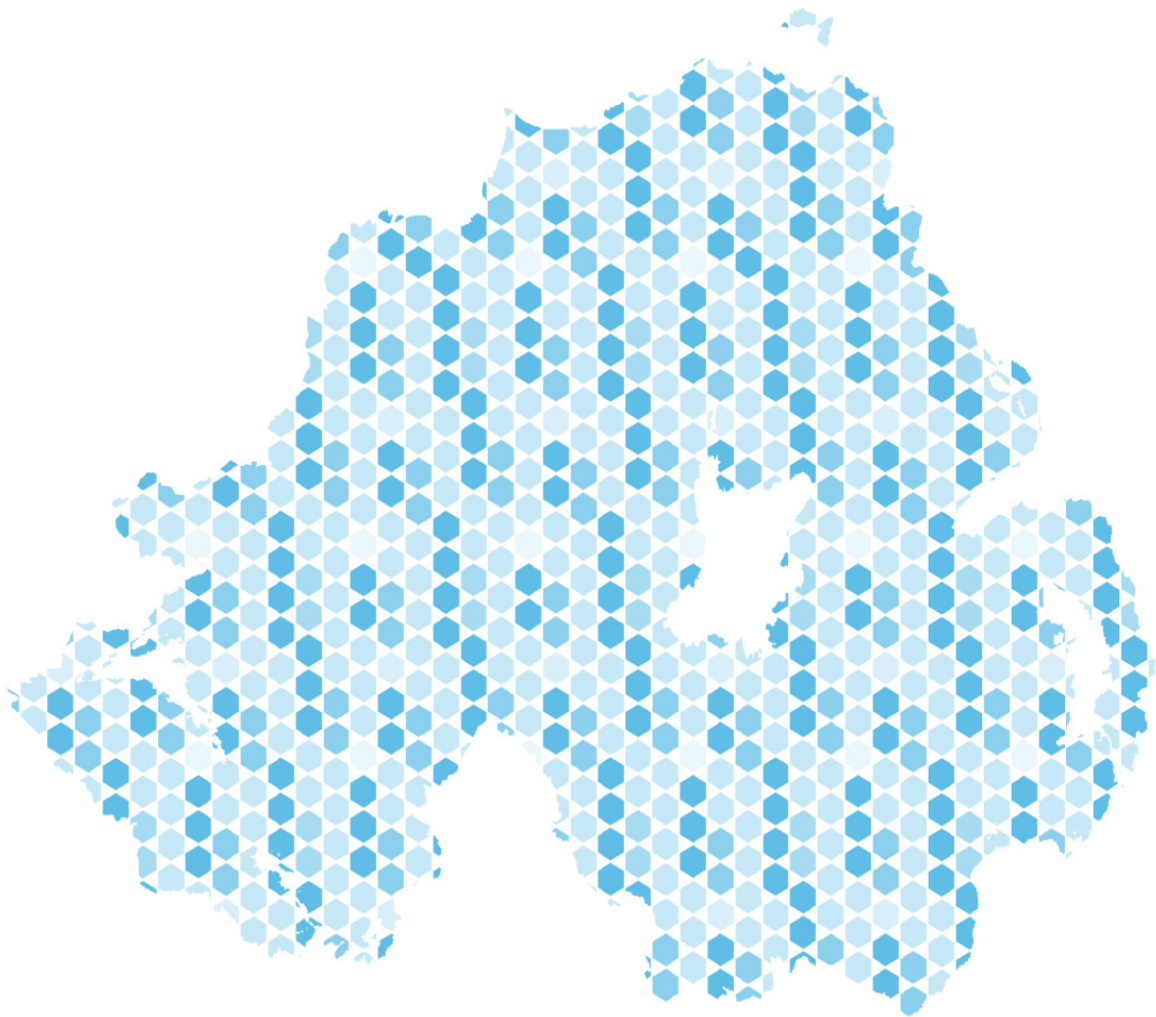


PRIMARY INSPECTION



Education and Training
Inspectorate

St Vincent de Paul Primary
School and Nursery Unit,
Belfast

Report of an Inspection
in May 2012

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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 Vincent de Paul Primary School and Nursery Unit is situated in Ligoniel on the outskirts of Belfast. The enrolment of the school has decreased over the last four years and currently stands at 175 children in the primary school and 26 in the nursery unit. The majority of the children come from the immediate area surrounding the school. At the time of the inspection, approximately 71% of the children were entitled to free school meals (FSM). The school has identified 31% 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 and support staff to complete confidential questionnaires 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 seventy-nine questionnaires were issued to the parents; approximately 25% of the questionnaires were returned to the Inspection Services Branch (ISB) and eight contained additional written comments. Twenty-eight questionnaires were issued to the parents in the nursery unit; approximately 18% were returned and three contained written comments. The responses from the primary school and nursery unit questionnaires, indicated that almost all of the parents are very supportive of the life and work of the school. In particular, the parents acknowledged the supportive and helpful staff, the recent improvements in the school and the progress made in the children's education and development.

In addition, a group of eight parents who met with a member of the inspection team all indicated that the links between themselves, the teachers and their children had been strengthened as result of attending a parent education programme.

Ten teachers and six support staff completed the confidential online questionnaire. The majority of the teachers and all of the support staff were very positive about almost all aspects of the life and work of the school. A small number of teachers expressed concerns regarding the rapid pace of change in the school.

The questionnaire responses and a summary of the written comments made by the parents and the staff were shared with the Principal and the governors.

The governors had a very detailed understanding of and expressed very strong support for the school; in particular, they recorded their appreciation of the energetic work of the Principal and the commitment of the staff to the community and to the children. They engage purposefully in the leadership and management of the school and are keenly aware of and have planned ahead for the future needs of the school.

The children in year 6 talked of their enjoyment of school and reported that they feel safe and knew who to speak to if they had a concern. In particular, they noted their appreciation of the introduction of playground equipment during break and lunch time and their enjoyment of the range of extra curricular activities.

1.4 PASTORAL CARE

The quality of the arrangements for pastoral care in the school and the nursery unit is very good.

The key strengths in the provision include the excellent pastoral lead provided by the Principal and the vice-Principal, who have a clear understanding of the needs of the children and families within the local community. In addition, there are effective strategies and support to overcome barriers to learning. The children's learning is fostered within the inclusive and supportive ethos of the school. A Personal Development and Mutual Understanding (PDMU) programme, effectively developed through well-established cross-community links with a local primary school, and a wide range of extra-curricular activities help broaden the children's learning. There is a clear, coherent approach being developed to promote positive behaviour throughout the school displayed in the excellent behaviour of the children observed during the inspection.

1.5 CHILD PROTECTION

On the basis of the evidence available at the time of the inspection the school has comprehensive arrangements in place for safeguarding children. These arrangements reflect the guidance issued by the relevant Department.

1.6 HEALTHY EATING AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

The school gives very good attention to promoting healthy eating and physical activity. There is a well enjoyed breakfast club and a healthy-break initiative; regular opportunities for energetic outdoor play, including very well organised break time activities, and a range of extra-curricular sports which encourage the children to adopt healthy lifestyles.

1.7 LINKS WITH PARENTS AND THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

There are very good links with parents and the local community.

The school and nursery unit are a focal point within the local community. The parents are encouraged to become involved in the life of the school and the education of their children; their contributions are valued. The effective implementation of the parent education programmes has clearly strengthened the home school links. This work is now being built on through the creation of an active parent-teacher and friends group within the school. The wide range of other health, education and community links support the work of the school in meeting the needs of the children. The valuable links established with the local pre-school centre, accommodated within the school, are very good.

2. ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS

2.1 LEARNING

Almost all of the children are well-motivated and engage purposefully with one another in the learning process, responding well to the expectations of the staff. The continuity from the nursery unit to the foundation stage (FS) is impacting positively on the children's learning experiences and it is appropriate that the teachers develop further their shared understanding of learning through play in the early years. Most of the children in key stage (KS) 1 and 2 take responsibility for their learning and persevere in group work activities; they take turns, adopt roles, communicate effectively and collaborate to make decisions.

An analysis of the KS2 assessment data over the past four years shows that the school's performance in English and mathematics is following a significant improving trend. This year, when compared with schools in the same free schools meal band, the levels of attainment in English and mathematics were both above the average. The school and governors are continuing to work in partnership with the parents in order to provide support to close the attainment gap when compared with the Northern Ireland (NI) average performance.

The school's data indicates that almost all of the children with special educational needs (SEN) make very good progress in English and mathematics. The children have developed positive attitudes to learning and with very good support, are keen to overcome the barriers to their learning.

2.2 ENGLISH AND LITERACY

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

Literacy is promoted well by the literacy team which appropriately includes the co-ordinator, the special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO), the Principal and representatives from the key stages. The literacy team have focused on improving standards in reading and writing. In addition they have improved the central library and added more non-fiction books that appeal to the interests of both boys and girls.

The teachers have devised a whole school policy for literacy and have begun to monitor the range of writing genres and progression in the children's skills using the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) 'Framework for Literacy'. They have also begun to make effective use of the school's internal data, such as that devised from a Belfast Education and Library Board (BELB) speech and language programme and standardised test results to identify early those children who are under-achieving in literacy, and to prioritise areas for whole-school improvement.

The children have very good oral communication skills. In the most effective practice, the teachers encourage the children to talk about their personal experiences and to provide extended oral responses to a range of stimuli; they support the children skilfully in structuring their ideas and in extending their range of vocabulary. In the less effective practice, there are limited opportunities for the children to express their opinions and to engage in meaningful discussion with their peers. Groups of children have used opportunities to perform in public to develop their skills and confidence further, and have won awards in regional drama competitions.

The younger children acquire basic reading skills through a structured phonics programme and the use of appropriate teaching of reading strategies. During the inspection, groups of children from years 4 and 7 read with fluency, expression and understanding. The older children were enthusiastic about reading and discussed their preferences and favourite authors. The classroom assistants provide additional support of a high quality. The 'Reading Partnership' programme enables the children to read with improved confidence and fluency. Performance data relating to progress is being analysed and as a result, the teachers are developing a clear view of the positive impact of this intervention programme. By year seven all of the children achieve standards in reading at or above those expected for their age and ability. The teachers have, appropriately, identified the development of the children's understanding of non-fiction text as an area for whole-school improvement.

In the Foundation Stage (FS) there are good examples of the children's early independent writing. The children in Key Stage (KS)1 develop as writers through well-structured guided writing lessons. The teachers have focused at whole-school level on the development of the children's comprehension skills. In addition, they are providing more meaningful stimuli to develop further the children's creative writing skills. In KS1 and KS2 the children write in a range of genres across the curriculum areas and for a variety of audiences. Information and communication technology is integrated effectively into classroom activities; the children make good use of ICT to draft, edit and present their work to a good standard. By the end of year 7, a majority of the children, including those registered with special educational needs, attain good or better standards in writing

2.3 MATHEMATICS AND NUMERACY

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

The vice-Principal, acting as numeracy co-ordinator, leads her team very well and is committed to ensuring that high quality learning experiences are provided for all children through systematic monitoring and evaluation of the provision. The current action plan places an appropriate focus on the development of the children's abilities to apply their mathematical understanding in investigations and problem-solving activities. In addition, the numeracy co-ordinator and her team have developed a framework, based on the levels of progression, to guide the teachers' medium-term planning and to assist them in evaluating the impact of their teaching. This good work is having a positive effect on the children's enjoyment of mathematics and on the standards they attain.

In the early years, the youngest children experience a good range of enjoyable learning activities in number, shape and space, measures and handling data. They use practical equipment with confidence to develop their understanding of number through sorting, matching and counting activities. This early mathematical development is built upon effectively in KS1 and KS2 through suitably challenging practical activities that provide breadth and balance across the full mathematical curriculum. Cross-curricular opportunities to consolidate the children's understanding of important mathematical concepts are being developed effectively through appropriate topic work. Almost all of the teachers use ICT effectively to enhance the learning of mathematics.

During the inspection, in the best practice, there were very good examples of the children working well with their peers to complete practical investigations and solve problems, often set within meaningful real life contexts. In almost all of the lessons observed, the teachers used skilful questioning to motivate and challenge the children, and encouraged them to reflect on and explain their thinking using appropriate mathematical language.

The highest attaining children in years 4 and 7 demonstrated good knowledge of the mathematics curriculum and a developing flexibility in their thinking. By the end of KS2, most of the children are working at a level in line with their ability or above expectation.

3. THE QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING

3.1 PLANNING

Within the current year the teachers have developed further their long-, medium- and short-term planning. In the best practice, this planning is of a good quality, is clearly focused on learning and is used effectively to guide the teachers in their day-to-day work with the children. The collaborative approach to planning for whole-school topics is effectively developing learning within meaningful contexts. In the less effective practice the written planning is not consistently reflected in the quality of the work in the children's books or in the classroom practice. The staff have identified the need for more adequate differentiation to meet the wide range of the children's abilities and needs within the whole-class setting.

In the best practice, the teachers complete informative and useful evaluations of the quality of the children's learning. The school has already begun the self-evaluation process and the sharing of good practice to inform future planning to meet the needs of all of the children.

3.2 TEACHING

The primary school and the nursery unit teachers are hard working and committed to supporting the children and their families in their learning.

During the inspection, the quality of the teaching in almost all the lessons was good or very good. In the remaining small number of lessons observed, there was a need for improvement in the quality of teaching.

In the most effective practice, the lessons were well-structured and appropriately paced. In these lessons, the teachers shared the planned learning very well; they provided the children with clear instructions and interacted purposefully with them, using effective questioning to stimulate the children's thinking and their sense of enquiry. The lessons were characterised by very good learning support for the wide range of abilities and needs, and had an appropriate emphasis on meaningful real-life experiences. The interactive white boards were used effectively as an integral part of the children's learning. The teaching was clearly differentiated and built upon prior learning with very good opportunities to develop the children's thinking skills. In the less effective lessons there was over-direction of low level tasks that restricted the opportunities for the children to develop their language and exercise autonomy in their learning. In a small number of the classes the time for learning was not managed efficiently and the classroom organisation was too fragmented to sustain quality learning.

The school provides in-class and withdrawal support, in numeracy and in literacy, for those children identified as having additional learning needs. A small number of children receive further support from a range of agencies. The children requiring additional help with their learning are identified at an early stage through the appropriate use of diagnostic tests and teachers' observations. The quality of the targets in the Individual Education Plans, (IEPs) however, is variable. There is a need to ensure that targets are child-, parent-, and teacher-friendly and focus on the primary needs of the children. To improve the provision further, the teachers need to integrate targets more effectively into their planning and evaluate the effectiveness of the specific teaching support.

The school's assessment data demonstrates that nearly all of the children receiving additional support are achieving in line with their ability.

3.3 ASSESSMENT

Assessment for learning has been appropriately identified as an area for development. The staff are at various stages of development in using strategies to encourage the children to self and peer assess the quality of their work. In almost all the classes the plenary sessions are used well to encourage the children to discuss and reflect on what they have learned.

In the FS and nursery unit, the use of observations to assess the children's progress and to inform planning is at an early stage of development. The staff need to work together more purposefully to develop a shared understanding of the integrated process of observation, assessment and planning for progression in the children's learning; to establish agreed procedures and to implement them consistently across the key stage.

Within the past four years, the school has developed procedures for administering and analysing a range of standardised tests as a result of support received through the 'Achieving Belfast' programme. Across all key stages the outcomes from these tests have been used effectively to assess the children's levels of attainment in English and mathematics, to identify discrepancies between individual children's expected and actual performance and to highlight a number of relevant areas for whole-school development. The senior leadership team (SLT) has identified, appropriately, the need to develop further their analysis and use of data to inform more effectively their action-planning for improvement at whole-school level. In the best practice, the children are aware of their standards and attainments and readily engage in self and peer assessment.

The teachers mark the children's work regularly. The quality of the written feedback is often very good; the teachers' comments encourage the children and provide guidance on how their work can be improved. There are very good procedures in place for keeping the parents informed about their child's progress.

4. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

4.1 LEADERSHIP

The quality of leadership and management within the school is very good.

The quality of the leadership provided by the Principal is outstanding. Since her appointment in September 2011, she has worked with great energy to develop and improve the learning environment, build links with the parents and the community, develop strategies to promote positive behaviour and continue to raise standards. She has led the school in a collaborative approach to curriculum development work which has promoted consistency and coherence in the children's learning. As a result, and with the hard work and dedication of her team, she has overseen the continuation of significant improvements in the standards the children attain.

The Vice-principal, who is the deputy designated teacher for child protection, co-ordinates the numeracy provision and shares responsibility for the development of SEN in the school, supports the Principal very effectively in monitoring and evaluating the quality of the overall provision. As special educational needs co-ordinator she provides effective leadership in SEN.

4.2 PLANNING FOR IMPROVEMENT

The school improvement process is clearly linked to a well-constructed school development plan underpinned by increasingly effective self-evaluation. The analysis of performance data, including target-setting and benchmarking, is used effectively to inform the action plans which are focused appropriately on raising further the standards of learning and teaching. Importantly, the well-conceived staff development policy focuses on achieving the targets set out in the action plans through developing further the teaching and teamworking skills of the staff, to meet the needs of the children.

The school gives very good attention to and meets fully the requirements of the School Development Plans Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2010.

4.3 RESOURCES, FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE

The school is adequately resourced to support learning and teaching.

The governors work in a supportive partnership with the Principal and the senior management team and are very well-informed about all aspects of the school's provision. They exercise their challenge function very well. They engage purposefully in the leadership and management of the school and are keenly aware of, and have planned ahead for, the future needs of the school.

4.4 ACCOMMODATION

The school building is approximately 40 years old; whilst it presents challenges in terms of the layout and size of the classrooms, all of the space available is used effectively for learning and teaching and for celebrating the children's achievements. Recent and ongoing development of the outdoor areas has enhanced the potential for the children's learning. The accommodation is not accessible for potential applicants with physical needs. The school grounds are not fully secured to control access to the playgrounds.

The standards of caretaking and cleaning are very good.

5. CONCLUSION

5.1 The strengths of the school include:

- the very good pastoral care provision which supports well the children's learning and raises the standards they achieve;
- the breadth of experiences provided by the school, supported effectively by a range of external agencies, which develop the children's confidence and help raise their aspirations;
- the good standards achieved by the children in literacy and numeracy, which are following a significant and improving trend;
- the quality of the teaching observed during the inspection, almost all of which was good or better;

- the important role played by the vice-Principal, teachers, governors and support staff in beginning the process of self-evaluation leading to improvement; and
- the outstanding leadership provided by the Principal.

5.2 The area for improvement is:

- to embed the improvement process and raise further the standards the children achieve.

5.3 In the areas inspected, the quality of education provided by this school is good. The school has strengths in most of its educational and pastoral provision. The inspection has identified an area for improvement which the school has the capacity to address. The Education and Training Inspectorate will monitor the school's progress on the area for improvement.

6. THE NURSERY UNIT

6.1 The nursery unit is situated in the grounds of St Vincent de Paul Primary School. It provides one full time session for 26 pre-school children.

6.2 The main strengths within the nursery unit's educational provision include:

- the very positive ethos which promotes the children's independence, confidence and self-esteem;
- the well resourced, language rich learning environment;
- the very good involvement of the staff with the children during their play to foster the children's learning and development;
- the children's positive attitudes towards and engagement in their learning, in particular their interest in books, mark making and imaginative play;
- the broad and balanced programme which provide good or very good learning experiences, across all areas of the pre-school curriculum; and
- the significant improvements made to the provision in recent months and the clear commitment to continuous improvement.

6.3 The key area for improvement is:

- to develop further systems for gathering, analysing and using information about the children's progress to ensure their individual needs are being met.

6.4 In the areas inspected, the quality of education provided by this nursery unit is good. The nursery unit has strengths in most of its educational and pastoral provision. The inspection has identified an area for improvement which the nursery unit has the capacity to address. The Education and Training Inspectorate will monitor the nursery unit's progress on the area for improvement.

**STATISTICAL INFORMATION ON ST VINCENT DE PAUL PRIMARY SCHOOL
NURSERY UNIT, BELFAST**

1. Details of Children

Number of children:	Class 1	Class 2
Attending full-time	26	0
Attending part-time	N/A	0
Under 3 years of age*	N/A	0
With statement of special educational needs	0	0
Without a statement but receiving therapy or support from other professionals for special educational needs	0	0
At CoP stages 3 or 4**	0	0
At CoP stages 1 or 2**	0	0
With English as an additional language	4	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.	50%
Average attendance for the previous year.	89.4%

2. Duration of Sessions

Full-time	Part-time: am	Part-time: pm
4½ 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	1
Trainees	0

*** Total placements since September of current year

4. Parental Questionnaires

Number issued	26
Percentage returned	19.2%
Number of written comments	3

HEALTH AND SAFETY

- Access to the school grounds is not fully secured.

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