

PRIMARY INSPECTION



Education and Training
Inspectorate

Avoniel Primary School and
Nursery Unit, Belfast

Report of an Inspection
in March 2011



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In this report, proportions may be described as percentages, common fractions and in more general quantitative terms. Where more general terms are used, they should be interpreted as follows:

Almost/nearly all	-	more than 90%
Most	-	75%-90%
A majority	-	50%-74%
A significant minority	-	30%-49%
A minority	-	10%-29%
Very few/a small number	-	less than 10%

In assessing the various features of the provision, Inspectors relate their evaluations to six descriptors as set out below:

DESCRIPTOR
Outstanding
Very Good
Good
Satisfactory
Inadequate
Unsatisfactory

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 SCHOOL CONTEXT

Avoniel Primary School is situated on the Avoniel Road in East Belfast. The school is set in extensive grounds and includes a self-contained double nursery unit. The enrolment of the school has remained steady over the last three years and currently stands at 152 children with a further 52 children in the nursery unit. Approximately 20% (31) children within the primary school are new-comer children who speak English as an additional language. At the time of the inspection 55% of the children within the school were entitled to free school meals (FSM). The school has identified 46% of the children as requiring additional support with aspects of their learning. Over the past four years there have been 15 children who were suspended from school for short periods.

1.2 FOCUS

The inspection focused on:

- the children's achievements and standards in literacy and numeracy;
- the quality of provision for learning; and
- the quality of leadership and management.

In addition, the use of information and communication technology (ICT) to support learning, and the school's arrangements for pastoral care, including child protection, were evaluated.

1.3 THE VIEWS OF THE PARENTS, TEACHERS, GOVERNORS, SUPPORT STAFF AND CHILDREN

The arrangements for the inspection included the opportunity for the parents and the teaching and support staff to complete confidential questionnaires prior to the inspection, as well as meetings with representatives from the Board of Governors (governors) and a group of children from year 6.

One hundred and sixteen questionnaires were issued to the parents within the primary school. Approximately 27% of the parental questionnaires were returned to the Inspection Services Branch (ISB): six contained additional written comments. The responses from the parental questionnaires indicate that most of the parents are very supportive of the life and work of the school. In particular, the parents acknowledge the care and support given by the staff to both the children and the parents.

Fifty-two questionnaires were issued to the parents within the nursery unit. Approximately 33% of these were returned to ISB: six contained additional written comments. The responses from the parents indicate a strong support for the work of the nursery unit and they acknowledge the progress made by their children since they began attending.

Eight teachers and three support staff completed the confidential online questionnaire, with four staff including additional written comments. All of the responses were positive about all aspects of the work of the school. The responses from the staff indicate that they enjoy working in the school and value the support of their colleagues.

The governors spoke of their appreciation of the work of the Principal and all of the staff and their commitment to the children. They reported that they were kept well-informed by the Principal and had a good understanding of the priorities outlined in the school development plan (SDP).

The children in year 6 spoke enthusiastically about their enjoyment of school life. In particular, they valued the care and encouragement provided by the teachers and support staff, and their participation in a very good range of extra-curricular activities. They reported that they feel safe, and know whom to turn to in the event of a concern.

An analysis of the questionnaires and the written comments made by the parents and the staff were shared with the Principal and the governors.

1.4 PASTORAL CARE

The quality of the arrangements for pastoral care in the school is good. The school provides a bright and stimulating learning environment, with good use being made of the corridors and classrooms to celebrate the children's work and achievements. The strengths of the pastoral provision include the behaviour of most of the children and the ability of these children to work collaboratively with their peers, and the effective links made with external agencies to support the emotional health and well-being of the children.

The school demonstrates a strong commitment to inclusion and integration through the supplementary support provided for the newcomer children. The children have the opportunity to express their views on pastoral issues through the school council. The school has recently revised the pastoral care policies; there is now a need to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness and implementation of these policies to ensure consistency of approach.

The quality of the arrangements for pastoral care in the nursery unit is very good. The strengths of the pastoral care provision include the care given to the children by the staff and the children's very good behaviour.

1.5 CHILD PROTECTION

The school has satisfactory arrangements in place for safeguarding children. These arrangements broadly reflect the guidance issued by the Department of Education (DE). There is a need to develop procedures for the safe storage and administration of prescription medicines.

The nursery unit has very good comprehensive arrangements in place for safeguarding children. These arrangements reflect the guidance issued by the DE.

1.6 HEALTHY EATING AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

The school gives very good attention to promoting healthy eating and physical activity through, for example, the healthy break initiative, the involvement of parents in health-related programmes, and the provision of a wide range of extra-curricular physical activities which encourage the children to adopt healthy lifestyles.

The nursery unit also gives very good attention to promoting healthy eating through for example, the fruit break, attention to dental health and the wider links to the curriculum. The children also have very good opportunities to participate in a range of energetic physical activities.

1.7 LINKS WITH PARENTS AND THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

The school has developed very good links with the parents and the local community. Communication with parents is maintained through the regular newsletter, an induction meeting for the parents of children entering the school, and annual progress reports. A school website has recently been created to provide useful information to parents on the life of the school.

The school offers a good range of courses to parents, including literacy, numeracy, ICT and cookery through the link with Belfast Metropolitan College, and a short revised curriculum course to help parents in supporting their children's learning. The provision of a room for parents to meet together encourages parents to become involved in the daily life of the school. The school engaged effectively with parents during the recent revision of the Promoting Positive Behaviour policy. Links have been established with the wider cross-community including a very good cross-community link with a neighbouring primary school and workshops in music and drama.

The staff in the nursery unit has developed some useful links with the parents, through for example, the nursery prospectus and the regular newsletters. This should be developed further to encourage the parents to become involved in the work of the nursery and to engage them more in their own child's learning

2. ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS

2.1 LEARNING

An analysis of the key stage (KS) 2 assessment data over the past four years shows that in English and mathematics, the school's performance is well-below the Northern Ireland average. When compared to schools in the same FSM band the school's performance over the last four years has been below the average in literacy and below the average in mathematics in two of the last four years. With the exception of one year there has been a steady increase in performance in literacy. The majority of children identified as having special educational needs (SEN) are making progress inline with their abilities.

The majority of the children engage well with their learning and are able to work independently. They are beginning to develop the ability to work collaboratively in pairs or small groups with adult support. Within the foundation stage (FS) classroom organisation and routines effectively promote the children's independence. Across the school, most of the children enjoyed their learning when it was linked to creative teaching approaches, meaningful contexts and practical activities. There is a significant number of children who have difficulties in maintaining concentration on task for sustained periods.

2.2 ENGLISH AND LITERACY

The quality of provision for English is satisfactory.

The literacy co-ordinator has been in post for 18 months and in that time she has accessed appropriate support. She has led the staff effectively in a thorough self-evaluation of the quality of learning and teaching in literacy and has devised an appropriate literacy action plan to develop the teaching of writing within the school with realistic targets and clear success criteria outlined. The literacy co-ordinator has identified the need to update the school's literacy policy and to develop a writing scheme to guide the teachers in their planning and ensure better continuity and progression across the school. The literacy and assessment co-ordinators are beginning to use the school's own assessment data to set individual targets for the children in order to raise the standards in English.

The children have satisfactory talking and listening skills. Most of the children communicate effectively during group work. The recent implementation of a new language programme in the FS has enabled the teachers to create a language profile for each child which identifies areas for development within talking and listening and provides for targeted support. As the children progress through the school, by year 7, the majority are able to speak confidently to peers, teachers and other adults within the school.

The standard of reading is satisfactory. There is a structured programme in place for the teaching of reading within the school. In the FS and KS1 the children acquire the basic skills of reading through shared and guided reading along with the use of commercial reading scheme and a structured phonics programme. The school's reading resources have recently been up-dated and during the inspection groups of the children in year 4 and 7 indicated that they enjoy the new reading books. The enjoyment of reading is fostered through the good use of the school's well-stocked central library, timetabled silent reading in KS1 and KS2, 'Free-reading Friday' and the annual School Council-led reading afternoon session where children from KS2 read stories to the younger children from the nursery and FS classes. The children's reading skills are developed progressively as they move through the school; they make steady progress in their reading in line with their abilities, and by the end of year 7 the majority of children read with confidence and fluency. The school needs to continue to place a priority on developing the children's reading skills in order to improve the standards further.

The standards attained by the children in writing are satisfactory. In the FS, the children become familiar with different forms of print and experiment with informal mark making. The children's letter formation, word building skills and knowledge of the basic conventions such as simple sentence structure, are developed through shared writing activities and some opportunities for independent writing. The teachers need to provide the children with more focused opportunities to develop these initial writing and phonic skills, in order for the children to become independent writers at an earlier stage. In KS1 and 2 the children are given opportunities to write in a variety of styles, which in the best practice, are linked to work across the curriculum. The use of ICT engages the children well and supports their learning in literacy. Children use ICT to express themselves through their work in literacy, to engage in research work and to improve the quality of their presentation.

The school has identified the need to develop the writing process to ensure a more consistent approach to the development of the children's writing style, their sense of audience and creative use of language. It will be important for teachers to develop a shared understanding of how to help the children to improve the quality of their writing and to achieve higher standards.

2.3 MATHEMATICS AND NUMERACY

The quality of provision in mathematics and numeracy is satisfactory.

The school has identified the improvement of the quality of the mathematics provision as an area for whole-school development and is included as a key priority in the current SDP. The planning for numeracy provides for a suitably broad and balanced curriculum but does not ensure that there is appropriate coherence or progression in the children's learning. This needs to be addressed promptly to provide appropriate guidance for class teachers from which they are able to create their medium and short-term planning and to ensure appropriate challenge for the children.

The numeracy and assessment co-ordinators are beginning to analyse and use the children's performance data to inform future planning and to identify children who require additional support or who are under-performing in mathematics.

In most of the classes ICT is used effectively to support the learning and teaching in mathematics; this includes the use of interactive games, handling data software, websites and programmable devices. The children's work is celebrated and standards in numeracy presentation are good.

In the FS, the children show enjoyment and confidence in mathematics. The children are developing appropriate mathematical concepts, skills and language through a variety of activities, action songs and effective questioning by the teacher. The teachers now need to build on this good practice in numeracy lessons through well-planned play-based activities to consolidate the children's learning.

In KS1, the teachers provide opportunities for learning in all areas of mathematics and incorporate mathematics well across other areas of the curriculum. In the best practice seen, the teachers made appropriate use of a variety of approaches such as practical work, paired and group work, and open-ended activities. In the less effective practice, the work did not cater sufficiently for the varying abilities and interests of the children, and more challenging learning outcomes and associated success criteria needed to be set. In KS2, in the best practice, the activities engaged, challenged and motivated the children; in these lessons the children were encouraged to articulate their thinking processes and the teachers used effective questioning to challenge and extend the children's learning.

There is variation in the quality of the teaching in numeracy. The senior management team need to develop further the capacity of the staff, in particular, to monitor and evaluate the quality of the provision, and to disseminate the very good practice which exists in the school.

The standards achieved by the children in mathematics are satisfactory. By the end of KS1, the children demonstrated good knowledge and understanding of number facts, and some limited knowledge of the application of number and shape and space. By year 7, the most able children demonstrated a good knowledge of number, handling data and some flexibility in their mathematical thinking. Most of the children achieve standards in line with their ability. In order to raise further the standards, there is a need to ensure that the learning activities are appropriately differentiated to meet the needs of all the children, and to provide greater challenge and extension to the mathematical experiences of the more able children.

3. THE QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING

3.1 PLANNING

The quality of the teachers' medium-term planning to support the learning and teaching is satisfactory. In the best practice, the teachers' planning develops connected learning across the curriculum well. These teachers regularly evaluate the effectiveness of their short-term planning to assess the quality of learning that has taken place and to inform future planning. In the less effective practice there is a need for the teachers' planning to focus more on the learning to be achieved and ensure that work is differentiated effectively to match the differing needs of all the children more effectively.

The area of play and activity-based learning is currently underdeveloped. There is a need for the school to review and develop the planning and resources for play and activity-based learning within the FS and KS1, in order to ensure that there is appropriate progression and challenge for the children across both key stages and including the nursery unit.

3.2 TEACHING

The quality of the teaching observed ranged from inadequate to very good. The majority of the teaching was good or very good; one third of the teaching has areas for improvement. In the best practice, the teachers demonstrate excellent classroom management and have high expectations for good behaviour and provide an affirming ethos within the class to increase the confidence and self-esteem of the children. They provide creative active-learning approaches and use effective questioning to build well on the children's prior learning.

In the less effective practice, the lessons observed lacked pace and the tasks were not matched well to the children's ability. Ineffective classroom management strategies led to a significant amount of time being spent on promoting good behaviour and subsequently there was not an adequate focus on the learning.

3.3 ASSESSMENT

The co-ordinator for assessment has led the implementation of sound procedures and processes for assessing the children's progress and attainment. This significant development work has been undertaken in a short time and has enabled all staff to identify more accurately the children's attainments and, very importantly, whether these are in line with their abilities. Careful analysis of the performance data is carried out enabling targeted provision to be made for those children whose attainment is seen to be low or below what could be achieved.

The co-ordinator's leadership is very effective and is, incrementally, building up the confidence and competence among all staff in assessing the attainment and progress of the children in their class. It will be important that the impact of this approach is monitored and evaluated carefully for its implementation within classes and the improvements it brings about in all the children's learning.

All the teachers mark the children's work regularly and often with supportive and personalised comments. In the best practice children are given immediate oral feedback on their strengths and personalised feedback is given to children and their parents indicating the child's learning over the week. In the less effective practice the quality of the marking often lacks rigour in encouraging the children to improve their work. The assessment for learning policy needs to be applied more consistently to ensure that all the staff implements the agreed procedures and the children understand how their work could be improved.

The children's achievements and standards are reported to the parents regularly through an annual written report, two formal parent-teacher meetings and informal contacts between teachers and parents.

3.4 SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

The school has undertaken a major review and development of its provision for the children with special educational needs within the current school year. A new special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO) has been appointed and has worked systematically and extremely diligently to ensure that processes and procedures are now in place to meet more effectively the needs of these children.

The school has identified almost one-half, (46%) of the children, as needing support with aspects of their behaviour and/or learning. The identification processes are robust and lead to education plans for the children which are well-informed by the teachers' professional judgements and the children's performance and attainments through their work and a range

of tests. Additional provision made for these children is carefully considered and results in either withdrawal or in-class support on the basis of which approach is deemed better for the children. The additional help given is provided in a most supportive and encouraging manner where the children are motivated and encouraged to learn and to improve.

In addition to the very good support provided by the SENCO, the school utilises very well the help of others to meet the varying needs of the children. This includes support for the newcomer children, outreach provided by the Harberton Outreach Service and a range of other programmes to meet the communication and social needs of the children. The children receiving the support benefit from it on a number of levels and significantly are making progress in their learning in line with their abilities as a result. Procedures are in place to monitor and track carefully the further progress which the children make.

The SENCO has a very good understanding of how the provision made for SEN needs to be built upon to ensure that the excellent development work undertaken to date is translated in further improvements in the children's learning. Importantly, this needs to include ensuring that appropriate differentiation is made throughout the school so that these children's needs are met more consistently within their own class throughout the course of each school day.

4. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

4.1 LEADERSHIP

The quality of leadership and management within the school is good.

The Principal has been in post for four years and during that time has worked systematically and strategically to develop good working relationships within the school and with the parents. A very significant effort has been put in to create a more welcoming school in the heart of the local community. The Principal has a clear focus on the need to raise further the attainments of the children particularly in literacy and numeracy. To that end, he has ensured that developments have been undertaken in many key aspects such as the review of roles and responsibilities within the school, effective provision for the children with SEN and the effective use of performance data to inform and improve learning and teaching. It is important that the role of all of the co-ordinators in monitoring and evaluating the quality of the learning and teaching is strengthened to ensure that the children achieve higher standards in literacy and numeracy across the school.

There is a need for the leadership within the school to review the current informal arrangements for break time and ensure that the use of this time is being effectively monitored.

4.2 PLANNING FOR IMPROVEMENT

Under the Principal's leadership the staff has engaged in whole-school self-evaluation of the school's provision. This process has been carried out comprehensively with the outcomes being used to inform the SDP. The SDP complies with the 2005 requirements and has an appropriate focus in year 1 on target-setting and the raising of achievement. The areas for development in literacy and numeracy for years 2 and 3 of the SDP need to be reviewed to ensure they are targeted more precisely on raising achievement. The school acknowledges the need to widen the scope of consultation in devising the next SDP.

Within the nursery unit the staff has benefited from recent training focused on the development of the children's language and listening skills. Overall, the staff has engaged in a limited range of continuous professional development.

There is evidence of recent improvements within the nursery including the pastoral links with the adjoining school and the review of the methods used for written planning and to assess the children's' progress. The nursery has identified relevant areas for further development including the development of outdoor play. The start made to self-evaluation should be developed further to focus more sharply on the on the quality of the learning and teaching and evidence of improvement.

4.3 RESOURCES, FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE

The governors are fully involved in the life and work of the school and support effectively the Principal and the staff in raising the profile of the school and maintaining effective links with the parents and the local community.

4.4 ACCOMMODATION

Within the last four years there have been significant improvements made to the school accommodation. The Principal, with the support of his staff, has worked hard to ensure that the accommodation is updated and a bright and more attractive learning environment is provided for the children. The Principal has appropriately identified the need to develop the outdoor play areas in order to exploit the opportunities to extend the children's learning. The accommodation and grounds are well-maintained and the standard of the caretaking is excellent.

5. CONCLUSION

5.1 The strengths of the school include:

- the good behaviour of most of the children and their enthusiasm for their learning;
- the good provision for pastoral care;
- the quality of the majority of the teaching observed which was good or very good;
- the effective leadership of the SENCO and the targeted provision for those children with additional learning needs;
- the effective leadership of the Principal and the actions taken to promote improvement; and
- the very good links established with the parents and outside agencies.

5.2 Areas for Improvement include the need to:

- raise further the standards achieved by the children in English and mathematics;
- develop the role of the co-ordinators in monitoring and evaluating effectively the quality of the children's experiences and their achievements; and
- identify and disseminate effectively the best practice in learning and teaching in order to better meet the differing needs of all the children.

5.3 In most of the areas inspected, the quality of education provided by this school is satisfactory; the strengths outweigh the areas for improvement in the provision. The inspection has identified areas for improvement in standards, teaching and learning and leadership and management, which need to be addressed if the needs of all the children are to be met more effectively. The Education and Training Inspectorate (Inspectorate) will monitor and report on the school's progress in addressing the areas for improvement.

6. THE NURSERY UNIT

6.1 The school has a double nursery unit which is accommodated in a purpose built mobile within the school grounds. The unit has its own safe, enclosed outdoor play area. Almost half of the children attending are in their penultimate school year. Approximately 14% of the children have been identified with language and communication difficulties; 6% are newcomer children who speak English as a second language.

6.2 The main strengths within the nursery unit's educational provision include:

- the good levels of pastoral care provided by the staff and the children's very good behaviour;
- the children's good level of interest in representational drawing and their interest in books, stories and early mark-making;
- the many examples of concentrated and collaborative play by the pre-school children;
- the very good opportunities for physical play outdoors;
- the interesting range of experiences provided for the children based on seasonal topics;
- the good pastoral links and increasing integration established with the rest of the school; and
- the evidence of recent development and improvement in planning and observation of children.

The inspection identified areas for improvement. The following are the most important areas that need attention:

- the quality of the staff interaction with the children needs to promote more consistently the children's language and learning through the play activities and daily routines;
- the staff need to improve the overall quality and range of experiences for the pre-school children to ensure greater challenge and progression in the provision; and
- the staff need to continue to develop the written planning and link the assessment more closely to the children's individual needs and stages of development.

In most of the areas inspected the quality of education provided in the nursery unit is satisfactory; the strengths outweigh areas for improvement in the provision. The inspection has identified areas for improvement in learning and teaching and leadership and management which need to be addressed if the needs of all the children are to be met more effectively. The Inspectorate will monitor and report on the nursery unit's progress in addressing the areas for improvement.

STATISTICAL INFORMATION ON AVONIEL PRIMARY SCHOOL NURSERY UNIT

1. Details of Children

Number of children:	Class 1	Class 2
Attending full-time	26	26
Attending part-time	0	0
Under 3 years of age*	10	9
With statement of SEN**	0	1
At CoP stages 3 or 4***	5	0
At CoP stages 1 or 2***	9	0
With English as an additional language	1	2

* On 1 July.

** Special Educational Needs.

*** The stages refer to those set out in the Code of Practice for the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs.

Percentage qualifying under DE admission criteria 1 or 2.	63%
Average attendance for the previous year.	87%

2. Duration of Sessions

Full-time	Part-time: am	Part-time: pm
4¾ hours	-	-

3. Details of Staff

Number of:	Full-Time	Part-Time
Teachers	2	0
Nursery Assistants	2	0
Qualified Nursery Assistants	0	1

Number of: ****	
Students	0
Trainees	0

**** Total placements since September of current year

4. Parental Questionnaires (to be completed by Inspection Services Branch)

Number issued	
Percentage returned	%
Number of written comments	

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