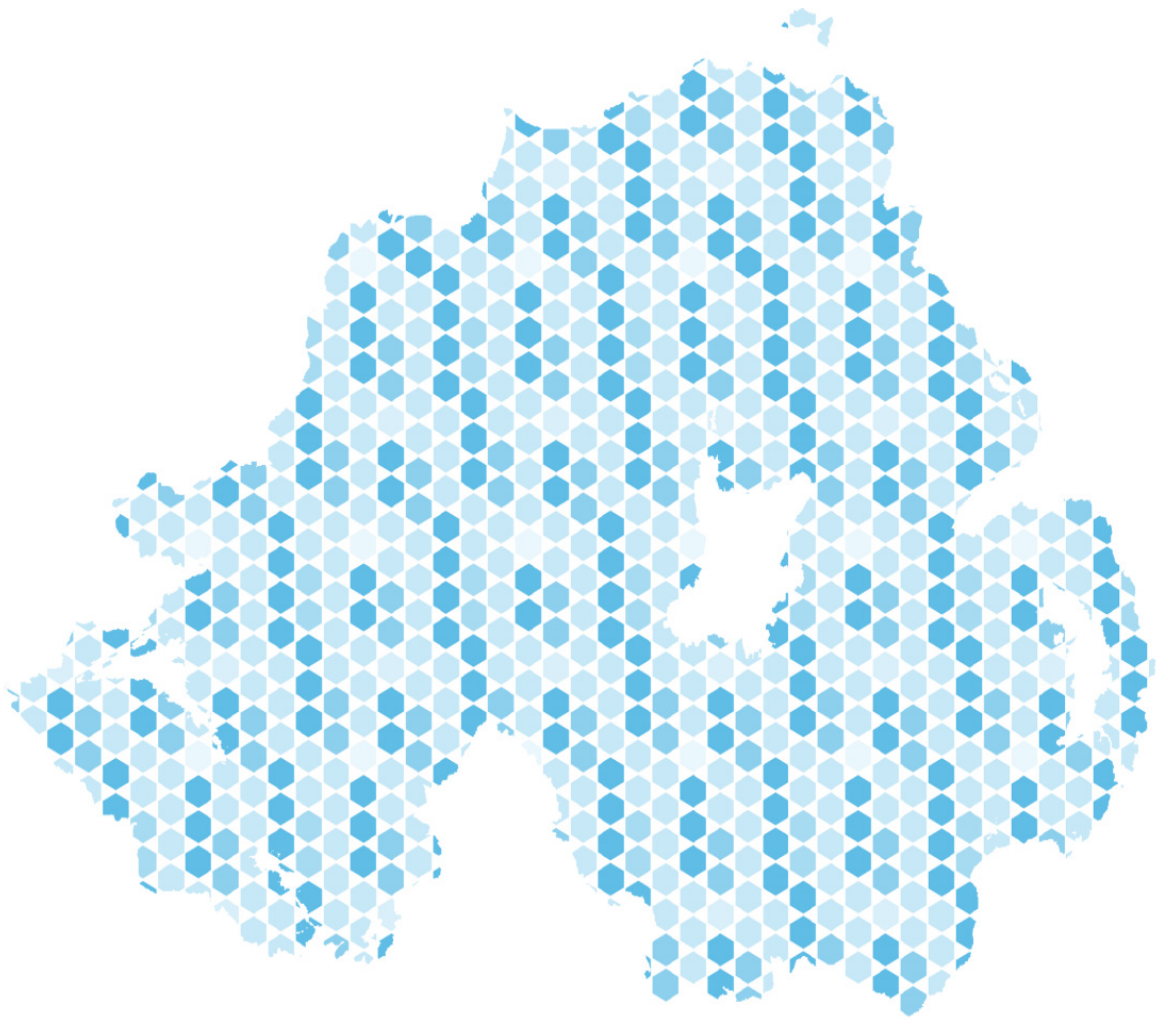


PRIMARY INSPECTION



Education and Training
Inspectorate

Foley County Primary School,
Armagh

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

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 CONTEXT

Foley Primary School is situated in a rural area approximately five miles south of Armagh City. The enrolment has declined steadily over the past five years and stands currently at 55. Almost all of the children come from the surrounding rural area, some of the children are now transported to the school by bus which is a development welcomed by the school. At the time of the inspection, around 4% of the children were entitled to free school meals. The school has identified approximately 13% of the children as requiring additional support with aspects of their learning, including 2% who have a statement of special educational needs. The children are taught in composite classes consisting of two or three year groups, two of the classes include children at two different key stages. In addition to his leadership role, the Principal has a teaching responsibility on four days each week.

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 communications 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 confidential questionnaires prior to the inspection. Meetings were held with representatives from the Board of Governors (governors), and a group of children from year 6.

Thirty-seven questionnaires were issued to the parents; approximately 50% were returned to Inspection Services Branch: five contained additional written comments. Almost all of the responses indicated a high level of satisfaction with the school. In particular, the parents highlighted the improvements over the last year in communication between the school and home, the range of after-school activities provided and the recently established parents' support group. The teachers and support staff completed the on-line questionnaire. The staff returns were wholly positive in relation to all areas of school life. An analysis of the questionnaires and the comments made by the parents and the staff were shared with the Principal and the governors.

The recently reconstituted Board of Governors expressed their strong support for the school and outlined their aspirations for the future when they met with the inspection team. They discussed their concerns about aspects of the school provision and outlined a number of recent improvements. Their vision for the school includes their commitment to improving the quality of the leadership and management, learning and teaching and the standards achieved by the children through working closely with the Principal and the staff.

In discussions held with the year 6 children, they talked positively about aspects of school life, including the range of subjects available to them and the extra curricular programme of activities and visits provided last year. They reported that they would value: more opportunities to use ICT in lessons; more challenging and less repetitive homework; continued opportunities to participate in extra-curricular activities; and being asked for their views and opinions on school matters. They indicated that they feel safe and happy in school and were aware of what do if they had any concerns.

1.4 PASTORAL CARE

The quality of the arrangements for pastoral care in the school is satisfactory. There is a family-centred ethos which supports the personal and social development of the children. The children are extremely welcoming, well-mannered and their behaviour was exemplary during the inspection. The several reward systems, including Student of the Week and Head Boy and Girl of the Month, are valued by the children. The Principal, parents and governors have worked hard over the last year to provide an extra-curricular programme of activities and educational visits to enrich the children's experience of school. The pastoral care co-ordinator has recognised the need to update a number of related policies and provide opportunities for the children to contribute to the decision-making process within the school.

1.5 CHILD PROTECTION

The school has satisfactory arrangements in place for safeguarding children. These arrangements reflect broadly the guidance issued by the Department of Education. The designated teacher needs to revise the child protection policy to reflect recent staffing changes and update the guidance for the children.

1.6 LINKS WITH PARENTS AND THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

There have been a number of significant improvements in the communication between the parents and the school within the last year. The recently formed parents' support group has worked hard, alongside the governors and the Principal, to raise the profile of the school in the local community and to provide funds for additional learning resources. The parents now receive a newsletter each term to inform them about recent and forthcoming events in the school.

2. **ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS**

2.1 LEARNING

The children are enthusiastic and respond particularly well to activities which challenge and extend their thinking and understanding. They support each other in their learning and respond positively to the staff and visitors.

An analysis of the key stage (KS) 2* assessment data indicates that in English and mathematics, over the past four years, the school's performance was well below the Northern Ireland (NI) average and the average for other primary schools within the same free school meals category.

* The key stage outcomes should be interpreted with caution for small primary schools as a large percentage change from year to year can often be attributed to a very small number of children.

2.2 ENGLISH AND LITERACY

The overall provision for English and literacy is inadequate; by the end of KS2, the overall standards in English and literacy are too low.

The school has a literacy policy that was reviewed in June 2010 and adheres broadly to the Southern Education and Library Board (SELB) Language Framework. Further work is required to ensure that the literacy planning is specific to the school and is sufficiently broad, challenging and progressive to reflect the differentiated needs within the composite classes. Currently there is no literacy action plan to identify and address key priorities and targets in literacy across the school and to guide the teachers in their further development.

The majority of the children display good talking and listening skills. In the best practice, the teachers develop the children's language through effective questioning which encourages them to talk about their learning and to share their views in pairs, groups and through whole class discussion. Too often, opportunities are missed to promote the children's language and learning and to build on their responses and encourage extended dialogue. During the inspection the children who were not engaged appropriately by their teacher became distracted and did not complete their work to an acceptable standard.

In the Foundation Stage (FS) and KS1 the children learn to read using a structured programme which incorporates a range of methods and reading material that enable them to decode unfamiliar text and to read with increasing fluency. As the children progress in their reading in KS2 they are introduced to a range of novels. The children have access to a good range of books in both the class and school library. The children in years 4 and 7 reported that they enjoyed reading and most talked confidently about their favourite authors and books. The school's internal performance data indicates that by the end of KS2, a significant minority of the children are not reading at a level commensurate with their ability and the inspection findings confirm this.

In the FS and early KS1, the children are supported very well by the teacher and the classroom assistant to develop letter formation, to write words and to express ideas in simple sentences. By the end of KS1 a majority of the children can express their ideas appropriately in writing. In KS2, the children have opportunities to write poems and to produce extended pieces of writing based on their personal interests and experiences; however there are missed opportunities to develop and extend their writing across a range of genre. Currently there is no structure in place to assess the quality and standards of the children's writing across other curricular areas.

The literacy co-ordinator has been in post for three years and has begun to analyse the available data to improve the target setting process for the children by the end of KS1 and KS2. He does not have a clear overview of the planning for literacy across the key stages and does not currently monitor and evaluate the provision. With the recent significant investment in, and implementation of, a phonics programme across the school, it is essential that the co-ordinator tracks the impact of this initiative along with the other approaches used on the children's spelling, reading, writing and overall standards of literacy.

2.3 MATHEMATICS AND NUMERACY

The quality of the provision in mathematics and numeracy is inadequate; by the end of KS2, the overall standards in mathematics are too low.

There is a variation in the quality of teaching of mathematics. The lessons observed at the FS were evaluated as good or very good, whereas one -half of the mathematics learning and teaching observed at KS1 and KS2 was inadequate.

In the FS and early KS1, the children enjoyed the mathematics lessons, they were encouraged to think mathematically and share their understanding with their peers. The work was suitably differentiated and through a range of practical investigative activities, all of the children were developing their mathematical knowledge and understanding across number, shape and measures.

At the end of KS1, the lessons observed were over-directed by the teacher and there was too much emphasis placed on repetitive pencil and paper textbook exercises. In discussions with the year 4 children, they displayed a poor understanding of number, shape and measures, and most used a very limited range of mental mathematics strategies for basic addition and subtraction which resulted in incorrect answers.

Across KS2, there is an over-emphasis placed on mathematical concepts taught in isolation and consolidated through repetitive textbook exercises. The children have too few opportunities to engage in investigative and problem-solving work in order to develop their thinking skills and use mathematics in meaningful real-life contexts. The work in the children's books indicated that there is little differentiation resulting in all of the children across two year groups generally working on the same tasks and exercises. In discussions with the year 7 children, the more able responded well to questions on number facts, place value and measures; however, they were unable to estimate and think flexibly.

The Principal is currently acting co-ordinator for mathematics and numeracy. He has recognised the need to review urgently the long-term and short-term planning for mathematics and develop an effective framework for the systematic development of the children's mental mathematics skills. The inspection findings confirm that this, in conjunction with targeted staff development to build expertise and effective monitoring and evaluation, is an urgent area for development which needs to be reflected more directly in the School Development Plan (SDP).

3. THE QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING

3.1 PLANNING

The planning for the children in years 1 to 3 across all areas of the curriculum is good and takes account of the stage of development and needs of the children. The recently appointed teacher of this composite class has worked extremely hard, to evaluate the children's learning and uses the information well to inform classroom practice. She has been well-supported in this by the experienced classroom assistant.

The overall planning for years 4 to 7 lacks breadth in the learning activities and resources. Too few opportunities have been identified for assessment and the planning does not promote sufficiently progression in the children's learning. It is important that the teachers who share the teaching of the year 6/7 class work together closely to plan for and evaluate the learning experiences.

Given the composite nature of all of the classes in the school, the teachers need to plan for the children based on their ability and not solely on their chronological age. The medium-term planning does not include clear differentiated learning outcomes which build on the children's prior learning nor provide opportunities for assessment

3.2 TEACHING

During the inspection, the quality of the teaching observed ranged from inadequate in almost one-third of lessons to very good in one-fifth; one-half of the teaching was good or better. In the best practice, the teachers had realistically high expectations of what the children could achieve, matched the work appropriately to challenge and support them and employed a range of strategies to maximise the children's oral contributions.

In the less effective practice the teaching focused on repetitive low level tasks or exercises which did not enable the children to access new learning. In these lessons there were too few opportunities to develop the children's language and thinking skills.

3.3 ASSESSMENT

The school uses a comprehensive range of standardised tests to assess the attainment of the children. The Principal and the assessment co-ordinator have recently collated the outcomes of the standardised assessment and end of key stage data. They acknowledge the need to make better use of the information, specifically, to set realistic targets for the children and to inform the planning and teaching throughout the school.

The teachers mark the children's work regularly and supportively. There are appropriate procedures and records in place for keeping the parents informed about their child's progress; this includes written reports and formal parent-teacher consultations. While the annual written reports provide the parents with a detailed and comprehensive evaluation of their children's progress and attainment.

3.4 SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

The quality of the provision for special educational needs (SEN) is satisfactory.

The small number of children who require additional support with their learning are identified at an early stage through a combination of the teachers' observations, diagnostic tests and the analysis of assessment data. The individual education plans (IEP) are written after consultation between the class teachers and the special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO). The IEP targets are specific and are reviewed regularly. The parents are made aware of the targets.

The current provision for the children is through in-class support. An analysis of the IEPs demonstrates that the majority of the children make good progress in line with the IEP targets and on occasion the children make sufficient progress to be removed from the register.

A policy for SEN was written over the last year and is due to be approved by the governors. The policy does not reflect sufficiently the context of Foley Primary School and contains a number of inaccuracies which need to be rectified before ratification by the governors.

4. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The overall quality of leadership and management is inadequate.

4.1 LEADERSHIP

The Principal has been in post for 12 years and knows the children, their families and the community they come from very well. He has faced a number of complex issues over the last number of years including those related to staffing, illness and industrial relations, while

carrying out significant teaching responsibilities. Consequently, he has not provided the school with the strategic leadership required to attain and maintain high standards in all areas of the school's provision.

At the time of the inspection there were significant inaccuracies in the documentation presented by the school. All documents which inform and guide the work of the school need to be reviewed to ensure that they are current and reflect the specific context and needs of the school.

Some progress has been made, however, in a number of areas over the last year. The recently constituted governors are committed and professional in their approach. They have worked diligently with the Principal over the last year to improve communication with the parents, increase the range of extra-curricular activities provided for the children and to raise the profile of the school in the local community. They are exercising actively their challenge function with the Principal and have indicated their willingness to support him in addressing the areas for improvement identified in this inspection.

4.2 PLANNING FOR IMPROVEMENT

The School Development Plan (SDP) does not meet the requirements of the Department of Education School Development Planning Regulations/Schedule 2005/1. While the SDP contains a number of areas for development covering a two year period, there is insufficient focus on improving the quality of literacy and mathematics or any evaluation of the progress made in the priority areas from the previous plan. Currently there are two action plans associated with the SDP, these are not sufficiently specific, measurable or time bound to enable appropriate monitoring and measurement of improvement to be undertaken. Importantly the action plans need to include a sharper focus on strategies to improve learning, teaching, assessment, and the standards attained by all of the children. In addition, the views of the parents, the children, the governors and the staff need to be sought and incorporated when revising the SDP to take account of the findings of this inspection.

The process of self-evaluation leading to improvement has not yet been established in the school. The Principal and co-ordinators need further leadership and management training and well-focused external support to establish clear lines of accountability for the monitoring and evaluation of the work of the school in order to provide improvement and raise standards.

4.3 ACCOMMODATION

The school accommodation generously comprises six classrooms, a staffroom, two offices, a small teaching space for SEN, an assembly/dining hall and a library housed in a combination of permanent and temporary buildings. The outdoor learning environment is underdeveloped and has the potential to enhance the children's learning experiences and improve the exterior appearance of the school. The standard of caretaking and cleaning is excellent.

5. CONCLUSION

5.1 The strengths of the school include:

- the exemplary behaviour of the children and their enthusiasm to learn; and
- the very good work observed in the Foundation Stage and early Key Stage 1.

5.2 The areas for improvement include the need:

- to raise the inadequate standards in literacy and numeracy attained by a significant minority of the children;
- to improve the quality of learning and teaching in years 4 to 7; and
- for the Principal to improve the inadequate curricular leadership including the development of self-evaluation in order to effect necessary improvements across all areas of the curriculum.

In almost all of the areas inspected, the quality of education provided by this school is inadequate; the areas for improvement significantly outweigh the strengths in the provision. The inspection has identified major areas for improvement in standards, learning and teaching, and leadership and management which need to be addressed urgently if the school is to meet effectively the needs of all the children.

It will be important that the employing authority, school governors and the staff plan for, and manage, issues related to the sustainability of the school provision and school budget, in order to address the current and future needs of the children and the staff.

The Inspectorate will monitor and report on the school's progress in addressing the areas for improvement, over a 12 to 18 month period.

HEALTH AND SAFETY

- Access points for the children need to be secure at all times during the school day.

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