

*The BOARD OF GOVERNORS*  
**ANNUAL REPORT**  
**2021 – 2022**



*SION MILLS CONTROLLED PRIMARY SCHOOL*  
*THE PARK*  
*SION MILLS*

*Principal: Mrs O McNelis*

## **LETTER FROM THE CHAIRMAN OF BOARD OF GOVERNORS**

Dear Parents/Guardians,

As Chairperson of The Board of Governors of Sion Mills Primary School, I welcome this opportunity to reflect on the school year which has just passed.

Thankfully, we were able to complete a full year without major interruption by Covid. The children settled well after the upheavals of the previous year and a very successful year ensued. The end-of -year assessments showed all children making up for time lost during lockdown.

This success is something you as parents can be proud of; your input during lockdown and continuing during this past year is significant in this achievement. The teaching staff and assistants have really risen to the challenge of bridging the gap. Many useful lessons were learned during lockdown and the school team under the Principal's dedicated leadership has retained those practices for the betterment of the school. It illustrates what can be achieved when we all work together for the common good.

Grateful thanks to Jonny Martin and his team for keeping the school a safe environment for all. A lot of extra work was done in keeping Covid at bay.

This year saw the Board of Governors take a decision to investigate transforming to Integrated Status. You were kept well informed about this process resulting in your resounding YES vote. We are confident that Integrated status will be granted for September 2023. Reaching this stage was the result of hard work by a dedicated team of teachers and parents.

This Board of Governors' Report gives a snapshot of a year in the life of this school and shows how the Board has carried out its responsibilities.

I have pleasure in presenting the report and I recommend it for your attention.

Thanks to our hardworking Principal Mrs McNelis, for all the many hours worked in keeping this school the best it can be for all our children.

Yours faithfully,

Peter J McNulty

## FOREWORD FROM MRS MCNELIS

Dear Parents/Guardians,

I write this Annual Governors' Report, on behalf of the governors to provide you with a summary of events and activities, which take place in school. It aims to give you some information on the organisation and its financing and how the Governors and others with responsibilities have carried out their duties.

As Principal I would personally like to thank the staff for their continued hard work, support and commitment. The year from August 2020 – June 2021 was again, unprecedented with the continuing impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. The beginning of the academic year began with the continuation of health and safety routines and protocols and an emphasis on being prepared for the possibility of another lockdown. Thankfully this did not happen, and I'm delighted to report that, except for a very few classes having to be 'shut down' temporarily during term 1, the school remained open for the entire academic year.

Attendance of pupils and staff was certainly affected by not only Covid-19 infections but also by the severity of other illnesses. I must commend the support of our parents and carers in being vigilant and honest when their children were unwell, Their action enabled us to keep the spread of infection to a minimum.

Out of the adversity some very positive resources became available to our school. We now can provide art therapy and counselling as a back-up pastoral care resource; we have increased our outdoor resources and decided to retain practices such as adults greeting the children outside each morning and a staggered lunch break that allows for a positive playtime for children.

With Term 3 being a much more settled time, we look forward to a new academic year that is more like 'school' of the past.

I thank the Governors for continued their support.

I commend this report to you for your consideration.

Yours faithfully,

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Mrs Oonagh McNelis  
SECRETARY TO THE BOARD OF GOVERNORS

### **WHO ARE THE GOVERNORS**

CHAIRMAN: Mr. P McNulty

SECRETARY: Mrs. O McNelis c/o Sion Mills Primary School.

TRANSFEROR REPRESENTATIVES:

Mrs J Browne

Mrs V Patterson

Mr P McNulty

Vacant

EDUCATION AUTHORITY REPRESENTATIVES:

Mr. S Hamilton

Mr S Aiken

PARENT REPRESENTATIVES:

Mrs G Sheen

Mrs E McMullen

TEACHER REPRESENTATIVE:

Mrs L Kingh

HEADTEACHER:

Mrs. O McNelis (Non-voting member)

### **WHAT ARE THEIR RESPONSIBILITIES**

The Governors are ultimately responsible for the overall management of the school.  
See: Guide for School Governors.

Some areas of responsibility include:

1. School Development Plan including Education Standards.
2. Oversight of the curriculum.
3. Promoting Equality, Good Relations and Diversity (Shared Education)
4. Oversight of the financial management of the school.
5. Selection of staff and other personnel responsibilities.
6. Admissions Policy.
7. Religious Education.
8. Child Protection & Pupil Pastoral Care.
9. Health and Safety.
10. School Maintenance.
11. Implementation of new legislation.
12. P.R.S.D.

## **TEACHING STAFF**

### **2021/2022**

PRINCIPAL:	Mrs O McNelis
VICE-PRINCIPAL:	Mrs L Kingh (took up post 1 <sup>st</sup> Sept. 2021)
ASSISTANT TEACHERS:	Mrs V Campbell Mrs K Cunningham Mrs M Hendron Mrs L Kingh Mrs G McAleer Miss C Harkin (Nursery) Miss D McGinley Mrs B Sproule Miss D Walsh(Speech & Lang. Class) Mrs L Lynch (Learning Support) Miss H Hamilton (Engage)

## **STAFFING**

Staffing is largely dependent upon the number of pupils enrolled at the school and the number admitted in September 2021 was 39. The school's admission number is 48 and enrolment number 333.

37 were admitted to the Nursery Unit. There were 11 children in the Speech and Language class.

### **Staffing Complement for 2021/2022**

Teaching Complement- Principal, Vice Principal, 9 teachers and 1 part-time teacher

Ancillary Staff	1 Full-time Secretary	36hours p.w.
	2 Full-time Classroom Assistants P1&P2	25 hours p.w.
	1 Full-time Classroom Assistant (Special Needs)	27 hours p.w.
	5 Part-time Classroom Assistants (Special Needs)	from 5 – 25 hours p.w.
	1 Term-time Speech & Language C/A	27.5 hours p.w.
	1 Full-time Nursery Assistant	26 hours p.w.
	1 Full-time Nursery Assistant	6.5 hours p.w.
	3 Part time Cleaners	10 hours p.w.
	1 Building Supervisor with cleaning and supervision responsibility	36 hours p.w.
	1 Senior Lunch-time Supervisor	6.25 hours p.w.
	4 Lunch-time Supervisory Assistants	6.25 hours p.w.

During the year, teachers actively engaged in weekly Curriculum Planning during 'Directed time'.

All staff attended in-service courses online, facilitated by the EA's Advisory Service and school-based INSET. School based INSET is a planned programme of professional development closely linked to the School Development Plan and shows our commitment to achieving a lifelong learning community. Due to the protocols of social distancing and the need to ensure class bubbles were kept as intact as possible, much of this work took place on platforms such as Microsoft Teams or Zoom. Whilst these are no replacement for face to face work there were a number of benefits to working and meeting online.

## Snapshots from 2021 -2022



P6/7C represent our school at a community music event on International Peace Day



Safety Comes First



P6/7C entertain Sion Mills senior citizens



Visitors can return Mrs Daljeet Guram tells us about Diwali



P1 plant sunflowers for our Ukrainian Appeal



Celebrating Queen Elizabeth's Platinum Jubilee Tea-party

## **Summary of Year**

### **September 2020 – June 2021**

September 2021 began with a positive feel and some hope that this year would be a more 'normal' one, with many people vaccinated and an awareness that the summer term had improved attendance.

In many ways this turned out to be true – we were gradually able to re-introduce some of our pre-Covid practices and we managed to keep the school open for children from September to June.

Keeping the school open every day was in fact our over-arching aim for the year. It is important to commend the staff for enabling this target to be met; their commitment and generosity of spirit in a time of turbulence has been incredible. We include in this group, kitchen staff and cleaning staff as well as the classroom and office-based staff.

Additional health and safety hygiene practices remained in place, as did our bubble system, and we gradually re-introduced Breakfast Club and some afterschool's activities. Activities that easily enabled social distancing and good ventilation or could be facilitated within an existing bubble came first.

The most significant Covid related challenge was the level of infection among pupils and staff. The Dept of Health isolating rules were stringent and impacted attendance to a high degree compared to pre-Covid. In fact, it was early May 2022 before the Principal noted two full weeks when no pupil or member of staff was absent due to Covid related issues.

It is commendable that, anecdotally, Mrs McNelis could state that every member of staff accepted at least the first and second Covid vaccines and continued with the twice weekly LFT testing until these were discontinued by DE.

The positive practices noted during the pandemic return to school have been continued and include:

- Staff supervising children arriving in the morning
- Entering classrooms from their outside door, handwashing and teachers ready to start the day at 9am
- No morning assembly has facilitated a more controlled start to the day.
- A double sitting lunchtime has created a much more enjoyable eating experience and playtime for everyone.

There follows a short summary of some of the highlights during the year, from 1<sup>st</sup> September 2021 – 30<sup>th</sup> June 2022.

### **Mrs Florence Finlay retires**

September 2021 began with the retirement as school crossing patrol lady, of Mrs Florence Finlay, after 27 years of loyal service to the young people of primary and post-primary age in Sion Mills village. Florence is a lady who loved her job but needed to spend more time caring for her husband who was in failing health but has since sadly passed away.



### **Staff**

Mrs Kingh assumed her role as Vice-principal.

Miss McGeady, having married in July is now known as Mrs Harkin.

Miss Coulter, now Mrs McElwee, joined the staff as a class teacher following Mrs Kee's retirement.

Miss Hannah Hamilton also joined the staff to facilitate the Engage project.

Miss McGinley brought some welcome publicity to the school when she was appointed vice-president of the INTO across the island of Ireland. The INTO is one of the largest teaching unions in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. We were also delighted to welcome MLA, Mr John O'Dowd and his entourage to our school on 29<sup>th</sup> June 2022 at the invitation of the pupils in Miss McGinley's class. Mr O'Dowd came to answer the pupils' queries on the continuing postponement of the building of the A5 dual carriageway.

### **DE Funded Support post-Covid**

**Engage** is a DE funded allocation that schools can use to create a bespoke programme to support children following the two lockdowns during the height of the pandemic. Miss Hamilton proved backfill in classes from P2 – P7 to enable class teachers provide small group support to children according to their professional judgement. Two classroom assistants, Miss Lucy McKevitt and Miss Tori Kennedy were also employed to provide precision teaching to identified children. The success of this resource was borne out in the very positive standardised test results in May 2022.

### **Healthy Happy Minds**

A counsellor was engaged for one day per week to provide emotional support for children. Users were identified through discussion with teachers or parents. 15 children were or continue to be supported for a bespoke length of time.

### **Health & Well-being Funding**

Each class was provided with a Sensory Box which allows children access to emotionally supportive objects, toys or activities and enable calming techniques to be developed and incorporated into the underlying curriculum. Activity corridors were added.



## Outdoor Learning

The re-introduction of our outdoor activities was welcomed. Additional resources were purchased to facilitate learning outdoors. Mrs Kingh and the Eco Team began to see their ambitious plans for an Eco Garden come into reality. This will be a long-term project and will involve the community in an active way assisting with planting and maintenance.



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Sure Start programmes continue to flourish and support our young families, even though many continued online during 2021 -22. Baby Yoga, Baby Massage and a Health Promoting Homes programmes are some of the supports on offer to families of young children.

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**Families Together**, will return in the new school year in a smaller form. Our school will have access to a support worker. This had been one of the most helpful aspects of the programme and will continue our access to Strabane Family Hub.

**Getting Ready to Learn** – This is an ongoing initiative from the Department for Education that provided funding for the purchase of books and support materials to encourage adults to read and engage with their Nursery children.

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Mrs Sproule, Jodi, Robert and Naomi proudly display our Silver Award banner. (Amirah missing from photo)

**UNICEF Rights Respecting School Award (RRSA)** We are delighted to announce that Mrs Sproule and her ambassadors led to achieving the Silver Award in June. We now continue the journey to Gold. Thankfully we had two ambassadors from P6 so they will lead and train up on the next leg of the journey. We continue to have Elmer the Elephant reminders all over the school as well as an enormous poster in the assembly hall, designed especially for our school.

The **P.T.F.A.** gradually returned to face-to-face support for fundraising. On 28<sup>th</sup> April a wonderful Treasure Hunt became the first face-to-face fundraiser held since 2019. It turned out to be a fantastic fun evening and was enjoyed by all participating

families. It was also wonderful to have these parents back providing tea/coffee and snacks on Sports Day.

Our thanks to all parents and from the staff, Mrs Hendron and Mrs Sproule for their continued commitment in liaising with the PFTA on behalf of the staff.

### **Extended Schools**

We continue to develop our skills and knowledge as a staff. Our Accelerated Reading and Athletics programmes continue to strengthen adding a technological dimension to reading and Maths. These programmes assumed a very important part of our curriculum since March 2020 and were vital during both lockdowns. Both these programmes are supported by our Extended Schools allocation. A welcome addition to our supportive curriculum, from ES funds, is the provision of art therapy one day per week.

Primary 6 were delighted to have Paverpol art return at the end of Term 2. Once again, due to continuing staff illnesses we were unable to secure a facilitator for a STEM project. This fund was reallocated to improve the cluster schools' access to sensory materials. Collaboration with St Theresa's P.S., Glebe, St Columba's P.S., Clady and St Eugene's P.S., Victoria Bridge continues to strengthen as part of this Extended Schools' Cluster Group.

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## **SHARED EDUCATION**

Pupil contact, the key part of the D.S.C. Shared Education programme, co-ordinated by Mrs Cunningham, was unable to be facilitated during 2021-22 due to the continuing health restrictions. With the lifting of many restrictions as the year progressed, it is hoped that contact will resume in 2022-23.

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## **TRANSFORMATION TO INTEGRATED STATUS**

In June 2021 the Board of Governors had an initial meeting with Sean Petis from NICIE (Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education) to explore the idea of transforming to official integrated status. The governor and staff are very proud of the 'mixed' nature, across the two main NI religious backgrounds, of the pupils and staff of Sion Mills PS. However, this cannot be publicly publicised as part of the school's name. DE approval must be sought for this permission. Many schools are currently requesting this permission from DE without the historic population Sion Mills has. So, a new target was added to the school's One Year Action Plan – To attain 'Integrated' status by September 2023.



The journey during Year 1:

- 9/11/21 NICIE and IEF (Integrated Education Fund) representatives met with school staff – teaching and non-teaching;
- 18/11/21 Parents informed by letter of the idea;
- 19/11/21 parents receive an online form asking their opinion on the idea of transformation. +60% favourable response;
- 30/11/21 Formal resolution to transform to 'integrated' status passed by the Board of Governors;
- 10/02/22 Parents Information session in Assembly Hall (restricted numbers due to Covid-19);
- 21/02/22 – 14/03/22 Secret Parental Ballot hosted by CIVICA to garner parental support for transformation;
- 25/02/22 TAG (Transformation Action Group) Team held their first meeting;
- 15/03/22 69% response to ballot; 98.7% said YES;
- 28/06/22 Case for Change submitted to the EA.

## **PREMISES**

After a recent inspection of the school premises, the Governors expressed their satisfaction at the standard of maintenance and cleaning. Mr Jonny Martin was appointed Building Supervisor with effect from 1<sup>st</sup> January 2022. As with the previous year the effects of the Covid pandemic added additional work to the normal routines. During Term 1, as infections affected classes rooms required thorough cleaning and steaming. This activity was important to regain the confidence of staff and parents that all possible was being done to keep people safe. This was another year where staff were required to adapt and shift as new protocols were put in place.

The governors wish to commend him for his commitment, and good humour throughout this challenging time.

## **ATTENDANCE**

TOTAL DAYS ATTENDED BY ALL PUPILS ON ROLL, AS A PERCENTAGE OF THE TOTAL POSSIBLE DAYS ATTENDANCE: **89.7%**

This again, was a difficult year to compare attendance with previous years. Attendance, during 2021-22 was measured in the normal physical way for the first time since the 2019 annual figure. However, with the rules on isolation and actual infections being much more prevalent our attendance is the lowest we've known as far as our records demonstrate, so this low rate is understandable even if it is challenging. The over-arching aim for the academic year was to keep the school open everyday for our pupils and that was achieved.

The governors recognise how fortunate the school was in not having a further shut down and commend the parents who kept children off who were close contacts and kept the school informed of their cautious actions for the good of the community.

### **LEARNING SUPPORT**

Mrs Grainne McAleer, SENCo continued to provide Learning Support in this year. This help has been expanded to include small group support for aspects of Literacy and Numeracy.

### **SAFEGUARDING & CHILD PROTECTION**

The Safeguarding & Child Protection policy that operates in Sion Mills PS was reviewed to incorporate reference to Covid-19 requirements and was approved by the Board of Governors. At the beginning of each new school year, parents receive a leaflet, which is a summary Safeguarding & Child Protection helpsheet or can access the full policy on the school website. Flow diagrams of how Child Protection procedures operate are on display in all entrance halls, with photographs of the relevant personnel, including the Chair of Governors, Mr Peter McNulty and Mrs Edel McMullen.

The care, welfare and safety of each child is our overriding concern. Therefore the school shall refer any concerns about the well-being of any of its pupils to the Social Services Department and to the Education Authority, Western Region (EA,WR) to protect pupils in its care and to comply with the DENI regulations. The Designated Teacher for Safeguarding and Child Protection is Mrs Kingh and the deputy-designated teachers are Mrs McNelis and Mrs McAleer.

In the Nursery Mrs Harkin is the Designated Teacher. If a parent has any concerns in respect of safeguarding or child protection, please do not hesitate to contact Mrs McNelis.

The monitoring system put in place to support our children remains in place as a positive means of communication between management and class level. Good professional contact is a priority between us and our social services colleagues.

### **DRUGS EDUCATION**

The school has a commitment to educating children about the dangers of drugs, smoking and alcohol abuse. The school follows the Hope Drug and Alcohol programme. Should any parent wish to receive a copy of these policies please contact the office. There is a continued commitment to overall health and well-being which was reflected in previous years by our Health Promoting Schools (Gold Awards). Although this award is no longer available to schools we have achieved three consecutive awards and continue to promote healthy choices amongst our pupils. Our Extended Schools programme normally offers extra-curricular activities many of which are sports/health related.

## **EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES**

(As per section 7:5 of the 1998 N.I. Act)

This school operates an equal opportunities policy where there will be no discrimination regarding race, gender, religion, mental and or physical disability.

## **ACCESSIBILITY**

The school will provide, within reason, equal access to all parts of the building and all aspects of the curriculum for pupils with disabilities. There are three disabled toilets with all the required disability access. The school is entirely a single storey building with no steps and therefore wheelchair friendly. There is a ramp in the car park for wheelchair access. All external doors are locked and require an alarm system release button or an adult to open from inside the building. This alarm system was upgraded during August 2018.

## **CURRICULUM POLICY**

The school produces plans and schemes of work in line with the Northern Ireland policy document. In the September 2021 – June 2022 academic year a Recovery Curriculum continued with a one-year action plan required by DE.

## **SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS**

The relevant staff work closely with the EA Educational Psychology Service to support our children with special educational needs. There are 64 children on the SEN register and this includes the children with Speech & Language difficulties. Mrs G McAleer works two days a week with groups of children from P2 – P7 some of whom are at Stages 1 or 2 of the SEN register. These groups participate in extra Literacy and Numeracy and education plans are drawn up and agreed with parents, teachers and children. Children on Stage 3 of the SEN register are referred to the Education Authority (E.A.) for specific support.

The 2021-22 academic year had the welcome input of SEND funding from DE. This money enabled Mrs McAleer to have a much-needed administration day each week. This time ensured all the paperwork, meetings, emails and letters required to speed up support for children was much more efficient.



**June 2022**

**Primary 7 2022 are pictured above with their teachers Mrs Campbell, Miss McGinley and Mrs McSorley as well as their Classroom Assistant Miss Megan Breslin.**

**All are wearing their specially designed Leavers' Hoodies.**