

# **St. Mary's Primary School and Nursery Unit, Portaferry**



## **Annual Report of the Board of Governors to Parents 2024/25**

## **THE BOARD OF GOVERNORS**

Our new Board of Governors was constituted in December 2024 for the period 2024 to 2028.

Chairperson	Mr Aidan Faloona
Vice – Chair	Mrs Marie McMullan
EA Representative:	Mr Kevin McGarry, Mrs Sharon McClements
DE Representative:	Mrs Marie Mullan
Trustee Representative:	Mr Aidan Faloona, Mrs Nuala Savage Mr Gerard Moreland Mrs Mary Merron
Parent Representative	Mrs Katrina Magee
Teacher Representative	Mrs Frances Dorrian

The Principal is an ex officio member of, and secretary to, the Board of Governors. As such the Principal is a non-voting member of the Board.

The Governors are responsible for...

Governors attend regular meetings of the Governing Body. They are expected to show an interest in all school activities and to be informed about education in general. Governors are also invited to attend regular training courses provided by the Education Authority. Governors' responsibilities include:

- Overseeing the School Development Plan
- Staff appointments
- Admission of pupils
- Preparation of the Annual Report
- Financial management of the school
- Effective use of resources
- Pupil discipline
- Overseeing the curriculum, policy and procedure
- Responding to Education Authority and Department of Education initiatives.

The school continues to be indebted to the Governors who willingly give of their time to ensure the administration of Saint Mary's Primary School and Nursery Unit proceeds smoothly and effectively. More details of the school's development can be found in the 2024-2025 yearly Action Plans which can be viewed upon request.

The Governors wish to record formally their appreciation of the work carried out by the teaching and Non-Teaching staff of the school. The Governors acknowledge the dedication and expertise of the staff, who each play their part in helping to make Saint Mary's Primary School and Nursery Unit a successful, happy school.

## **Staff**

**June 2025**

**Principal:** Mr P Gilchrist

**Senior Teacher:** Mrs G Breen

### **Teaching Staff**

Miss CR McCarthy (Foundation/ KS1 LSU Teacher)

Mrs C McDermott (KS2 LSU Teacher)

Mrs J Birt (Nursery Teacher)

Mrs C Gibson (P1 Teacher)

Mrs F. Dorrian (P2 Teacher)

Mrs k Fowler (P3 Teacher)

Mrs A. M. O'Neill (P4 Teacher)

Mr G Smyth (Mon- Wed)/ P Gilchrist (Thurs/ Fri) (P5 Teacher)

Mrs G Breen (P6 Teacher)

Mr S Denvir (P7 Teacher)

### **Non- Teaching Staff**

#### **Classroom Assistants**

Ms S Magee (P1 General Assistant)

Mrs R Healy (P2 General Assistant)

Mrs Fiona Milligan (LSU)

Ms S Kelly (LSU)

Mrs C Doherty (LSU)

Mrs L McKeating (LSU)

Mrs M Clarke (P4)

Mrs C Magee (P7)

Mrs O Wallace (P5)

Mrs C Braniff (P6)

Mrs C Hannon (P5)

Mrs E Finnegan (P5)

Mrs M Denvir (Nursery)

**Secretary:** Mrs J Young

**Building Supervisor:** Mrs P Magee

**Cooks:** Mrs J Ritchie  
Mrs D Byers

**Lunchtime Supervisor:** Mrs Kelly

### **Staff Curricular Responsibilities**

<b>Principal</b>	Mr Gilchrist
<b>Senior Teacher</b>	Mrs Breen
<b>Designated Teacher For Child Protection</b>	Mrs Breen
<b>Deputy Designated Teacher For Child Protection</b>	Mr Denvir
<b>Literacy Co-Ordinator: And PE</b>	Mr Denvir
<b>Maths Co-ordinator:</b>	Mrs O'Neill
<b>SENCO and PDMU Co-ordinator:</b>	Mrs Dorrian
<b>Assessment and RE Co-ordinator:</b>	Mrs Gibson
<b>World Around Us Co-ordinator:</b>	Mrs Birt
<b>ICT Co-Ordinator:</b>	Mrs Fowler
<b>The Arts Co-ordinator</b>	Mrs Breen

The school could not function happily or effectively without the help of all staff who each play a significant part to ensure the best possible.

## **SAINT MARY'S OVERALL PUPIL NUMBERS**

There are currently 160 pupils enrolled in St Mary's Primary School and Nursery Unit with 23% of pupils registered on the Free School Meals Register.

## **OPEN ENROLMENT, ADMISSIONS AND ATTENDANCE**

### Nursery Unit

In accordance with the Department of Education requirements the school can admit 26 Nursery pupils each year. Admissions to Nursery in 2024/25 was 26.

### Primary 1

In accordance with the Department of Education requirements the school can admit 27 Primary 1 pupils each year. Admissions to Primary 1 in 2024/25 was 16.

## **ATTENDANCE**

Overall Whole School Attendance was 92.4%.

## **P7 LEAVERS**

The 27 Primary 7 children who left school in June 2025 transferred to the following schools.

Saint Columba's	14
Assumption Grammar	2
Our Lady and Saint Patrick's Knock	2
Lecale Trinity Grammar School	7
St Columbanus College, Bangor	2

## **STANDARDISED TESTS & ASSESSMENT**

Assessment forms an integral part of the teaching and learning at Saint Mary's Primary School and Nursery Unit. Pupil attainment is continually monitored and assessed. Records of pupil progress and achievement are maintained whilst the data is used to set future targets for whole school, groups and individuals.

Nursery/ P1/ P2 - Base-line Test (Sept, January & June)

Primary 3 to Primary 7 - CAT4 (P4 & P6 pupils only)

- Progress Test English (PTE)
- Progress Test Maths (PTM)
- Single Word Spelling Test (SWST)
- STAR Reading Test

## **SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS**

Using information from formal assessments and classroom observations, the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCo), Mrs F Dorrian, in close consultation with class teachers and parents, identifies children who would benefit from individual education plans. These children are placed on the school's Special Educational Needs Code of Practice Register.

There are currently 28 pupils recorded on Stage 1 and 2 of our Special Educational Needs register and 7 pupils with a Stage 3 Statement of Special Educational Need.

### *Specialised Provision*

There are 8 pupils enrolled in our Specialised Provision Class for Social and Communication need.

Staff are skilled at early identification of needs and strive to identify underachievement and low achievement, drawing on their professional judgement and the data available from classroom observations and from standardised scores. There continues to be a close liaison between the SENCo, Mrs Dorrian, and staff preparing and reviewing Individual Education Plans (IEPs) in consultation with pupils and their families.

Evidence is collected by the SENCo to help inform discussions with parents and to assist with the Annual Review process for children with a Statement of Special Educational Needs.

There continues to be close liaison with the Educational Psychologist from whom advice was sought and referrals made. The team from RISE provided support this year for individuals. School continues to work closely with speech therapists, the AAIS Support Team and the EA Literacy Support Unit. With our Specialist Provision we work closely with the Specialist Setting Support Team (SSST), who provide integrated support for specialist provisions in mainstream schools. The team supports staff and parents in specialist provisions to improve outcomes for children and young people.

In Saint Mary's Primary School and Nursery Unit, support is given within the classroom setting whereby differentiated learning and teaching experiences allow children to work at an appropriate level. These experiences present opportunities

for each child to progress at his or her own pace, consistent with his or her ability.

Eighteen children from P4-6 were provided with literacy support by external partners through the Time to Read programme run in conjunction with Business in the Community. The school continues to work closely with parents and children to meet the wide spectrum of needs e.g. health, emotional and behavioural difficulties as well as physical disabilities.

Children who appeared to be underachieving were also monitored with Target Groups to assist teachers to focus on areas for development to help pupils reach their full potential.

### **SAFEGUARDING AND CHILD PROTECTION**

Safeguarding Child Protection procedures continue to be fully implemented. Mrs Breen is the Designated Teacher for Child Protection and Mr Denvir is the Deputy Designated Teacher for Child Protection.

All staff and governors have updated child protection training annually.

The School's Safeguarding Team is made known to children through information posters and termly assemblies with pupils reminded they may approach any teacher and in particular the Designated Teachers if they wish to discuss any concerns.

Child Protection notices are displayed in prominent places around school and in every classroom. Families are kept informed of the team and have immediate access to important documents through the school website.

The pastoral care of our pupils remains central to the ethos of the school and all staff members are committed to it. We aim to reassure our children their worries and concerns will be listened to sensitively and sympathetically.

Worry boxes in Key Stage 2 classroom areas encourage children to write their worries down and share their problems with the class teacher or the Designated Teacher.

List of policies that have been written from Sept 24 - June 25

- Anti Bullying
- Positive Behaviour
- Child Protection
- Attendance Policy
- Complaints Policy



- Data Protection
- Educational Visits
- E Safety
- First Aid and Administration of Medicine
- Intimate Care
- Privacy Notice
- Whistleblowing

Policies are available upon request.

### **PREVENTATIVE CURRICULUM**

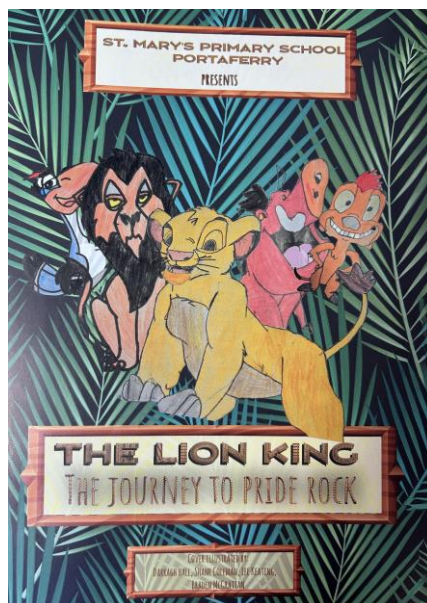
Substantial work was, again, undertaken on the preventative curriculum during the 2024-25 academic year. Preventative Curriculum work as follows:

- PDMU lessons being planned and delivered in each of the classes.
- Weekly celebration assemblies are ongoing. They help to promote self-esteem and confidence in the children. Children have been reminded in Assembly who is part of the Safeguarding Team in School and who they can go to/ what they can do if they are worried about something.
- Buddy Team is currently happening from Monday to Friday each week. Children from Primary 7 were able to apply for the post and then receive training. They play with the Primary 1 pupils during their lunch break in the playground. Children benefit greatly from this experience.
- School 'House System' continuing to be used effectively throughout School, encouraging children to make good choices by following our five Golden Rules. Children from Primary 7 are voted in as House Captains by the children from their respective Houses.
- School Council- elected representatives from each year group meet to discuss and make decisions together based upon ideas and opinions from their peers in class.
- Anti-Bullying Week was held in November this year. An assembly focussed on this topic during this week. Children in each class had the opportunity to report back about what they had been doing in for it. This content was shared via our school website.
- Fire Safety Awareness P5 class - Local Fire Officers attended school and explored different ways, with the children, to Stay Safe.
- Love for Life deliver talks to children in P6 & P7 (January 2025).
- Designated Teacher is the Period Dignity Champion for the school.
- All children in P5-7 have the opportunity to attend Swimming lessons each Tuesday morning from September – February

- Bee Safe programme was attended in February 2025 by children from Primary 7. This event incorporated subjects such as road safety, drug awareness, fire safety, internet safety and safety within the home etc.
- Safer Internet Day was held in school in February 2025. Each class participated in relevant class lessons.
- Primary 7 children attended a three-day residential at Shannaghmore Outdoor Centre. This was an invaluable experience for all pupils who attended. They had opportunities to overcome their fears and build upon resilience in all the activities they were doing. The children were a credit to themselves and the school.

## **THE LION KING**

One of the standout highlights of our school year was the spectacular production of *The Lion King*, which brought together pupils, staff, and families in a joyful celebration of creativity and teamwork. Pupils dazzled us with their energy, talent, and teamwork, bringing the magic of the savannah to life with colourful costumes, vibrant sets, and powerful performances. Every aspect of the show reflected the dedication and talent of our school community. Pupils from Primary 3 through to Primary 7 took part, building confidence, developing new skills, and forming lasting memories. The production was met with enthusiastic applause and glowing feedback from parents and visitors, and it truly showcased the spirit and potential of our young performers. The response from families and guests was overwhelmingly positive, and we couldn't be prouder of everyone involved. It was a wonderful reminder of what we can achieve when we work together—and a highlight of the school year!



## **FAITH IN ACTION AT SCHOOL**

Our school continues to nurture a strong connection with our parish community through attendance at monthly mass, the celebration of the sacraments and involvement in parish life. Pupils continue to take part in school-led liturgies, supporting the sacraments of First Confession, First Holy Communion and Confirmation preparations, and we have joined in special services throughout the liturgical calendar. These experiences have helped deepen our pupils understanding of faith and foster a sense of belonging and spiritual growth. We are grateful to Father McGrady and parishioners for their ongoing support and for welcoming our pupils so warmly into the life of the church.

## **SPORT AND EXTRA CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES**

Sport and Extra–Curricular activities form an important part of the life of the school. The local community has a strong sporting tradition, and sports also provide an excellent opportunity for the children to represent the school.

In 2024/25 the extra curricular programme included:

- choir,
- football (indoor and outdoor),
- girls' football (indoor and outdoor),
- hurling (indoor and outdoor),
- camogie (indoor and outdoor),
- multi-sports,
- gymnastics,
- art,
- pottery

Participation in inter-school competitions is also an important part of school life, with St Mary's Primary School and Nursery Unit competing in:

- GAA: County Down hurling, camogie and Gaelic football (boys' and girls 'competitions (indoor & outdoor). The school won the Boys County Indoor hurling title and participated in the Ulster finals in Magherafelt.
- Quizzes: School quiz teams took part in the Credit Union Quiz.

## **PARENT AND COMMUNITY LINKS**

St Mary's Primary School and Nursery Unit enjoys the strong support of the local community which is reflected in the extensive activities, events and services the pupils both participate in and attend. The staff are welcoming and outward

looking in encouraging pupils to see themselves as part of the wider community. Effective communications between home and school is regarded as an essential part of the school mission.

Parental engagement, in a formal sense, takes the form of:

- year group curriculum meetings in the first term;
- formal parent teacher consultation meeting in February;
- an annual written report on children's progress, sent home in June;
- a weekly newsletter;
- The use of Facebook to connect with parents;
- Nursery/ P1/ SP1 and SP2 Class Seesaw accounts;
- a regularly updated school website;
- a texting service used to contact parents at short notice if necessary; and
- an open door policy whereby parents can address concerns to the Principal or arrange to meet with their child's class teacher.

The school has strong links with a range of sporting, community and business organisations, as well as other schools which allow us to broaden opportunities for our children. These include coaching provision organised and delivered by County Board (GAA), Portaferry GAC, Irish Football Association (Girl's Football), as well as links with local nursing homes which our pupils attend each Christmas to sing Christmas carols.

### **LIAISON WITH PARENTS**

We see ourselves as partners with parents in the education of pupils. Mutual support and co-operation is an essential element in achieving our objectives. On-going activities to ensure communication and parental involvement include:

- School website
- School App
- Seesaw
- Annual parent/teacher meetings
- Prospectus
- Open Afternoon for new intake
- Weekly newsletters
- SMS communications
- Annual Pupil Reports
- Annual Reviews and SEN meetings
- School Policies
- School Calendar
- Induction Morning/Days

- Verbal Communication (Telephone Calls/Messages/Notes from Teacher
- Verbal Communication (Initiated by Parents)
- Contact through external agencies including Education Welfare Officer (EWO), School Nurse, Educational Psychologist, CIDS team Behaviour Support Team etc.
- School Mass, Celebrating the Sacraments and Class Assemblies
- Parent Teacher Assemblies
- Class Parental Assemblies
- Questionnaires regarding school life which contribute to school policies e.g. Anti-Bullying, Positive Behaviour and Child Protection.
- Curriculum Meeting
- Parent Workshops
- Parents' Forum
- Board of Governors
- Paired reading/programmes
- Parental Questionnaires

### **LIAISON WITH EXTERNAL AGENCIES**

The staff of St. Mary's Primary School and Nursery Unit is committed to having good working relationships with relevant external support agencies to enhance, protect and support individual pupils' and teachers' social and emotional welfare. The following agencies work in partnership with St Mary's Primary School and Nursery Unit:

- School Psychology Service – Education Authority
- Child Protection Office – Education Authority
- Special Needs /Behavioural Support Team – Education Authority
- RISE Team
- Specialist Setting Support Team (SSST)
- Educational Welfare Officer
- School Nurse
- School doctor/dentist
- N.S.P.C.C
- PSNI
- Action Cancer
- Eco Schools Programme
- Sustran
- Portaferry GAA
- CCMS

### **PARENTS SUPPORT GROUP**

As we reflect on another busy and rewarding school term, we want to take a moment to recognise the incredible work of our Parent Support Group. Their

ongoing dedication, energy, and generosity have made a real difference to our school community—from organising events and fundraising efforts to offering practical help and encouragement throughout the year.

Their contributions help create a positive and welcoming environment for all. We are deeply grateful for their continued support and look forward to working together in the years ahead.

Thank you for being such an important part of our school family!

## **CONCLUSION**

The Governors wish to congratulate the children for their diligence and efforts during the school year. We would also like to thank you, their parents, for the support and assistance given to the school. We particularly commend our dedicated and loyal staff for the way they have undertaken their many and varied tasks and we congratulate them on another successful year in St Mary's Primary School and Nursery Unit.