



## Annual Evaluation for the IQM Flagship Project



<b>School:</b>	St. Colman's PS and All Saints' Nursery Monteith Road, Annaclone, Banbridge BT32 5LS
<b>Head/Principal:</b>	Aisling Morgan
<b>IQM Lead:</b>	Aisling Morgan
<b>Date of Review:</b>	1 <sup>st</sup> December 2021
<b>Assessor:</b>	Kenny Frederick

### **IQM Cluster Programme**

Cluster Group:	Ferrero Roche
Ambassador:	Kevin O'Neill
Date of Next Meeting:	TBC
Next Cluster Group Meeting Focus:	TBC

### **Sources of Evidence during IQM Review Day:**

Various items of paperwork.  
A transition Booklet – 'Colin is going to school.'  
Memories of Lockdowns – 2 Books.  
A power point presentation about the school.

### **Discussions with:**

- The Principal.
- The Foundation Stage Lead and KS2 Lead.
- Three Teaching Assistants.
- Two parents.
- A Parent Governor (also the Safeguarding Governor.)
- A group of P5 & 6 girls.
- Two P 6 pupils, who took me on a tour of the school.
- Many staff in situ (in class) and around the school.

### **Additional Activities:**

I was scheduled to observe the 'Health Hustle', but sadly missed it (but heard all about it!) Attended Year 3 Assembly on Superhero's. An extensive tour around the school with two Year 7 pupils and a Learning Walk with the Principal



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### Evaluation of Annual Progress towards the Flagship Project

The school's progress from the previous year were based on the project focus of:

#### *Using ICT to promote whole school development.*

The project aimed to use ICT to transform and enrich pupils' learning experience through whole school development. The vision was to continue to build on their blended learning approach and ensure that it was purposeful, that pupils could both own and drive their learning through collaboration and that families were active participants in the learning process.

#### **Next Steps:**

Use ICT to further improve home-school sharing of work:

- Children will upload completed work in class and this will be evidenced and highlighted to parents.
- Continue to train staff in Apps/ICT practices that cater for specific learning difficulties.
- Training for staff and 'Young at Hearts Community.'
- Use the wider curriculum areas of Art, Drama, Music and PE as 'therapeutic' vehicles for improving mental health and wellbeing'
- An increased element of learning will take place outdoors.
- To introduce mental health ambassadors'

#### **Agreed Actions for the Next Steps in the Flagship Project**

***Project Title:*** *Further develop the use of ICT and to support the Physical & Emotional Health and Wellbeing.*

Project One – To continue to build upon the current inclusive practice in ICT and further promote the role digital technology can play in supporting learners.

Project Two – To increase staff and pupil awareness of how to look after their Mental health & well-being.

The school aims to motivate and inspire pupils to recognise when they feel overwhelmed and equip them with age-appropriate strategies to deal with challenges.

#### **The Impact of the Cluster Group**

The school have attended all Cluster group meetings in person, when possible, but then virtually. They have also hosted a cluster meeting. They value the cluster network as an opportunity to learn.



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## Overview

I was warmly welcomed to St Colman's Primary School by the amazing Caretaker Manager, who, as I later found out, is a lynchpin in the inclusive ethos and culture of the school. His name was mentioned by everyone I met as someone to be respected and admired for all that he contributes to the school. He greets the children and families every morning as they come into school, and they really enjoy being welcomed in this way.

The first engagement was attending the Year 3 Assembly that was all about Superhero's. The class had prepared the assembly with their class teacher, and they had all learned their lines carefully and spoke (fairly) confidently despite the stranger in their midst! Some were in the usual Superhero costumes, but many others were in the less recognised heroes who were the doctors, nurses, teachers, and firefighters and so on. They ended with some helpful hints on how we can all be heroes. They were fantastic and deserve congratulations. The audience were mesmerised and paid good attention all the way through.

Following assembly, I went outside to meet the Foundation Stage Co-ordinator and to see the children at play, supervised by several members of staff. I was told that play is of paramount importance for the children as this is the way they learn best. Everything in the playground is designed to stimulate learning. They try to use only natural materials (many made by the incredible Caretaker Manager), and they try to maximise the outdoor space. The local community helped with providing resources for outdoor play and donated different items that were turned into play equipment. Local joiners built the shed for the school. The whole school, not just Foundation Stage, spend as much time outdoors as possible, and this is reflected in all parts of the curriculum.

When children came back to school, the school wanted to take learning outside and remind children how to play. They made a video to explain to parents and children why outside play was such a positive thing.

Circles of friends and peer buddies, where the older children were matched with younger ones who got to know them and befriend them, were the order of the day. The Principal produced an amazing transition document, that was sent home to families and children, so they were prepared for coming back to school following lockdown. The transition booklet showed what topics were covered during home learning and there was an ice cream van on first day to make children feel even more welcome. Staff noticed some pupils showed decreased levels of independence and resilience and language has regressed a little, in some cases, in comparison with pre-lockdown. It took children a while to make friends again, but staff were well prepared to support them with this. They adapted the curriculum to surmount these potential barriers to learning. In the first weeks back, the emphasis was on play rather than the traditional numeracy and literacy. They also spent a lot of time working on emotional aspects and wellbeing.

Parents of Foundation Stage children were phoned regularly during lock down and the team made doorstep visits to the children's homes at end of June to let the pupils see them and reacquaint themselves, albeit briefly, with the children, to reassure children and families that all would be fine when they returned. Teachers noticed spelling and



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language development was the primary concern as pupils returned from lockdown. To address this need, the school has put on more phonics sessions and have purchased a spelling programme, The Complete Spelling Programme, and they emphasised a big push on reading at home. They school purchased SEESAW as a tool to communicate with parents and to keep them informed about what is happening at school. This was particularly important for children who were non-verbal and could not tell parents what they had done at school that day. Whilst they were on lockdown parents were asked to record their children reading and send these videos to their teachers who gave every individual detailed feedback. This was a great success – even though it was very time consuming for teachers.

The Principal talked me through the Safeguarding Processes in the school, as she is the Designated Teacher, she is supported by a Deputy DT so they can share the load. All the appropriate systems and training is in place and all measures are taken to ensure children are, and remain, safe. There is an annual safeguarding audit carried out by the Local Authority and any recommendations are always followed up. During lockdown the school held regular live Google Assemblies and kept in touch with families and children – particularly more vulnerable ones. They sent ‘Welcome to St Colmans’ videos, on YouTube, to pupils who were coming to the school but had not been able to visit. There was a facility for children to ask questions about what would happen when they started at school. A lot of work was done to ensure they were keeping children safe on-line.

The Leadership are very aware of the importance of nurturing the wellbeing and mental health of pupils and staff and they do a lot to meet the needs of both groups. I missed the morning ‘Health Hustle,’ which happens every morning and is designed to get the children, and staff, moving at the start of the day before they start their work. The children told me there is a regular session where they run a mile on the school grounds there is a purpose built track so they know exactly where to go. I have been told there is a mile run planned for the following week that will be led by Santa! The children are very excited at the prospect, and they told me they will all be wearing Santa hats! The SeeSaw website has been useful, in terms of communication between home and school and particularly in times when covid restrictions meant that parents can’t come into school as they would have done before March 2020. Assemblies are normally held every week and parents used to be invited but are now able access these virtually.

Other wellbeing activities included:

- Paws B Mindfulness Project.
- Healthy Mind and Healthy Body activities.
- Wellness Wednesday.
- Outdoor learning - using the outdoor environment for learning and for literacy.
- The Prayer Garden – which the children showed me on their tour of the school.

More staff training on wellbeing is to take place in January.

Another new development is to run an Outdoor Assembly every Friday, for all except the Nursery children. There is usually a theme to the assembly, but they always include a celebration of achievement and effort where children are awarded Gold Stars or



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Worker of the Week Awards. These have happened every week and so far, they have only had to cancel one due to heavy rain.

After-school clubs and activities have re-started, and the Gaelic tournament has resumed along with other sporting activities. Breakfast Club and after school club (until 5.30pm) is paid for by parents. Most of the other clubs and activities are run by staff at the school and everybody can take part. The numbers of pupils in receipt of FSM are low in the school but the associated funds are used to support them to attend some of these clubs and visits and residential experiences, when they take place.

This term the school held face-to-face curriculum meetings with parents, and these were very well attended. There have not been many changes to the Northern Ireland curriculum except there is more of an emphasis on outdoor learning. Currently children are rehearsing for the annual Peace Proms, which is a cross-border event and lots of schools learn the songs and go to perform them in Belfast. It's a great event and parents can buy tickets to attend. It did not happen last year (due to Covid), so everybody is looking forward to it this year. There are plans in place for a Christmas Show, but this has now been changed to a virtual performance due to new restrictions. The need for both a Plan A and a Plan B is pivotal of the way they have learned to move forward through Covid and its associated restrictions.

I had the opportunity to talk to two Senior Leaders - Phase Leaders for Foundation Stage and Literacy Co-ordinator and we discussed the school in general and their role within it. We talked about teaching and learning, and the curriculum and the way teachers work together to share resources and ideas and good practice. They told me that they have some autonomy, rather than being prescribed, in terms of what and how they teach and assess. Teachers are fully involved at every stage and can discuss new programmes and ideas. We talked about the Covid experience and lockdown where teachers quickly moved teaching and learning on-line. They had to learn as they went, and they supported each other as they became more proficient as it went on. Learning a new way to teach (on-line) in a short time whilst ensuring lessons remained of a high quality was something they are very proud of. This is a school that values professional learning and development, and they are always looking for ways to improve. We talked about the literacy developments across the school and how these had been delivered throughout lockdown.

We also talked about the wellbeing of staff and talked about the way the Senior Team support the Principal, and each other. It's the quality of relationships within the school that ensure that staff feel included and supported. Although there has been a lot of absence through illness during this term the school have coped well and managed to continue to provide a good experience for the children.

I was pleased to meet with three Classroom Assistants during my visit to the school. They told me there are ten of them in all and they are all one-to-one support assistants, although they also get to know the classes they are attached to and support other children when the child they are working with is working independently. They told me they feel valued by the teachers and pupils but also by the Leadership. The class teachers make sure they include them in their lesson planning and tell them what they want them to do in the lesson. Teachers respect their skills and their knowledge of the



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children. There is currently no formal appraisal or performance management system for teaching assistants – these are not a requirement in Northern Ireland, but it would be good to get something in place to ensure this group are treated equally. It was obvious that they are valued and appreciated but they need the formal policy and practice of reviewing their work and performance.

One of the TAs showed me the SeeSaw programme on her iPad so I could understand how it is used as a communication conduit between home and school. They also showed me Word Shark, which they use with the children, it helps them learn the high frequency words. It was especially useful during lockdown. Most of the TAs were in school during lockdown, running the provision for vulnerable and key worker children. They told me that the provision was well attended as parents felt it was safe to send the children to school so they could get to work themselves.

The TAs told me they get lots of training and development and one told me about the Six Bricks training they did last week. They meet formally every month with their Line Manager and discuss any difficulties they might have. The children they support have lots of different needs and they must learn all about the child and the diagnosis/condition, so training is ongoing.

We talked about the way staff at all levels work together to do the very best for the children in their care. There are strong relationships between staff and between staff and children and between staff and parents. They are all working towards one aim, and this is what makes St Colman's a great place to be.

During my visit to the school there were several staff absences, due to Covid and other illnesses, and there were some substitute teachers in school, although lots of staff were covering for each other. This was not obvious to a visitor or indeed to the children, who always felt secure because even if a new teacher was taking the class that day there was always a TA in the lesson who knew the class well and who could advise and support the teacher.

The behaviour of children throughout my visit was exemplary. They came to school ready to learn and they knew the routines and expectations and they followed them to the best of their ability. They were very supportive of each other and were aware if another child had particular needs that meant they may need additional help. Pupils are very accepting of each other, and this was exemplified in discussion with the pupils and parents.

The first parent I met has two children in the school. As a 'newcomer' to Annaclone, a relatively small town, she thought she would have difficulty making friends but since the children started school, she has got to know many parents and children and she now feels part of the community. Her children love school and the little one who started in Nursery in September is very happy despite being a lockdown baby! Her oldest was the one who was more effected by the Covid Pandemic. She missed so much school (her first year in school) but told me the Head of Foundation came to visit and brought resources and a Booklet to help her prepare for coming back to the school. The Booklet was helpful, as it allowed parents to discuss coming back to school with their child. They also did a curriculum morning and a stay and play session, so the pupils felt at ease.



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Normally, her child is very quiet in school but comes to life at home and the SeeSaw programme helped not only to communicate and allowed teachers to see a different side of her. I was told the Foundation Stage Lead produced a different video every day (often 3 or 4 in fact) for pupils. This involved her showing her niece how to do different tasks or giving her instructions and watching her completely different tasks. This helped model what to do and the children loved it.

This parent told me she was very happy with the school. That they are always very welcoming, and nothing is too much trouble and are very accommodating of different needs. She said SeeSaw really helped and she loved getting pictures of them doing different things throughout the school day so she could talk about them when they got home. World Book Day was celebrated and there were lots of videos posted on YouTube. Ensuring children continued reading during lockdown was important and the school sent several scanned books to children and then parents were asked to record their children reading to them and send them back to the school. They also sent very detailed feedback to the children about their reading. This was a real success and children and parents loved it.

The second parent I met has two children at the school, the youngest one with additional needs. The parents are absolutely delighted with the school. Her oldest child has always loved being at school and been very happy, so the parents really wanted their youngest child to go to the same school. They had feared their son would not be welcomed but were told it would be a privilege to have him in the school. The parent said that the school nurture him and value him and love him for who he is. This was a great relief for the parents. I was told that his Teaching Assistant and teacher listen to the parents and plan appropriate work for him. They use SeeSaw to demonstrate what he has done during the day and what he has achieved. This parent was full of praise for the Principal and her team, and she wanted to thank them most sincerely for all they have done for her children.

Next, I met with another parent, who is also a Parent Governor. She has previously been a SENCO. In view of that she is the SEND and Safeguarding Governor. She has three children – all boys and all are now or have been pupils at St Colman's School. Her first child has now moved on. The other two are still at St Colman's and they are very happy and love coming to school. The previous Head persuaded her to become a governor and the Governing Body were very welcoming to her. She took part in Governors' Induction Training and various training sessions run by the Education Library Board since then. She told me that Governing Board is not professionally clerked, but minutes are taken by one of the governors and agendas and minutes are widely distributed. The Chair of Governors is very experienced and provides good leadership to the team. As Safeguarding Governor, she undertakes an annual training course and meets regularly with the Principal, who is DSL. She drew my attention to the safeguarding posters around the school, ensuring that everybody knows who to speak to if they have concerns and Governors receive a regular report from the Principal re safeguarding at every meeting.

Finally, we talked about the process for appointing the Principal – as she is in an acting position now. I was told the appointment will happen after Christmas as it had to be advertised externally.



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I asked to see a group of pupils who would be happy to talk to me and one of the first questions I asked them was what was the best thing about St Colman's School? The five girls (from P 5 and P6) were more than happy to tell me:

- Teachers & staff and pupils are kind.
- Lots of learning goes on.
- Playground buddies include everybody.
- ICT.
- Behaviour is really good.
- Rewards – Star of the Week, Workers of the Week Award.
- The reward system, including House Points.
- Outside celebration assemblies.
- Trips and visits (before Covid.)
- Swimming every week.
- The daily mile run.
- Basketball and dance classes.
- Irish dancing.
- Football club.
- The Healthy Hustle in the mornings.

The girls told me that the local community really support the school and they gave up their time to build the daily mile track and lots of other things around the school. They are always trying to raise money for the school and the latest project is to raise about £30K for new whiteboards in every class. To get this fund going some of the children suggested they hold 'Breakfast Bakes' to raise money. They held a community event and raised over £3,000. This has already been used to buy 3 new whiteboards. The children were, quite rightly, extremely pleased with their efforts.

Most of the children in the school live very near to the school and know each other outside school. In some classes there are uneven numbers of boys and girls, but the overall gender split is even and there don't appear to be any problems associated with gender imbalance in some classes.

We talked about lockdown and how they had got through it. They missed their friends and their teachers and other staff, but they got on with the work that they were given and did not feel that they had fallen behind with their work. They said teachers helped them catch up with their work and were very patient and kind. They also said they helped each other.

I had spent much of the day with the Principal, who was also busy checking to see classes were covered and everything was as it should be. The commitment to including every child is a priority for the Principal. She and her staff are welcoming and make sure they find out what the child needs and then they ensure that they provide it. This is a community school in every sense of the word and children with different needs are part of that community. The whole school benefits as a result.



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The school works in partnership with various associates, and they belong to many different clusters of school. The Principal is part of a Principal’s Cluster, which she finds very useful – as a way of networking and support from her peers. There is also a SEND Cluster and a Local School Cluster and of course the school is part of the IQM NI Cluster.

Funding is tight and as a small school it is particularly difficult to provide all the additional resources the staff and children need. Thankfully, the PTA are very active and have a fundraising target of £10,000

The priorities and targets for the next year are around Literacy, Numeracy, and Mental Health and there is a clear plan of action. Everybody is hoping that they are not thrown off course because of the covid pandemic continuing.

It was a real pleasure to visit St Colman’s School. They are a very special sort of community school when inclusion is integral to everything they do. The school is expertly led by a Principal with vision and with heart. She is well respected, and staff are happy to follow her lead. She took over the school with very little notice at a very difficult time and she has already made her mark. She has much to feel proud of.

I am happy to recommend that St Colman’s School retains its Flagship status and is reviewed in a year’s time. It certainly deserves it. It is a truly inclusive school.

**Assessor: Kenny Frederick**

**Findings confirmed by Inclusion Quality Mark (UK) Ltd:**

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Joe McCann MBA NPQH  
Director of Inclusion Quality Mark (UK) Ltd