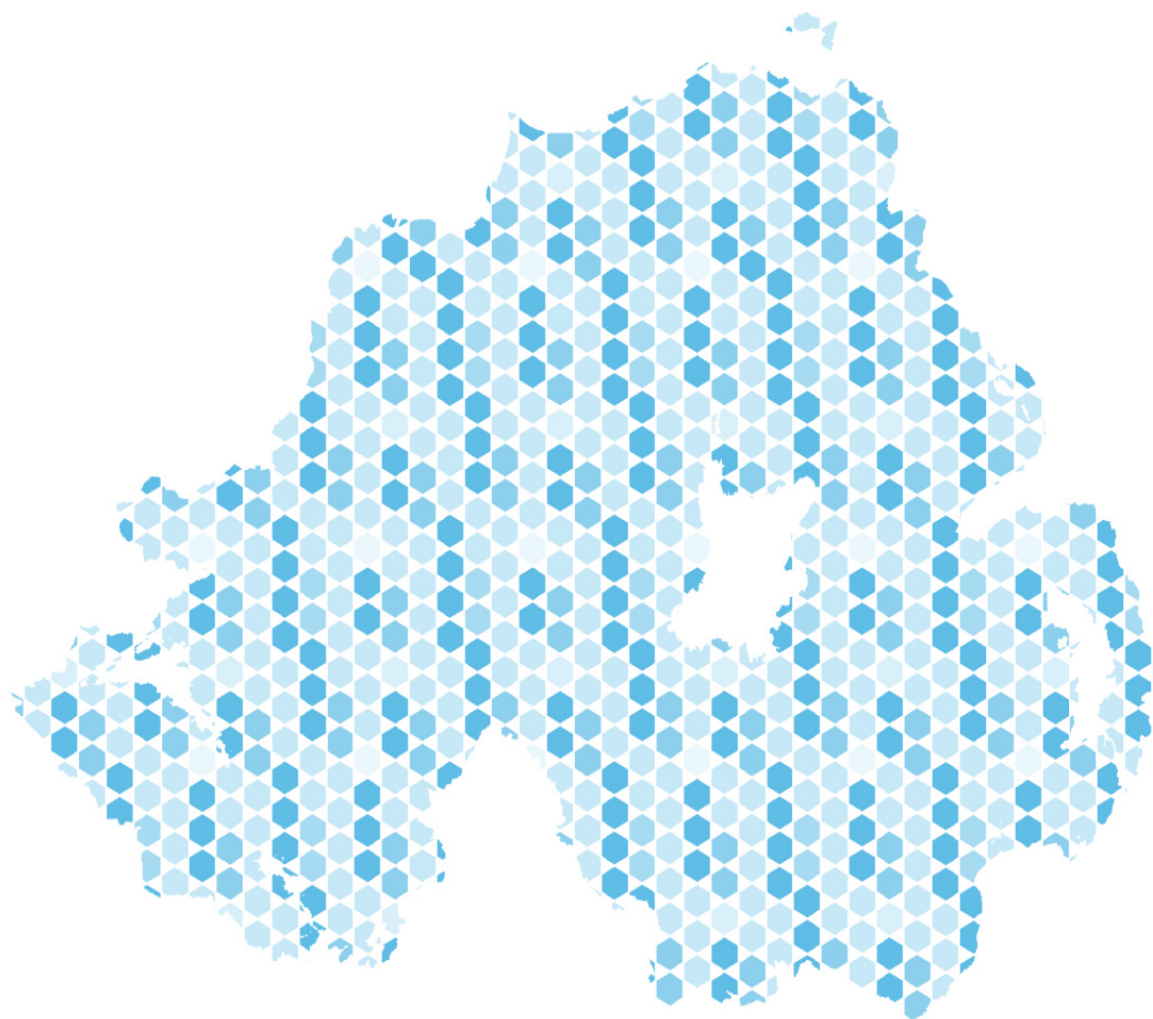


PRIMARY INSPECTION



Education and Training
Inspectorate

Our Lady's Girls' Primary
School, Belfast

Report of an Inspection
in March 2011

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

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

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

DESCRIPTOR
Outstanding
Very Good
Good
Satisfactory
Inadequate
Unsatisfactory

BASIC INFORMATION SHEET (BIS) - PRIMARY SCHOOLS

- A. i. **School: Our Lady's Girls' Primary** iii. **Date of Inspection: W/B 28/03/11**
ii. **School Reference Number: 103-0326** iv. **Nature of Inspection: Focused**

B.

School Year	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
Year 1 Intake	53	39	40	40	51
Enrolments					
Primary	336	311	296	285	290
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): | | 93.2% | NI Avg Att: 94.9% | |
| | | | Primary &
Reception | Nursery
Unit | Special
Unit |
| | | | | | Irish Medium
Unit |
| D. | i. | Number of Teachers
(including the principal and part-time teachers):
(Full-time equivalent = 25 teaching hours) | 15.4 | 0 | 0 |
| | ii. | PTR (Pupil/Teacher Ratio): | 18.8 | NI PTR: 20.7 | |
| | iii. | Average Class Size: | 20.7 | | |
| | iv. | Class Size (Range): | 16 to 27 | | |
| | v. | Ancillary Support:
Number of Hours Per Week: | | | |
| | | i. Clerical support: | | | 31.5 |
| | | ii. Foundation Stage Classroom
Assistant Support: | | | 60 |
| | | iii. Additional hours of other
classroom assistant support: | | | 65 |
| | vi. | Percentage of children with statements of special educational needs: | | | 1.7% |
| | vii. | Total percentage of children on the Special Needs Register: | | | 24.14% |
| | viii. | Number of children who are not of statutory school age: | | | 0 |
| | ix. | Percentage of children entitled to free school meals: | | | 52% |
| | x. | Percentage of children at the end of Key Stage 2 for 2009/10
who attained level 4 and above in English and mathematics: | | English
84% | Mathematics
84% |

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 SCHOOL CONTEXT

Our Lady's Girls' Primary School is situated in Deanby Gardens, off the Oldpark Road in North Belfast. The enrolment has decreased over the past five years from 336 and currently stands at 290 children. Almost all of the children who attend the school come from the local area. Approximately 52% of the children are entitled to free school meals (FSM). The school has identified 24% of the children 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 staff to complete a confidential questionnaire prior to the inspection, as well as meetings with the Board of Governors (governors), and a group of the children from year 6.

One hundred and forty-five questionnaires were issued to the parents; 37% were returned to Inspection Services Branch. Twenty-nine returns included additional written comments. The parents expressed a very high level of satisfaction with the educational and pastoral provision provided by the school. In particular, they acknowledged the welcoming and encouraging staff and the happy environment in which their children were taught.

Ten of the teachers and thirteen 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.

The very few issues raised through the questionnaires were shared with the Principal and the governors.

The governors expressed very strong support for the school. In particular, they commented on the welcoming atmosphere and the work done by parents in support of the children during the after-school clubs. In addition, they commented on the challenge function they exercised in support of the Principal and staff where they focused strongly on discussing matters to raise even further the standards the children attained.

The year 6 children talked openly, positively and enthusiastically about their experiences in school. They valued, for example, the pastoral support of the teachers, the very affirmative nature of the reward system, and the many opportunities they had to contribute to school decisions through their active participation in the school council. In addition, the children

commented with great appreciation on the rewards they received and the motivating effect this had for their outstanding effort and achievement. The children reported that they felt safe in school and were fully aware of what to do if they had any concerns regarding their work, safety or well-being.

1.4 PASTORAL CARE

The quality of the arrangements for pastoral care in the school is outstanding.

The teachers promote and reward positive behaviour through their consistent application of a wide range of strategies and rewards. Frequent valuable opportunities are provided for the children to influence decisions about school life through the school council. The Principal and acting Vice-principal have played a key role in ensuring the pastoral system operates effectively and in the best interests of the children. The children's learning and social development are enhanced well through regular visits to places of educational interest, and visits to the school by individuals and organisations. The range of extra-curricular activities and opportunities to participate in outside competitions adds significantly to the children's learning.

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 LINKS WITH PARENTS AND THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

The school informs parents of special events through the distribution of newsletters and the school website gives good access to current school policies. Effective links with the local nursery schools ensure that the youngest children make a very good start to their primary education. There are appropriate procedures for keeping the parents well informed about the school and their children's progress, for example, written reports, formal parent-teacher consultations and an open-door policy for informal consultations. The annual written reports for parents provide necessary information about their children's progress and the standards they reach.

2. ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS

2.1 LEARNING

An analysis of the key stage (KS) 2 assessment data over the past four years shows that in English and mathematics the school's performance is above the Northern Ireland average. When compared with schools in the same FSM category, the levels of attainment in English and mathematics are well above the average.

The children settle quickly to their work; they engage effectively with one another in small groups and when working in pairs. The children enjoy engaging in debates and in challenging class activities during which they demonstrate very well their ability to solve problems and complete investigations through open-ended learning.

For those children with special educational needs, the school's internal data indicates that, when comparing their standardised scores in English and mathematics with tests of their ability, almost all of the children are achieving at a level in line with, or above their ability.

2.2 ENGLISH AND LITERACY

The quality of the provision for English and literacy is outstanding.

The children demonstrate excellent talking and listening skills. In the foundation stage (FS) the teachers skilfully develop the children's listening skills, promoting well their opportunities for talking in peer groups and to adults. The teachers encourage individual children to express their thoughts and talk about their learning. By the end KS2, most of the children engage well in whole-class discussion influencing very positively the teaching and learning. The children are confident and eager to engage with other children and adults on a variety of topics in an informed manner. Talking and listening skills are further developed well across the curriculum.

Reading has a high priority in the FS through well-planned cross curricular activities, resulting in the children being competent readers by the end of KS1. The teachers plan for a variety of approaches, and make very good use of 'Big Books' and guided reading sessions. Parents provide assistance through the 'Better Reading Partnership'. The school is committed to providing an age appropriate reading level to each and every child, and makes use of a variety of methods to complement their work, for example, through participation in the 'COMET' programme. The children in KS2 read with confidence and expression, and for a variety of purposes, and make excellent use of reading schemes, class novels and library books.

The provision for writing across all key stages is very good. The children develop their writing skills throughout the curriculum. The children in the FS make very good use of formal and non-formal opportunities to develop their writing, and in the best practice, produce well-formed simple sentences independently. The children in KS1 produce excellent pieces of extended writing across the curriculum, developing their skills through the skilled use of thesauri and dictionaries. There is an appropriate focus on presentation and spelling. In KS2, the children build on the cross-curricular writing through their reviews, interviews and the effective use ICT. There is a need for the dissemination of the very good recent initiatives in writing to all of the classes. A feature of the development of the children's writing is the marking for improvement by the teachers, which is outstanding in the majority of classes. This work needs to be disseminated.

The teachers monitor and set literacy targets for every child from year 1 onwards, as well as evaluating the quality of the children's written work. Children's books are collected each term and analysed under agreed criteria. The co-ordinators lead a Literacy Team which appropriately involves a range of teachers from across the key stages, and liaise closely with the Assessment Co-ordinator and Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator. The appropriate focus of the work of the newly appointed literacy co-ordinators is the dissemination of the existing outstanding practice to all of the classes. This strategic approach to the further and continuing development of literacy is a strength of the school.

2.3 MATHEMATICS AND NUMERACY

The quality of the provision for mathematics and numeracy is outstanding.

Across all key stages the children display enjoyment in and enthusiasm for mathematics. The mathematics programme supports well the progression in the children's learning and is set in meaningful contexts. The children's learning is consolidated regularly through the well-planned application of their learning to other areas of the curriculum.

In the FS, the teachers have realistically high expectations for the children and are developing mathematical concepts through play and practical sessions. In KS1 and KS2, the teachers employ a wide range of teaching strategies to promote the children's confidence and competence in mathematics, such as, paired and group work, practical work and discussion. The children are involved in designing and planning mathematical investigations and they engage well in these activities. There is an effective use of ICT to support the learning and teaching; this includes the use of programmes such as Excel, websites, interactive games, programmable devices, a virtual learning environment, and the interactive whiteboard, by the teachers and the children to consolidate, extend and explore mathematical concepts.

The numeracy co-ordinator monitors and evaluates well the quality of the provision through her scrutiny of teachers' planning, analysis of performance data, sampling of the children's work and class visits. She promotes well the on-going development of the provision through a well-planned programme of staff training in a range of numeracy initiatives, such as the development of mathematical language, mental mathematics strategies and the effective use of age-appropriate software. A detailed policy guides well the teachers' planning and ensures a whole-school approach to the teaching and learning of mathematics. All teachers work effectively as a team to develop comprehensive planning for the curriculum.

During the inspection, the most able children in years 4 and 7 demonstrated an excellent understanding and confidence in all areas of the mathematics curriculum. They showed high levels of flexibility in their mathematical thinking. By the end of KS2, almost all of the children achieve excellent standards in mathematics and are working at a level in line with, or above, their ability.

3. THE QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING

3.1 PLANNING

The quality of the planning to support the learning and teaching is very good.

A wide range of detailed curriculum policies guides the teachers' planning and ensures a whole-school approach to the teaching and learning. All teachers work effectively as a team to develop comprehensive planning for the curriculum. For example, all of the teachers are presently working effectively on planning for writing.

3.2 TEACHING

During the inspection, the quality of the teaching observed in almost all of the lessons was good or better.

In one-third of the lessons the quality was very good, and, in a further third, it was outstanding. In the best practice, the teachers engaged the children well in their learning and kept a sharp focus on what they would be able to do, know and understand at the end of the lesson. The learning intentions were clear and the success criteria were negotiated skilfully with the children. The teachers' skilful questioning ensured that the children had very good opportunities to organise their ideas and give extended responses. The teachers have appropriately high expectations of what the children can achieve.

The children who require additional support with their learning are identified at an appropriately early stage through diagnostic tests, analysis of standardised assessment data and teacher observations. In-class and withdrawal support are provided, in both literacy and numeracy. The quality of the teaching and learning observed in the withdrawal sessions was outstanding.

3.3 ASSESSMENT

Overall, the arrangements for assessment and target setting are very good.

The school's assessment policy is of a very good quality and is implemented well. The school makes extensive and effective use of a wide range of performance data, including a detailed analysis of standardised tests and DE benchmarking information. This information is used well to track the children's progress, including the standards they reach, and is distributed effectively to all of the teachers who, in the best practice, use the information very well to set targets for individuals or groups of children in their classes. Overall, the school uses well the information gathered from the quantitative data to review and inform further improvements in the already outstanding standards the children reach.

The teachers mark the children's written work regularly and, in the best practice in most classes, provide detailed written feedback which gives appropriate praise for good work and, equally, allows the children to correct any mistakes. In the best practice, the children are encouraged to engage in self-evaluation of their own learning, in particular in analysing whether they meet the success criteria set out for lessons by the teacher. This practice needs to be disseminated to all the classes.

4. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

4.1 LEADERSHIP

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

The quality of the leadership provided by the Principal is outstanding. She knows the children and their families very well and has a clear and shared vision for the future development of the school which focuses appropriately on achieving the highest possible standards for all of the children. The Principal, school leadership team and staff set and achieve very high standards and a culture of self-evaluation permeates their work.

The Principal, supported well by the acting Vice-principal and the staff, have a clear vision for how the pastoral system supports the school's work in promoting the highest standards. The effective outworking of this vision was clearly evident during the inspection, both in the children's exemplary behaviour and in the outstanding standards attained. There is a strong and effective emphasis on the promotion of the children's confidence and self-esteem, and their achievements are celebrated well.

The co-ordinators evaluate and review systematically and effectively the quality of the planning, the teaching, the children's learning experiences and the standards achieved. As part of the ongoing work, the subject co-ordinators analyse all of the data available from standardised and other tests available on the children's performance in literacy and numeracy, and the Principal and co-ordinators use this information well to set appropriate targets for further whole-school improvement.

4.2 PLANNING FOR IMPROVEMENT

The Principal, supported well by the Board of Governors, provides excellent strategic direction for the school, focused sharply on ensuring the continued improvement in the learning and teaching across the key stages. A key part of the future development of this work will be the use of the wide range of information already gathered, and analysed, and particularly including evidence from children's written work and from lesson observation, to inform and support the dissemination of the very good or outstanding practice observed in the majority of classes.

4.3 RESOURCES, FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE

The governors carry out their associated challenge function well, adopt a proactive role in the school development planning process, and support the Principal and teachers well in raising further the educational performance for all of the children. The quality of the cleaning and caretaking in the school is of a very high standard.

The school gives very good attention to and meets fully the requirements of the Education (School Development Plans) Regulations NI 2005 Order.

5. CONCLUSION

5.1 The strengths of the school include:

- the supportive ethos which promotes the children's positive attitudes to their learning and develops their confidence and self-esteem;
- the quality of the teaching observed during the inspection, with one-third of the lessons very good and a further one-third outstanding;
- the excellent standards achieved by the children in literacy and numeracy;
- the outstanding quality of the pastoral care provision and the support provided for those children who require help with aspects of their learning;
- the work of the governors who carry out their challenge function well, in particular adopting a proactive role in supporting the Principal and teachers in raising further the educational performance for all of the children; and
- the outstanding leadership provided by the Principal, well supported by the acting Vice-principal, whose vision ensures a collegial approach by the staff, focused appropriately on the achievements and standards the children attain.

In the areas inspected, the quality of education provided by this school is outstanding; the quality of pastoral care is also outstanding. The school has demonstrated its capacity for sustained self-improvement.

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