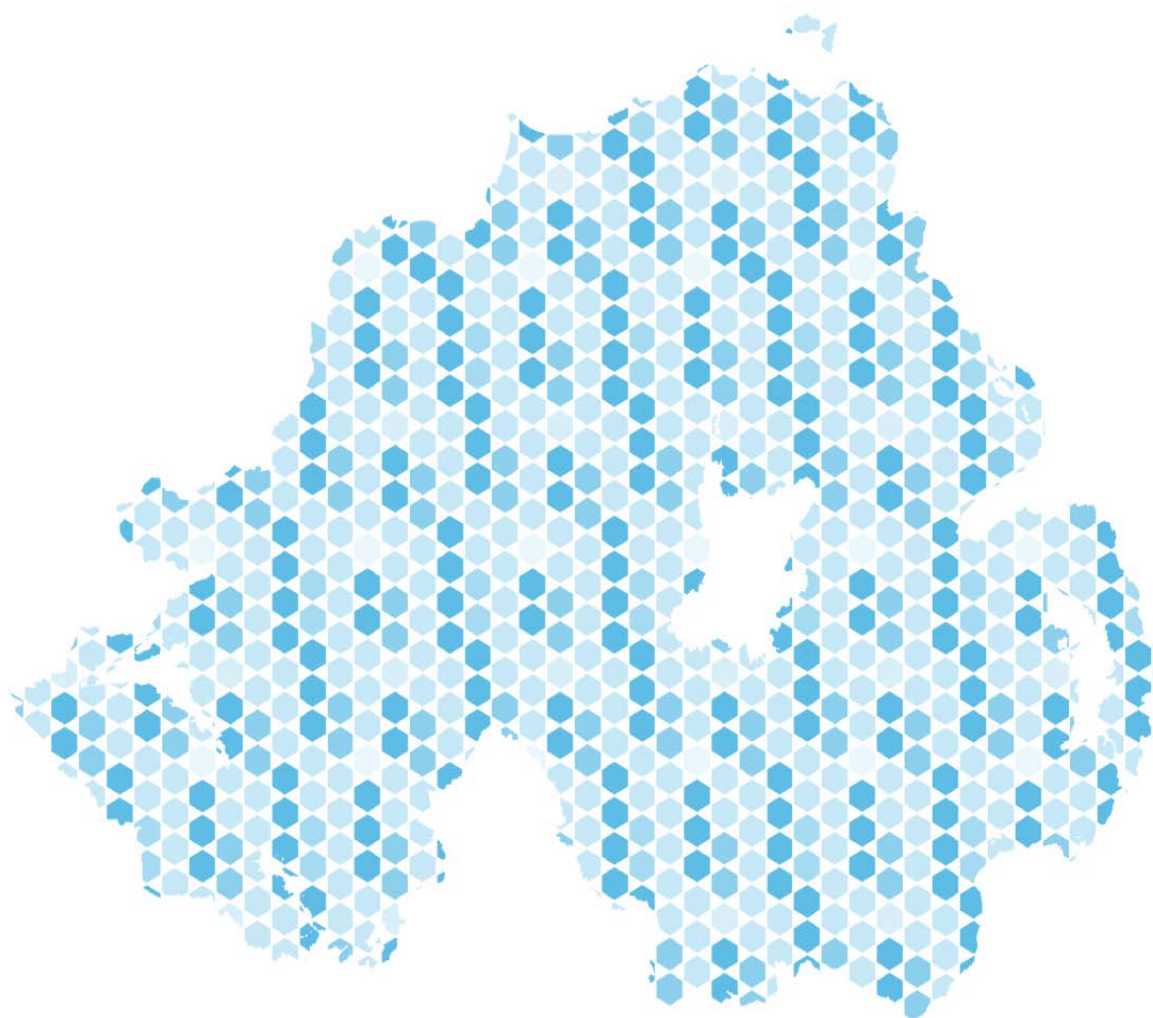


PRIMARY INSPECTION



Education and Training
Inspectorate

Rathcoole Primary School and
Nursery Unit, Newtownabbey

Report of an Inspection
in April 2013



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Inspection methods and evidence base

The inspection evaluations are based on evidence gained from lesson observations, from scrutiny of the children's completed written work and from a range of documentation including the school's internal performance data. In addition, the inspection team held discussions with groups of the children, with teaching and non-teaching staff and with representatives from the Board of Governors.

The views of the parents, teaching and non-teaching staff were sought through a confidential questionnaire prior to the inspection. The reporting inspector discussed any issues raised through the questionnaires with the principal and the governors. A summary of the outcomes from the questionnaires is included in section 6 of the report.

Quantitative terms

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. School context

Rathcoole Primary School and Nursery Unit is situated in the Rathcoole area of Newtownabbey and draws all of its children from the surrounding housing estate. The catchment area suffers from significant social and economic deprivation. The school's enrolment has declined in the last four years and presently stands at 88 children in the main school. At the time of the inspection 72% of the children were entitled to free school meals and 67% of the children in the primary school were identified as requiring additional support with aspects of their learning. The children are taught in composite classes, two of the classes include children at two different key stages. A nursery unit including 52 children in full time places, a toy and book library, a parent's room and a nurture room are also accommodated within the school grounds. At the time of the inspection the Vice-principal was absent and three substitute teachers were deployed to cover for staff absences.

2. Focus of inspection and overall finding

The inspection focused on:

- the children's achievements and standards in literacy and numeracy, in particular, how the school is addressing low attainment and under-achievement where applicable;
- the quality of provision in the school and nursery unit; 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.

OVERALL FINDING OF THE INSPECTION

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, learning and teaching and leadership and management which need to be addressed if the needs of all the children are to be met more effectively.

Summary of key findings

Achievements and standards Provision for learning Leadership and management Nursery Unit	Satisfactory Satisfactory Inadequate Good
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KEY FINDINGS OF THE INSPECTION

3. Achievements and standards

The quality of the children's achievements and standards is satisfactory.

- At the Foundation Stage (FS) the children enjoy a play based curriculum and are to work with independence, be creative and work collaboratively. Throughout the school most of the children engage purposefully in the learning experiences and complete the tasks given to them. Within all of the classes a minority of the children with complex learning needs are dependent on support from the adults in order to remain focused on their learning. Those children who access additional support within the nurture room are showing increasing engagement in their learning with effective individual support from the adults. The school's internal performance data demonstrates that these children have begun to make appropriate progress in meeting the targets outlined in their individual education plans.
- An analysis of the key stage (KS) 2 assessment data¹ over the past four years shows that the school's performance in English is below the Northern Ireland (NI) average across all four years and in mathematics it is below the Northern Ireland (NI) average in three out of the last four years. When compared with schools in the same free schools meals category the children's level of attainment in English during the same period is consistently above the average across all four years and in mathematics is above the average in three out of the last four years.
- The children achieve a satisfactory standard in literacy and mathematics. The more able children read with a good level of fluency and achieve satisfactory standards in writing. To raise the standards further the children, particularly in upper KS 2, need to write more extensively across the curriculum using a range of genre. A minority of children have difficulties in listening with sustained concentration, are less confident in talking and are still developing their social skills. Further learning and teaching strategies are required to address these difficulties. By year 7, the more able children show a sound knowledge of most of the key aspects of the mathematics curriculum. They are able to explain their methodology but there is inconsistency in their ability to apply their knowledge and skills in other contexts in mathematics and across the curriculum.
- Almost all of the children in the nursery unit are well-settled, highly motivated and can talk about their learning activities and experiences. They make good use of all of the play areas and often engage in lengthy periods of concentrated and purposeful play. The majority of the children show imagination and creativity in their play; their drawings, paintings and constructions are often representational and show good attention to detail. The majority of the children have a good understanding of early mathematical concepts and can sort, match and count independently.

¹ The key stage outcomes compared to schools in the same free school meals category should be interpreted with caution as this category contains a relatively small number of schools compared to other categories.

4. Provision for learning

The quality of the provision for learning is satisfactory.

- The quality of the planning, teaching and assessment is inconsistent across the school. The teaching observed during the inspection ranged from satisfactory to very good. In just over half of the teaching observed in the primary school, the quality is good or very good. However a significant minority of the teaching observed had areas for improvement. In the most effective practice the activities are appropriately differentiated to meet the wide range of needs and abilities within the class. The teaching is well paced and the adults interact skilfully with the children to foster positive working relationships. In the less effective practice there is over direction by the teacher, insufficient account is taken of the children's prior learning; expectations are low; the organisation for and management of the children's learning is not undertaken well and there is insufficient purposeful differentiation to meet the needs of all of the children. There is a lack of appropriate induction procedures and monitoring arrangements for temporary teachers to guide them in their day to day work with the children.
- The whole school provision for literacy is currently being reviewed and a draft reading programme has been developed which now needs to be disseminated at whole school level. The school is currently investing in resources to raise the profile of reading and broaden the reading experiences of the children; it will be important to monitor the impact of these initiatives on the children's achievements. The school has appropriately identified the need to develop further the children's comprehension skills across all key stages. In the Foundation Stage (FS) and KS1 the children acquire good mathematical knowledge and language through the appropriate use of games, stories and practical activities; in KS2 they have satisfactory opportunities to consolidate and extend their knowledge, particularly in number work. To improve the children's understanding and flexibility in mathematical thinking, particularly at upper KS2, processes need to be more fully integrated into the day to day teaching of mathematics and the learning needs to be set within meaningful contexts for the children. Appropriate strategies to promote improvement in numeracy have been identified in the School Development Plan and professional development has been provided through the Raising Achievement in Numeracy (RAIN) programme to develop further the support provided for those children who are underachieving in this key curricular area.
- The quality of the arrangements for pastoral care in the school is satisfactory and in the nursery unit it is very good. The majority of the children were well-behaved, polite and mannerly to one another and visitors to the school. Almost all of the staff in the school and the nursery unit promote positive behaviour through effective strategies and reward systems. The staff need to provide opportunities for the parents and the children to contribute to the decision-making process within the school. There are a significant number of suspensions of children from school over recent years, the leadership and governors should continue to address this issue.
- The school is equipped with a computer suite in addition to individual terminals in each classroom. The children have access to these at regular intervals but there is insufficient use made of the information and communication technology (ICT) to support the children's learning.

- The quality of the provision for special educational needs is good. The school identifies early those children who require support with literacy and numeracy through careful observation and a range of suitable assessments. The majority of class teachers are well informed about the wide range of ability in their classes and suitably differentiate the children's work. There is effective withdrawal support, particularly in reading. The children respond well to this targeted support and make good progress as they move through the school. The classroom assistants provide additional support which develops the children's confidence in reading and in their self esteem.
- A nurture class designed to support those children with very significant social, emotional and behavioural issues opened in September 2012. Morning and afternoon classes for KS1 and KS2 children are provided in order to enable them to engage more effectively in their learning and to develop their social and life skills within a warm and supportive environment. In the short time since it opened there is clear evidence of significant benefits for the children and they are making good progress towards re-integration to the primary classes.
- The programme for play based learning in the FS is well planned. There is a broad range of activities available during the play sessions and these are linked to, and reinforce themes and topics across the curriculum. Good opportunities are provided to enhance the children's oral, early reading, writing and numeracy skills.
- The quality of the provision in the nursery unit is good. The attractive and stimulating learning environment in the nursery unit promotes effectively the all round development of the children. The very good quality of the staff interactions with the children ensure that the opportunities for learning through the play experiences are well exploited. Aspects of the dinner routine and the collection arrangements at the end of the day need to be reviewed to ensure all time is used effectively to promote learning.
- The nursery unit gives good attention to healthy eating and physical activity through the provision of healthy breaks and the daily opportunities for physical play experiences outdoors.

5. Leadership and management

The quality of the leadership and management is inadequate.

- The Principal has been in post for 11 years and has invested much time and energy in fostering the pastoral care of the children and has reached out to the parents with some success and endeavoured to involve them more fully in the education of the children. He has faced a number of complex issues over the last number of years. Staff changes and a high proportion of substitute teachers have resulted in a lack of focus on improving key areas of the provision including literacy, numeracy and ICT. As a result of the ongoing changes teachers have been redeployed and the Senior Management Team (SMT) has begun reorganising co-ordinating roles and responsibilities. However, the co-ordinators and teachers have not always received the necessary professional development

associated with their new roles. The Senior Management Team (SMT) and staff need to develop good professional working relationships and further develop effective lines of communication at all levels. In addition, priority needs to be given to improving the quality of learning and teaching at KS2 to meet more effectively the needs of all of the children.

- The professional development and contribution of the co-ordinators will be an essential factor in achieving the improvements required. The co-ordinators need to be more proactive in developing their own knowledge and expertise and in monitoring and evaluating the quality of learning and teaching within their area of responsibility. The SMT and the Board of Governors (BoG) need to ensure that the roles and responsibilities of the co-ordinators are clearly communicated and that action for improvement is progressed at an appropriate pace. The challenge for the leadership team and the governors is to prioritise these developments in a strategic and time costed framework.
- The School Development Plan (SDP) complies partially with the requirements of the Department of Education School Development Plans Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2005. The process of self-evaluation leading to improvement has not yet been established in the primary school. A good start has been made to the collection and analysis of performance data and samples of the children's literacy and numeracy work; this now needs to be built upon to develop further a culture of self-evaluation at whole school level. There is a lack of effective consultation with the parents, the children and the staff when identifying the priorities for whole school development; and the teachers do not have a working knowledge of the SDP and associated whole-school priorities. The Principal, vice-principal and the appointed co-ordinators need to establish a rigorous and collegiate approach to the school development planning process, and implement a range of appropriate strategies to monitor, evaluate and improve further the quality of the provision and use the outcomes to plan for and effect improvement.
- The children on the special needs register have a wide range of difficulties in literacy and numeracy and a small minority of children have very challenging behaviours. Children and their families have good opportunities to avail of good quality experiences through the toy and book library, the nursery unit, the nurture room and the support provided for those families accessing the Family Learning programme with a number of Barnardo's facilitator's. A more collegiate and strategic approach is required, in order to share these strategies and approaches at a whole school level for the benefit of all the children. It will be important to monitor and evaluate the impact of the combined aspects of this provision and ensure that the key stages of transition are managed effectively to provide a consistent and progressive approach to the children's acquisition of knowledge and skills.
- The joint heads of the nursery unit have very recently been appointed and together they promote a team spirit among the hard working staff. A good start has been made in the process of self evaluation and appropriate action plans are in place to outline the future development of the unit. It will be important that the staff have appropriate time allocated to carry out their duties and to work together on the necessary documentation to ensure high standards are maintained.

- The school has established and continues to develop helpful links with the parents and the local community. The children benefit from a range of visitors to the school and a variety of educational trips within and beyond the local environment. The school has strong links with a local church which supports the Breakfast Club. The parents benefit from the provision of a parents room, the toy and book library and value the work of the teacher who provides social and pastoral advice. A growing number of the parents are taking part in the Family Learning programme through a partnership with Barnardo's, the facilitators are working well within the school.
- The Board of Governors is supportive of the Principal and staff and active in aspects of the life and work of the school. It is committed to improving the provision for all the children. Based on the evidence presented at the time of the inspection, the evaluation is that the governors are effective in aspects of governance. As the school moves forward it will be important for the governors to exercise a more robust challenge function in relation to achieving improvements in the quality of learning and teaching throughout the school.
- On the basis of the evidence available at the time of the inspection the school's arrangements for safeguarding children are unsatisfactory and do not adequately reflect the guidance issued by the relevant Department. In particular the staff have not received formal child protection training within the last two years. The school needs to update the training in safeguarding for all of the teaching, support staff and the newly appointed governors, and consult further with the staff, children and the parents when revising policies. In particular, with regard to the current review of the policy for the management of the children's personal care in the primary school and ensure that the parents within the nursery are clear about who to contact in the case of any concerns. The District Inspector will return to the school, within a six week period, to ensure that these important issues are addressed appropriately.
- 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.

CONCLUSION

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, learning and teaching and leadership and management which need to be addressed if the needs of all the children are to be met more effectively.

The areas for improvement include the need to:

- clarify the roles and responsibilities of the co-ordinators at all levels to effect a coherent and collegial approach to curricular development;
- to continue to raise the standards in literacy and numeracy further for the children and review the arrangements at key transitional stages to ensure progression and continuity in the children's learning experiences; and

- provide more sharply focused strategic leadership, including school development planning, at all levels and implement more robust systems for monitoring and evaluating the core work of the school.

The Education and Training Inspectorate will monitor and report on the school's progress in addressing the areas for improvement over a 12-24 month period.

6. Summary of questionnaire responses

PARENTAL QUESTIONNAIRES	
Number of Questionnaires Issued to the school and nursery unit (Based on 09/10 Enrolment)	65
Number of Questionnaires Returned	18
Percentage of Returns	28%
Percentage of Returns	7
NURSERY UNIT	
Number of Questionnaires Issued	52/26
Number of Questionnaires Returned	9
Percentage of Returns	35%
Percentage of Returns	6

Almost all of the responses from the parental questionnaires in both the primary school and nursery unit indicated a high level of satisfaction with the provision in the school. In the written comments, in particular, the parents highlighted the caring, supportive staff, the quality of the care provided and provision within the nursery unit, the children's happiness and instances of notable development in the children's social skills. A small number of concerns were raised however, through the confidential questionnaires, regarding the high number of substitute teachers used to cover staff absences, requesting more curriculum meetings for the parents, and reported low expectations for the children.

TEACHERS QUESTIONNAIRES	
Number of Questionnaires Returned	6
Number of Comments	*

SUPPORT STAFF QUESTIONNAIRES	
Number of Questionnaires Returned	8
Number of Comments	*

* Denotes fewer than five

The majority of the responses from the staff were supportive of the work of the school; a significant minority expressed concerns through the confidential questionnaires, in relation to effective communication within the school, limited opportunities to be involved in professional development, and about aspects of the leadership and management of the school. These issues were shared with the Principal and the governors.

In discussions with the governors, they expressed their awareness of the difficulties faced with recent staffing arrangements, their commitment to supporting the school, the recent development of the nurture room, and the importance of the school within the local community.

In discussion with the year 6 children, they spoke positively about the school, the established links and new friendships with children from a neighbouring primary school but missed the lack of after schools activities this school year. They indicated that they know what to do and who to turn to with any worries or concerns.

The concerns raised in the written comments has been discussed with the governors and the Principal.

**STATISTICAL INFORMATION ON RATHCOOLE PRIMARY SCHOOL NURSERY UNIT,
NEWTOWNABBEY**

1. Details of Children

Number of children:	Class 1	Class 2
Attending full-time	26	26
Attending part-time	0	0
Under 3 years of age*	0	0
With statement of special educational needs	0	0
Without a statement but receiving therapy or support from other professionals for special educational needs		
At CoP stages 3 or 4**	1	0
At CoP stages 1 or 2**	0	0
With English as an additional language	0	0

* On 1 July.

** The stages refer to those set out in the Code of Practice for the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs.

Percentage qualifying under DE admission criteria 1 or 2.	100%
Average attendance for the previous year.	87.9%

2. *Duration of Sessions*

Full-time	Part-time: am	Part-time: pm
4¾ hours	-	-

3. DETAILS OF STAFF

Number of:	Full-Time	Part-Time
Teachers	1	2
Nursery Assistants (qualified)	1	2
Nursery Assistants (non-qualified)	0	0

Number of: ***	
Students	1
Trainees	0

*** Total placements since September of current year

4. Parental Questionnaires

Number issued	26
Percentage returned	34.6%
Number of written comments	6

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