values of the school to be fully embedded in everyday practice.

Next Steps:

- Parents are strongly of the view that their voice is heard and impacts on school practice. The school should seek additional ways of promoting the positives of this collaboration perhaps a notice board for the PA which reads "You suggested – We acted."
- Continue encouraging the parents to be active participants in the life of the school. You hold many successes in this area which add to community engagement and has led to parental satisfaction being so high.



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Element 8 - Links with Local, Wider and Global Community

The Leadership team and Governors of St. Brigid's have fully embraced links with the local, wider, and Global community. They have actively and strategically forged relationships with external stakeholders who can assist them in developing the best possible, high-quality provision for their students. This includes relationships with the Education Authority, the Health Trust, Speech and Language Services, Acti- Sport, Shared Learning, school counselling services, Equine therapy, Local GAA clubs, dance classes and CCMS to name but a few. It is not a one-way exchange as the school makes valuable contributions to their local parish, to the St. Patrick's Day parade, to local environmental projects and much more. The collaboration on the school site between the speech and language therapy services, the health services and the counselling services have been of particular support to families of pupils with additional needs. Having many of these supports on site means that the service is delivered in a personal and professional manner as part of a linked PLP.

The two SENCos play a pivotal role in maintaining these beneficial relationships. They are very aware of their inclusion agenda and seek to establish connections between pupils, their families and specialist support services when appropriate. Taking many of these supports onto the school site gives the school a certain amount of oversight and input into the interventions.

On the day of assessment meetings were held with Acti-sport and an equine therapist. Over a period of weeks, a donkey visited the school and students with additional needs were encouraged to care for them. This allowed empathy and responsibility to grow in these students. The classroom assistants were able to see an improvement in the ability of the students to communicate and to relate to each other as they jointly cared for the donkey. There was a certain amount of team building which took place during what was described as animal therapy in the moment. What was also noticed by the leadership team is that for the few students who have attendance issues that on the days of equine therapy school was not missed.

Acti-Sport has been a valued partner of the school for many years. The younger students can attend with their buddies and together they have built a sense of comradery and teamwork. Every pupil has a role, even those who are not naturally drawn to sport are encouraged to set up the cones and the activities and take them down. In doing these tasks they are drawn into participation. It is not just about sporting excellence and about applauding those for whom sport comes naturally it is about participation and encouraging each other. Both the equine therapist and the sport provider commented on how they are welcomed into the staffroom and how the teaching and support staff are interested in their views on the progress of the children. They feel that they are part of the inclusive practice within the school and that they have an important function with students of all abilities, a view shared by the school leadership.

The shared learning experience brings the students into contact with students from a different context perhaps culturally and with a difference in faith outlook and practice. This has been seen as an important step in building trust and positive relationships in the local community. It also reinforces the acceptance of difference and the need for respecting and accepting other traditions, cultures, and faiths.



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The school are also involved in many environmental issues which bring them into relatable Global issues. The Eco committee are involved in competitions and local sustainability projects in partnership with the local council.

Next Steps:

- The Shared Learning experience is viewed as a positive experience. Continue to build on this experience perhaps including different schools.
- The increase in number to the locality of pupils with English as a second language signals a need to prepare for support in this area. Plans are already in place but could be enhanced through involvement in the cluster group and the experience of schools already in this situation.
- The practice in many areas of student support is exceptional particularly with the partnerships in different therapies. Sharing these experiences through the cluster group will enhance the inclusion agenda.