

# PRIMARY INSPECTION



Education and Training  
Inspectorate

Mount St Catherine's Primary  
School, Armagh

Report of an Inspection  
in January 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, the Inspectorate 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:** Mount St Catherine's Primary School, Armagh      iii. **Date of Inspection:** 10/01/2011  
 ii. **School Reference Number:** 503-1126      iv. **Nature of Inspection:** Focused

B.

School Year	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
Year 1 Intake	32	26	12	25	22
<b>Enrolments</b>					
Primary	183	208	201	204	207
Reception	0	0	0	0	0
Nursery Unit	0	0	0	0	0
Special Unit	0	0	0	0	0
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): 92.6%      **NI Avg Att:** 94.9%
- |  | Primary &<br>Reception | Nursery<br>Unit | Special<br>Unit | Irish Medium<br>Unit |
|--|------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|----------------------|
|--|------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|----------------------|
- D. i. Number of Teachers  
 (including the principal and part-time teachers): 10.6      0      0      0  
 (Full-time equivalent = 25 teaching hours)
- ii. PTR (Pupil/Teacher Ratio): 26      NI PTR: 20.7
- iii. Average Class Size: 23
- iv. Class Size (Range): 18 to 27
- v. Ancillary Support:  
 Number of Hours **Per Week:**
- |   |       |
|---|-------|
| i. Clerical support:  | 32.5  |
| ii. Foundation Stage Classroom Assistant Support:           | 42.5  |
| iii. Additional hours of other classroom assistant support: | 127.5 |
- vi. Percentage of children with statements of special educational needs: 4.35%
- vii. Total percentage of children on the Special Needs Register: 23.19%
- viii. Number of families in school: 162
- ix. Percentage of children entitled to free school meals: 39.61%
- x. Percentage of children at the end of Key Stage 2 for 2009/10  
 who attained level 4 and above in English and mathematics:
- |                    |     |
|--------------------|-----|
| <b>English</b>     | 63% |
| <b>Mathematics</b> | 80% |

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 SCHOOL CONTEXT**

Mount Saint Catherine's Primary School is situated on Windmill Hill in the city of Armagh. The school is a member of The Sacred Heart Network of Schools and has a history in Armagh dating back to 1851. The enrolment has increased over the past three years and currently stands at 207 children. Almost all of the children who attend the school come from the local and surrounding area. The school reports that approximately 51% of the children come from a Neighbourhood Renewal Area and approximately 39% of the children are entitled to free school meals (FSM). The school has identified 23% of the children as requiring additional support with aspects of their learning and 4% with statements of special educational need (SEN).

### **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 and the teaching and 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.

Just over 27% of parental questionnaires were returned to Inspection Services Branch. Twelve returns included additional written comments. The parents expressed a high level of satisfaction with the educational and pastoral provision provided by the school. In particular, they acknowledged the strong sense of community that exists within and beyond the school, the caring and supportive ethos that promotes the children's individual achievement and their confidence and self-esteem, the good links established between the Principal, the teachers and the parents, and the opportunities provided for the children to participate in projects with other schools at home and in other countries.

A majority of the teachers (70%) and six members of the support staff responded to the online questionnaires. Almost all of these responses were very positive and highly affirmative of the work of the school. In particular, they acknowledged the excellent working relationships, the strong team spirit among the staff and high levels of support for the Principal and Vice-principal.

The governors expressed strong support for the school. In particular, they commented on the traditional values and caring ethos which permeate the life and work of the school, the very inclusive nature of the school and the excellent links that exist between the school, the parents, the community and the neighbouring post-primary schools including their sister school, St Catherine's College.

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.

#### 1.4 PASTORAL CARE

The quality of the arrangements for pastoral care in the school is outstanding and a significant strength of the school; the Principal and the staff are dedicated to the children in their care. The classroom assistants, office staff, caretaker and cleaning staff and other ancillary personnel contribute significantly to promoting and maintaining a pleasant working environment for the children.

The children reflect a diverse socio-economic background and a wide range of cultures which enhance the welcoming, friendly and inclusive ethos of the school. They are friendly and courteous, and respond well to the staff's expectations; their behaviour is exemplary. The school regularly awards achievement incentives to encourage the children's sense of self-esteem and self-confidence.

Through the School Council, the children are able to make a valuable contribution to the life and work of the school; their views and opinions on a range of issues are sought and valued. The children have the opportunity to participate in a wide range of extra-curricular activities which include a breakfast club and ICT, drama and sporting activities. In addition, their learning and social development are enhanced through regular visits to places of educational interest and visitors to the school.

The Sacred Heart Network provides the school with a 'Director of Chaplaincy Services' who is a member of the pastoral care team and the Religious Education team. She provides additional pastoral support for the staff, the children and the parents through, for example, preparation for special services, pastoral assemblies, circle time, and counselling sessions. Her contribution adds significantly to the pastoral provision in the school.

#### 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 (DE).

#### 1.6 HEALTHY EATING AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

The school gives very good attention to promoting healthy eating and physical activity. All the school initiatives combine well to encourage the children to adopt healthy lifestyles, such as, the encouragement stickers given to the children for their participation in healthy breaks and the meaningful involvement with health promoting organisations.

#### 1.7 LINKS WITH PARENTS AND THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

The school has worked hard and successfully to develop positive links with the parents and the local community. The parents are encouraged to become involved in school events and in supporting their children's learning through, for example, parent seminars, curriculum briefings, homework clubs, the family learning programme and an adult English class for newcomer parents. Very good communication with the parents is maintained through a

variety of meetings, regular newsletters and the school website. The parents play an active role in the life and work of the school through the School Support Group. Community links include cross-community contact, parish work and involvement with both pre-school and post-primary centres and schools in the area. Links with the wider and international community have been developed through the Dissolving Boundaries Project, the Sacred Heart Network and the Comenius Project. The Extended Schools Programme provides a variety of activities for the children and the parents, and is helping to promote inclusion further and address underachievement through for example the 'Saturday SWOTS Club'.

## **2. ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS**

### **2.1 LEARNING**

The children are well-behaved and settle quickly to their work; they are highly motivated and demonstrate good levels of engagement and enjoyment in their learning. They have good opportunities for collaborative learning and are able to communicate effectively with their peers and adults. 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 consistently below the Northern Ireland (NI) average. When compared with schools in the same FSM category, the level of attainment in English is below the average and in mathematics is above the average. Appropriately, the school has prioritised, in the School Development Plan (SDP), the need to improve standards in literacy and numeracy.

Effective use is made of a range of ICT, including interactive games, websites and programmable devices to support learning and teaching in English and mathematics. The children in years 4 to 7 participate in the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment ICT Accreditation scheme.

### **2.2 ENGLISH AND LITERACY**

The overall quality of the provision for English and literacy is good.

In the foundation stage (FS) the children develop their talking and listening skills effectively and are able to respond well to skilful questioning. They listen attentively during group story sessions and engage readily in class discussions. In KS1 the children are actively involved in the lessons and are confident in expressing themselves orally. They engage well in class discussions, and in the best practice, appropriate challenge is provided. In KS2, the children offer reasoned and articulate opinions, and listen to the teachers and the other children respectfully. They regularly take on the role of scribe and reporter and provide written and verbal recounts to their peers. Good use is made of ICT to promote the children's language development and to support their learning.

In the FS the children engage in writing through modelled and play based activities. Greater emphasis needs to be placed on developing the children's independent writing. The children in KS1 develop their writing skills through, for example, writing and reviewing poetry, writing character descriptions and completing activities which enhance their understanding. The teachers need to consider the level of challenge in the activities, particularly for the more able children, and have higher expectations of the work the children produce. In KS2, the children use Haiku and acrostic writing, creative writing, and ICT effectively to enhance their literacy skills. They write for a range of audiences and their written work is appropriately celebrated in vibrant and colourful displays throughout the school. A more consistent approach to developing the children's handwriting skills and to the presentation of their work in class books needs to be developed across the school.

Reading is taught in a systematic manner throughout the school. The children generally demonstrate a good understanding of phonic strategies, and this is reinforced by daily phonics sessions. In the best practice the teachers provide context and meaning to the reading material, and make connections to real life. In both the FS and KS1 the children have access to a wide variety of reading material, and they make good use of both class and library books, both fiction and non-fiction, through guided and shared activities. In KS1 the children read with fluency and expression and demonstrate an awareness of punctuation. More attention needs to be given to developing further the children's independent reading. In KS2 the children read with increasing fluency and expression, engage in in-depth discussions about the text and can articulate their opinions with accuracy and respect for the views of others. The children enjoy reading class novels and make good use of the well stocked library.

The literacy co-ordinator has been in post for nine years and provides very good support for her colleagues. In more recent years, she has, with the assistance of the Curriculum Advisory and Support Service, conducted a whole-school audit of need. The result has been the implementation of the Southern Education and Library Board Primary Language Framework as the school Literacy scheme of work. This has guided the school effectively in their planning for literacy and sharpened the focus on differentiation and the identification of need. The co-ordinator has appropriately identified the areas of underachievement and the teaching of reading and writing at a whole-school level as key areas for development. She has already put in place effective strategies to address underachievement and has given a presentation to the parents on literacy, and developed the introduction of paired reading, writing away together and reading partnership.

The school is also involved in the Primary Languages Programme and the children enjoy lively and cross-curricular Irish language lessons.

## 2.3 MATHEMATICS AND NUMERACY

The quality of provision for mathematics and numeracy is very good.

The programme for mathematics provides the children with a wide range of experiences in number, shape and space, measures and data-handling; this includes the effective use of practical equipment and regular opportunities for work in pairs and small groups. In the majority of classes the children engage in a variety of problem-solving and investigative mathematics. A scheme of work for mental mathematics enables the teachers to plan for, and develop, the progression of the children's mental mathematics strategies. In the majority of the lessons observed, the pace was good, and the activities engaged, challenged and motivated the children; the teachers provided good opportunities for the children to develop their mathematical language and to articulate, clarify and extend their mathematical thinking. This good practice needs to be applied more consistently across the school.

The children apply their mathematics in real life contexts; for example, in years 6 and 7 they have investigated the potential profit in making and selling sandwiches at the same price as local retail outlets. The children need to be given greater opportunities to write about their mathematics, particularly in response to problem-solving and investigative activities.

The co-ordinator and numeracy team provide very good leadership and have a clear vision for the development of mathematics within the school. The co-ordinator monitors and evaluates well the quality of the mathematics provision through the sampling of the children's work, the monitoring of teaching plans and the analysis of performance data. She supports effectively her colleagues in implementing the agreed strategies and has worked with the staff to identify appropriate priorities for further development. Attractive displays, challenge boards and whole-school events, such as maths week, capture the children's interest and



enhance their enjoyment and understanding of numeracy. The school has appropriately identified the need to review the long-term planning for numeracy in order to ensure greater continuity and progression in the children's learning.

The standards achieved by the children in mathematics are good. During the inspection the highest attaining children in year 4 demonstrated their ability to think mathematically across all areas of the numeracy programme and to talk with confidence about their experiences. In year 7, while the highest attaining children demonstrated their knowledge of important ideas and concepts, for example, metric measures, they were unsure of the most effective mental mathematics strategies and were slow to demonstrate flexibility in their mathematical thinking.

### **3. THE QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING**

#### **3.1 PLANNING**

The quality of the planning in the school is very good.

The plans set out clear learning intentions, provide appropriate activities and are cross-curricular in nature. In the FS, the plans are augmented by play-based learning observation sheets, which inform future planning. The Common European Framework of References is used effectively as a baseline for the planning for Newcomer children. In the best practice the teachers' evaluations are detailed and inform appropriately future action for individual children and groups. This good practice needs to be disseminated more consistently throughout the school. The literacy and numeracy co-ordinators oversee the planning and provide appropriate advice to their colleagues highlighting specific areas for development.

#### **3.2 TEACHING**

The quality of the teaching observed ranged from satisfactory to outstanding. Nearly all of the teaching was good or better, and a majority of the teaching was very good or outstanding. The teachers create an inclusive and supportive learning environment; they know the children well and relate the learning effectively to their interests and needs. In the best practice the teaching was well paced, well resourced, and enjoyable. The children were engaged and enthused by the teachers who asked open ended questions and made real life connections in the learning. The very good and outstanding teaching observed provided high levels of challenge and expectation. In a minority of lessons there was a lack of challenge for the more able children, and missed opportunities to promote language and learning.

Special Educational Needs is given a high priority by the school and the quality of the provision is very good. The special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO) has been in post for approximately two years and demonstrates a strong commitment to the children in her care. She has carried out a comprehensive audit of the SEN provision, drawn up an appropriate action plan and implemented systematic and effective changes to the provision. Literacy and numeracy support are provided for the children through a combination of in-class and withdrawal sessions. The SENCO works closely with the class teachers to develop detailed education plans which set out realistic targets and strategies to address each child's needs; they monitor and review the children's progress on a regular basis and there is evidence to show that the actions taken have resulted in improvements in the children's learning. In the withdrawal sessions, the children were supported very effectively

by the SENCO using a variety of strategies to develop and support the children's learning. The children are enthusiastic about their work and are motivated by the practical work and by the good use of ICT. The school deploys and utilises the support provided by the classroom assistants efficiently.

### **3.3 ASSESSMENT**

The arrangements for the continual assessment of all the children are very good. The teachers mark the children's work regularly and supportively and, in the majority of classes, provide the children with helpful comments on how their learning can be improved. This good practice needs to be developed more consistently throughout the school. Children are encouraged, through self-assessment, to reflect upon and improve the quality of their own work.

The school has recently raised considerably its awareness and use of performance data to inform and improve the children's learning. Through a detailed and comprehensive analysis of standardised tests and DE benchmarking information, the teachers identify those children who are either underachieving or are having difficulty with aspects of their learning. An appropriate range of intervention approaches are being used to meet these children's needs. The Senior Leadership Team (SLT) has also begun to use this data to inform the setting of targets for improvement in aspects of literacy and numeracy.

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. In addition, informal contacts between teachers and parents are arranged as the need arises. The annual written reports are prepared to a high standard by the class teachers and provide the parents with a comprehensive evaluation of their children's progress and attainment.

## **4. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

### **4.1 LEADERSHIP**

The overall quality of leadership and management in this school is very good.

At the time of the inspection the Principal was in post for one year. In this short time he has provided outstanding leadership and has adopted an inclusive approach to leading change with an appropriate focus on improving standards for all the children. He is fully committed to the life and work of the school and his concern and care for the staff and the children is evident. He works very closely with the Vice-principal; they have a shared vision for the future development of the school and together they promote a strong team spirit among the hard-working staff. The SLT and the co-ordinators work closely together to develop and monitor the pastoral and curricular areas of school life.

### **4.2 PLANNING FOR IMPROVEMENT**

The Principal and SLT have worked effectively to create a culture of self-evaluation, involving children, teachers, parents and governors in the audits of provision leading to setting priorities for improvement. A comprehensive SDP is in place and is clearly focused on raising further the standards achieved by the children in literacy and numeracy. A well structured staff development programme enhances the skills of the staff. The school gives very good attention to and meets fully the requirements of the Education (School Development Plans) Regulations NI 2005 Order.

#### 4.3 RESOURCES, FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE

The school governors make a very positive contribution to the life and work of the school; they are fully involved in the strategic planning and policy development and support effectively the Principal and staff in the implementation of the SDP.

#### 5. CONCLUSION

5.1 The strengths of the school include:

- the outstanding quality of the pastoral care provision which fosters successfully a caring and inclusive ethos;
- the exemplary behaviour of the children;
- the good standards achieved by most of the children in literacy and numeracy;
- the quality of the teaching observed, the majority of which was very good or outstanding;
- the very good provision for the children who require additional support with aspects of their learning; and
- the very good leadership and management throughout the school and the outstanding leadership provided by the Principal in the short period that he has been in post.

5.2 In the areas inspected, the quality of education provided by this school is very good. The school is meeting very effectively the educational and pastoral needs of the children; and has demonstrated its capacity for sustained self-improvement.

**HEALTH AND SAFETY**

Car parking at the main entrance to the school is limited and presents difficulties for the parents and the children at the start and end of the school day.

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