



**Prospectus  
2023-2024**





Dear Parents and Carers,

We would like to warmly welcome you to Sion Mills Primary School. We wish you and your child every happiness whilst you are part of our school community and hope that this prospectus will give you an insight into the way we work. It is intended to give an overview of the life of the school.

The staff of Sion Mills Primary School firmly believes that children only get one chance at a quality education and are, therefore, committed to raising standards for children in all areas of school life as well as providing a breadth of experiences to enhance their learning.

Sion Mills Primary School is quite unique in that from the 1800s it has always been a cross community school. We are currently in the process of being formally identified as an 'integrated' school so that cross community nature, that we are extremely proud of, can be publicised widely from September 2023. The spiritual development of the children is of paramount importance to the staff, and this is developed through a broad Christian context, in which all denominations are respected.

The school has a long history of excellent relationships with parents, carers and the local community, all of whom give their support to the school and its work. We actively encourage you to get involved with your child's school.

The impact of Covid-19 continues to be evident in the form of poorer attendance due to more severe illnesses, but we are delighted to have remained fully open since August 2021. All activities, that you will read more about in the is document have returned to normal while remaining mindful of good hygiene and ventilation. We are delighted to offer face to face parent/teacher meetings again and you are always welcome to contact your child's teacher at any time and all classes from Nursery to Primary 7 continue to communicate with parents/carers online through the school website and an app called Seesaw. Mrs Kingh and I are also happy for any parent/carer to make an appointment through the school office to discuss and/or resolve any concerns.

We have a very proactive PTFA (Parents, Teachers & Friends Association) who provide a wide range of events that fundraise as well as enhance the school experience through fun activities, such as a Hallowe'en disco, Santa's Grotto and Treasure Hunts, Spring into Summer Fair, to name a few. The PTFA is always open to welcoming new members.

Our governors are actively involved with our school through providing supportive challenge as well as helping out at key events, sitting on our Eco Committee, Safeguarding & Child Protection teams.

We promise you that, as Principal and Co-principal, we will do our utmost to ensure that your child/ren receive the best we can provide, whilst they are with us.

Once again, Mrs Kingh and I wish you and your child every success and happiness during their time at Sion Mills Primary School and look forward to working with you and your children.

Yours faithfully,

*Oonagh McNelis*      &      *Louise Kingh*

## View of School & Grounds



### FACTS ABOUT THE SCHOOL

**Address:** Sion Mills Primary School  
The Park  
Sion Mills  
Strabane  
Co. Tyrone  
BT82 9HP

**Phone No:** 02881658249

**E-mail:** [omcnelis240@sionmills.strabane.ni.sch.uk](mailto:omcnelis240@sionmills.strabane.ni.sch.uk)

**Principal:** Mrs Oonagh McNelis B.Ed, M.Ed.

**Co-principal:** Mrs Louise Kingh

**Chairman of Board of Governors:** Mr Peter McNulty

**Classification of School:** EA Controlled  
Co-Educational, Primary

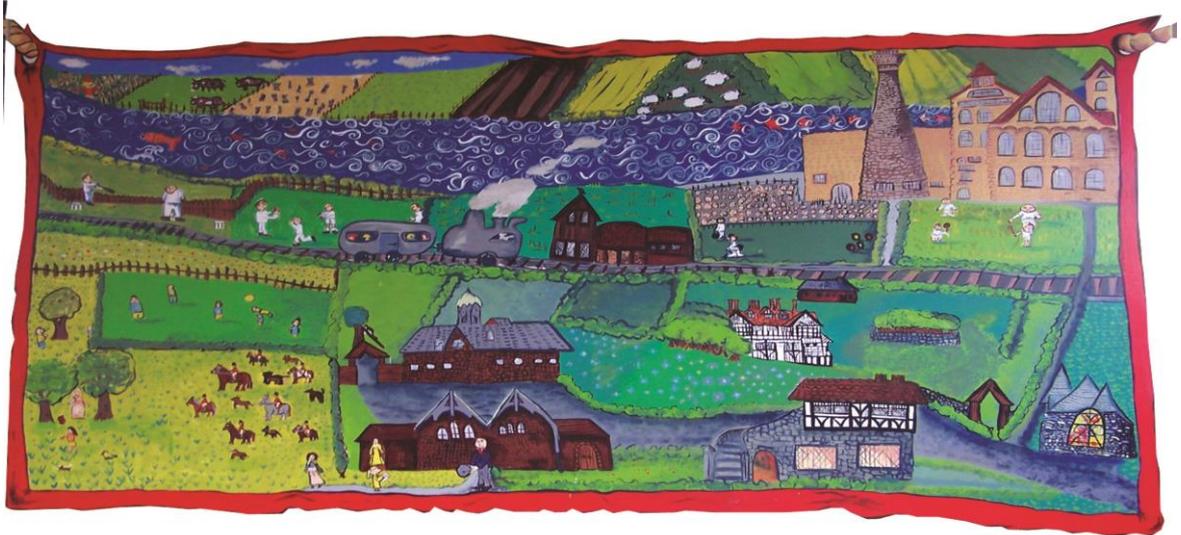
**Age range of pupils:** 3 - 11 years.

**Expected number of pupils including Nursery in 2022/2023:** 253

**Admission numbers:** Nursery up to 52 part-time  
P1 up to 48

**Enrolment numbers:** Up to 333

# Our School



Sion Mills Primary School is a controlled school with an integrated enrolment. The school is situated in the centre of the village and was originally maintained by Herdman's Mill. The new school was opened on its present site in 1985 and is situated in attractive grounds with a large grass playing field and two separate playgrounds. The school is designed to meet the needs of all children from Nursery age up to end of Key Stage 2 (Primary 7) when the children transfer to a variety of post-primary schools.

The facilities include a self-contained Nursery Unit, which has its own outdoor play area, three clusters of infant, middle and junior classrooms, four activity areas, a library, a computer suite, a nurture room (The Rainbow Room), a large assembly hall and a Youth Wing which is operated by the Education Authority, Western Region, Youth Department. In 2004 an extension of three classrooms was completed and external doors and a covered soft play area were added to the P1-P3 classrooms to facilitate an outdoor classroom all year.

In 2012 the Speech and Language Class relocated to Sion Mills PS from Knockavoe Resource Centre. The children are integrated as much as possible throughout the week and they are very much part of our school. The Speech & Language class is a small group, with no more than 12 children, from P1 - P4. They access the Northern Ireland Curriculum through a teacher and classroom assistant, supported by regular weekly speech & language therapy. Children are identified for this class through an external referral process by speech therapists.

## BOARD OF GOVERNORS

Chairman:		Mr P McNulty
Vice-Chairman:		Mrs V Patterson
Representing:	(a) Parents	Mrs G Sheen Mrs E McMullen
	(b) Staff	Mrs L Kingh
	(c) EA, Western Region	Mr S Aiken Mr S Hamilton
	(d) Transferors	Mrs J Brown Vacant Mr P McNulty Mrs V Patterson
Secretary:		Mrs McNelis (Principal)



## SCHOOL STAFF

Principal  
Co-principal & Vice-Principal

Mrs O McNelis  
Mrs L Kingh

### TEACHING STAFF 2022/2023

Nursery	Mrs C Harkin	Nursery Co-ordinator DDT
P1S	Mrs B Sproule (Mrs R Long)	Art & Design & PATHS Co-ordinator, Rights Respecting School Award Leader
P1/2H	Mrs M Hendron	P.E. & Games Co-ordinator, Daily Mile Leader & DDT
P2/3C	Mrs M McElwee	ICT & Numeracy Team
P3L	Mrs L Lynch	SEN & Numeracy Team
	Mrs E Ward	Fridays to release SENCo
P4/5K	Mrs L Kingh	Vice-Principal, Designated Teacher for Safeguarding & Child Protection, World Around Us Co-ordinator & Assessment and Eco Leader.
P5C	Mrs V Campbell	Numeracy, Music & R.E. Co-ordinator
P6McG	Miss D McGinley	Literacy, Pastoral Care & R.E. Co-ordinator
P6/7C	Mrs K Cunningham	Shared Education Co-ordinator and Assessment & ICT Leader
Learning Support	Mrs G McAleer	SENCo, Deputy Designated Teacher for Safeguarding and Child Protection, Extended Schools' Co-ordinator
Speech & Language Class	Miss D Walsh	Speech & Language Leader and Class teacher

## ANCILLARY STAFF 2022-2023

School Secretary:	Mrs I Lynch
Nursery Assistant:	Mrs K Harkness (4 days) Mrs A McCosker (1 day)
P1/2 Classroom Assistants:	Mrs E McKelvey & Mrs L Pierce
Special Needs Classroom Assistants:	Mrs M Beattie Ms M Breslin Ms E Brown Mr R Catney Mrs M Devanney Mrs Y Gilchrist Mrs A Greenstreet Ms K Hendron Ms V Noble Mrs L Speak Ms J Tinney (N) Ms K Wade (N)
Building Supervisor:	Mr J Martin
School Meals Supervisor:	Mrs H Keatley
Canteen Staff:	Mrs C Burke Mrs E Moore Mrs B Cairns
Senior Supervisory Assistant:	Mrs K Moore
Supervisory Assistants:	Mrs H McCallan Mrs F Hamilton Mrs B Hyndman Mr R Catney

<b>The School Day Sion Mills Nursery Unit</b>	
Morning Session	9.00a.m. - 11.30 a.m.
Afternoon Session	12.30p.m. - 3.00p.m.

<b>The School Day Sion Mills Primary School</b>	
Breakfast Club	8.15 a.m. - 8.45 a.m.
Exterior doors open	8.45 a.m.
School day begins	9.00 a.m.
Morning break	10.35 a.m. - 10.45 a.m.
Lunch	11.45a.m. - 12.30p.m. (P.1) 12.00 - 12.45p.m. (P2 & P3) 12.30p.m. - 1.15p.m.(P4 - P7)
School day ends P1 & P2	2.00 p.m.
School day ends P3 - P7	3.00 p.m. <b>Monday - Thursday</b>
School day ends P3 - P7	2.00p.m. <b>Friday only</b>

The four churches in Sion Mills



## CURRICULUM POLICY

In 2018 the whole school population embarked on a planned journey towards being recognised as a UNICEF Rights Respecting School. This journey requires us to raise our awareness and knowledge of the UNCRC (United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child). We realise that our ethos in the school is a firm belief in Article 28 of the UNCRC - the right of every child to an education. Therefore, we strive to provide a stimulating learning environment where all children can develop their self-confidence, skills and knowledge, with the ultimate aim of their full potential. Self-esteem and respect for all are at the core of all we do. We strive to develop positive attitudes and values at all times. Children are encouraged to develop intellectually, morally, physically, socially and spiritually throughout their seven/eight years at Sion Mills Primary School and Nursery Unit.



A full range of subjects are taught in every year group and all children are allowed to develop at their own pace. Class teachers use all available data to ensure children are reaching their potential. Provision in Sion Mills PS has an emphasis on understanding rather than simply covering content.

Each teacher takes responsibility for the children who have learning difficulties or disabilities in their class. The Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCo) oversees the placement of and provision for children on the Special Needs Register. The SENCo is responsible for many duties throughout the school year. With the beginning of the implementation of the SEND Act in September 2021, the vital duties of the SENCo have been recognised and an administration day has been allocated per week. This is reflected in the current staff complement.

The Educational Psychologist, Peripatetic Staff (Curricular and Behaviour) and other outside agencies work together with our staff to support all children with additional needs.

The school provides withdrawal to our Learning Support Teacher on two days per week. Class teachers support all children on Stage 1 of the Code of Practice.

At present we have 13 or 5% of children at Stage 5 on the Code of Practice with 58 or 24% of children at stages 1-4.

An educational psychologist makes regular visits to the school and is available to advise staff on any problems which arise.

### Extra Curricular Activities

The school offers a variety of extra-curricular activities over and above the curriculum as part of our Extended Schools Programme. Children from P1 - P7 can take part in a variety of in school and after school activities with qualified coaches. A Breakfast Club is available from 8.15 a.m., where children can purchase healthy food at a nominal cost. Through Extended Schools, our pupils can access Athletics, Accelerated Reading, Nesy, Paverpol and ICT projects.

- All Primary Six pupils will receive a block of 15 weeks swimming lessons in Riversdale Leisure Centre.

- The P4 - P7 children have the opportunity to join the school choir and participate in carol competitions and village community events or school productions.



- Links have been made with local community groups and residential homes to cultivate mutual respect between young and old.

- Through Shared Education children participate in short programmes of work with peers from Strabane Controlled PS. Pupil - pupil contact had been stood down for the past two years, so we are grateful that normal activities have resumed during the current year.

- Libraries N.I. provide a library van which visits the school every alternate Friday.

- ✚ There is the opportunity for stringed instrument lessons for P4 - P7.
- ✚ The IFA provide a coach whereby all children access Fundamental Ball skills training
- ✚ A Relax Kids practitioner facilitates Mindfulness programmes for all year groups during the year.
- ✚ Art Therapy and Counselling for Children are available through Extended Schools and Healthy Happy Minds programmes.
- ✚ From Primary 1 upwards, children have opportunities to be part of the Student Council, or Eco Team and P6/P7 children are UNICEF ambassadors for the school.

## Charging and Remissions Policies

The policy of the Board of Governors is to charge for visiting shows and outside visits' entrance fees and/or bus, and the cost of the P7 annual residential trip. Participation in these activities is on the basis of parental choice and a willingness to contribute towards the costs.

Parents will also be charged for:

- ✚ Music Tuition fees unless entitled to Free School Meals.
- ✚ Voluntary Contributions to sports coaching activities, school activities, transport, whether or not the trip takes place within or outside school hours and visiting entertainment opportunities to the school.
- ✚ Recovery of the cost of breakages and losses as a result of a pupil's behaviour.
- ✚ The Governors reserve the right to consider remission of charges in whole or in part, in cases of proven hardship.

## Anti-Bullying Policy

Following a review of the school's Anti-Bullying policy the following definition of bullying was adopted by the school community,

**"The repeated use of power by one or more persons intentionally to harm, hurt or adversely affect the rights or needs of another or others."**, Northern Ireland Anti-Bullying Forum (NIABF)

The school policy lists unacceptable behaviours that constitute bullying behaviours when they are recurrent/persistent, targeted with intent and/or where a power imbalance between pupils is evident. Our aim, in line with Article 19 of the UNCRC is to provide an environment where the child's right to feel safe is respected. We endeavour to encourage good behaviour and respect for others' and in particular 'prevent all forms of bullying'. We review our Pastoral Care and Behaviour policy annually and can issue this to parents on request or it can be accessed on the school website.



## Health Education

Sion Mills Primary School has a firm commitment to developing a positive attitude to health, fitness and well-being. There is a '**Healthy Breaks**' policy whereby children are encouraged to eat fruit, vegetables or sandwiches and/or drink milk or water.

Small cartons of milk may be purchased at a cost of 20p per day; this low-cost milk is subsidised by the EA.

For those children who bring their own lunch rather than purchase school meals, we also encourage healthy options and strongly discourage more than one item of high fat foods such as crisps/processed bars.

At appropriate times children are taught about the dangers of drugs, smoking and alcohol abuse.

In 2018, following a pilot it was decided to incorporate the 'Daily Mile' initiative as an everyday activity. During this activity, children *and their teaching staff* walk or run for 15 minutes. Staff have noted increased mobility and general fitness as well as higher concentration levels since this activity was introduced. The school is registered with the Europe-wide Daily Mile initiative and many children can now walk/run a mile inside 15 minutes.



## Positive Behaviour

We believe that praise should be used as a reward and that everyone in the school community has the right to be respected. **Every teacher has the right to teach and every child has the right to learn.** Positive behaviour will create an optimum learning environment.

Agreed Golden Behaviours (positive behaviours) are the moral values we want children to learn, understand and practice. Each class devises their own class contract annually, and every child will gain stamps on their stamp card for positive behaviour.

Mrs McNelis reinforces positive behaviour throughout the year by giving out stickers when 25, 50 & 75 stamps are reached. For 100 stamps a badge and a certificate is presented. Older children enjoy a trip to the office to choose their sticker, get their card signed by Mrs McNelis/Mrs Kingh and tell her their good news.

The School Charter says:

 Be gentle	We keep our hands and feet to ourselves.
 Be kind	We try to be nice to others.
 Be honest	We tell the truth.
 Work hard	We use our time well and help others.
 Look after property	We care for our own, our classmates and the school's property.
 Listen to people	We allow others time to speak.
 Play fair	We play for fun and enjoyment.

### **Show respect for everyone**

A Student of the Week is nominated from each class weekly, and certificates and badges are awarded. The Student of the Week is always told why they earned their award, and this is noted on their certificate.

Unfortunately, some pupils choose not to observe our golden rules. Our aim for them will be to show them that there are consequences for poor behaviour.

The consequences of poor behaviour will include withdrawal of privileges which may include a period of reflection at lunchtimes. Parents will be informed if there are serious issues. If persistent poor behaviour should continue it may well result in suspension or eventual expulsion. A copy of

the full Positive Behaviour policy is available from the office and accessible in the Parent Area of the website at [www.sionmillsps.com](http://www.sionmillsps.com)

### Safeguarding and Child Protection

All staff are fully committed to safeguarding and child protection and will raise children's awareness about how to keep themselves safe through many areas of the curriculum. The school has recently signed up to the



Safer Schools NI app, a one-stop area for access to safety information on all areas of abuse - online, neglect, sexual, emotional and exploitation; this will be rolled

out to parents in the very near future.

Designated Child Protection staff are required to attend refresher training bi-annually and all staff are updated at least bi-annually.

We have a policy of partnership between home and school but with child abuse or suspicion of child abuse our first and only responsibility is to the child.

The Designated Teacher for Safeguarding and Child Protection is Mrs Kingh and the Deputy Designated Teachers are Mrs McNelis, Mrs McAleer, Mrs Harkin and Mrs Hendron. These staff will adhere to the E.A. Western Region procedures, which are known and supported by all staff. The named teachers will liaise with Social Services and the P.S.N.I. if they receive any reports of child abuse or neglect or even suspect that a child is suffering child abuse or neglect.

Mrs Harkin is the designated teacher for the Nursery children.

<b>Safeguarding &amp; Child Protection Team</b>	
<b>Mrs Oonagh McNelis, Principal &amp; Deputy Designated Teacher</b>	<b>Mrs Louise Kingh, Vice-principal &amp; Designated Teacher</b>
<b>Mrs Grainne McAleer, Deputy Designated Teacher</b>	<b>Mrs Catherine Harkin, Deputy Designated Teacher</b>
<b>Mrs Mairead Hendron Deputy Designated Teacher</b>	
<b>Mr Peter McNulty, Chair of Board of Governors</b>	<b>Mrs Edel McMullen, Child Protection Governor</b>

## Complaints Procedure

Complaints should be dealt with in accordance with Article 33 of the Education Reform (N.I.) Order 1989 and regulations as subsequently made by the Department of Education. Any parent who has a complaint should write to Mrs McNelis in the first instance or ultimately to Mr McNulty, as Chairman of the Board of Governors. The full Complaints Procedure is available on the school website at: [www.sionmillsp.com](http://www.sionmillsp.com) or from the school office on request.

## Annual Attendance Rate 2021/22

Total days attended by all pupils P1 - P7 on roll as a percentage of total possible days of attendance in the 2021/2022 academic year was 89.7%. We are very conscious that the past two years have been abnormal due to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic. The staff work closely with the school's designated E.A. Welfare Officer and parents/carers to improve the attendance rate. Each child is required to submit an absence note to their teacher. The full Attendance Policy is available on the school website or can be obtained from the office.

## Homework

Homework, for the most part should be viewed as a natural extension of classwork as it helps to reinforce and consolidate. It will take a variety of forms and will often be uploaded onto the Seesaw app, in order to keep children and their families familiar with it and to cut down on excess paper usage. A full copy of the Homework Policy is available on the school website or can be provided on request. Since March 2020, pupils are regularly required to complete online homework. Please speak to your child's teacher if this is an issue so that suitable access arrangements can be discussed.

## School Meals

School meals are prepared and cooked at the school by Mrs Heather Keatley. The meals are of high quality and nutritionally well-balanced. The children have a choice of meal content each day. The menu, outlining the choices on a four weekly rotation, changes at times during the year. It is available on the school website or on request from the school office. Meals cost £2.60 per day (from 1<sup>st</sup> Sept. 2017). If you feel that you may be entitled to free school meals application is through an online process on the EA website ([www.eani.org.uk](http://www.eani.org.uk)). **This application should be made annually during the summer so that it is in place for 1<sup>st</sup> September. However, applications can be made throughout the year if circumstances change.**

## School Uniform

Nursery: Both boys and girls wear a school royal blue sweatshirt and a sky-blue polo shirt with navy tracksuit bottoms.

P1 - P7: Boys wear grey trousers, pale blue polo t-shirt and royal blue sweatshirt.

Girls wear grey skirts/pinafores/grey trousers, pale blue polo t-shirt and a royal blue sweatshirt.

PE Uniform: Pale blue polo shirt, dark grey, navy or black bottoms. Pupils wear school sweatshirt with the PE uniform. **No hoodies allowed.**

**All items of clothing should be clearly named.**

*A uniform grant is available from the EA (Education Authority). If you feel that you may be entitled, the application process is available on the EA website ([www.eani.org.uk](http://www.eani.org.uk)).*

**This application should also be made annually.**



**School sweatshirts are available from O'Neill's, Dublin Road Industrial Estate and Strabane GMG Logos, Orchard Road Industrial Estate, Strabane**

## Other Information

### Fundraising

We support a variety of charities each year. To keep this under control a charity is nominated per term. We also run events which raise money towards school funds.

### School Trips

Classes experience a variety of educational visits throughout the school year and in P7 the children are encouraged to participate in a residential trip. Due to rising costs this trip has been to Dublin in recent years. Residential trips have been on hold since 2020, but we hope to re-instate these.

### Shared Education

During the 2015-2016 year the school embarked on a Shared Education project with Strabane Primary School. It began with only P6 and P7 classes engaging in WAU and PDMU themes. By the end of our previous school year nearly all classes have experienced shared classes. It is the aim that every pupil will be engaged with Shared Education with their counterparts in Strabane P.S. As we return to normal procedures, post-pandemic, each alternate year group from P1 upwards will be engaging in a shared project with a similar class from Strabane Primary School.

This is a project funded by the Dept. of Education and is encouraged across Northern Ireland so that staff and pupils can enhance their learning with shared expertise and learning both cognitively and socially.

### Assemblies

We have not yet re-engaged with whole school assemblies, so all our normal celebratory activities are happening in each individual classroom - birthdays, Pupil of the Week, Hand-writer of the Month and themed activities.

Assemblies are held in afternoons when the need arises, for now.

At the final assembly of the Year there are a range of cups presented to P7 children for sport, music, art/craft, technology, science, together with the Pollock Cup for academic excellence. In addition, every class

(P1-P7) gives a citizenship award to the child who has contributed most to the class throughout the year. Team medals are also awarded at this time.

### Check list for September

The following forms will be distributed in a booklet form in late August, when you are invited to an induction meeting for Nursery or Primary 1

Please read, complete/sign and return the following forms to your child's class teacher. (1 per pupil)

- ✓ Data collection sheet.
- ✓ Child protection policy. (Please keep the pamphlet)
- ✓ Photograph permission.
- ✓ Internet use policy.
- ✓ Educational visit permission.
- ✓ Behaviour contract. (guardian and pupil to sign)