

*The BOARD OF GOVERNORS*  
**ANNUAL REPORT**  
**2020 – 2021**



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

It has been an extremely challenging and worrying time for everyone, especially our children and young people. We have all had to adapt to new ways of working; parents having to work from home and home- school; children having to learn and adapt to new ways of learning; teachers and assistants having to develop new ways distance learning. The creativity, resilience, adaptability and determination of everyone is a wonderful testimony to the human spirit.

Managing the return to school was a daunting task but, with parental co-operation, the whole school team so ably led by Principal Mrs Mc Nelis, must be congratulated and thanked for a job very well done.

The challenge continues but we are confident that the future is in good hands.

I would like to thank everyone for their commitment and hard work. Thanks to the Buildings Supervisor, Jonny and his team for their Herculean efforts in keeping the premises clean and safe.

I would like to pay tribute to my predecessor as Chair, Mr Tom Bradley. Tom gave many years' service to this school as a governor and as Chairman, gave very positive, caring leadership to the Board. We wish him many happy years' retirement in Moira.

During the year, we lost our long serving Buildings Supervisor, Mr Malcolm Alexander. We extend ongoing sympathy to his wife and family.

Mrs Wendy Kee, Vice-Principal retired having given 41 years of committed service to this school and community. We wish her a well-earned happy retirement.

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 commend it for your attention.

Yours faithfully,

Peter J McNulty

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 return to school on 17<sup>th</sup> August for the first time ever in primary schools. This was the date that staff returned, some for the very first time since 20<sup>th</sup> March 2020; with the children gradually returning from Monday 24<sup>th</sup> August. From the outset, as staff (teaching and non-teaching) learned the new health and safety routines and protocols and prepared for the possibility of another lockdown, there was a strong and sincere sense of needing to support our families, our community as the strange and unknown future unfolded. It is commendable how colleagues 'stepped up' and overcame personal safety as well as technological and social media fears in order to continue to support their pupils. Later in the Summary of the Year I will expand on this but I was thoroughly heartened by the generosity of the staff. All of us discovered the true meaning of working in education when the 'normal' methods were suddenly removed as an option. We realised that **presence** really does matter.

The Governors have shown tremendous allegiance to the school and its aims, and have worked tirelessly at late night meetings during Term 1 and 2 followed by numerous Zoom meetings in Terms 2 and 3 to support the procedures, practices and governance of our school. We are particularly delighted this year, that due to the early intervention of their lobbying to both the Education Authority and local MLA, Mr Daniel McCrossan and his colleague Stephen Edwards, councillor, Sion Mills Primary School has a completely new boiler and heating system in place.

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            Sion Mills.

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

### TRANSFEROR REPRESENTATIVES:

Mrs J Browne  
Mrs V Patterson  
Mrs C Cronin  
Mr P McNulty

### EDUCATION AUTHORITY REPRESENTATIVES:

Mr. T Bradley (resigned in February 2021)  
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

### 2020/2021

PRINCIPAL:	Mrs O McNelis
VICE-PRINCIPAL:	Mrs W Kee (retired 1 <sup>st</sup> April 2021)
ASSISTANT TEACHERS:	Mrs V Campbell Mrs K Cunningham Mrs M Hendron Mrs L Kingh Mrs G McAleer Miss C McGeady (Nursery) Miss D McGinley Mrs B Sproule Miss D Walsh(Speech & Lang. Class) Mrs L Lynch (Learning Support)

## STAFFING

Staffing is largely dependent upon the number of pupils enrolled at the school and the number admitted in September 2020 was 39. The school's admission number is 48 and enrolment number 333.

37 were admitted to the Nursery Unit. There were 6 children in the Speech and Language class in September 2020 and this increased to 11 in January 2021.

### **Staffing Complement for 2020/2021**

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 7.5 – 25 hours p.w.
	1 Term-time Speech & Language C/A	25 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 supervision responsibility	36 hours p.w.
	1 Senior Lunch-time Supervisor	7.5 hours p.w.
	4 Lunch-time Supervisory Assistants	7.5 hours p.w.

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

All staff attended in-service courses, if offered, facilitated by the EA's Advisory Service, the Shared Education team 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, all 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 2020 -2021



Ball Skills



Odd Sock Day –  
Anti-Bullying Week



P7 Trade Fair



P7 One World Project



Chalk Art



Business Beginnings P7

## **Summary of Year** **September 2020 – June 2021**

Again, as in the previous year this was a very different type of academic year. Initial staff development was strongly focused on Covid-19 health and safety; ensuring all staff were clear on the protocols and routines to keep them and our children safe. The next focus was ensuring staff were prepared in the event of a second lockdown. We needed to be prepared with appropriate resources as well as upskilled with technology. When lockdown 2 was announced in January, we were ready to provide the best teaching and learning we could, to support our children and their families. I would like to thank all parents and governors for their support to all members of staff.

It is interesting to note that some of the changes implemented to keep people safe have had very positive consequences, providing food for thought:

- Staff supervising children coming in and staggered exiting in the afternoons – traffic congestion has eased considerably, and children can have a check-in chat with key adults first thing.
- Entering classrooms from their outside door (and washing hands) with teacher inside and no morning assembly has facilitated a more controlled start to the day.
- Children remaining in their class bubbles at lunchtime has created a much more enjoyable eating and playtime for everyone. The dining hall is more organised and older children can have access to their class fun bag on a regular basis.

This is a short summary of some of the highlights during the year, from 1<sup>st</sup>September 2020 – 30<sup>th</sup> June 2021.

The year began with news of the retirement of Malcolm Alexander, who had been the building supervisor for 28 years before ill health overtook his exemplary record of attendance at his work. Sadly, Malcolm did not get enjoying a long retirement and passed away on 9<sup>th</sup> February 2021. Due to the Covid regulations and that February was in the midst of a lockdown we were unable to show our appreciation of Malcolm in the usual ways. However, the guard of honour that included colleagues from the Education Authority, the Board of Governors and all of the school staff, as well as the many heartfelt tributes on Facebook will hopefully have given his family a sense of the high esteem in which Malcolm was held.



We were delighted to welcome Miss Mary Coulter onto the staff to support a Department of Education (DE) funded programme – Engage. This programme provided additional funding to schools to allow for assistance for children who had lost progress in their learning due to lockdown 1.

On 1<sup>st</sup> April 2021 Mrs Wendy Kee retired as teacher and vice-principal of our school. Mrs Kee had, at that point been teaching in Sion Mills Primary School for 41 years, having secured her first post on leaving college in 1980, in the old school on the main street of Sion Mills. There is no doubt it is an amazing achievement in teaching to have remained in the same area for all those years and to still love the job.



Mrs Wendy Kee with her Primary 2 pupils 28<sup>th</sup> March 2021



Mrs Louise King has been appointed to replace Mrs Kee as vice-principal, with effect from 1<sup>st</sup> September 2021.

Sure Start programmes continue to flourish even though many had to continue online during 2020-21. Baby Yoga, Baby Massage and a Health Promoting Homes programmes are some of the supports on offer to families of young children.

**Families Together**, a pilot programme that had provided much support to our young people come to an end with a final New Life Counselling programme. However, connections established through this project strengthened our access to Strabane Family Hub. Several children were referred for support.

**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 with Nursery children.

**UNICEF Rights Respecting School Award (RRSA)** We were well on our way with the help of our fantastic ambassadors to achieving the Silver Award when Covid-19 struck and halted our progress. We continue the journey and 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.** continue to support the school as well as possible. Most of our normal activities were on hold during 2020-21, but we did manage to hold a Sponsored Danceathon in June to raise some much need funds. £2.... Was raised with families being as generous as always despite difficult circumstances.

My 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.

We continue to develop our skills and knowledge as a staff. Our Accelerated Reading and Mathletics 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 to continue supporting our children's learning. These programmes proved to be vital during both lockdowns as they can be manipulated by teachers remotely so that children can be encouraged to progress, not just sit playing 'learning 'games. Accelerated Reading saw its best year with many more children than ever before achieving Word Millionaire status, in fact seven children achieved this twice over. Both these programmes are supported by our Extended Schools allocation. With the restrictions our usual Extended Schools activities, such as Breakfast Club and After Schools clubs could not be facilitated. Normally these funds cannot be used to buy resources but, in the circumstances, DE allowed the unused monies be allocated to the purchase of outdoor items. We now have some lovely new seating areas, outdoor kitchens and all classes were able to replenish fun bags with updated equipment.



Fun bag Fun at lunchtimes



Primary 4 checking out the outdoor kitchen

Mrs Hendron's Primary 1 class in their outdoor story area.



## SHARED EDUCATION

The D.S.C. Shared Education programme, facilitated by Mrs Cunningham was unable to be facilitated during 2020-21 due to the coming together of people from different places.

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 an Extended Schools' Cluster Group. We were delighted that Mrs Gloria Perry was able to facilitate a highly enjoyable art programme for 8 children and an adult on Zoom, with a Celebration Day for the children and adults from all 4 schools joining in to talk about their experiences and showing each other their creations. Whilst face to face is much more comfortable it was wonderful to engage the young people in some collaborative work despite the challenges. Hopefully everyone involved enhanced their life skills as part of the experience.



Primary 6 stayed in their bubbles and joined each other via Zoom on the Celebration Day



## PREMISES

After a recent inspection of the school premises, the Governors expressed their satisfaction at the standard of maintenance and cleaning. We wish to thank the acting building supervisor, Mr Jonny Martin. Mr Martin worked tirelessly with Mrs McNelis throughout July and August 2020 to have rooms reorganised, signage, sanitising stations, PPE boxes available in every room, excess furniture removed and stored and any other task that would help the school be safe for staff and children returning. Throughout the year he and his team of cleaners were required to adapt and shift as new protocols were put in place. The governors wish to commend him for his commitment, vision and good humour throughout this challenging time. In addition to this work from May until August 2020 a completely new boiler system was installed. Mr Martin had to assist by being on call for the engineers as the old equipment was removed and replaced with the new installation. The school is a much more comfortable for staff and pupils.

## **ATTENDANCE**

TOTAL DAYS ATTENDED BY ALL PUPILS ON ROLL, AS A PERCENTAGE OF THE TOTAL POSSIBLE DAYS ATTENDANCE: 93.8%

This again, was a difficult year to quantify attendance. A second lockdown compounded by anxious families with vulnerable family members created challenges for everyone. However, as the year progressed, and staff and parents gained confidence in the measures implemented to keep people safe attendance was very good by most children. The governors recognise how fortunate the school was in not having any class shut down due to positive cases within the building. We 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. During lockdown engagement of children with their online classwork was used as a means to manage attendance. Children who were not engaging in this way were encouraged to attend Supervised Learning in school. Many took up the offer of these places.

## **LEARNING SUPPORT**

Mrs Grainne McAleer, SENCo has reduced her teaching commitment to a 3-day per week temporary contract and took over responsibility for Learning Support in this year. This help has been expanded to include small group support for aspects of Literacy and Numeracy.

Supervised Learning was offered to the school population during the lockdown from January – March 2021. Particular emphasis was placed on encouraging our children with additional needs to attend. Many families took up this offer as the lockdown continued.

## **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. All parents received a copy of the parents' leaflet. 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 Kee and the deputy-designated teachers are Mrs McNelis and Mrs McAleer. As noted earlier, Mrs Kee retired on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2021, so Mrs McNelis, as Principal and DDT, assumed responsibility until the new Vice-principal and Designated Teacher for Safeguarding and Child Protection is in place. In the Nursery Miss McGeady is the Designated Teacher. If a parent has any

concerns in respect of child protection, please do not hesitate to contact Mrs McNelis. Parents will receive a summary Safeguarding & Child Protection helpsheet or can access the 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 Carmel Cronin.

During lockdown 2 the school's Safeguarding Team were better informed and organised in supporting all our families including monitoring any 'at risk' families. A monitoring system was put in place and either class teachers or members of the Safeguarding Team kept in touch with non-engaging families. Contact was made by telephone and good contact kept with 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 2020 – June 2021 academic year a Recovery Curriculum with a one-year action plan was required by DE.

### S.E.N.

The school works closely with the Educational Psychology Service to support the 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 P4 – 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.



#### **June 2021**

Being the year it was, our Leavers' Assembly was held outside and thankfully the weather was reasonably kind. Mr Lesley Matthews kindly came along with his speakers so everyone could relax in a socially distanced way, yet still hear the proceedings comfortably.

**Primary 7 2021 are pictured above with their teacher Mrs Cunningham and Classroom Assistant Mrs Leanne Speak. All are wearing their specially designed Leavers' Hoodies.**