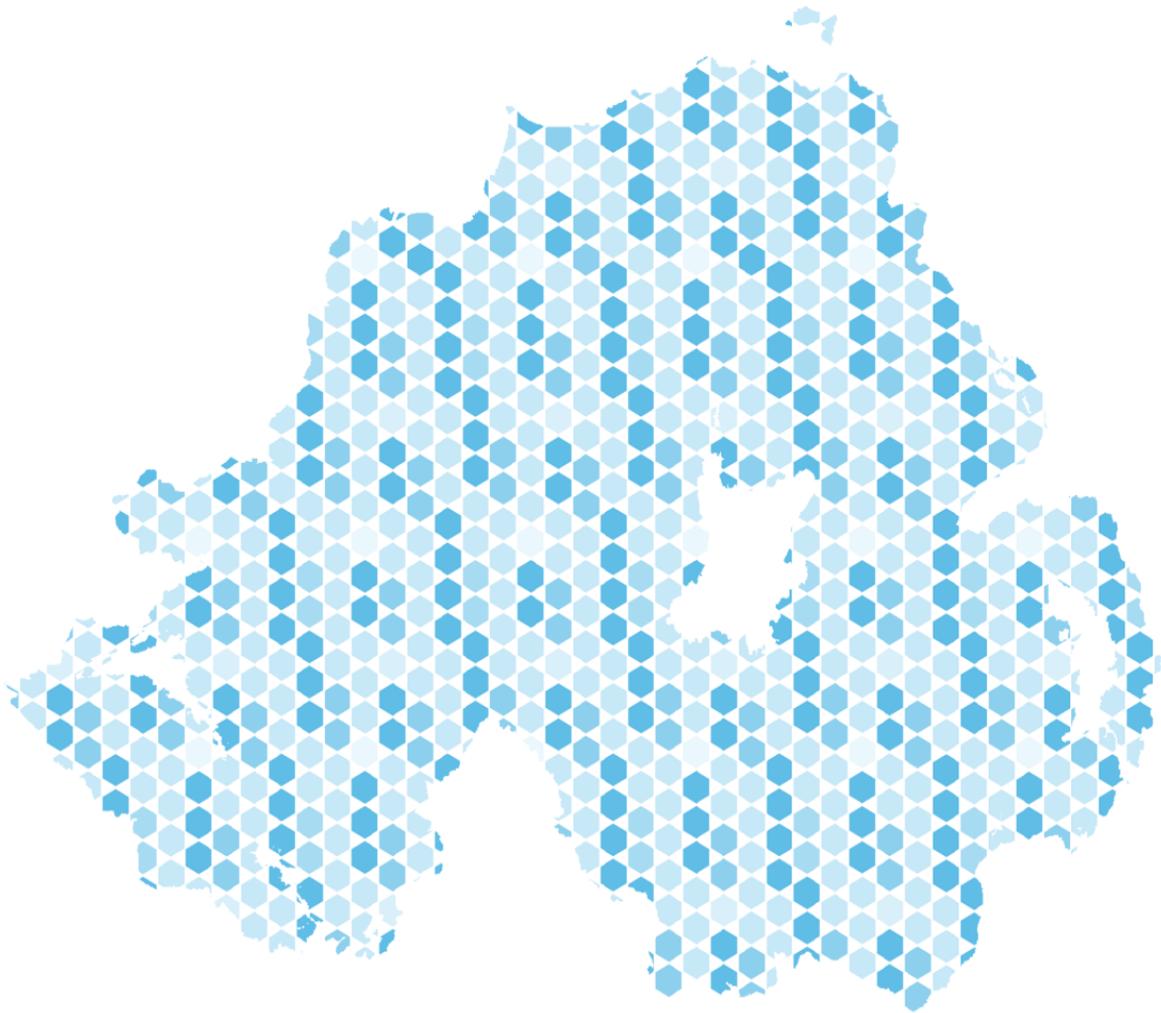


PRIMARY INSPECTION



Education and Training
Inspectorate

Sullivan Upper Preparatory
Department, Hollywood

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

Sullivan Upper Preparatory Department is located adjacent to Sullivan Upper School in Holywood, County Down. The school has a large catchment area and the enrolment has remained consistent over the past four years and currently stands at 189. Approximately one-fifth of the children have been identified as needing additional support with aspects of their learning, including a small number of children who have statements of special educational need.

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 preparatory department'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 teaching staff and the 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 the children from year 6.

Of the 138 questionnaires issued to the parents, 78 were returned to Inspection Services Branch, including 33 (42.3%) which contained additional written comments. Almost all of the questionnaires expressed very high levels of satisfaction with the life and work of the preparatory department and praised in particular, the friendly, caring atmosphere, the dedicated and committed teachers, the wide range of extra-curricular activities and the additional support provided to meet individual needs. A small number of comments were raised relating to, for example, health and safety matters, reporting arrangements to parents and guidance for parents on how to support their child's education.

Ten of the teachers and five of the support staff responded to the online questionnaires. The majority of the responses highlighted strengths in the pastoral provision for the children, however most of the teachers responses expressed concerns about aspects of the leadership and management of the school.

The governors expressed their support for the work of the preparatory department. They spoke positively about the dedication of the staff and the close links with the parents, the local community and the senior school.

In discussions held with a group of children in year 6, they talked positively about their experiences in the school. The children value the support given by their teachers, the enjoyable and practical learning activities and the very good range of extra-curricular activities. They indicated that they know what to do if they have any worries about their care and well-being.

An analysis of the questionnaire returns and summary of the comments raised were shared with the Head of the Preparatory Department, the Principal of the school and the governors.

1.4 PASTORAL CARE

The quality of the arrangements for the pastoral care of the children in the preparatory department is outstanding. The children are friendly and courteous and during the inspection their behaviour was exemplary. The staff know the children very well and work hard to promote a caring, family ethos based on mutual respect. The children develop self-awareness and appreciation of others in the school and the wider community through the Personal Development and Mutual Understanding programme.

The key strengths of the pastoral provision include the wide range of activities, events and visits, which enhance the quality of the learning experiences for the children. Of particular note is the importance given to developing the children's musical, creative and sporting abilities, as a means to develop further their personal and social development.

The children contribute meaningfully to discussions and decisions that directly affect them through circle-time sessions, a comment box and the active school council; there is evidence that their opinions and ideas are acted on and valued.

1.5 CHILD PROTECTION

On the basis of the evidence available at the time of inspection the preparatory department has very good comprehensive arrangements for safeguarding children. These arrangements reflect the guidance issued by the relevant Department.

1.6 HEALTHY EATING AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

The preparatory department gives very good attention to promoting healthy eating and physical activity. There is a range of strategies and initiatives to encourage the children to adopt healthy lifestyles, including the promotion of healthy snacks and lunches and a wide range of physical and sporting activities.

1.7 LINKS WITH PARENTS AND THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

The preparatory department is committed to maintaining and extending communication with the parents. Induction procedures are in place to welcome new parents and children, and a range of information, including a weekly e-mail service is available throughout the academic year to keep the parents informed about various events. The 'Parent Teacher Association' has raised significant funds which have been used to help broaden the children's learning experiences.

The preparatory department works hard to develop and maintain links with a wide range of schools in the local and wider area and participates in many sporting and educational events. In addition, the partnerships with the nearby pre-school and the senior school support very well the children's transitions to the next stage of their education.

2. ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS

2.1 LEARNING

The children are highly motivated and engage fully in the learning process. They settle quickly to the activity and are keen to contribute to discussions and present their ideas to the class. They work very effectively in pairs and collaboratively in groups expressing their own ideas confidently and showing respect for the opinions of others. The children have frequent opportunities to evaluate the effectiveness of their own and their peers' contribution to their lessons and, by key stage KS2, they are developing high levels of independent learning skills.

An analysis of the KS2 assessment data over the past four years shows that the preparatory department's performance in mathematics and English, when compared with both the Northern Ireland average and with schools in the same FSM band, are consistently above the average. An analysis of the school's internal performance data indicates that almost all of the children in KS2 achieve standards in line with their ability in English and mathematics.

The children with special educational needs achieve very well. The close monitoring of their progress and the very good early intervention enables the children to become more independent and confident as they progress through the year groups and by the end of KS2, nearly all of the children demonstrate very good levels of attainment in literacy and numeracy.

2.2 ENGLISH AND LITERACY

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

Throughout the preparatory department, there is a very good focus on the development of the children's oral communication skills. The children are confident and mature in their responses to questions and in their discussions with each other. In the best practice, the teachers use effective questioning and give the children sufficient time to consider their responses; and the children respond by listening carefully and giving extended answers. In particular, the children in KS2 have very good opportunities to talk in a range of settings, to a variety of audiences.

Across the preparatory department the children enjoy reading and are supported well by their teachers to use appropriate strategies to help them understand unfamiliar text. In the foundation stage, there is a clear emphasis on the teaching of reading with regular phonics and guided reading sessions. As a result, the children have acquired a very good standard of reading. In KS1 and KS2 the children are fluent, expressive readers who enjoy reading a broad range of fiction and non-fiction books and magazines. In class the children have access to an interesting and stimulating range of reading materials which they use for reference and research and personal interest. A reading support programme has recently been implemented to provide additional assistance for the children.

In the school development plan, there is a very well-considered focus on writing. The standards attained by the children in writing across all key stages are very good. In the foundation stage (FS), the children develop initial writing skills, and are structuring sentences to a high standard using a good range of vocabulary. In children's books at KS2, there are very good examples of planning, drafting and independent writing in a range of genres and the work is presented to a very high standard.

The teachers make very effective use of ICT to support the development of the children's English and literacy skills. The children demonstrate high levels of ICT skills to research plan and present their work to a very good standard.

By the end of KS2, the standards achieved by the children in literacy are very good.

2.3 MATHEMATICS AND NUMERACY

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

There is an appropriate policy which guides the teaching of numeracy throughout the preparatory department. The planning provides a programme which is broad and balanced, sets the work in meaningful, real-life situations and, in the best practice, includes appropriate differentiation of the tasks. The children develop their skills of problem-solving and apply their mathematical knowledge in a wide range of contexts across the curriculum. They benefit too from the teachers' very clear focus on developing the skills of financial capability.

In the FS, the children are developing their confidence in the use of mathematical language and their understanding of mathematical concepts through a range of appropriate practical activities. In KS1 and KS2 the teachers use a very good range of practical resources, to develop and consolidate the children's learning. The children's learning is developed progressively through a relevant range of mental maths activities. During discussions with the children in year 4, the children spoke positively about their learning in mathematics and have a good knowledge of different strategies to use when approaching mathematical problems. In KS2 the children extend and secure their mathematical learning through innovative, well-planned lessons where they work in groups and in pairs to meet realistically challenging learning intentions. During the inspection, the children responded very well to the teachers questioning and were able to discuss the methods they used to solve problems and demonstrated clear understanding and enjoyment of mathematics. By year 7, the children have very good flexibility in their mathematical thinking and apply their learning in other contexts.

The co-ordinators for KS1 and 2 work together and through monitoring identify the strengths and areas for development with the teaching of maths and numeracy. The resulting action plan identifies appropriate targets to develop further the teaching of mathematics.

Across KS1 and KS2, most of the children make very good progress.

3. THE QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING

3.1 PLANNING

The teachers use a range of detailed planning formats to plan for progression in the lessons. The best practice has well-differentiated, lesson plans, which support effectively the learning and teaching. The children contribute to the planning processes, through questionnaire audits and effective review and plenary sessions during class. In a majority of the lessons observed, the teachers' evaluations of individual children and their progress are informing future practice.

In the planning for the play based learning programme there is insufficient emphasis on free choice and independence in the activities.

3.2 TEACHING

During the inspection, almost all of the lessons observed were very good or outstanding. In the best practice, the teachers share the learning intentions with the children, make very good cross-curricular links, set their teaching in real-life contexts, and consolidate and review the children's learning throughout the lesson and in the plenary session. The teachers know the children very well and use a variety of techniques and strategies to meet individual needs and to keep the children focused and on task. The teachers' use of questioning is consistently of a very high standard and is differentiated to make sure the children are secure in their knowledge, before progressing with the lesson.

3.3 ASSESSMENT

Effective use is made of a comprehensive range of data to help bring about improvement in the children's attainment. The children's progress is tracked and realistically high targets are set for their future achievement. The teachers have made a very good start to using the relevant data to inform their planning. A detailed analysis of the standardised test results identifies elements of literacy and numeracy for further development across the school.

The method of record keeping used during play based learning sessions does not provide a wide overview of the children's progress and development across all areas of the curriculum.

The teachers' marking is constructive highlighting the strengths of the children's individual work. In the best practice the marking includes guidance for the children on how to improve their future work.

The parents receive an informative annual report on their children's progress and focus for future development as well as two formal meetings each year.

3.4 SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

Special educational needs is given a high priority by the preparatory department and the quality of the provision is very good.

The children benefit from the very good support of the special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO) and the Learning Support Teacher (LST) who work closely with the teachers and classroom assistants to address the individual needs of the children. The teachers identify early those children who require additional support with aspects of their learning through observations of the children in class, the use of standardised tests and the analysis of assessment data. Differentiated work is provided and the teachers and classroom assistants spend valuable time with individuals and groups supporting them in their learning. In addition, peripatetic support is provided for a small number of the children. The SENCO and LST, together with the class teachers, monitor and review the children's progress on a regular basis and there is evidence to show that the actions taken have resulted in significant improvements in the children's learning.

4. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

4.1 LEADERSHIP

The overall quality of the leadership and management is good.

The Head of the Preparatory Department has been in post for eleven years and has been in a non-teaching role for the last two years. She has high expectations for the work of the school and gives a high priority to the care and well-being of all of the children and to raising

further the standards they attain. She is well organised and has a good overview of all aspects of the work of the department. She has been instrumental in reviewing the current provision of SEN in the school and has recently managed the successful relocation of KS2 from premises in the senior school to the new purpose built accommodation. The co-ordinators provide very good guidance for all of the staff.

Given the concerns expressed by most of the teachers, through the staff questionnaires, it is imperative that the key issues relating to, communication and staff welfare in the school are addressed as a matter of urgency.

4.2 PLANNING FOR IMPROVEMENT

The school development plan (SDP) is compliant with the requirements of the School Development Plans Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2005 and is in the process of being updated in line with the 2010 regulations.

The school improvement process is linked clearly to the SDP which is underpinned by regular self-evaluation including the analysis of qualitative and quantitative information. Appropriate policies and action plans are in place for the key curricular areas.

4.3 ACCOMMODATION

The teachers have created stimulating environments in the classrooms and shared areas which support and celebrate the children's learning. Excellent use is made of the available outdoor space to provide additional learning opportunities.

4.4 RESOURCES, FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE

The preparatory department is well resourced for all areas of the curriculum. The governors make a positive contribution to the life and work of the preparatory department; they are involved in the strategic planning and policy development and support the Principal and the staff in the implementation of the SDP.

5. CONCLUSION

5.1 The strengths of the preparatory department include:

- the outstanding quality of the pastoral provision for the children characterised by the caring, family ethos and their exemplary behaviour;
- the very good standards attained by the children in literacy and numeracy;
- the very good and outstanding standard of the teaching observed;
- the high quality of the special educational needs provision;
- the breadth and balance of the curriculum; and
- the whole-school commitment to effecting improvement in learning and teaching.

5.2 In the areas inspected, the quality of education provided by this preparatory department is very good. The preparatory department is meeting very effectively the educational and pastoral needs of the children; and has demonstrated its capacity for sustained self-improvement.

HEALTH AND SAFETY

- There are limited car parking facilities for the parents at the preparatory department.
- In Dromkeen House a number of the windows cannot be opened resulting in a lack of ventilation in some classrooms; in addition, some floor surfaces are uneven and present a trip hazard.
- The preparatory department has identified a concern regarding the fire escape at Dromkeen House.

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