

PRIMARY INSPECTION



Education and Training
Inspectorate

St Mary's Primary School,
Greenlough

Report of an Inspection
in December 2011



Providing Inspection Services for
Department of Education
Department for Employment and Learning
Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure

CUSTOMER
SERVICE
EXCELLENCE



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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: St Mary's Primary** iii. **Date of Inspection: W/B 05/12/11**
 ii. **School Reference Number: 303-2275** iv. **Nature of Inspection: Focused**

B.

School Year	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
Year 1 Intake	16	24	18	27	28
Enrolments					
Primary	142	149	132	144	156
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): 93.8% **NI Avg Att: 94.7%**
- Average Attendance for those children on the Special Educational Needs Register: 91.85%
- | | Primary & Reception | Nursery Unit | Special Unit | Irish Medium Unit |
|--|---------------------|--------------|--------------|-------------------|
|--|---------------------|--------------|--------------|-------------------|
- D. i. Number of Teachers (including the principal and part-time teachers): 7.4 0 0 0
 (Full-time equivalent = 25 teaching hours)
- ii. PTR (Pupil/Teacher Ratio): 21.08 NI PTR: 20.2
- iii. Average Class Size: 22.2
- iv. Class Size (Range): 16 to 28
- v. Ancillary Support:
 Number of Hours **Per Week**:
- | | |
|---|------|
| i. Clerical support: | 32.5 |
| ii. Foundation Stage Classroom Assistant Support: | 44.5 |
| iii. Additional hours of other classroom assistant support: | 30 |
- vi. Percentage of children with statements of special educational needs: 1.28%
- vii. Total percentage of children on the Special Needs Register: 12.82%
- viii. Number of children who are **not** of statutory school age: 0
- ix. Percentage of children entitled to free school meals: 17.3%
- x. Percentage of children at the end of Key Stage 2 for 2010/11 who attained level 4 and above in English and mathematics, and Irish (in Irish-medium schools):
- | | | | | | |
|----------------|--------|--------------------|--------|--------------|-----|
| English | 83.33% | Mathematics | 83.34% | Irish | N/A |
|----------------|--------|--------------------|--------|--------------|-----|

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 SCHOOL CONTEXT

St Mary's Primary School, Greenlough is situated in the village of Clady, just outside Portglenone. All of the children come from within a five mile radius of the school. The enrolment currently stands at 156. The school has identified just under 13% of the children as requiring additional support with aspects of their learning. Approximately 17% of the children are entitled to free school meals.

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 and support staff, to complete confidential questionnaires prior to the inspection, as well as meetings with representatives from the Board of Governors (governors) and the children from year 6.

A questionnaire was issued to every family; 45% were returned to Inspection Services Branch. A majority of the responses expressed support for the work of the school; a minority expressed concerns about the communication and engagement with the parents and about the standards of attainment.

Almost all of the responses from the staff questionnaires were positive, indicating strong support for the work of the school.

The Education and Training Inspectorate (Inspectorate) reported to the Principal, and representatives of the governors, the findings from the questionnaires.

A majority of the governors present at the meeting stated that they were informed well about the work of the school and expressed their confidence in the quality of education provided. However, a significant minority of the governors expressed concerns about the level of communication and engagement with parents, and about the need to raise further the standards achieved in literacy and numeracy.

The children in year 6 spoke positively about the caring and inclusive atmosphere within the school, the care and support they receive from their teachers, and their great enjoyment of practical work. They reported that they felt safe, and knew whom to turn to in the event of a concern.

1.4 PASTORAL CARE

The quality of the arrangements for pastoral care in the school is very good. Among the strengths are: the caring and inclusive ethos; the friendly, respectful children whose behaviour is excellent; the good to very good working relationships between the staff and the children; the positive reward system which places a high value on the children's efforts; the valuable extra-curricular and after-school programme, with key strengths in music and sporting activities.

1.5 CHILD PROTECTION

The school has very good arrangements in place for the safeguarding of children. These arrangements reflect the guidance given by the Department of Education (DE).

1.6 HEALTHY EATING AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

The school gives good attention to promoting healthy eating through a comprehensive health education programme which includes initiatives such as a "Healthy Living Week". Through this programme, healthy eating and exercise for children and adults in the whole-school community is encouraged well.

1.7 LINKS WITH PARENTS AND THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

The school communicates with parents, for example, through regular newsletters, text to parents' mobile phone service, a well-planned induction programme for the foundation stage (FS) and parent/teacher meetings. The school has also undertaken a very useful consultation exercise, through the use of questionnaires, with the parents to ascertain their views on key aspects of life and work in the school. It now needs to address the issues raised by the parents in the interests of improving further the quality of its provision. The children's learning experiences are enhanced through many and varied links with the wider community, including those with the local church, the early years' playgroup, the local GAA club and a school in Africa through the 'Connecting Classrooms' initiative.

2. ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS

2.1 LEARNING

In the majority of classes observed, the children were highly motivated, and participated enthusiastically in their learning. In these classes, they had well-planned opportunities to work together in groups and pairs, and were keen to talk about their learning. The children identified with special educational needs (SEN) make very good progress in meeting the targets outlined within their individual education plans (IEPs).

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 was below the average for Northern Ireland (NI) schools and for similar schools in the same free school meals category for three of the four years. This pattern, however, improved substantially in 2010/2011, with the school's performance around the average for both NI and for similar schools in the same free school meals category.

2.2 ENGLISH AND LITERACY

The quality of provision of English and literacy is good. Under the guidance of an effective co-ordinator, the school is revising the schemes of work for all aspects of literacy. The current action plan for English identifies appropriate priorities for further improvement which this inspection endorses.

Most of the children have good oral communication skills and their talking and listening skills are promoted effectively in a majority of the classes. In the FS, the teachers use every opportunity to promote the children's language skills. As they progress through the school, the children have very good opportunities in most classes to develop their listening and talking skills through whole-class discussions and during paired and group work.

A majority of the children achieve good standards in reading. Reading is taught systematically through the use of a commercial reading scheme, enhanced by a good range of other materials. In the younger classes, the teachers use a range of effective approaches and develop the children's early reading skills well, for example, through a phonics programme, and through shared and guided reading. Throughout KS1, the children continue to develop good independent reading skills and read unfamiliar words well, using an effective range of strategies. By the end of KS2, a majority of the children can read with fluency, confidence, expression and understanding at a level which is appropriate for their age.

In the FS, the children are encouraged to experiment with writing, and the majority can use their phonological knowledge to express their ideas in simple sentences. In KS1, the children's writing skills develop further, and they often write in response to personal and school events. As they progress into KS2, there are very good opportunities for the children to develop a variety of written forms and styles. In the older classes in KS2, however, there are insufficient opportunities for extended writing. Accordingly, the teachers in these classes need to more frequently provide the children with a wider range of writing activities and a higher degree of challenge, both across the ability range, but particularly for the more able children, in order to improve further the standards of writing reached overall by the end of KS2.

Information and communication technology is used well to support and extend the children's literacy skills across the curriculum and the children make good use of a variety of devices, software, and on line services to research, communicate and evaluate different aspects of their learning.

2.3 MATHEMATICS AND NUMERACY

The quality of provision for mathematics and numeracy is satisfactory. The very recently appointed mathematics co-ordinator provides good leadership and has a clear vision for the development of mathematics in the school. Under her guidance the school is revising the schemes of work with a sharp and appropriate focus on achieving the standards and learning outcomes expected for the various year groups. A recent audit of the range of quantitative data the school has on the children's performance provided a useful evaluation of the standards achieved and the school is beginning to take action to address the important areas for improvement in mathematics.

In the very good or outstanding practice observed, in most classes, the pace was appropriately high and the teachers used effective questioning which challenged the children's thinking, and developed well their flexibility to solve problems in different ways.

In the FS, KS1 and a minority of classes at KS2, the children experience a wide range of opportunities to develop their mathematical understanding. Practical equipment is used well and the children develop appropriate mathematical language. In most of the classes observed in these years there was a strong and effective focus by the teachers on the children achieving the learning outcomes expected for the lesson. This practice was supported well with a variety of teaching strategies which, in particular, allowed the children to provide extended oral responses, and produce written and mathematical work of a very good quality.

In the older classes in KS2, however, while the children experience an appropriate range of activities in mathematics, there was too often an insufficient challenge for individuals or groups of children in the tasks set or insufficient well-focused support for the children where this was needed. As a direct result, a minority did not reach the standards of which they were capable. This is a key area for improvement.

Information and communication technology needs to be used more frequently in a significant minority of classes to support the children's work as they collate record and graph statistical data, and when they try to solve problems arising from realistic and everyday situations. The children need more opportunities for investigative and problem-solving tasks in a significant minority of classes.

3. THE QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING

The quality of provision for learning is good.

3.1 PLANNING

The teachers prepare conscientiously for lessons. In the outstanding or very good practice observed, the teachers' planning is linked closely to the ability of the children, and evaluations are used effectively to inform future planning for learning.

3.2 TEACHING

The quality of the teaching observed during the inspection ranged from outstanding to satisfactory; almost 60% was of an outstanding quality. In contrast, 23% of the lessons were satisfactory and often needed improvement in key areas. Accordingly, the effective dissemination of this outstanding practice is a key area for improvement.

In the outstanding or very good practice observed, the lessons were well-structured with effective support provided for individuals or groups of children; learning intentions were clear, with an appropriate review and consolidation of learning often taking place; the teachers' questions often drew extended and excellent oral responses from the children; a brisk pace and a high and realistic degree of challenge was evident; and, a good range of practical resources was provided where needed;

Where the practice was less effective and needed improvement, the opportunities for group work were limited; the pace was too slow, with lack of challenge and progression in learning; and, in particular, the learning was not matched closely enough to the varying abilities of individuals or groups of the children. As a direct result, a significant minority of the children, including the more able, did not achieve the standards of which they were capable.

3.3 ASSESSMENT

The school has gathered an extensive range of data on the children's performance, including various standardised tests and benchmarked information on key stage results. Under the excellent guidance of the assessment co-ordinator, the English and mathematics co-ordinators recently introduced a number of well-conceived and appropriate improvement strategies, including the implementation of a 'tracking system' through which the teachers have begun to monitor more closely the children's progress and to help identify and target underachievement. The school has plans to develop further the use of a wider range data, in order to adjust the teaching and learning where needed, and thus improve further the standards the children achieve; the inspection strongly endorses this stated aim. A more regular examination of samples of the children's written work is needed to complement the school's evolving and increasingly effective self-evaluation arrangements.

The teachers mark the children's work regularly and, in the best practice, annotate the work with positive comments on what the children need to do in order to improve their work further.

3.4 SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

The quality of the provision for children with special educational needs is very good.

The special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO) is committed to the children and provides highly effective leadership in SEN. Through the use of testing and the teachers' observations, the school strives to identify early those children requiring additional support with their learning and to provide appropriate intervention strategies.

The class teachers, in liaison with the SENCO, write individual education plans (IEPs) for the children with special educational needs. These plans outline appropriate targets which are focused on promoting improvements in the children's learning. The teachers review regularly the progress the children make in meeting their targets and the parents are kept well informed about their child's progress through regular updates from the teachers. All of the children with special educational needs respond positively to these approaches and make good progress in their learning.

The current provision is mainly through in-class support, and, in the majority of classes, the children with language, social and learning difficulties benefit from well-focused support provided by the teachers and the classroom assistants, who provide sensitive, valuable and well-directed support, and contribute significantly to the children's overall progress.

4. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

4.1 LEADERSHIP

The overall quality of leadership and management is satisfactory.

The Principal has been in post since 2007 and is hard working and committed to the school. She has reviewed numerous school policies and has agreed roles and responsibilities with the staff. She is supported well by her long serving Vice-principal who discharges her wide range of responsibilities very effectively, including that of assessment co-ordinator. The co-ordinators for literacy and numeracy have begun to lead key development work within their areas of responsibility, and in this, they demonstrate a clear commitment to action planning and school improvement.

Monitoring and evaluation at a whole-school level, however, is at an early stage. The Principal now needs to lead and manage the staff to implement collectively the range of appropriate strategies now developing to monitor, evaluate and improve further the quality of the provision. This should include, in particular, a sharp focus on implementing the actions necessary to bring about improvement and raise standards in the areas this inspection has identified.

4.2 PLANNING FOR IMPROVEMENT

The school's process for improvement is linked clearly to a well-constructed school development plan (SDP) that complies fully with the requirements of the School Development Plans Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2010. The governors are well-informed about the plan. There are some opportunities for consultation and communication about the SDP within the school community.

The arrangements for self evaluation leading to improvement are at an early stage and need improved. In particular, in a minority of classes, the use of the available data needs a sharper focus to raise further the expectations of what the children can achieve.

5. CONCLUSION

5.1 The strengths of the school include:

- the very good quality of the pastoral care, and in particular the promotion of an inclusive environment throughout the school;
- the outstanding quality of the majority of the teaching observed where the children reach the standards of which they are capable;
- the very good quality of the provision for children with special educational needs;
- the enrichment of the children's experiences through the wide range of extra activities provided, including sport and music, as well as the involvement of a wide range of visitors to the school; and
- the very well-behaved, courteous and responsive children who demonstrate great enthusiasm and interest in their learning.

5.2 The areas for improvement include the need:

- for the Principal to lead the staff collectively in identifying and implementing appropriate strategies to monitor and evaluate the quality of provision, and to disseminate the outstanding practice more effectively;
- to improve further the standards achieved by a minority of the children by the end of KS2; and
- within the school development planning process, to improve the arrangements for the effective communication with, and the engagement of, all of the parents.

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 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 Inspectorate will monitor and report on the school's progress in addressing the areas for improvement.

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