



## Report on IQM Inclusive School Award



**School Name:** Victoria College Preparatory School

**School Address:** 2A Cranmore Park  
Belfast, Northern Ireland  
BT9 6JA

**Head/Principal:** Ms Kirsty Hrabovsky

**IQM Lead:** Ms Maria Pearson

**Assessment Date:** 14<sup>th</sup> June 2022

**Assessor:** Kenny Frederick

### Evidence base:

- Principal
- The Vice Principal (at Stay and Play)
- Three Governors
- Foundation Stage/KS1 Leader/SENCO
- Four KS1 & KS and 2 SEN Support Classroom Assistants
- KS2 Leader and IQM Lead
- Four Prep Parent Representatives
- A group of students

### Other activities:

The assessor attended or participated in the following activities:

- Attended a Stay and Play session with the Vice Principal
- A Learning Walk with the Headteacher
- Assembly
- Choir (at end of day)



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### Overall Evaluation

Victoria College Belfast is a voluntary grammar school for girls founded in 1859 by Mrs Margaret Byers to provide an excellent education for women and is one of the longest established girls' schools in the UK. In 1987 Victoria College amalgamated with Richmond Lodge School, a neighbouring girl's grammar school with a noted emphasis on personal development and involvement in world citizenship. The College has built on the strengths of both schools and have a strong academic record underpinned by a supportive pastoral system. Currently the school is on two sites. Victoria and Prep are on one site and P 8 & 9 are based in another building. There are plans to bring together the two parts of the school onto one site.

Pupil intake is steady (approx. 150) annually and there is a growth in KS2 classes with a view to entry into VCB Senior School. There is no specific catchment area and pupils come from across Northern Ireland. Some family links with VCB old girls still exist but are not predominant in the intake.

Students come from a wide variety of backgrounds adding to the diversity of school life. The Boarding department is no longer up and running following the Covid pandemic.

My visit concentrated on the primary phase of the school.

Victoria Prep is a small school that is part of the Victoria College Secondary Grammar School. They are both situated on one site and work closely together. However, the Prep school has developed its own culture and ethos and is obviously a place where children and adults want to be. The school is led by an inspirational Principal who knows her staff, her pupils, and her parents well. She has the greatest respect for them all and in turn they are fully supportive of her leadership. Stakeholders trust her to make the right decisions because they know she puts the girls in her care at the forefront of every decision. She is well supported by her Senior Team and by Governors.

Although the school is a private school it is not well funded, and the school is unable to access some of the grants and funding for catch-up available to other primary schools. As a one-form entry school with small classes this lack of funding will continue to be a challenge. The Principal and her team are all teaching leaders. They know the challenges teachers face and they work with them to ensure pupils are well taught. All the staff met by the assessor felt they are very well supported.

Victoria Prep works hard to be an inclusive school. Although pupils can only be admitted if parents are able to pay the school fees, they welcome children from all backgrounds and abilities. Their greatest strength is their diversity and openness. Parents want their children to be part of a school that enables children to get to know each other and to work alongside each other. This, within a community that is segregated in so many ways, is a great achievement.

I am of the opinion that the school fully meets the standard required by the Inclusion Quality Mark's Inclusive School Award. There are only minor areas requiring



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development and the school is aware of these. I recommend that the school be awarded IQM's Inclusive School Award and be reassessed in 3 years' time.

**Assessor:** Kenny Frederick

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

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J. McCann".

.....

Joe McCann MBA NPQH

Director of Inclusion Quality Mark (UK) Ltd



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### Element 1 - The Inclusion Values of the School

The assessor met the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 Leader, who is also the SENCO. She has been a teacher in Victoria School for over thirty years so knows the school very well. She has completed her SENCO training and more recently a qualification around Dyslexia. Like all other post-holders, she also teaches for much of the day. She does get some free time to undertake the other elements of her role when the College provide supply/sub cover one day a week. Like all schools in Northern Ireland, they are working to move over to the new SEN Code of Practice. This has been delayed because of the current political situation which means the Assembly have not met and have been unable to officially launch the new code. However, Victoria College have taken the proactive decision to get it in place ahead of the official launch. This is a heavy workload and has involved a whole school audit to see what is currently in place and to provide training for staff at all levels.

The SENCO said that teachers now work as a team and the culture has changed so that everybody now accepts that they are all teachers of SEN. This has involved lots of work with staff – both teachers and support staff. Most teachers have an awareness of Quality First Teaching, but a training programme is looking at embedding this further. The new Education Plans (PLPS) look different from the IEPs, but they contain additional information that teachers can utilise. The school have been using a paper version, but these are now being moved to on-line versions. The SENCO attended preliminary training on this, and they have had helpful resources for training from the Education Authority SEN department.

Transition from one class to another is key to SEN support. This is carefully planned and the handover from one teacher to the next is key to ensuring children's needs are met. They have rewritten their Transition Policy for SEN pupils, and this includes a 'moving on' mornings for everybody. There is a transition plan for every child with SEN. Classroom Assistants join in with the transition arrangements and they plan what needs to be done to support individual children.

There are thirty children on the SEN Register and quite a few of these have significant needs. 20% (9) of these have Statements of Special Need. There is no additional funding for these pupils, but they are allocated a Classroom Assistant for part of the day. Therefore, most CAs are part-time. The school appoint their own Classroom Assistants. There are two pupils with statements that have split placements and are dual registered at Victoria Prep and a special school. Most of the Classroom Assistants are 1:1 and work with a named pupil. However, there are a few general assistants who support whole classes and run interventions in the afternoon. Staffing is the biggest challenge – trying to recruit suitable candidates and then organise them according to the hours they work. The SENCO is working to try to ensure 1:1 Assistants are not permanently attached to a child but are able to support groups of children. However, parents are not always happy with such arrangements.

The SENCO does the training for Classroom Assistants, and they access many on-line courses. She carried out an audit to ascertain what teachers are expecting Assistants to



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do in the classroom and if that is appropriate. She uses some of her SENCO time to be a rolling substitute teacher/assistant to allow teachers and assistants to meet together.

There is another SENCO in the senior school, and they meet at the end of year to pass on information on girls receiving SEN support so that transition can be smooth as possible. She provides brief summaries on each pupil so that they can be passed to class teachers. The SENCO gets support from an amazing Literacy Support Teacher she knows who she can bounce ideas off and share information and good practice. She finds this really helpful. Currently, there appears to be no official network of SENCOs to share their concerns and issues over introducing the new Code of Practice. This would appear to be an area for development. Training for SENCOs has been on-line which means they have little time to connect and chat informally. The SENCO is part of the Senior Leadership Team and works closely with other members of the team. This is an indication of the school's commitment to inclusion.

The assessor was also able to meet with four Classroom Assistants who have been working in the school for a number of years. Three of them are 1:1 Assistants and one is class based. They all had stories to tell about how they were recruited and about their working day. They all said their induction to the school was very good, and they feel their contribution is valued and they feel appreciated by pupils and staff. They said they feel teachers welcomes them and plan their time appropriately. They liaise with the teacher as much as they can, and teachers are always receptive of their ideas. They shared that they have had a lot of training particularly on safeguarding but also on different areas of special need. Courses have been delivered in school, on-line and through external courses. There has been a lot of training on autism and other conditions.

Pupil voice is important to the leadership of the school. There are regular pupil questionnaires and a School Council. There is a School Council Suggestion Box and Prefects can also bring any concerns/suggestions to the Key Stage Leader or their own class teacher. Philosophy lessons are part of the Key Stage 2 curriculum where discussion, debate and skills of independent inquiry are promoted. School Council Week is an annual event, and all pupils are asked to respond to a whole school Pupil Satisfaction Survey.

All of those spoken to were keen to talk about the way the school looks after their wellbeing and mental health. This included staff as well as pupils and it is also something that parents mentioned when met during the visit. There are regular parent, pupil, and staff surveys around attitudes to school and self. There are Suggestions and Worry Boxes in each classroom.

Pupil and Staff wellbeing is part of the Physical Education Action Plan. The School Nurse runs weekly awareness raising events such as non-smoking, cancer focus, neurodiversity, and physical activity. Furthermore, pupils take part in the Daily Mile and Forest Schools lessons and Medics in Primary Schools deliver workshops on how to stay safe and well. Access to a School Counsellor for pupils and Inspire Workplace CBT for staff is also promoted.



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There is a lot of thought given to transition processes both within the Prep School and in their transition to the senior school. Discussions with some of the girls met who were about to move up to senior school highlighted that they felt they had been really well prepared for that move. They do have to complete a number of tests which must be passed before they can transfer. As the senior school is a grammar school the entry criteria are tough. I asked what happened to those who are unable to pass the test and where they would go if they did not pass. The Principal told me that both parents and pupils would be well aware if it was likely they would not be successful, and these children would receive additional support throughout. In the event if they were not successful the school would help them to find a suitable placement where they would continue to thrive. The school have to manage parents' expectations as they may have to consider non-selective schools.

### Strengths

- Commitment to inclusion within the parameters of the school.
- Provision for SEN pupils are good.
- Training and development of Classroom Assistants is carefully planned and is effective.
- There has also been some training for teachers on how to make effective use of an additional adult in their classroom.

### Next Steps:

- There is no official network of SENCOs to share their concerns and issues over introducing the new Code of Practice. This seems an appropriate area for development.



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### Element 2 - Leadership and Management and Accountability

The assessment visit was organised by the Head of Prep because her IQM Lead had been unwell, and she did not want to overload her as she was recovering. The Head not only organised the visit, but she made sure the assessor was where she was supposed to be at different times of the day. She also took the assessor on an extensive tour of school. It was obvious that she clearly loves the school and is very proud of what they are doing together.

The tour enabled the assessor to visit classrooms and to see the school at work. We attended an assembly led by another member of staff and we talked to many members of staff as we walked around the school. There was a real warmth in terms of the communication between the Principal and staff at all levels. It was also clear that she knew all the children by name and had an easy relationship with them. This was confirmed in later discussions with some of the girls.

The school has developed a strong collaboration with the boys school across the road and she works closely with the Head of that school. They are also part of the South Belfast Cluster Groups who currently meet once a week via Zoom. She also works closely with the Head of the senior school.

Performance management of the Headteachers is done by an external provider on behalf of the Governors. The new Deputy Head is also a teacher in P6 and indeed all SLT are teaching for most of the week. The Headteacher teaches for three days a week and has two days to concentrate on her leadership duties. Next year she will job share with the DH in P6. There are four on the senior team including the HT, the DH, the Foundation Leader, and the Head of KS2 (IQM Lead.) She has been working on the Prep-School's School Development Plan with her team and with Governors.

The assessor had the pleasure of meeting three members of the Board of Governors of Victoria College Prep and Senior School. They were all either old girls or their daughters currently attend the school. One of those met was the Teacher Governor and was currently teaching at the school. Following the amalgamation of two schools in 1989 the Governing Bodies also merged, and they now have twenty-seven Governors. This can make running effective meetings difficult, but they have a committee structure that works well. There is no professional Clerk to Governors, but the Head's PA takes the minutes and is well versed in the regulations and legalities the Governing Board must adhere to.

There are plans for a new build (adaptations to the original building that is a listed building) which will bring the two school sites together. This will be cost effective in the long run as it is currently expensive in terms of services and curriculum development.

The Governors continued to meet throughout the Covid pandemic, but they met on-line via Zoom. Senior staff were usually in school and set up their own support systems. They provided support for staff as well as finding time to support each other. The Governors made sure they offered support to the two Headteachers and were very conscious of their wellbeing.





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This year has been difficult because the pandemic was not over and there were many absences due to Covid. During this time the College was in the middle of a SLT restructuring process and this was another difficulty to overcome. However, Governors work well together and have done a lot of training and development.

There is a Safeguarding Governor who meets with the Vice Principals who are DSLs. All Governors have had safeguarding training.

The Governors told me about the boarding part of the school that has recently closed due to the Covid pandemic. The boarding facility had allowed the school to include a number of multi-national pupils especially from China and Europe. The girls went home as the pandemic started and have not returned. This is a big change for the school and is one they are sad about.

The College and Prep are both have extremely wide catchment areas and are oversubscribed, and they receive lots of applications for entry at different times – not just the usual transfer points.

Governors know the school very well and many have been associated with it for many years. They are totally loyal to school, and they go to great lengths to support it. They are well informed and very confident in asking challenging questions when they need to. They are in school regularly for drop-in sessions and they are well known to staff who they have frequent discussions with.

The Governors are very proud of the diversity of the school population and about the college's ethos of inclusion. This is obviously something they value. The diversity is in terms of ethnicity and religions – they are integrated in every sense of the word. However, they are not officially designated as an integrated school.

The Prep school opened since 2015 and they are linked in many ways to the senior school. Indeed, they share the same site (Years 8 & 9 are on another site, just over the road) and they share some teaching staff, including Languages, Latin, Music, and PE specialists.

The pre-school is financed by parents at £5K a year and the school does not receive any Government funding. We discussed the grammar tests children need to pass and the assessor was told the school prepares the girls for two tests they need to move on to senior school. There is no test for pre-school. However, they do baseline tests with all new entrants so they can establish where the pupil is at and what gaps they need to fill. This is particularly important for girls who join at different points of the year or who have transferred from other schools. Parents know or are made aware if their child is unlikely to pass the grammar school test.

Two new Ukrainian girls joined the school the previous week. Thankfully, one of the Classroom Assistants has taught EAL before in Russia and one of the cleaners is from Slovakia and she has helped out with translations and communication issues.



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Safeguarding children is the priority of the school and college. All staff complete safeguarding training at the beginning of each academic year. There are designated and deputy designated teachers. They are trained well and run refresher training for staff. There are photographs of these teachers around the school and in each classroom. Information events and workshops take place annually for pupils, staff, and parents such as e-safety, anti-bullying and domestic abuse awareness.

Accountability processes are largely supportive and are designed to support teacher professional development. There are good practice visits, along with a trusted colleague network lesson peer observations throughout the year. In addition, there are key stage book monitoring exercises completed twice per year. Pupils with Special Educational Needs have Individual Education Plans in Place (including Pupil Targets), and these are reviewed with Classroom Assistants and parents on a termly basis. Data is collected regularly and is analysed to identify pupils who may be struggling.

All staff are provided with regular opportunities for professional development and training. However, following the pandemic most of these have been provided digitally and uptake has been good. Staff are supported and encouraged to attend and once complete, all staff complete personal evaluations of the learning outcomes and what they mean for themselves, their class, SLT and whole school. Hopefully, the school will be able to ensure staff are able to attend in person courses as well as on-line ones. This way they get the opportunity to meet others and to network with other professionals.

As the school is independent, they receive no funding from Government. A recent example of this would be the Engage Programme where local maintained primary schools received additional funding in their budgets to support pupils returning to the classroom after the disrupted learning during 2020/2021. The Prep School did not qualify for this funding initiative. The school does not therefore, receive Pupil Premium Funding. Therefore, they fill the gaps in provision through other pots of funding often raised by Friends of Prep (the Prep School's PTA), wellbeing nursery funding etc.

### Strengths

- The leadership provided by the Headteacher is determined and is informed by a commitment to developing and inclusive culture and ethos.
- The Governors are in full support of this policy and practice.
- Pupil voice processes are strong, and pupils are able to participate in at least one pupil voice/leadership group.
- Wellbeing of staff and pupils is carefully considered, and action is taken to ensure measures are in place
- Accountability processes are robust but are not overwhelming for staff.

### Next Steps:

- More in-person CPD to allow staff to network and exchange ideas with colleagues from other schools.



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### Element 3 - Curriculum –Structure, Pupil Engagement and Adaption

The assessor met with the IQM Lead who also leads KS2. She has been working at the school for nine years and is part of the SLT. She said that new staff (teaching and support staff) are always carefully inducted. The SLT work closely together as they are all teaching (including the Head) and are very conscious of the need to support each other's wellbeing. They worked on a rota system during the pandemic, but the IQM Lead worked at home for most of the time because she has asthma. Over 80% of the children came into school during the last lock down as most were the children of key workers.

We talked about teaching and learning across the school. We agreed that all teachers are different and teach in different ways. Although they have to teach the agreed curriculum, they can be creative in their approach. There are set lesson plans, and this includes three or four layers of planning. Every teacher produces a curriculum map for each subject supported by the Curriculum Coordinator. They have medium and long-term plans. They come together in Key Stages to ensure that the curriculum is progressive and remains fit for purpose. However, teachers produce their own lesson plans, and they are encouraged to take risks and try new approaches if these are seen to benefit the children. Teachers are also encouraged to suggest additions (different texts or case studies) to the curriculum.

Reading has been a focus on the School Development Plan and new resources, systems and programmes have been introduced throughout the past 3-4 academic years to foster a love of literature, develop vocabulary, comprehension, inference, and deduction skills. The school subscribes to Bug Club, Reading Eggs as well as investment in Reciprocal Reading training, resources, and books. World Book Day is celebrated every year.

Knowledge organisers, good practice lesson visits, book monitoring, class target setting and digital support and resources including Seesaw and Microsoft Teams are used to continually monitor and implement new and innovative ways for pupils to develop and build upon their knowledge, skills and understanding.

Victoria College achieved the British Council's International School Award in 2015 in recognition of its work to bring the world into the classroom. This included links with partner schools and fostering an international dimension in the curriculum. Curriculum design across the school continues to reflect this good practice and the International Action Group plan and deliver events throughout each academic year so that young people gain the cultural understanding and skills they need to live and work as global citizens. This is an important part of the diversity and inclusion agenda.

There are a wide range of opportunities for learning beyond the classroom. Some of these are included in the taught curriculum and some are part of the extra-curricular curriculum delivered through afterschool clubs and activities. The children met with gave many examples of the extra-curricular activities they are involved in. They said many of these stopped during the pandemic and were sadly missed by pupils. However, they now take up the many opportunities to participate in the various clubs and activities on offer.



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There are many examples of curriculum topics that involve external agencies delivering different aspects of the curriculum. Examples such as Medics in Primary Schools where P6 pupils participate in a joint Queen's University/Sentinus activity which brings student doctors into the classroom over a period of 8-10 weeks to teach science and anatomy. Another is Healthy Habits and involves in an activity where P7 girls spend the Summer Term developing an awareness of their physical, social, and emotional health as well as addressing the areas of adolescence and puberty. They also participate in the Northern Ireland Department for Infrastructure Road Safety and Cycling Proficiency Schemes.

General mental health and wellbeing awareness is promoted throughout the whole school in response to the post pandemic education restart. Specific mental health needs (individual) are noticed by each class teacher and relevant support is put in place. Both staff and pupils spoke clearly and positively about what has been done and what continues to support their wellbeing.

### Strengths

- Teaching and learning are well organised and delivered. Teachers teach well.
- The International Curriculum helps to ensure diversity across the curriculum.
- Extra-curricular activities contribute to the whole curriculum.
- The curriculum is always under review.

### Next Steps:

- The school has identified the need to continue to find creative ways to overcome the lack of access to funding projects including Engage. This potentially puts pupils at a disadvantage and may limit opportunities. Funding is a big issue for this small private school that gets no support from the government.



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### Element 4 - Learner Progress and the Impact on Learning

“Victoria College Preparatory School aims to provide a balanced curriculum which promotes the full development of each pupil, preparing her for the opportunities, responsibilities, and experiences of adult life. Effective teaching and learning are of paramount importance in the successful delivery of these aims. Teaching and learning are at the heart of the work of the College; the quality of teaching has a strong bearing on the effectiveness of learning. Victoria College aims to plan and deliver a curriculum and lessons that:

- Ensures high expectations and raised pupil performance.
- Promote effective learning for both pupils and staff.
- Develop good relationships, high motivation, and responsive pupils.
- Promote good classroom practice which is also shared amongst staff.
- Develop inquiring minds and responsible, independent learning.
- Promote self-confidence and a sense of achievement.
- Ensure that pupils understand what is expected of them.
- Provide opportunities for the development of key and transferable skills.

This statement clearly outlines the curriculum intent and states how it will be monitored and evaluated.

Lessons are varied to provide challenge to individuals and groups as well as the whole class. All weekly planners include differentiation details for pupils in top, middle and lower thirds of the class as well as individual learning intentions for pupils with Special Educational Needs. Extension activities are also planned and delivered. The mantra is that every teacher is a teacher of SEN is widely accepted and acknowledged.

Technology is used effectively to support the learning in the lesson. All classes (pre-school – P7) were provided with LED touchscreen boards funded by Friends of Prep. These are used effectively to enhance the interactive nature of all lessons. Pupils also have access to a class set of iPads, individual headphones, Wi-Fi, and Seesaw.

The assessor met with four Classroom Assistants to find out how they are able to work alongside and in partnership with teachers and how the support individual pupils. They said they are well trained and can offer suggestions and ideas to teachers on how they might best support SEN pupils in their classes. Most said that teachers do include them in their planning so they know exactly what they will be doing in each lesson. This is easier in the Prep School as there is only one teacher (and some specialist teachers) to liaise with.

The Classroom Assistants are not involved in staff meetings but do meet together on ‘exceptional days.’ They do meet and chat with each other throughout the day during breaks and after school. Many of them deliver after-school clubs. They shared that the SLT are fantastic and are very approachable and are always willing to listen. They said everybody has the occasional ‘wobble’ and SLT are always happy to listen. The School Nurse is always available if they need to talk to somebody urgently but there is also



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counselling available from an outside provider. There are a lot of posters offering this service around the school. They acknowledged that pupils do get anxious over the Grammar School tests and there is a sort of collective anxiety. The school response is to help develop their emotional resilience and there are many wellbeing strategies employed.

The assessor was told that the staff who work in the school are very attentive to the pupils and each other. They notice if someone is looking down or depressed or anxious and they speak to them and ask them if they need help or want to talk. They said there is a lot of empathy within the school.

The Classroom Assistants said they have self-appraisal three times a year with the Principal or SENCO or Early Years Lead. They value this opportunity to have a one-to-one discussion with their leaders. While all the assistants told me they loved working in the school one said the school was family friendly and they never had 'Sunday scaries!'

A variety of teaching and learning approaches are promoted and all staff are provided with regular opportunities to attend CPD training and courses. Staff are supported and encouraged to attend and once complete, all staff complete personal evaluations of the learning outcomes and what they mean for themselves, their class, SLT and whole school. Relevant outcomes are shared with pupils/ parents and implemented as quickly as possible.

The school provides adequate funding and resources to support learning. Each class purchase their own resources, but some items are shared throughout the school. There is a central resource hub in the school hall and staff work together to ensure that class teachers have everything they need to support learning. There are learning walls and displays on show as well as a bank of documentation and resources to support learners who have a diagnosis of Dyslexia, Autistic Spectrum Disorder, English as an Additional Language, and other Special Educational Needs. Although space is at a premium, there are several areas designated for group work including a learning support room and a wellbeing/quiet/sensory room.

Inclusion and celebration of difference is a high priority for the Prep school. Children of all abilities and disabilities are welcomed and every effort is made to meet their particular needs. The SENCO works very closely with all class teachers and assistants to ensure that Individual Education Plans are up to date, relevant, implemented, reviewed, and shared with pupils and parents. Step-Up Kids groups are in place to support underachieving pupils in each class.

Teachers meet weekly to discuss and reflect on their practice, to communicate with each other, to share successful pedagogies, to raise concerns, and to provide support. The SLT meets on a fortnightly basis. PRSD and trusted colleague networks provide a safe forum to give and take constructive criticism and discuss methodologies within the classroom setting. Teachers in the school are generally reflective in their practice. They are always striving to be even better.

### Strengths



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- Inclusion and diversity are promoted and valued throughout the school.
- The effective use of Classroom Assistants to support individual children and groups of children.
- Partnership between teachers and assistants is very good and they are included in lesson plans.
- Classroom Assistants are well trained and developed.
- Teachers are keen to develop their skills and work together to share their practice.

### Next Steps:

The school have identified three areas for development this year.

- To improve pupil PC/laptop skills (Staff self-review 2020 indicates this is an area for improvement.)
- To streamline the teaching of guided reading across school (Staff self-review 2020 indicates this is an area for support.)
- To further embed Reciprocal Reading practice across all Key Stages.



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### Element 5 - Assessment

The school knows its pupils well and they use a variety of informal and formal assessments to ensure effective teaching and learning. Teachers use prior attainment data to identify gaps in learning in order to plan effective learning. They put their knowledge of the individual girls together with the assessment data to identify any gaps in their knowledge or understanding and in their expected progress.

Pupils are tracked carefully throughout their school experience. They use both formative/diagnostic assessments including pupil self-assessment, verbal feedback, and homework. Teachers can then make informed decisions about the next steps in learning and take appropriate action to ensure that the pupils are able to take those steps with confidence.

Summative assessments are used to record the overall achievements of pupils in a systematic way and at a particular time of the year e.g., reporting to parents in February and June. Also used is evaluative assessment that encourages reflective learning, effective curriculum planning, and appropriate resources based on information gained about pupils' learning. Assessment is integral to planning, teaching, and learning.

Pupils are actively involved in their own learning through shared learning goals and strategies, recognising the knowledge and skills required and the standards expected. Overarching goals are set termly and recorded in the pupil's homework diaries for literacy and numeracy. The girls are involved in setting their own targets and recognising the steps necessary for their attainment. Parents are also actively involved in their daughter's learning through termly parent consultation meetings, twice yearly reports, and informal feedback.

The Assessment Coordinator has overall responsibility for the management of assessment and assessment data, reporting directly to the Head of Preparatory School and Senior Leadership Team.

Class teachers are actively involved in assessing and reviewing pupils' progress through a range of well-planned formative and summative assessments and in agreeing appropriate intervention strategies to address any underachievement.

Pupils' understanding is checked throughout the lesson and any misconceptions are accurately addressed. Assessment of and for learning is completed on an ongoing basis each day. Teachers and Classroom Assistants continually differentiate their level of questioning to check the level of understanding and provide opportunities to extend and challenge learning further. Every piece of class and homework is marked, and individual, written feedback is provided including 2 stars and 1 wish (2 successes and 1 area for improvement) Pupils also complete self-assessment at the end of each lesson in the form of "traffic lights." Whilst this is very thorough it seems a heavy workload for teachers. This might be an area for development.

### Strengths





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- Teachers know their pupils well and they use their personal knowledge together with assessment data to plan appropriate learning strategies for pupils.
- Children are generally well motivated and keen to do well and are keen to get feedback from teachers on every piece of work. Currently, this is provided.

### Next Steps:

- It might be an idea to review of the assessment and marking policy. Teachers are expected to formally assess pupils at many points throughout the year and every piece of work is currently marked in some detail. This may not be sustainable and may not be necessary to maintain the high achievement and attainment



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### Element 6 - Behaviour, Attitudes to Learning and Personal Development

The Behaviour for Learning Policy is designed to create an environment where quality teaching and learning can take place and where children can enhance their self-esteem and develop self-discipline. The promotion of positive behaviour with the emphasis on praise and encouragement is at the heart of the ethos in Victoria Prep.

There are strong links between the home and school community where positive behaviour is promoted and each person is valued so that they can achieve their maximum potential. Positive behaviour is promoted, celebrated, and rewarded. All staff work together to deliver the joint vision and clear agreed objectives.

The assessor was able to meet with some of the pupils during the visit. They were very happy to share all about their life at school. It was obvious that they were very happy at school and enjoyed their learning.

The girls said that behaviour is not an issue in the school as everybody gets on well and rarely misbehave. They are never disturbed by others in lessons, and they said they don't have any distractions.

We spoke about opportunities to have their voices heard and they told me that there are over ten different action groups. These include: The Welcome Team, the Eco Team, the School Council – they have to write a speech and the class have to vote for them. The Fair-Trade Group, the Community Action Group, the International Action Group, the School Nutrition Action Group, the IT Group

The School Council meet twice every month and is chaired by a teacher. They take other pupils' opinions - usually from the Suggestion Box in each classroom or occasionally in-person.

The Welcome Team meet and greet new pupils and support them. Currently, they are curious who (which member of staff) will lead the Welcome Team in September. The current teacher is leaving.

The girls shared the fact that they collect food for the community, including hampers for Fair Trade Week. They also make up Shoe Boxes at Christmas for children who are unlikely to get a present. Others (the ECO Team) do litter picks around school grounds and support the schools' efforts at recycling.

When asked to describe the best things about school the girls came up with a long list. They said the teachers are nice and they learn a lot every day. They said they lots of different sports during PE and after school. They mentioned they do a Big Write every week which is something they enjoy.

They mentioned the school facilities and large playgrounds as being a very positive aspect. They said the PE department organise lots of different teams and girls can be on any of them. They play against other schools and there are lots of competitions.



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The girls spoke about the many after school clubs including orchestra and different sports, and choir to name but a few. They said that if teachers run the clubs, they are provided free but if external agencies or coaches are involved, then they have to pay to participate.

The girls said the school prepare them well for transfer to senior school. Most said they all wanted to go onto the senior school. However, one girl was aiming to go to another school where her brothers go. She has just done the test to get in. They were all able to tell me where they wanted to go on to (university) and all were highly ambitious. They have careers lessons to help them decide what they wanted to do in the future careers.

When asked what it was like to be in a school with no boys the girls told me it's better to have no boys because they said boys misbehave and can be very annoying. They also told me that research says girls do better in a girl's school.

The girls said they had good relationships with their teachers, and they help them talk through any difficulties they might be having with their friendships. They also help them to manage their own emotions. The girls said there are few if any instances of bullying but sometimes girls might feel left out of their friendship groups.

The inclusive environment of the school promotes attitudes of understanding and acceptance of individual differences where learners and staff can thrive. The girls appreciate the multi-cultural, multi-lingual, and multi-religious diversity of the school. They are very proud of the mix of girls and families. They enjoy the curriculum that covers a whole range of subjects and topics that are not part of the traditional subject curriculum. PHSE is carefully planned to prepare the girls to become independent and to develop strong characters and self-esteem.

### Strengths

- The girls are obviously happy in their school. They make excellent progress and develop as resilient young women.
- Behaviour across the Prep School is exemplary – the pupils take school very seriously and are very much in control of their own behaviour and attitudes.
- The school goes to great lengths to ensure that every girl is included and that they have a good understanding of the world around them.
- Differences are celebrated and diversity is central to the school culture.

### Next Steps:

- The school have identified a number of steps they will take to review the Behaviour Policy in their School Development Plan. The girls attitudes to learning and to school are excellent.



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### Element 7 - Parents, Carers, Guardians

The assessor met with three parents during the visit. They had children in different year groups, and one had previously attended the school as a pupil.

There is a supportive WhatsApp group for each class which helps disseminate information about what is happening in that class. They organise combined presents for teachers and Classroom Assistants. The WhatsApp groups are run by Parent Reps – usually someone who volunteers to liaise with the school and parents. The Parent Reps meet with the Head every term, and all are clear that concerns are school specific rather than child specific.

The assessor asked parents why they had chosen Victoria Prep as their school of choice. A variety of reasons were given and they like the fact that the school is a single sex school as the girls tend to be more confident. Others liked the fact that the school is non-denominational and has a diverse population. One of the parents had attended the school as a pupil, as had her mother, the family had been living in England and her daughters needs had not been identified or met. She has autism. However, Victoria Prep noticed straight away and have given her the support she needs. This has transformed her life and her school experience.

Another parent, who was not from Belfast, did not want her daughter growing up in an environment where it was all about religion. As a Catholic she was able to make her Holy Communion with a local group. This was fully supported by the school.

One parent said that her daughter was attending another private mixed grammar school. However, the parent said she was overlooked at the school. During lockdown the family had to do extra shielding and for six weeks they really struggled without support from that school. The parents noticed her daughter had some signs of possible ADHD, but the previous school had not noticed and did not seem to know about masking in girls. She went to see every private school in Belfast and realised this school was different. It was warm and welcoming, and she spoke to the Head who was kind and lovely. Her daughter was enrolled soon after that visit.

Another parent said that when she and her daughter visited the school, they were greeted by the Headteacher who knew her by name. The parent described herself as a humanist and she loves the fact that difference is celebrated at Victoria Prep. She said her daughter is being prepared for transfer (she has autism and anxiety) and they support her emotionally and academically. She said they do practice tests every Friday and girls are used to it. It's not a big deal for them and they don't feel pressured. The assessor was told the majority of parents pay for private tutoring for their daughters in the lead up to transfer exams – although they agree they are probably not required.

The Headteacher holds regular open sessions on Friday that parents can drop into. Plus, parents are regularly informed of where their child is in terms of the class average. The assessor is not sure this practice is good for the girl's wellbeing and might be an area for review and development.



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The parents told the assessor that Victoria girls are 'all-rounders' and that hard work is part of the school culture. Their commitment to supporting girls with SEN has been amazing and they have provided effective support. They would like to see the peer mentoring scheme revived – it was stopped during Covid.

There are parent-teacher consultation meetings three times a year and there are two formal written reports. Communication between home and school is excellent and can be either formal or informal.

### **Strengths**

- The parents feel they are working in partnership with the school. They feel valued, appreciated, and involved in their daughter's education.
- Parents said they are well informed about all that happens in the school, communication is open, and they are always listened to.
- Parents trust the school.

### **Next Steps:**

- Parents are regularly informed of where their child is in terms of the class average. The assessor would urge the school to review this and ask if it is necessary and if the practice puts girls under even more pressure.



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### Element 8 - Links with Local, Wider and Global Community

Links with the wider community have suffered during the last two years of the Covid pandemic. This has been the case in all schools. However, Victoria Preparatory School is also involved with the Northern Ireland Shared Education project. They work in partnership to provide opportunities for pupils, staff, and the community to engage in collaborative learning experiences. For pupils this means participating in shared classes which are jointly planned, delivered, and evaluated by teachers from across the partner schools. For parents it means having the chance to take part in shared events within partner schools and for the wider community it offers an opportunity for groups and individuals to engage with local schools in a very different way to that previously experienced. The link with the nearby boys school is well developed.

The school is part of the South Belfast Cluster Group that now meet once a week via Zoom. The Headteacher finds this very supportive. The school has close curriculum links with a range of external organisations such as Forest Schools and CREST Award. They are also very proud to be one of the first primary schools to deliver the Princes Trust "Achieve" accreditation.

The local community is widely used to access enrichment activities. Outdoor learning is increasingly fostered and promoted. Examples of locations include the Senior School gardens, pond area, sports facilities, canteen, and art department as well as Drumglass Park and various areas of interest in the local vicinity (Lisburn Road, post office, fire station, library etc). Each class also arranges excursions throughout the year to enrich their cross curricular topic-based work (W5, Planetarium, Ulster Folk Museum, Castle Ward, Titanic Centre, Ulster Museum etc).

The school continues to offer a varied cross-curricular programme which provides and enhances learning opportunities such as Young Enterprise, Love for Life, Medics in Primary Schools, Philosophy for Children and HYP Psychology.

They also provide opportunities for the pupils to be introduced to a wide range of sports and physical activities such as; hockey and netball, Irish dancing (delivered by a Prep parent), multisport (Galaxy Coaching), football (IFA), cricket (Prep parent), camogie and Gaelic football (Senior School teacher) cross country, athletics, and yoga (various providers.) The girls mentioned their participation in many of these activities.

Partnership between other educational establishments includes close liaison with Mitchell House Special School (Belfast) Steiner School (Holywood) Inch Marlo Preparatory School (Belfast) and Shared Education.

The inclusion philosophy of the school is promoted and shared amongst the local, wider, and global community. One example of how this is achieved includes the fact that they welcome students from a range of universities to complete placements and work experience in Prep.

Local and global community resources are accessed by staff to support the curriculum. This includes visits to the play resource centre for materials and timetabled use of Prep



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and Senior School facilities including outdoor space, sports complex, ICT suites, library, and art department. The school also makes good use of Better Belfast Leisure Centre for swimming lessons and Cranmore Park for Foundation Stage Outdoor Learning lessons.

The school achieved the International School Award, and they make effective use of international links and opportunities to promote global awareness. The International Action Group, Rights Respecting and Community Action Groups are led to establish international links and opportunities to promote global awareness. The selection process for these groups is fair and pupil led. All pupils will have had an opportunity to be part of all groups by the time they reach their final year in Prep.

### Strengths

- The school makes good use of local resources to enhance the curriculum and experience for their pupils.
- The school reaches out to collaborate with a range of external agencies and providers. This is increasing once again after community networks suffered during the Covid pandemic.

### Next Steps:

The school have identified two targets for improvement.

- To use social media to increase Prep's presence within the community.
- To start an Intergenerational Care Programme with a local care home so pupils across school can participate and a different class can visit each month.