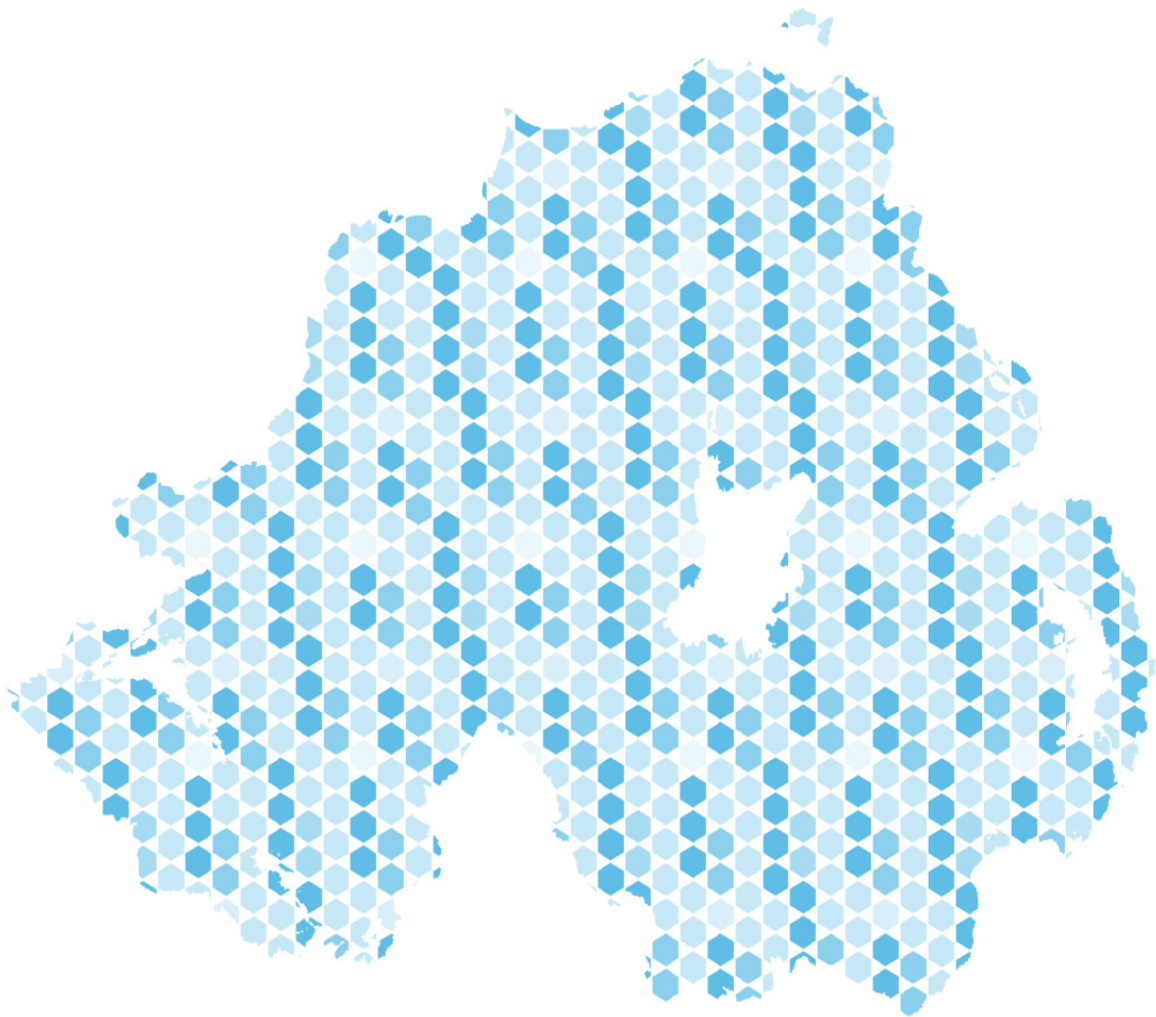


PRIMARY INSPECTION



Education and Training
Inspectorate

Balnamore Primary School,
Ballymoney

Report of an Inspection
in April 2011



Providing Inspection Services for
Department of Education
Department for Employment and Learning
Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure

CUSTOMER
SERVICE
EXCELLENCE



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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

Balamore Primary School is situated in Balamore village, which is approximately three miles north of Ballymoney. The children who attend the school come from the village and the surrounding rural area. The enrolment of the school over the last five years has remained steady and currently stands at 105. At the time of the inspection, approximately 30% of the children were entitled to receive free school meals and around 27% were identified by the school as requiring additional support with aspects of their learning.

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, the teachers and the support staff to complete a confidential questionnaire prior to the inspection, as well as meetings with representatives from the Board of Governors (governors) and a group of the children from year 6.

Almost 48% of parental questionnaires were returned to Inspection Services Branch. Ten returns included additional written comments. The parents expressed high levels of satisfaction with the educational and pastoral provision provided by the school. In particular, they acknowledged the supportive, caring and approachable staff.

Five teachers and five members of the support staff responded to the online questionnaires. These responses were very affirmative of the work of the school. All the teachers and three-fifths of the support staff, who completed the questionnaires, made written responses which were very positive. There were a small number of comments offering suggestions for future improvements and these were received positively by the Principal and representatives from the governors. Within the comments, a strong sense of team spirit, good staff morale and the effective leadership provided by the Principal came to the fore.

A small number of issues raised through the questionnaires and associated comments were shared with the Principal and the governors.

The governors expressed very positive support for the school. In particular, they spoke favourably of the very good working relationships at all levels, the well behaved children and the commitment of all the staff.

In discussions, the children in year 6 reported that they feel very safe and secure and are aware of what to do if they have concerns about their safety or well-being. They talked enthusiastically about many aspects of school life, including the welcoming ethos that exists in the school, the caring teachers and their satisfaction in having a say in some aspects of school life which affect them.

1.4 PASTORAL CARE

The quality of the arrangements for pastoral care in the school is very good. The staff promotes the children's self-esteem and confidence and celebrate well their identity, culture and achievements. The school has an inclusive and supportive ethos where the contributions of the children are valued, and enacted upon. The high level of commitment to inclusion is reflected in the very good work which supports those with additional learning needs. There is an interesting and stimulating learning environment which often supports creative learning across the curriculum. Very good progress is made in involving the children in the decision-making processes about issues which affect them. The school is committed to promoting children's rights and has recently met the initial standard for the Rights Respecting School award.

1.5 CHILD PROTECTION

The school has very good comprehensive arrangements in place for safeguarding children. These arrangements reflect the guidance issued by the Department of Education.

1.6 HEALTHY EATING AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

The school gives very good attention to promoting healthy eating, for example through the meaningful links established with health promoting organisations which encourage the children to adopt safe and healthy lifestyles. There are opportunities for the children to engage in a good range of physical activities through the regularly timetabled physical education lessons and the extra-curricular activities provided.

1.7 LINKS WITH PARENTS AND THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

There are effective strategies in place to maintain good home and school links. The school, for example, issues regular information sheets, termly newsletters and uses the children's homework diaries to communicate with parents. In addition, there are regular meetings to share information about the children's progress and development.

There are good quality community links. The school has developed an effective range of external links with other schools, organisations and agencies which support and broaden the children's social, cultural and educational experiences. These include links with various Ulster Scots organisations, multi-agency support teams and business links. The school has maintained a valuable community relations link with a neighbouring primary school and has centred this programme on improving understanding of cultural differences and on fostering better community relations.

2. ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS

2.1 LEARNING

The children are sociable and motivated to learn. They interact confidently with their teachers and with one another. In the best practice observed, the children enjoyed a range of appropriately challenging tasks and activities, set in meaningful contexts, which allowed them to demonstrate very good levels of self-management and collaborative learning skills.

The children's learning is further enhanced through the school's participation in a range of externally organised initiatives. The best of these projects develop the children's entrepreneurial skills and deepen their knowledge and understanding of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM). These important educational and social enhancements enable the children to use their thinking skills and personal capabilities in real life contexts. The children's recent achievements include: winning a Sentinus Young Innovators Award; producing a series of animated films on children's rights; and participating in the school forum, which allows them a voice in matters that affect them.

An analysis of the key stage (KS) 2 assessment data shows that in English, the school's performance was above the Northern Ireland (NI) average in three out of the last four years, while in mathematics it remained above the average in all four years. When compared with schools in the same free school meals category, assessment data shows that in English, the school's performance remained above the NI average in three out of the last four years, while in mathematics it remained above the average in all four years.

By year 7, most of the children with special educational needs are achieving standards in literacy and numeracy which are in line with their age and ability.

2.2 ENGLISH AND LITERACY

The quality of provision for English and literacy is good.

The literacy co-ordinator is in post almost two years and has identified appropriately literacy as a priority area for improvement. The whole-school literacy policy and planning for progression is at an early stage. The development of the library provision is the most significant outcome of the current action plan, however there is a need to monitor and evaluate the impact of this development on improving the learning outcomes for the children. Additionally, there is a need to agree an integrated whole-school approach to talking and listening, reading and writing which provides coherence and progression in the children's learning across the year groups.

The quality of the children's oral skills is a key strength of the literacy provision. In the foundation stage (FS) and KS1, the children benefit from opportunities to listen and respond to stories and contribute effectively to class discussions and whole-school assemblies. The children's talking and listening skills are developed systematically throughout the school and, by year 7, almost all of the children are capable of mature and confident contributions based on their own opinions and judgements. The children have many good public speaking experiences through school drama performances and representation in local and province-wide competitions.

The standard of reading is good. Most of the children are reading at a level that is average for their age and appropriate for their stage of development. The children are well supported in year 7 to develop reading skills through interesting contexts related to their favourite novels. They are able to relate to discussions about characters in the novels and analyse the use of language to convey feelings and emotion. Throughout most classes in the school, there is a need to broaden the range of the children's reading experiences beyond the commercial reading scheme used to teach reading skills. It is appropriate that the recent development of the whole-school library provision is complemented more effectively at classroom level, in order to engage the children more fully in reading and to promote a keener culture of reading for enjoyment.

Most of the children's writing reaches a good to very good standard by year 7; however the progression in the standards of writing across the school needs to be improved. The quality of the children's writing experiences are variable across the classes. In the best practice, emergent to extended and independent writing in a range of genres is promoted effectively through meaningful contexts, for example through creative and personal writing. During the inspection, effective writing approaches emerged from interesting and contemporary topics, such as the census and natural disasters. In the less effective practice, the children's writing styles are restricted by the overuse of worksheets and de-contextualised grammar activities.

In the best practice, ICT is used effectively to provide the children with valuable opportunities to enhance their reading, writing, presentational and design skills.

2.3 MATHEMATICS AND NUMERACY

The quality of provision for mathematics and numeracy is good.

The numeracy co-ordinator is in post just over five years and has rightly identified the need to make better use of assessment data to inform and raise standards further. The numeracy development plan outlines a range of targets, success criteria and monitoring strategies, but it is too general and needs the inclusion of more strategic actions to bring about whole-school improvement. The co-ordinator needs to develop more systematic processes for action-planning for improvement and ensure that the focus is on the outcomes for the children's learning. The co-ordinator involves all the teachers in the development of numeracy and is taking a lead in helping staff to understand better the levels that the children are working at.

The children's mathematical knowledge and skills are developed incrementally throughout the school, guided by planning documents that, while useful, need to be tailored more closely to the needs of all the children. The children receive a good range of experiences in number, shape and space, measures and data-handling. Across all key stages, there is a need to develop more systematically, opportunities to embed mathematical processes across other areas of the curriculum, as well as using ICT to enhance teaching and support learning.

In the FS, the children acquire and use mathematical language through play-based learning. They benefit from regular use of appropriate practical materials which stimulate their interest and embed the foundations of mathematical concepts. In KS1, the teachers develop the children's mathematical language and knowledge further and ensure the children deepen their mathematical understanding in meaningful contexts. The children are able to apply their learning through a range of appropriate sorting, counting and measuring activities.

In the most effective practice observed, which was mostly at KS2, the children were able to investigate mathematical concepts in a creative way, which promoted flexible thinking and allowed them to talk through their reasoning and pose their own mathematical challenges for their peers.

By year 7, most of the children achieve good standards and are working in line with their ability. They are able to work confidently with number, shape, space and measurement. They demonstrate a sound understanding of key mathematical concepts and are able to apply these well.

3. THE QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING

3.1 PLANNING

The teachers use medium- and short-term plans to guide the learning and topic webs are used to support more connected learning across the curriculum. The plans detail appropriately the intended learning outcomes and the teaching strategies to be used. There is a need for the plans to identify more clearly how the planned activities match the range of ability within the class.

The teachers take responsibility for the creation and implementation of the individual education plans (IEPs) to plan for the children with additional learning needs. In most classes the IEPs contain specific targets and outline appropriate strategies to guide the teaching and learning to address the individual children's needs. There is a need to ensure greater consistency of the target setting in the IEPs across the school.

3.2 TEACHING

The efficacy of most of the teaching is a clear strength of the school's provision, given that over four-fifths of the teaching observed was good or better. While, the quality of the teaching ranged from outstanding to satisfactory, the teaching in just over three-fifths of all lessons observed was evaluated as very good or outstanding. The classroom assistants make a significant contribution to the quality of teaching within the classes.

In the most effective lessons, the teaching engaged the children through very creative and imaginative activities that were connected thematically to the children's learning across other parts of the curriculum. The teachers had high expectations for all of the children. They used an appropriate range of teaching strategies to engage the children's interests and ensure good levels of engagement and motivation. The teachers used questions adeptly to stimulate thinking and develop extended oral responses from the children. Such lessons were well-paced and provided sufficient challenge.

All the classrooms are equipped with interactive whiteboards. The teachers acknowledge that a more systematic development of the whole-school use of ICT, to include more regular and effective use of computer software and websites to support learning and teaching would enhance the children's learning further. In the less effective lessons observed, there was insufficient challenge and the pace of lessons could have been brisker.

The part-time special educational needs teacher provides very good programmes of support for the children in the withdrawal sessions. These are conducted in a caring and inclusive environment and the quality was always excellent. There is very good deployment of the classroom assistants in class to support the children's learning, aligned to their IEPs. In the withdrawal sessions observed, the children were very well motivated by and engaged in a range of numeracy and literacy activities well suited to their individual needs.

3.3 ASSESSMENT

The assessment co-ordinator has developed a marking policy and assessment procedures at class and whole-school level to guide the assessment of and for learning. The marking of the children's work is regular; however, the quality of the marking needs to be more consistently evaluative in highlighting strengths, while encouraging the children to improve further the quality of their work. At a whole-school level the teachers are using standardised tests to record and track individual and class progress in literacy and numeracy. The school recognises the need to develop and refine these assessment processes further, in order to identify any children who may be under-achieving and to raise standards further.

3.4 SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

The quality of the special educational needs (SEN) provision is very good.

The school has identified 27% of children who require additional support with aspects of their learning. A small number of the children are identified with physical and behavioural needs.

The school demonstrates an outstanding commitment and sensitive approach to the inclusion of the children with special educational needs. The special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO) provides very good leadership and management. The school policy for SEN and learning support is reviewed regularly and amended to reflect the needs of the children. The SENCO has established effective links with a range of multi-agency support teams and fosters purposeful parental involvement. Information from a wide range of appropriate sources is used well to inform appropriate intervention strategies. The IEPs are drawn up in collaboration with the parents and, where appropriate, the children. These are reviewed regularly in order to ensure that the children are managed sensitively and supported appropriately within the stages of the SEN Code of Practice.

The learning support is provided through in-class and withdrawal sessions for literacy and numeracy. During the inspection, the integration of learning for language, science and mathematics encouraged the children to explore and consolidate language and mathematical concepts. There is clear evidence that children who have been identified as having special educational needs are making good progress and benefiting from the support they receive.

4. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

4.1 LEADERSHIP

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

The Principal has been in post for 12 years and her leadership is very good. She is a leading role model in classroom practice and sets a positive tone for the work of the school through her very good working relations and open channels of communication with the children, parents, staff and governors. She is very committed to the well-being and achievements of the children and promotes effectively in them a sense of their own individual worth and a better understanding of their cultural identity. She is well-supported by a dedicated senior teacher and the SENCO.

4.2 PLANNING FOR IMPROVEMENT

The school uses self-evaluation processes, such as audits and consultation to identify areas for school improvement. A collegial approach to school development planning has been established which involves the staff and governors in establishing priorities for a three year school development plan that is carefully budgeted and improves the whole-school provision for learning. The associated action plans in literacy and numeracy are too general to guide the implementation of improvements that the school has identified.

4.3 RESOURCES, FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE

The school accommodation is clean and tidy and is used effectively to meet the curricular, pastoral and social needs of the children. The standard of caretaking is excellent. The school governors make very positive contributions to the life and work of the school and support well the Principal and the staff. They involve themselves in overseeing the work of the school, attend relevant training and observe lessons to gain a better understanding of learning and teaching.

5. CONCLUSION

5.1 The strengths of the school include:

- the caring, supportive and rights-respecting ethos of the school;
- the very good quality of the pastoral care provision;
- the excellent behaviour and friendliness of the children and their positive attitudes to their learning;
- the good standards attained by the children in literacy and numeracy, including those identified with additional learning needs;
- the quality of the teaching observed which was very good or outstanding in just over three-fifths of all lessons observed; and
- the very good leadership provided by the Principal.

5.2 The area for improvement is:

- to review the roles and responsibilities of the literacy and numeracy co-ordinators, particularly to ensure there is more strategic action-planning to bring about further improvements in learning and teaching.

5.3 In the areas inspected, the quality of education provided in the school is good. The school has important strengths in most of its educational and pastoral provision. The inspection has identified areas for improvement which the school has demonstrated the capacity to address. The Education and Training Inspectorate will monitor the school's progress on the areas for improvement.

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