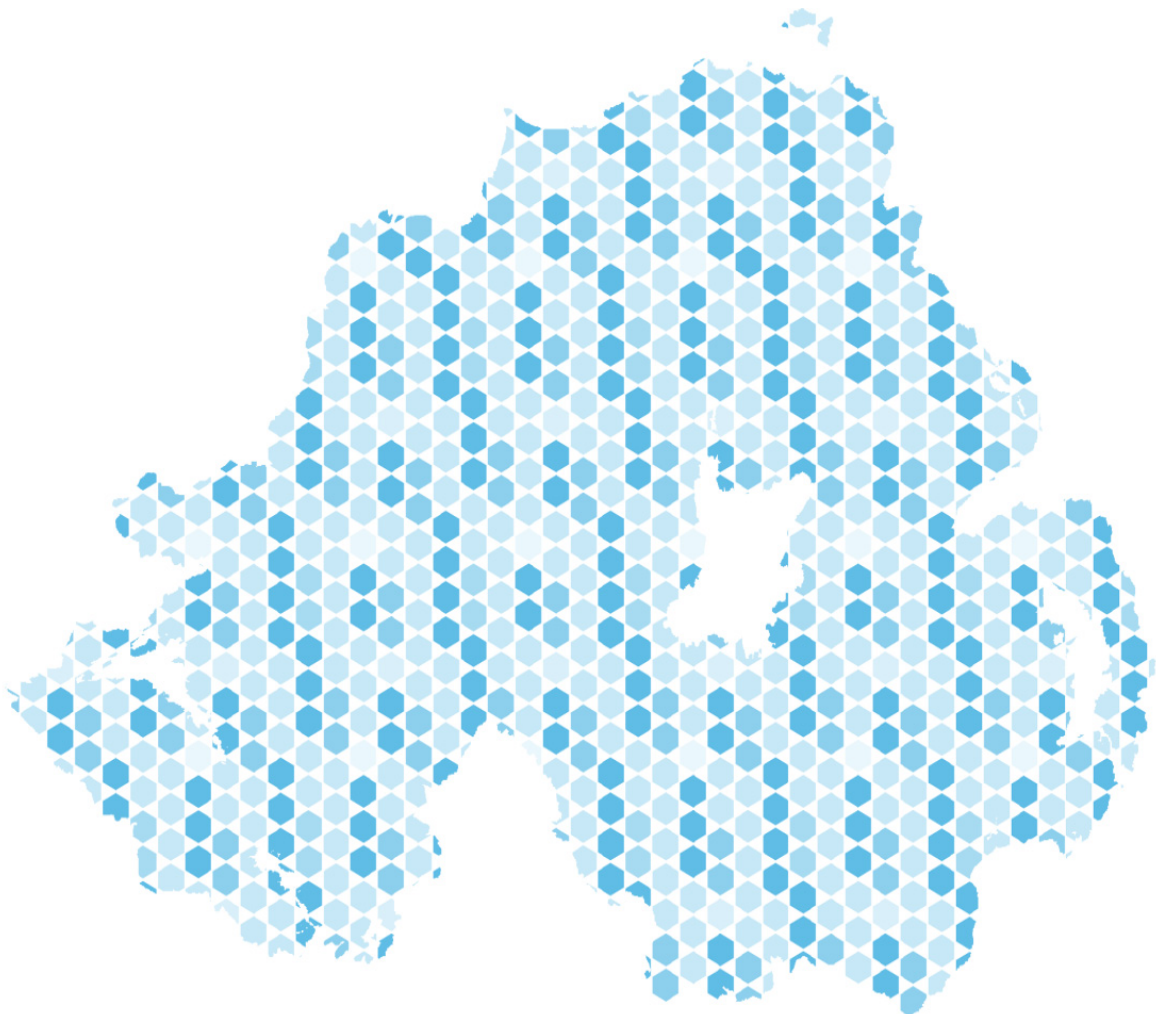


PRIMARY INSPECTION



Education and Training
Inspectorate

St Colman's Abbey Primary
School and Nursery Unit,
Newry

Report of an Inspection
in November 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 SCHOOL CONTEXT

St Colman's Abbey Primary School is situated on Courtenay Hill in the city of Newry, County Down. It is a single sex, boys' school with a co-educational nursery unit and an educational centre for children with physical disabilities (ECPD). The enrolment in the school has fluctuated slightly over the past four years and currently stands at 204. In addition, there are 52 children enrolled in the nursery unit and six children in the ECPD. All of the children in the school and almost all of the children in the nursery unit come from the immediate area. At the time of the inspection 30% of the children were entitled to free school meals and 11% of the children were identified as requiring help with aspects of their learning. There are 52 newcomer children in the school and nursery unit.

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, the teachers 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 children from year 6.

Of the 111 questionnaires issued to the parents in the primary school, 48 (43%) were returned to Inspection Services Branch, including 24 which contained an additional written comment. Almost all of the responses from the questionnaires indicated a good level of satisfaction with the provision in the school. In particular, the parents valued the dedicated, hard-working staff, the respect shown to the children and the efforts made by the whole staff to provide for those children with additional learning needs.

In addition, 21 parents (40%) from the nursery unit and a small number of parents (50%) from the ECPD returned the questionnaires to ISB. Ten of these responses included an additional written comment. Most of the responses from the nursery unit indicated a good level of satisfaction with the quality of provision. All of the responses from the ECPD expressed a high level of satisfaction with the quality of the provision.

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

Nine of the teachers and 15 support staff completed the questionnaire. Almost all of the staff indicated that they are happy in their work in the school. In the meeting with the governors, they expressed their appreciation of the hard-working Principal and staff and of the school's commitment to the holistic education and development of the children through, for example, the wide range of after school activities provided. They also acknowledged the school's efforts to include and provide for the newcomer children in the school and nursery unit.

In discussions held with the year 6 children they spoke enthusiastically about the range of activities on offer to them both before and after school. They also indicated that they feel safe in school and know who to speak to if they have any concerns.

1.4 PASTORAL CARE

The quality of the arrangements for pastoral care in the ECPD is outstanding. This is evidenced through, for example, the excellent working relationships at all levels and through the appropriately challenging learning activities which are clearly differentiated to meet the children's individual needs.

In the school and nursery unit the quality of the arrangements for pastoral care is good. This is demonstrated through the development of the pastoral and sensory rooms to meet the needs of the children and through the school's commitment to providing an inclusive environment, for example, by providing a meeting place for newcomer families in the greater Newry area. The school also encourages the children to take appropriate responsibility for aspects of the school's work as evidenced through the school council's role in improving the provision during playtime.

The strengths in the pastoral provision within the nursery unit include the care which the staff show the children; the children's co-operation with the adults and the children's very good behaviour.

1.5 CHILD PROTECTION

The school, nursery unit and ECPD have very good, comprehensive arrangements in place for safeguarding children; these arrangements reflect the guidance issued by the Department of Education (DE).

1.6 HEALTHY EATING and PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

The school and nursery unit give good attention to promoting healthy eating and physical activity, for example through encouraging healthy breaks, through the range of extra-curricular sporting activities available within the school and, in the nursery unit, through the attention to dental hygiene, all of which encourage the children to adopt healthy lifestyles.

1.7 LINKS WITH PARENTS AND THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

The school has long-established and effective links with the parents, the parish and wider school community. The children benefit from strong links with a range of sporting organisations and, in turn, contribute generously to the life and work of a number of local charities and residential homes for the elderly. Within the past three years the teachers have developed appropriate procedures for consulting with the parents about aspects of the

provision within the school and have introduced a paired reading programme in years 2-7 in order to help the parents to support their children's learning at home. As part of the programme, the teachers prepared a very useful booklet to support the parents and the school records indicate that most of the children who participated in the programme made appropriate progress in their reading.

In the nursery unit, the communication with the parents needs to be developed further to enable them to work in closer partnership with the nursery staff in supporting their children's learning and development

2. ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS

2.1 LEARNING

Throughout the school, the children are courteous, co-operative and very well-behaved. They are considerate of their peers and are developing a sense of responsibility for the school environment and for the wider school community. Most of the children listen well in class; when given the opportunity, they can work well independently and in pairs, can speak articulately about their learning and are keen to share their ideas. Similarly, when the teachers set high expectations for the children, the children respond positively to the challenge, demonstrating a willingness to take appropriate risks for their learning.

In the foundation stage (FS), the staff has identified the need to develop the opportunities for the children to learn through well planned, stimulating and open-ended play activities. In order to bring about this improvement, the staff needs to develop and implement an appropriate play policy and planning to guide them in their practice. There is also a need for a clear action plan, including staff training, to guide the development of play-based learning in the nursery unit and FS.

The children in the ECPD are enthusiastic, well-motivated and achieve very good standards in numeracy and literacy in relation to their ability.

During the inspection, there was evidence to indicate that, by year 7, a majority of the newcomer children are proficient in their use of the English language and make good progress in their learning.

An analysis of the key stage (KS) 2 assessment data over the past four years shows that the school's performance in English has been in line with or above the Northern Ireland (NI) average for two of the four years. When compared with schools in the same free school meals category, it has also been in line with or above the average for two of the four years. During the same four year period, the school's performance in mathematics fluctuated considerably. In each of the four years it has been below the NI average and below the average when compared to schools in the same free school meals category.

During the inspection, the evidence gained from discussions with the children, scrutiny of the children's completed written work and examination of the school's internal data, indicates that, by year 7, a majority of the children attain good standards in both literacy and numeracy. The school has, appropriately, identified the need to review the procedures for internal standardisation of the quality of the children's work in order to track the children's attainment more accurately as they progress through the school.

2.2 ENGLISH AND LITERACY

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

The development of the children's language and communication skills is inconsistent as they progress through the school. In the FS the children have insufficient opportunity to engage orally with their teachers and their peers. In KS1 and KS2, the children can engage well in class discussions when given the opportunity, and, in most of the classes, their responses are valued well by the teachers. In a majority of the classes, however, the opportunities for the children to develop their language skills are limited by over-direction from the teachers.

In the FS the children read with enthusiasm and confidence; as they progress through the school, they have regular opportunities to develop their reading skills further through guided, shared and independent reading sessions; they read with increasing fluency and expression and use appropriate strategies to help them identify unfamiliar words. During the inspection, the children talked enthusiastically about their reading and about a variety of authors. The majority of the children make appropriate progress in reading and their attainment is in line with their age and abilities.

In the FS, the children have insufficient opportunities to engage in independent writing; they can form letters well and can copy accurately simple captions and sentences. In KS1 the children are able to plan and write simple factual recounts, produce instructional and biographical writing and diaries. They use their phonics skills to sound out and spell unfamiliar words and by the end of KS1 they can produce extended pieces of scaffolded writing. In KS2 the children write for a range of purposes, including planning for creative stories, poetry, and non-fiction writing. Whilst a majority of the children in KS2 achieve good levels in writing, the provision for writing throughout the school does not encourage the children to write independently and at times, restricts the children's creativity. By year 7, a majority of the children achieve good standards in literacy.

The newly appointed literacy co-ordinator has identified, appropriately, the need to develop further the school's scheme of work in order to guide more effectively the teachers' medium and short term planning and to ensure greater cohesion and progression in the literacy provision throughout the school.

2.3 MATHEMATICS AND NUMERACY

The overall quality of provision in mathematics is satisfactory.

There has been limited whole-school development in this area of learning for a number of years.

Within each of the key stages, there is significant inconsistency in the quality of the children's learning experiences and in the progress they make. In the most effective practice, the teachers take good account of what the children already know, understand and can do; they have high expectations of what the children can achieve and they set appropriately challenging learning activities to meet the needs of all of the children. In these classes, the teachers also employ a range of suitable strategies to motivate and engage the children, to challenge their thinking and to sustain their focus on learning; the children are encouraged to problem solve, to think flexibly, to make decisions about their preferred method of working and to talk about their work using accurate mathematical language. In the less effective practice, there is over-direction by the teacher; there is insufficient

opportunity for the children to consolidate and apply their understanding of key language and concepts and the planned practical work has limited relevance to the learning intention. In a number of the classes, the teachers are inflexible in the use of their planning; and there is an over-reliance on the completion of basic worksheets. As a result, in these classes, there is limited improvement in the children's learning.

In discussion with groups of the children from years 4 and 7, they demonstrated positive attitudes towards mathematics; most of the year 7 children are competent in working with number, can apply their knowledge practically and are secure in their understanding of measures, shape and space. Most of the children in year 4 have a secure understanding of place value, can complete simple mental calculations and are competent in their understanding of length. The staff has identified, appropriately, the need to develop further the children's understanding of processes and the application of mathematics within real life contexts.

By the end of year 7 most of the children attain standards in mathematics which are in line with their ability. These standards need to be enhanced further through more consistent provision and high quality teaching in all year groups.

The co-ordinator, who has been in post for approximately 18 months, has, appropriately, identified the need to review the whole-school programme and planning arrangements for mathematics in order to ensure consistent and adequate progression in the children's learning within and across year groups.

The use of ICT to support learning and teaching is under- developed. During the inspection there were a few examples of the interactive white board being used well to engage the children in, for example, shared reading activities and mental maths activities based on computation. However, ICT is used mainly by the children to edit and present their written work and needs to be used in a more planned way to support and enhance their learning.

3. THE QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING

3.1 PLANNING

The school's current planning does not provide sufficient information to guide the teachers in their day-to-day work with the children. The staff has made a useful start to developing thematic and curricular medium term planning which takes account of the Northern Ireland Curriculum (NIC). In a few classes the teachers have used this medium term planning as a basis for developing effective short-term planning which informs their teaching and is differentiated skilfully to meet the needs of all of the children.

In most of the classes the teachers are beginning to complete written evaluations of their planning. In the most effective practice, the evaluations provide useful information about the extent of the children's learning and clear guidance for future planning for individuals and small groups. This good practice in planning and evaluating the quality of the children's learning needs to be shared, further developed and implemented consistently throughout the school.

3.2 TEACHING

During the inspection the quality of the teaching observed ranged from inadequate to outstanding; in almost half of the lessons it was good or better and in a small number of lessons it was outstanding. In over half of the lessons observed there was a need for improvement in the quality of the teaching.

In the most effective practice, the lessons were well-structured; the learning activities were matched appropriately to the children's abilities and needs; and the focus on the planned learning was sustained throughout the lesson. In these classes, the teachers provided the children with clear instructions; they challenged the children to think and problem solve independently and to explain their chosen methods. In the less effective practice, the teachers held low expectations for the children's learning; the pace of the lessons was too slow; the focus was on the completion of routine tasks and there was inadequate provision made for the newcomer children. In these classes, over-direction by the teacher restricted the opportunities for the children to develop their language and self management skills, to work collaboratively together and to make sufficient progress in their learning.

In most of the classes, the classroom assistants are deployed effectively to support the children's learning.

3.3 ASSESSMENT

The school has, appropriately, identified the need to review the marking policy and procedures. Whilst most of the teachers mark the children's written work regularly, the quality of the marking varies significantly across the school. In a few classes, the teachers share well-focused learning intentions with the children; they encourage the children to reflect meaningfully on their personal learning and provide clear guidance on how to improve the quality of their written work. This good practice needs to be shared, developed further and implemented more consistently throughout the school.

In the FS, including the nursery unit, the use of observations to assess the children's progress and to inform planning is at a very early stage of development. The FS staff needs to develop and implement a more integrated approach to observation, assessment and planning for progression in the children's learning.

The school carries out a range of standardised tests to assess the children's levels of achievement in English and mathematics. The outcomes from these tests are used as a basis for target setting for improvement at individual and class level and to identify discrepancies between individual children's expected and actual performance. The senior management team (SMT) has identified, appropriately, the need to develop further their analysis and use of data to identify areas for whole-school development; to inform target setting more effectively; to track individual progress and to enable them to make specific provision for the small number of children who are underachieving.

The parents of the children in the primary school are kept well-informed about their children's progress through a progress meeting in term 1 and term 2 and through an informative annual written report at the end of term 3.

3.4 EDUCATION CENTRE FOR THE PHYSICALLY DISABLED

The quality of the provision in the ECPD is outstanding.

The planning, assessment, learning and teaching are integrated effectively and used to provide suitable differentiation to meet well the needs of all the children. The lessons are planned effectively to ensure the children experience enjoyment, challenge and success in their learning; the adults value the children's suggestions and build well on their ideas and responses. The teacher plans individual targets for the children and keeps detailed records of their progress. There are very good classroom routines and activities to enable the children, where possible, to develop their independence. The classroom assistants are deployed effectively and provide excellent support to the children individually and in groups.

There are opportunities, where appropriate, for a small number of the children to integrate with their peers in the mainstream school for example, for physical education and swimming. However, the first floor location of the assembly hall and the lack of wheelchair access within the main school building make it very difficult for the children from the ECPD to integrate further into the life of the school.

The special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO) liaises effectively with the staff in the ECPD and has this year worked with all teachers to begin a reverse integration programme to enable a small number of children from the mainstream classes, identified as needing support with their social and language skills, to work alongside the children in the ECPD class. It will be important for the SENCO, ECPD teacher and class teachers to monitor closely the success of this new initiative.

3.5 SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

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

The SENCO meets regularly with the class teachers and provides good support in the creation and review of the Individual Education Plans (IEP) for children identified as having additional learning needs. The majority of the IEPs have appropriate targets and, where necessary, take account of the advice from a range of educational and health professionals. The teachers need to integrate the IEP targets more effectively into their planning and evaluate them more rigorously in order to indicate the effectiveness of the teaching support and the progress the children make.

Almost all of the literacy and numeracy support for the children with SEN is provided through differentiation of the planned learning activities in the main class. However, in the lessons observed during the inspection, the learning activities were not sufficiently differentiated to meet the children's needs or to ensure adequate progression in their learning. The SENCO needs to monitor and evaluate the quality of the provision in order to ensure that the planning and teaching for children with additional learning needs is effective in ensuring that all of the children make progress in line with their abilities.

An analysis of the information provided at the time of the inspection indicates that by the end of year 7 a majority of the children identified as having SEN have made appropriate progress commensurate with their ability.

4. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The overall quality of leadership and management is satisfactory.

4.1 LEADERSHIP

The Principal has been in post for approximately three years; he is hard-working, knows the children and their families well and is committed to developing the school to meet their needs and the needs of the wider community. Since taking up post he has created a range of appropriate structures and programmes to support the children's diverse range of additional needs; he has implemented a number of initiatives to support the children's learning in literacy and numeracy and has extended the range of extra curricular activities on offer to the children. In that time he has also reviewed the management structure in order to meet more effectively the school's curricular and pastoral responsibilities. There is a need for the management structure to be developed further to identify clearly the arrangements for the leadership of the nursery unit and ECPD. The leadership and management of the nursery unit is currently inadequate.

The SENCO and recently appointed subject co-ordinators have made an effective start to managing the development of their respective areas of the curriculum. They need now to be provided with the opportunity for further training to enable them to build upon this foundation. It will also be important for the Principal and Vice-principal to undertake appropriate leadership training in order to ensure more rigorous and coherent monitoring and evaluation of the school's overall provision and to bring about the necessary improvements in learning and teaching. There is a need for more frequent, well-focused SMT and staff meetings to monitor and plan for the school's development.

4.2 PLANNING FOR IMPROVEMENT

Within the past three years the school has begun to develop the process of self-evaluation to promote improvement. The Principal has carried out a range of meaningful consultations with the children, the parents and the teaching and support staff; the outcomes from these consultations have been used effectively to inform planning for the school's development in areas such as provision for wet play times and the programme of extra-curricular activities. It will be important for the school to develop further the self-evaluation procedures in order to focus more keenly on learning and teaching and to inform more fully the school development planning process.

The processes for self-evaluation within the nursery unit are inadequate.

The School Development Plan (SDP) outlines a range of appropriate actions to support and improve the educational and pastoral provision for the children. It will be important for the Principal, staff and governors to review the current SDP in light of the inspection findings in order to identify more specifically the developments and staff training which will bring about improvement in the overall quality of the learning and teaching in the school and nursery unit.

4.3 ACCOMMODATION

The school building is approximately 75 years old and presents difficulties associated with a building of that age. However, a majority of the staff use the corridors and classrooms to good effect to display and celebrate the children's work; good use has also been made of the vacant classrooms to provide appropriate pastoral and sensory facilities for the children.

The standards of caretaking and cleaning are very good.

4.4 RESOURCES, FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE

The school is adequately resourced to support learning and teaching.

The governors are very supportive of the Principal, the staff and of the work of the school.

The school has made effective use of the extended school's funding to support the newcomer children, to support the development of the children's literacy and numeracy skills and to extend the range of after-school sporting activities. It will be important for these programmes to be evaluated rigorously in order to gauge the extent of the benefits to the children.

5. CONCLUSION

5.1 The strengths of the school include:

- the co-operative, courteous and well-behaved children;
- the good quality of the arrangements for pastoral care in the school and nursery unit and the staff's commitment to developing an inclusive ethos;
- the outstanding educational and pastoral provision in the ECPD;
- the good standards achieved by a majority of the children in literacy and numeracy; and
- the hard-working Principal, teachers and support staff.

5.2 The areas for development include the need to:

- improve the overall quality of staff development and of the planning for learning in order to raise further the standards the children attain;
- improve the overall quality of the teaching and of the leadership and management; and
- address the inadequacies in the quality of the provision within the nursery unit.

5.3 In most of the areas inspected the quality of education provided in this school is satisfactory; the strengths outweigh areas for improvement in the provision. The inspection has identified areas for improvement in leadership and management and in learning and teaching which need to be addressed if the needs of all the children are to be met more effectively. The Education and Training Inspectorate will monitor and report on the school's progress in addressing the areas for improvement over a 12-24 month period.

6. THE NURSERY UNIT

6.1 The nursery unit is accommodated in a mobile unit within the grounds of St Colman's Abbey Primary School. The nursery unit operates two part-time sessions with 26 children in each. The children are all in their immediate pre-school year; approximately 20% of the children speak English as their second language.

6.2 The strengths of the nursery unit include:

- the development of the children's listening skills, their very good behaviour and the progress in the development of their social skills;
- the children's interest in and enjoyment of books, stories and rhymes;
- the children's independence to manage their own break routine; and
- the examples of settled and concentrated play for periods during the sessions.

6.3 The areas for improvement include the need to:

- develop the skill and understanding of the staff to implement more effectively a rich and stimulating pre-school curriculum which is matched more effectively to the needs and interests of all of the children;
- review the organisation of the daily timetable to improve the balance of adult-led and child initiated activities and to make better use of daily routines as opportunities for learning; and
- develop more effective links and partnership with the parents.

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

**STATISTICAL INFORMATION ON ST COLMAN'S ABBEY PRIMARY SCHOOL
NURSERY UNIT, NEWRY**

1. Details of Children

Number of children:	Class 1	Class 2
Attending full-time	0	0
Attending part-time	26	26
Under 3 years of age*	0	3
With statement of special educational needs	0	0
Without a statement but receiving therapy or support from other professionals for special educational needs	3	2
At CoP stages 3 or 4**	0	0
At CoP stages 1 or 2**	2	0
With English as an additional language	7	12

* 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.	17.3%
Average attendance for the previous year.	88%

2. Duration of Sessions

Full-time	Part-time: am	Part-time: pm
-	2½ hours	2½ hours

3. Details of Staff

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

Number of: ***	
Students	4
Trainees	5

*** Total placements since September of current year

4. Parental Questionnaires

Number issued	
Percentage returned	%
Number of written comments	

HEALTH AND SAFETY

- The traffic congestion at drop off and pick up times poses a potential danger to the children. There is a need for a risk assessment to be carried out with regard to parking and traffic flow at peak times of the day.
- The access to the nursery unit and ECPD building is not controlled. In the interests of the safety of the children and staff and in order to meet the requirements of current guidance, there is a need for this to be reviewed as a matter of urgency.

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