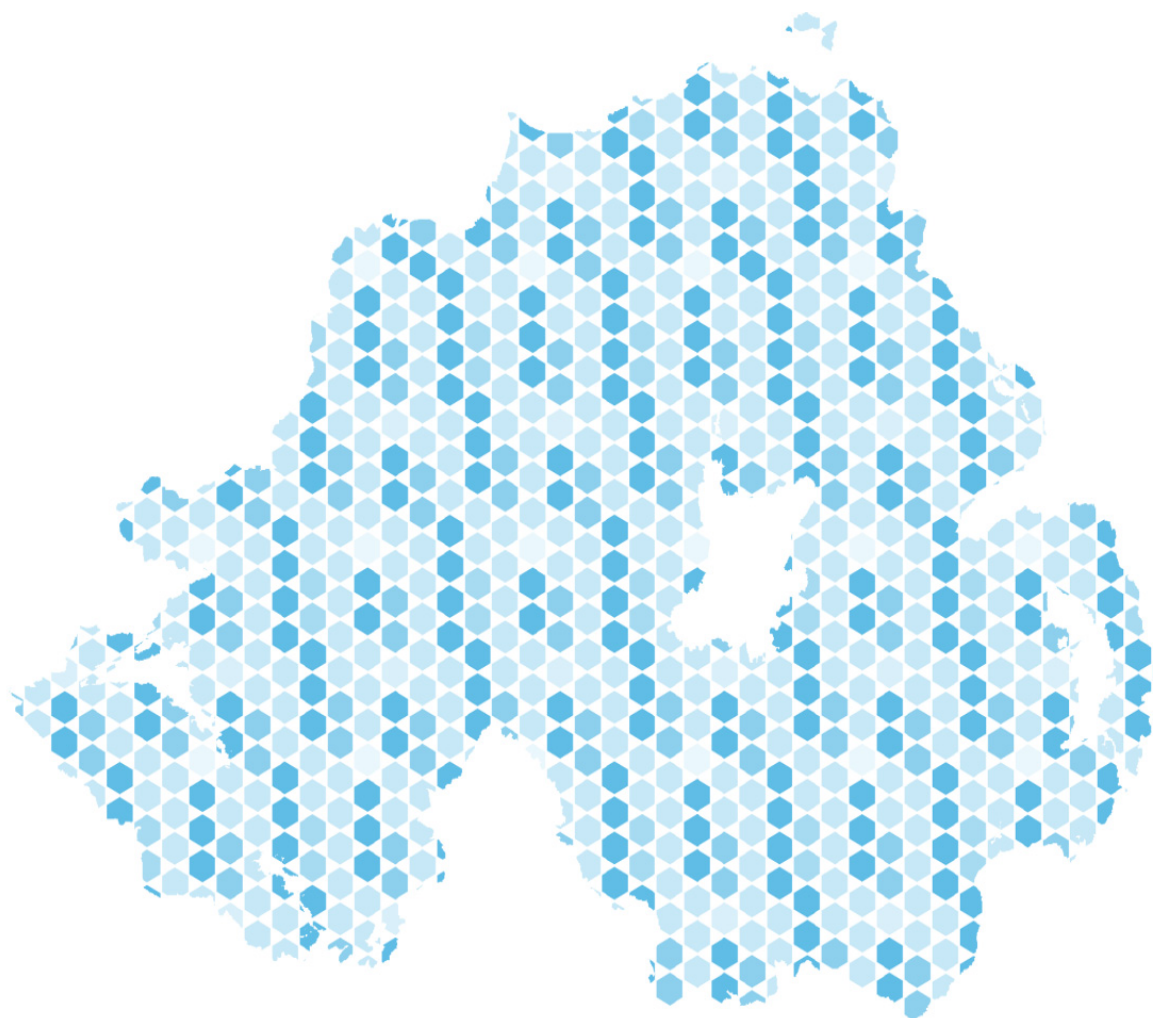


PRIMARY INSPECTION



Education and Training
Inspectorate

Downpatrick Primary School,
Co Down

Report of an Inspection
in October 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

BASIC INFORMATION SHEET (BIS) - PRIMARY SCHOOLS

- A. i. **School: Downpatrick Primary** iii. **Date of Inspection: W/B 03/10/11**
ii. **School Reference Number: 401-6235** iv. **Nature of Inspection: Focused**

B.

School Year	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
Year 1 Intake	32	30	31	25	28
Enrolments					
Primary	213	193	193	185	182
Reception	0	0	0	0	0
Nursery Unit	0	0	0	0	0
Special Unit	0	26	30	28	26
Irish Medium Unit	0	0	0	0	0

The enrolment for the current year is the figure on the day of notification of inspection. For previous years it is the figure in the annual return to the Department of Education.

The calculations at C and D should be based on the total of the primary and reception enrolments only.

- | | | | |
|----|---|-------|--------------------------|
| C. | Average Attendance for the Previous School Year
(expressed as a percentage): | 94.7% | NI Avg Att: 94.7% |
|----|---|-------|--------------------------|

Average Attendance for those children on the Special Educational Needs Register: 92.5%

[illegible]

- | | | | | | | |
|----|----|---|------|-----|---|-----|
| D. | i. | Number of Teachers
(including the principal and part-time teachers):
(Full-time equivalent = 25 teaching hours) | 9.82 | N/A | 3 | N/A |
|----|----|---|------|-----|---|-----|

- ii. PTR (Pupil/Teacher Ratio): 18.53 NI PTR: 20.2

- iii. Average Class Size: 20.8

- iv. Class Size (Range): 21 to 32

- v. Ancillary Support:

- | | | | |
|-----------------------------------|------|--|-------|
| Number of Hours Per Week : | i. | Clerical support: | 27.5 |
| | ii. | Foundation Stage Classroom Assistant Support: | 50 |
| | iii. | Additional hours of other classroom assistant support: | 247.5 |

- vi. Percentage of children with statements of special educational needs: 2.74%

- vii. Total percentage of children on the Special Needs Register: 31.3%

- viii. Number of children who are **not** of statutory school age: 0

- | | | |
|-----|---|--------|
| ix. | Percentage of children entitled to free school meals: | 26.37% |
|-----|---|--------|

- | | | | | |
|----|--|--------------------------|------------------------------|---------------------|
| x. | Percentage of children at the end of Key Stage 2 for 2010/11 who attained level 4 and above in English and mathematics, and Irish (in Irish-medium schools): | English
68.18% | Mathematics
77.28% | Irish
N/A |
|----|--|--------------------------|------------------------------|---------------------|

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 SCHOOL CONTEXT

Downpatrick Primary School is situated on Mount Crescent in Downpatrick and overlooks the Quoile River and the Dromara Hills. The enrolment of the school has remained steady over the last five years and currently stands at 182 children with a further 26 children in the Learning Support Centre (LSC). At the time of the inspection approximately 28% of the children within the school were entitled to free school meals (FSM). The school has identified 31% of the children in the mainstream classes 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 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 the children from year 6.

Ninety-one questionnaires were issued to the parents within the primary school. Approximately 48% of the parental questionnaires were returned to the Inspection Services Branch (ISB): 23 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 friendly, welcoming environment where the emphasis is placed on both the social and academic development of the children.

Twenty-six questionnaires were issued to the parents within the LSC. Approximately 22% of these were returned to ISB: a small number contained additional written comments. The responses from the parents indicate a very strong support for the work of the LSC and they acknowledge the good progress made by their children since they began attending.

Eleven teachers and nine support staff completed the confidential online questionnaire. All of the teachers were positive about all aspects of the work of the school. A small number of teachers included additional written comments where they acknowledged the good support received from both the parents and governors and the caring ethos in the school. Almost all of the support staff were positive about all aspects of the work of the school. The additional written comments indicated how much they enjoyed working in the school.

The governors spoke of their appreciation of the work of the Principal, Vice-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 talked openly and positively about their experiences in the school. They value the help and support of their teachers and enjoy the wide range of after-school activities and clubs. The children indicated that they know what to do and who to turn to if they have any concerns regarding their work or their safety and well-being.

An analysis of the questionnaires and a summary of 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 very good. Among the school's strengths are: the caring and supportive ethos; the very good behaviour of the children, and the emphasis the school places on recognising both the children's social and academic achievements through the House System and the fortnightly 'Down Dynamo' awards. Good progress is being made to involve the children more fully in the decision-making process about issues which affect them in school, through the School Council.

1.5 CHILD PROTECTION

The school have very good comprehensive arrangements in place for safeguarding children. These arrangements reflect the guidance issued by the Department of Education (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 provision of playground games and a wide range of extra-curricular physical activities which encourage the children to adopt healthy lifestyles.

1.7 LINKS WITH PARENTS AND THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

The school has developed a positive relationship with the parents and the local community. Effective communication with parents is maintained through the regular school newsletter, a range of meetings focused on the curriculum and progress reports. The school website also provides up to date information to parents on the life of the school. The school facilitates extended services for families through the Breakfast and After-school clubs which are self-sustaining. The school has a highly supportive Parent Teachers' Association who engage in fund raising activities to provide additional resources for the school.

The school maintains close links with a local maintained primary school in providing sacramental preparation for some of the children. Links have also been established with a local nursery school and post-primary school to assist with the transition of the children. Good use is made of external visitors from the local community to broaden the children's curricular experiences.

The children in upper key stage (KS) 2 have the opportunity to take part in residential trips to enhance their learning and personal development. Very good use is made of trips within the local community for children in the LSC as an integral part of their learning.

2. ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS

2.1 LEARNING

An analysis of the key stage (KS) 2 assessment data shows that in English and mathematics, the school's performance is above both the Northern Ireland average and the average of schools in the same FSM band in three of the past four years.

All of the children in year 7 have successfully achieved level 4 in the Curriculum Council and Examination ICT Accreditation Scheme in the last two years. The majority of children identified as having special educational needs (SEN) are making progress in line with their abilities.

Most of the children settle quickly to work, can work collaboratively and independently and are well-behaved. When the tasks are well-matched to the children's needs and interests, the children participate confidently and enthusiastically for sustained periods. Within the foundation stage (FS) classroom organisation and routines provide some opportunity to promote the children's independence. Across the key stages, more consistent opportunities need to be provided for the children to be challenged to think both critically and creatively in paired and group work.

While the standards achieved by the majority of the children range from satisfactory to very good, the standards in aspects of literacy and numeracy achieved by a significant minority of the children, across the ability range, could be higher than they are presently.

2.2 ENGLISH AND LITERACY

The quality of provision for English is satisfactory.

By year 7, the majority of the children in the school have sound spoken communication skills and most demonstrate very good listening skills when taking part in whole class tasks. In the best practice throughout the school, the teachers provide regular opportunities to promote the children's confidence to share ideas through discussion, group work and effective plenary sessions. In a minority of classes, the teachers planning identifies opportunities to develop the children's oral skills and effective open-ended questioning challenges the children's thinking and elicits extended spoken responses. This best practice needs to be disseminated across all of the classes in the school to improve the progressive development of the children's language and communication skills.

At the FS, the children learn through a range of play-based and more formal activities. The quality of adult interactions, expectations of the children's abilities and the teaching strategies employed during these sessions need to be developed to support more effectively improvements in the children's language, skills and learning across all areas of the curriculum.

The standard of reading observed and the school's performance data suggest that, by the end of KS2, the majority of the children are achieving in line with their ability. There is a structured programme in place for the teaching of reading within the school and a whole-school phonics programme has recently been implemented across all classes.

There is a suitable range of reading materials being used to develop the children's reading skills and, throughout the school the children enjoy listening to stories. The children have access to their own class libraries and regular use of the school library.

In the FS, a significant minority of children are beginning to show an interest in emergent and early writing. This interest needs to be developed more extensively through the literacy and play-based learning sessions to provide meaningful contexts for writing. In KS1, most of the children make satisfactory progress in the development of letter formation, writing words and expressing ideas in simple sentences. In KS2, the teachers build on the children's writing skills by teaching the structures and conventions of various writing genres. In the best practice the children are encouraged to write for a purpose and are given time to complete work to a good standard.

The reliance on worksheets and commercial schemes across the key stages should be reviewed and a wider range of opportunities provided to develop the children's ability to give extended written responses. The standard of children's handwriting and presentation skills needs to improve.

Information and Communication Technology is well-used to enable the children to refine the presentation of their work and for research purposes. Digital microphones have recently been introduced to enable the children to record and present their work in a different medium.

The school has begun identifying those children with potentially low or under-achievement in English. Almost 35% (45) of children in years 3-7, are currently withdrawn a number of times each week from their mainstream classes to receive well-focused additional support. The school's data indicates that the targeted groups of children demonstrate progress in their reading. The existing good practice within the withdrawal classes and LSC needs to be reinforced within the mainstream classes.

The Learning Area Leader for English has made effective use of the analysis of data and staff audits over the last number of years, in order to prioritise the areas for development in literacy within the school. She has identified appropriately 'Talking and Listening' as the focus area for whole-school development. She has facilitated a range of professional development opportunities including a whole-school approach to the teaching of phonics, spelling and the teaching of comprehension and has collated a range of resources to assist teachers in the teaching of literacy.

2.3 MATHEMATICS AND NUMERACY

The overall quality of provision for mathematics is satisfactory.

The schools assessment data shows that the children make steady progress in most aspects of their mathematics as they progress through the key stages.

In the FS the children were observed counting, sorting and describing the properties of basic shapes. The children settled well to tasks and enjoyed their experiences. They also showed confidence in using the Interactive White Board independently to explore relevant mathematical programmes and consolidate aspects of their learning. There is insufficient consideration given to the range of abilities within the FS. The children's mathematical language and thinking skills need to be developed more effectively through play-based activities and during their numeracy tasks.

As the children progress through KS1 they are provided with a range of opportunities to use practical materials and work collaboratively in groups and pairs. By the end of KS1 the majority of the children demonstrate confidence to perform simple calculations within 20 and when asked can explain their approach. They are less confident in some aspects of their learning such as estimating measurement and explaining their thinking. The school has identified measures as a key area for development. The majority of children enjoy mathematics lessons particularly when they involve the use of ICT and practical work.

In KS2 most of the children clearly enjoy their mathematics and the most able show good mental agility. In the best practice observed the children provided approaches to solving problems and they could explain their methods confidently and coherently. By the end of KS2 most of the children are making satisfactory progress and demonstrate a good understanding of the concepts being taught.

In the best practice meaningful cross-curricular links integrate mathematics into other curricular areas and ICT is effectively used to support the learning and teaching.

The school have begun to identify children who are underachieving in mathematics and are providing them with additional withdrawal support. The approaches to support these children should be fully integrated into classroom practice.

The Learning Area Leader for numeracy is committed to improving the provision further and has identified the area of measures as the current priority for whole-school development. She has provided staff development including practical ideas and resources to develop aspects of mathematics within their classrooms, which the teachers clearly value.

The school needs to continue to develop the whole-school planning for all areas of mathematics in order to provide clearer lines of progression which build on the children's previous knowledge and skills. The staff needs to develop a greater level of shared understanding of the progression in mathematics and develop their class planning and teaching strategies to take account of the wide range of ability within each class. More emphasis also needs to be given to developing the children's mathematical language and thinking throughout the school.

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. The teachers plan using the agreed format and they are making progress in developing topic planning which identifies cross-curricular links including ICT and Personal Development and Mutual Understanding (PDMU). The teachers need to plan more effectively to support both the children experiencing difficulties and the more able children who often require greater challenge. The evaluation of lessons needs to focus more fully on the quality of the children's learning and progress to inform this planning process.

The planning and resources for play and activity-based learning in FS and KS1 need to be developed, to ensure that there is better progression and challenge in the learning for the children.

The Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO) works closely with the class teachers to create Individual Education Plans (IEPs) for those children who require additional support with aspects of their learning. The SENCO has led staff development in relation to SEN issues such as speech and language and provided good advice and guidance to teachers in relation to children identified as requiring additional support with their learning. The literacy and numeracy support teachers meet frequently with the SENCO to review the children's progress and plan further strategies to support the children in their learning.

3.2 TEACHING

The quality of the teaching observed in the school ranged from very good to inadequate. Most of the teaching was satisfactory or better; a minority of the teaching observed was inadequate. Almost two-thirds of the teaching has areas for improvement.

The teachers all work hard and are committed to the care and wellbeing of the children. In the best practice, the teachers make effective use of positive behaviour strategies to provide a good climate for learning. In a significant minority of lessons, the teachers used good questioning which gave the children opportunities to explaining their thinking and understanding and helped to develop their language.

In the majority of the lessons the teachers were not sufficiently clear about the learning to be developed and in particular the purpose of active learning. At times, the lessons were over-directed by the teachers and there was a lack of opportunity or missed opportunities to develop thinking skills, problem-solving, decision making and creativity. Tasks were often inappropriately matched to the children's ability and there were insufficient strategies implemented in the classes to support children identified as low or underachieving.

3.3 ASSESSMENT

The co-ordinator for assessment has led the implementation of the analysis of data to assess the children's progress and attainment. This significant development work has enabled the staff to identify more accurately the children's attainments and, very importantly, whether these are in line with their abilities. The internal data generated is used effectively to identify whole-school issues which inform the school development planning process. The Senior Management Team need to develop a strategy to build the capacity of staff to plan more effectively and address the identified underachievement within their classrooms. Within the FS the systems for tracking progress and building on prior learning require significant development to enhance teaching and learning.

The teachers mark the children's work regularly and often with supportive and personalised comments. The effective use of assessment for learning strategies is at an early stage of development.

There are good opportunities for the parents to receive information on their children's achievements through an annual written report, two formal parent-teacher meetings and informal contacts between teachers and parents.

3.4 LEARNING SUPPORT CENTRE

The Learning Support Centre (LSC) within the school provides for the needs of 26 children with moderate learning difficulties. The LSC has three classes; one class caters for children from year 1 to year 3 while the other two classes provide for children from year 4 to year 7.

The quality of the provision in the LSC is very good. The majority of the teaching observed was very good. The lessons are well-structured with differentiated activities closely matched to the needs and ability of the children. The teachers have detailed records of the children's progress and effectively evaluate and plan lessons. There are good classroom routines and activities that challenge and engage the children. The classroom assistants are effectively deployed and support the children individually and in groups. The teachers use a range of successful strategies to enable the children to manage their own behaviour. The children are given opportunities to work in pairs and groups, building their social skills and abilities to work with others. There are good opportunities for the children to integrate with their peers in the mainstream school. The children are enthusiastic and motivated and achieve good standards in numeracy and literacy in relation to their ability. The good practice in the LSC needs to be shared with all staff.

4. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

4.1 LEADERSHIP

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

The Principal has been in post for five years and is highly regarded by the governors, staff and parents. He has introduced new developments within the pastoral care approaches to promote positive behaviour and foster the children's self-esteem; celebrating both the social and the academic achievements of the children. He is committed to the welfare of the staff and the children. The Principal recognises the need to raise standards further and has begun working closely with the Vice-principal and Learning Area Leaders (LAL) to identify underachievement in the school. The processes in place for the leadership in the school to monitor and evaluate the teaching and learning in order to address underachievement and raise standards are currently inadequate.

The Principal, Vice-principal, LALs and key stage co-ordinators are insufficiently aware of the quality of the teaching and learning within the school. The Principal and Vice-principal need to develop more robust and strategic procedures to monitor and evaluate the provision in order to raise standards.

4.2 PLANNING FOR IMPROVEMENT

The school development plan (SDP) is compliant with the requirements of the School Development Plans Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2005 and is currently being updated. The current SDP sets out a large number of priorities for the medium and longer term which should now be reviewed to take account of the inspection findings.

Self-evaluation processes within the school have not been used sufficiently to evaluate effectively the impact of staff development on improving the quality of teaching and learning. Staff development needs to focus on ensuring teachers have a shared understanding of all aspects of teaching and learning to ensure consistent progression in literacy and numeracy.

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, Vice-principal and the staff in raising the profile of the school and maintaining links with the parents and the local community.

4.4 ACCOMMODATION

The school accommodation comprises of nine classrooms (two of which are used for an ICT room and a library) and a multi-purpose hall. The LSC and the numeracy support room are housed in mobiles in the school grounds. The school buildings and grounds are well-maintained.

5. CONCLUSION

5.1 The strengths of the school include:

- the very good arrangements for pastoral care which promote effectively the children's positive behaviour and self esteem;
- the good use made of ICT to support teaching and learning and the very good standards in ICT achieved by the children at the end of KS2;
- the good start made to collecting and analysing data to identify children's levels of progress;
- the very good provision made for the children with moderate learning difficulties in the Learning Support Centre; and
- the children's ability to listen attentively, settle to tasks and show enjoyment in their learning.

5.2 Areas for Improvement include the need:

- to build the capacity of all staff to improve the quality of the teaching and learning; and
- for the leadership and management to focus their monitoring and evaluations more closely on the learning outcomes in order to raise further the standards achieved by 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 will monitor and report on the organisation's progress in addressing the areas for improvement over a 12-24 month period.

HEALTH AND SAFETY

- There is a significant number of steps leading to access areas within and around the school which impedes disabled access.
- There is a potential hazard for the children in the LSC negotiating the steps leading to the entrance of their mobile classrooms.

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