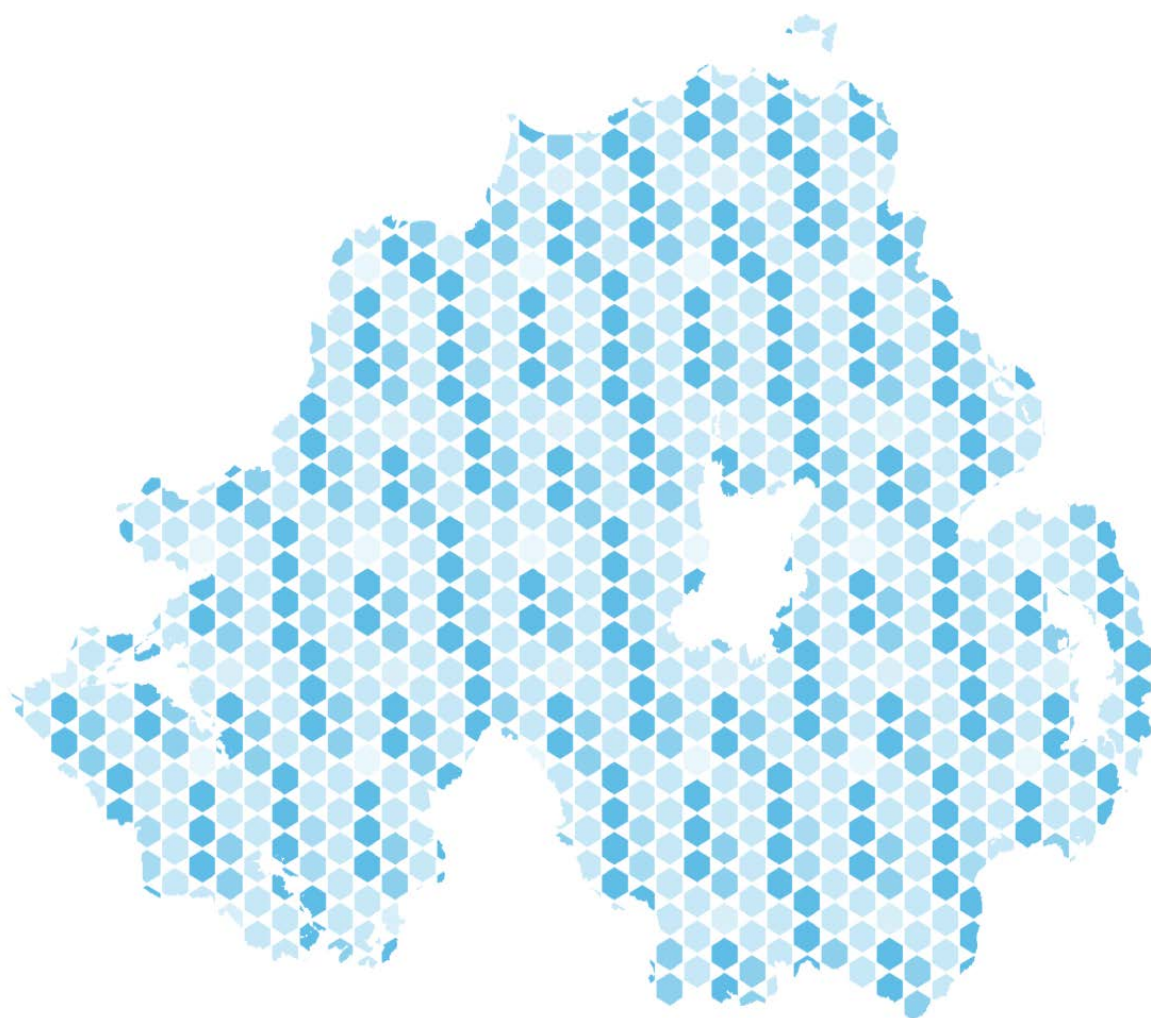


PRIMARY INSPECTION



Education and Training
Inspectorate

Acorn Integrated Primary
School and Nursery Unit,
Carrickfergus, Co Antrim

Report of an Inspection in
March 2014

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*The Education and Training Inspectorate -
Promoting Improvement*

Providing Inspection Services for

Department of Education
Department for Employment and Learning
Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure

CUSTOMER
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Quantitative terms

In this report, proportions may be described as percentages, common fractions and in more general quantitative terms. Where more general terms are used, they should be interpreted as follows:

Almost/nearly all	-	more than 90%
Most	-	75%-90%
A majority	-	50%-74%
A significant minority	-	30%-49%
A minority	-	10%-29%
Very few/a small number	-	less than 10%

Performance levels

The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) use the following performance levels in reports:

DESCRIPTOR
Outstanding
Very Good
Good
Satisfactory
Inadequate
Unsatisfactory

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1. Inspection method and evidence base

The key questions and quality indicators which guide inspection and self-evaluation of primary schools, which were applied to this inspection, are available in the Education and Training Inspectorate's (ETI) publication *Together Towards Improvement: a process for self-evaluation* at: <http://www.etini.gov.uk/index/together-towards-improvement/together-towards-improvement-primary.htm>.

Inspectors observed teaching and learning, scrutinised documentation and the children's written work and held formal and informal discussions with children, teachers and staff with specific responsibilities.

The arrangements for this inspection included:

- a meeting with representatives from the governors;
- meetings with groups of children; and
- the opportunity for the parents, teaching and support staff to complete a confidential questionnaire.

Questionnaire	Number issued (total number in the school per category)	Number returned	Percentage returned	Number with comments
Parents	168	41	24.4%	21
Teaching staff	10	6	60%	6
Support staff	17	*	6%	*

* fewer than 5

The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) is trialling a range of methods for collecting the views of parents about the life and work of the school. As a result, the response rate to the parental questionnaire may be low.

Most of the responses to the parental questionnaires indicated high levels of satisfaction with the life and work of the school. In particular, the parents highlighted the happiness of their children, the caring and helpful staff under the leadership of the principal, the sense of community in the school and the wide range of activities for the children. A minority raised concerns about some aspects of the life and work of the school. All of the staff questionnaires were positive. An analysis of the questionnaires and all of the comments including concerns raised were shared with the principal and the governors.

2. Context

Acorn Integrated Primary School and Nursery Unit is located on Victoria Road, Carrickfergus. Over the past four years, the enrolment has remained steady and currently stands at 204 children in the school and 27 children in the nursery unit. The percentage of children entitled to receive free school meals has increased in the last four years and is currently 15%. Approximately 23% of the children have been identified by the primary school as requiring additional support with aspects of their learning and 22.2% by the nursery unit. The children attend from Carrickfergus and the surrounding area.

	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14
Enrolment	201	201	204	204
% Attendance (NI Average)	98.5%	96.5%	98%	97.8%
FSME Percentage ¹	8.4%	13.4%	11.2%	15.2%
% of children on SEN register	18.3 %	22.8%	21.6%	23%
No. of children with statements of educational needs	*	*	*	*
No. of newcomers	*	*	*	*

Source: data as held by the school.

*fewer than 5

3. Focus of inspection

The inspection focused on:

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

4. Overall finding

Overall Performance Level	Good
Achievements and Standards	Good
Provision	Good
Leadership and Management	Good
Nursery Unit	Good

5. Achievements and standards

- The children engage enthusiastically in their learning and are self-confident, well-behaved, friendly and polite. They work well in pairs and in groups with high levels of respect for each other. They develop a wide range of skills to help them be independent and to solve problems in their learning and are eager to ask questions to deepen their understanding.

¹ The term 'FSME Percentage' refers to the percentage of pupils entitled to free school meals.

- An analysis of the key stage (KS) 2 assessment data, in three² of the past four years, shows that the school's performance in English is broadly in line with the Northern Ireland (NI) average in one year and below in two years. The school's performance in mathematics is below the average in three years. Compared with schools in the same free school meals category (FSM), the levels of attainment in English and mathematics are below the average in the same three years. The end of key stage results, however, demonstrated an upward trend.
- The school's internal performance data indicates that the majority of the children, including those who require additional support with aspects of their learning, make good progress in English and mathematics and are achieving standards in line with their ability or above expectation. The children who require additional support with their learning make good progress by year 7; they respond well to their learning through the effective development of their personal, social and emotional skills.
- By the end of key stage 2, a majority of the children attain good standards in literacy; the children read well with increasing fluency, understanding and enjoyment and they produce a variety of good writing across a range of genres. The children are receptive to the ideas and opinions of others; most engage well in sustained discussions about aspects of their work across the curriculum. By year 7, the children demonstrate a good understanding of number facts, numerical operations and key concepts across the areas of mathematics. They use mathematical language precisely and apply their mathematical understanding flexibly in real and relevant contexts and across the curriculum.
- The children in the nursery unit show good progress in making independent choices and developing their social skills. Most of the children concentrate for sustained periods and persevere at tasks developing positive attitudes and dispositions for learning. The children enjoy books and stories and most are confident to talk about their play and personal experiences.
- The children achieve good standards in their use of information and communication technology (ICT), including accreditation in years 4 and 7 through the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment. It is appropriate that the school has identified the need to develop further this good practice in using ICT to support the children's learning.

6. Provision

- The teachers' written planning ensures a broad and balanced curriculum. In the more effective practice, the medium term-planning is expanded upon with precise guidance for questioning and learning strategies, and is evaluated to inform how to meet better the needs of individual children. Overall, the teachers mark the children's work supportively; the marking is most effective when the children are given clear, age-appropriate direction on how to improve their work further. This good practice in planning and assessment needs to be more consistent across the school.

² Due to the current transition period in the arrangements for statutory assessment, this analysis of the end of KS2 performance data is based on the outcomes up to but not including the 2012/13 school year.

- The quality of the learning and teaching in the majority of lessons was good; in one-quarter it was very good or better. In this effective practice, the teachers build on the children's prior learning and use questioning skilfully to develop depth in the children's understanding and to challenge their thinking. They plan learning activities to match closely the children's needs and progress the learning at an appropriate pace. In over one-third of the lessons which required improvement, the children were not clear about the intended learning and as a result were not settled. The learning activities were not planned sufficiently to meet the children's needs and the teachers' interaction with the children was less effective overall.
- The teachers support well the children's skills in talking and listening, reading and writing through a range of curricular contexts. By the end of the foundation stage, the teachers are developing well the children's phonological awareness and their confidence to express their thoughts and ideas orally and in writing. As the children progress through the school, the teachers build their understanding of more challenging reading materials, including appealing novels and provide them with good opportunities to write in a variety of forms. The teachers are currently developing further their shared understanding of effective strategies to promote and extend key aspects of the children's literacy skills more holistically and meaningfully in their reading and writing. The inspection findings endorse this good work.
- The mathematics programme is comprehensive, ensuring the progressive development of the children's mathematical language, skills and understanding, including more able children. The teachers make effective use of a range of practical contexts, materials, games, investigations and ICT applications to engage the children and to develop their thinking. The teachers plan regular sessions to help the children with their mental calculations and by year 7 they develop well their skills in financial capability, problem-solving and mathematical processes. In the foundation stage and key stage 1, the children's mathematical understanding needs to be developed more consistently.
- The planned pre-school programme provides good opportunities for learning in most areas of the pre-school curriculum. The staff are caring and supportive in their work with the children and engage them well in social conversations and enjoyable group story sessions. The planning and assessment methods should be built on further to ensure all areas of the curriculum are matched well to the children's interests and stages of development. The staff interaction needs to exploit more fully the learning potential of activities.
- The children who require additional help with their learning benefit from in-class support through the well-trained classroom assistants and withdrawal support sessions on a formal and flexible basis. The children respond well to their secure environment and to the effective learning strategies which help them develop their independence and manage their emotions. The teachers respond creatively and flexibly to meet the needs of the children. The school has identified appropriately, the need to monitor and evaluate the impact of the additional support more rigorously to inform future planning.

- The quality of the arrangements for pastoral care is very good. The school and the nursery unit have an inclusive, caring, family ethos in which the children's ideas, opinions and achievements are valued. The children are supported well to take responsibility for themselves and each another through the buddy scheme, peer mediation and their participation in the school's council.

7. Leadership and management

- The principal and senior management team have fostered successfully a collegiate approach to the strategic leadership of the school and to the development of key areas. The school development planning process is based on extensive consultation with staff, governors, parents and children. The action plans target appropriate priorities for improvement and focus clearly on measurable outcomes for the children based on effective analysis of data. All staff benefit from a comprehensive staff development programme linked clearly to the priorities of the school. Self-evaluation needs to be consolidated further through more rigorous evaluation of the children's learning across the key stages.
- There is a very good pastoral partnership and effective lines of communication between the nursery unit and the primary school. The reflective approach and recent improvements made in the nursery unit should be built on further to develop a more systematic approach to monitoring and evaluation.
- The school has a very good range of links with parents, governors, local schools, community and others to enhance its ethos of embracing difference and contributing to the wider community; these links enrich the children's learning experiences and enable them to celebrate cultural diversity and to understand the perspective of others.
- The governors provide advice and challenge in supporting and improving key aspects of the school's provision. Based on the evidence presented at the time of inspection, the parents, staff and school community can have confidence in the aspects of governance evaluated.
- 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 Department of Education. In discussions with the inspectors, the year 6 children reported that they felt secure in school and knew what to do if they had any concerns about their well-being.

8. Conclusion

In the areas inspected, the quality of education provided by the school and nursery unit is good. The school and nursery unit have important strengths in most of their educational and pastoral provision. The inspection has identified areas for improvement which the school and nursery unit have demonstrated the capacity to address. These are:

- to improve the consistency in the quality of the learning and teaching; and
- to develop further the rigorous approach to self-evaluation at all levels.

The Education and Training Inspectorate will monitor, through district inspection activity, the school's and nursery unit's progress in the areas for improvement.

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