

Education and Training Inspectorate

PRIMARY INSPECTION



St Colmcille's Primary School, Ballymena, County Antrim

Maintained, co-educational DE Ref No (303-6666)

Report of a Sustaining Improvement Inspection (Involving Action Short of Strike) in June 2019



The Education and Training Inspectorate
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Sustaining Improvement Inspection of St Colmcille's Primary School, Ballymena, County Antrim (303-6666)

Introduction

The previous inspection in January 2013 evaluated the overall effectiveness of St Colmcille's Primary School as very good¹. The school took part in the pilot of the sustaining improvement inspection (SII) in May 2016. There is a longstanding shared education partnership, involving all classes, with a local controlled school; this includes a joint School Council. The school has achieved its fourth Eco Green Flag. A sustaining improvement inspection (SII) was conducted on 10 and 11 June 2019.

Four of the teaching unions which make up the Northern Ireland Teachers' Council (NITC) have declared industrial action primarily in relation to a pay dispute. This includes non-co-operation with the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI). Prior to the inspection, the school informed the ETI that most of the teachers would not be co-operating with the inspectors. The senior leadership and a middle leader co-operated with the inspection team in relation to their leadership and safeguarding responsibilities. The ETI has a statutory duty to monitor, inspect and report on the quality of education under Article 102 of the Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 1986. Therefore, the inspection proceeded and the following evaluations are based on the evidence as made available at the time of the inspection.

Focus of the inspection

The inspection focused on evaluating the extent to which the school is capable of demonstrating its capacity to effect improvement through self-evaluation and effective school development planning. The school also provided evidence of provision for safeguarding as part of the inspection.

The line of inquiry during the SII was:

- to continue to raise the children's outcomes in mathematics by developing the key principles of language and communication, mathematical thinking, conceptual understanding and problem-solving.

Key findings

- The strategic leadership of the school has as its central tenet a child-centred focus for improvement. The comprehensive development planning process is underpinned by consultation with staff, children, parents and governors; and, the associated action plans are appropriately evaluative. The senior and middle leaders evaluate robustly the school's internal data to track the children's development and acquisition of mathematical language, conceptual understanding and problem-solving skills. Improvement work undertaken since the last inspection, including creating a growth mind-set in the children and staff, has been effective in developing further the mathematics provision for the children and raising the outcomes they attain. Almost all children achieve as expected; underachievement is being reduced systematically.

¹ From September 2015, the overall effectiveness of a school evaluated previously as outstanding or very good has been reported as a school demonstrating a high level of capacity for sustained improvement.

- In discussion with a group of year 4 children, they talked confidently and enthusiastically about their knowledge and understanding of key mathematical concepts, use of precise terminology and application of problem-strategies. Throughout the discussion, the children listened effectively to their peers with consideration and respect and built on their ideas. The children articulated how they apply their mathematical learning to real-life situations.
- The inspectors met with a group of year 6 children who spoke positively about their learning experiences across the curriculum. The children appreciate the range of after-school activities offered in the school, including sports, dance and cookery. They have a thorough understanding of the election process for the School- and Eco-Councils and explained their role in fundraising activities. The display of the children's work, in the corridors, represents the breadth of their learning experiences which reflected what the children told the inspectors.

The ETI was unable to evaluate fully:

- the line of inquiry; and
- the quality of learning and teaching within the classrooms.

Safeguarding

During the inspection, the school provided evidence that the arrangements for safeguarding children reflect broadly the guidance from the Department of Education (DE). The inspectors met with a group of year 6 children who reported that they feel safe in school and know what to do if they have any concerns about their safety or well-being; they have a good understanding of how to stay safe online. However, owing to the action short of strike, the ETI was unable to evaluate fully the outworking of the arrangements for safeguarding in the school.

Conclusion

Owing to the impact of the action short of strike being taken by the staff, the ETI is unable to assure parents/carers, the wider school community and stakeholders of the quality of education being provided for the children. This will be reflected in future inspection activity.

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