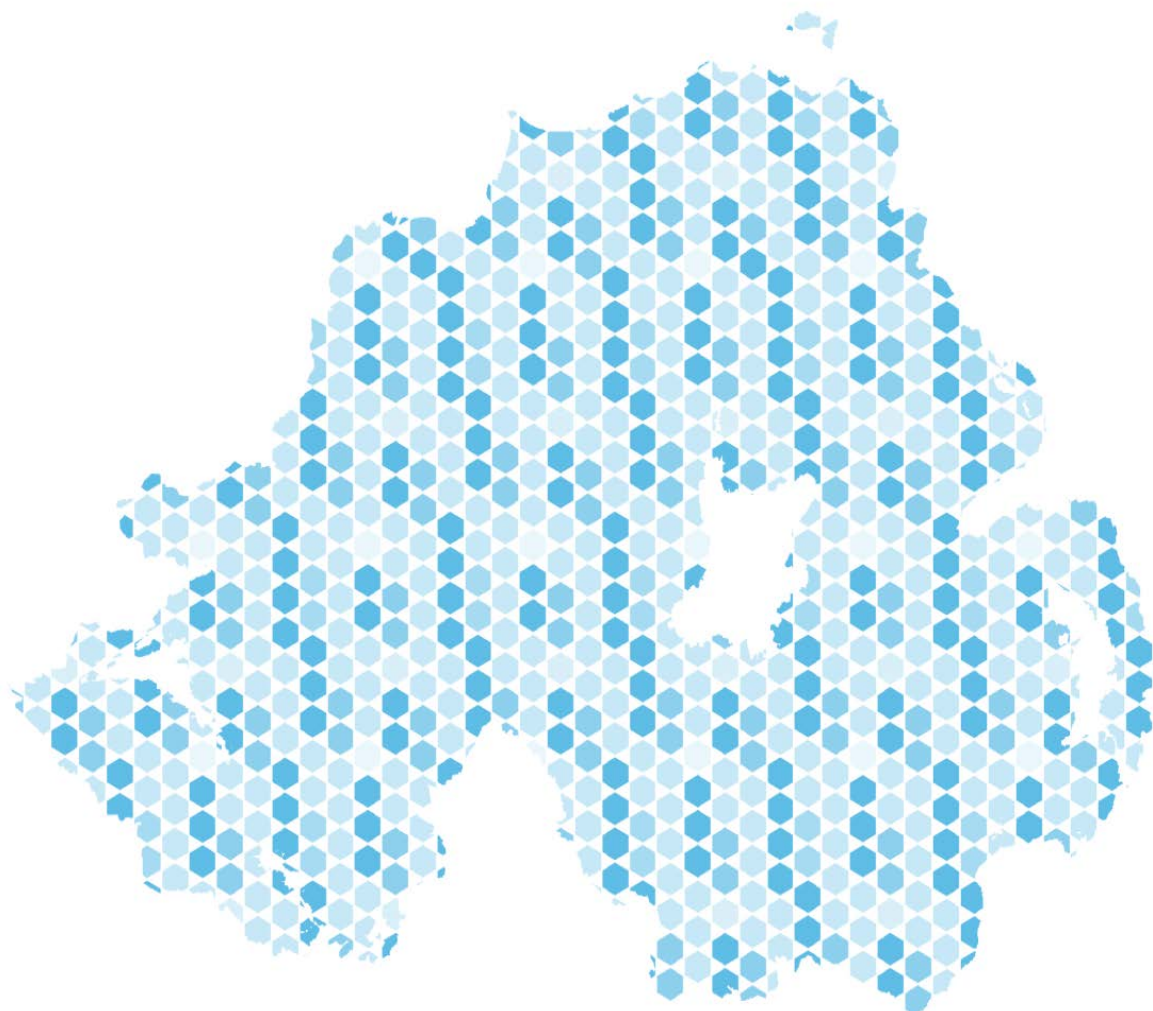


PRIMARY INSPECTION



Education and Training
Inspectorate

Ballymacash Primary School
and Nursery Unit, Lisburn,
Co Antrim

Report of an Inspection in
October 2013

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	Number returned	Percentage returned	Number with comments
Parent/Carer	274	34	12%	15
Teaching staff	24	16	66.7%	*
Teaching Support staff	12	*	25%	*
Support staff	16	*	25%	*

*fewer than 5

ETI is trialling a range of methods for collecting the views of parents/carers about the life and work of the school. As a result, the response rate to the parent/carers questionnaires may be low.

The responses to the parental questionnaires indicated high levels of satisfaction with the life and work of the school. In particular, the parents highlighted their appreciation of the caring, family ethos, the dedicated staff and the approachability of the principal. A very small number of concerns raised in the written comments were discussed with the governors and the principal. A majority of the teachers and the support staff completed questionnaires and their responses were very positive.

2. Context

Ballymacash Primary School and Nursery Unit is situated in the town of Lisburn, County Antrim. Almost all of the children attending the school come from Lisburn and the surrounding rural area. The enrolment was stable over the last three years and rose this year to a total of 362 children in the primary school and 52 children in the nursery unit. At the time of the inspection, approximately 26% of the children in the school were entitled to free school meals and around 19% of the children were identified by the school as requiring additional support with aspects of their learning.

Ballymacash Primary School	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/ 14
Enrolment	341	337	338	362
% Attendance (NI Average)	94.2 (-)	95.4 (95.2)	94.7 (94.7)	94.7 (-)
FSME Percentage ¹	15.5	19.4	22.5	26%
% of children on SEN register	27.9%	28.78%	22.19%	18.7%
No. of children with statements of educational needs	11	11	9	8
No. of newcomers	11	11	12	4

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	Very good
Provision	Good
Leadership and Management	Satisfactory
Nursery Unit	Good

Key findings of the inspection

5. Achievements and standards

- The children display positive attitudes to their learning; they settle quickly in class and respond well to the learning activities provided by their teachers. Their behaviour is very good and they engage readily with each other and with visitors to the school. When given the opportunity, the children work well collaboratively and take responsibility for their own learning. They need additional opportunities to acquire and develop thinking skills and personal capabilities, including self-management skills.

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

- An analysis of the end of key stage (KS) 2 performance data in three of the past four years* shows that in English and mathematics, the school's performance is above the Northern Ireland (NI) average. Compared with schools in the same free school meals (FSM) category, the performance in English and mathematics is also above the average. The school's internal performance data in English and mathematics shows that a majority of the children achieve in line with their ability or above expectation.
- By year 7, a majority of the children attain very good standards in literacy. They participate well in class and group discussions, write competently across an appropriate range of formats and can produce extended pieces of creative writing of a very high standard. The children read with fluency and understanding, and talk enthusiastically about their reading texts. By year 7, a majority of the children are secure in their understanding of number and place value. Most of the children can complete simple and more complex computation accurately and can explain the mathematical processes they use with confidence. In a majority of classes, the children's mental mathematics strategies are developing effectively, and support well their learning and thinking in mathematics.
- A majority of the children who require additional support with aspects of their learning make steady progress in their learning.
- The children in the nursery unit are well settled and often spend lengthy periods engaging in purposeful and productive play. Almost all of the children are familiar with the various routines of the nursery. They show good levels of confidence and independence, engage readily with the staff and their peers, listen attentively to group stories and follow simple instructions. The children are making good progress in all areas of the pre-school curriculum, however, on occasions, a small number of the art and craft activities are overly directed and this limits the children's own creativity.
- The children in years 4 and 7 have participated in the Council for the Curriculum Examinations and Assessments (CCEA) information and communication technology (ICT) accreditation scheme, and, in the last two years, achieved standards above the Northern Ireland (NI) average.

6. Provision

- The quality of the teaching observed ranged from satisfactory to outstanding. A majority of the teaching was good or better; in the remaining proportion there were areas for improvement. In the most effective practice, there is good pace, challenge and progression in the children's learning. The teachers have high expectations for what the children can achieve; they build successfully on previous learning and develop the children's thinking and extended oral and written responses through effective questioning. In the less effective practice, the lessons are over-directed by the teacher and insufficient account is taken of

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

the range of individual learning needs within the class. The teachers mark the children's work regularly and supportively. In the best practice, the feedback focuses on how the children can improve the quality and standard of their work. In addressing the inconsistencies in teaching, learning and assessment, the school needs to disseminate the most effective practice.

- The children who require support for literacy are identified early through a combination of assessment data, testing by the special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO) and information provided by class teachers. The children respond well during the withdrawal sessions which are provided by the SENCO and learning support teachers. In order to develop further the special educational needs provision, there is a need for closer liaison between the SENCO, class teachers and support teachers in order to: improve the quality of the targets on the individual education plans; monitor the effectiveness of the interventions; and, track the children's progress. The quality of the individual education plans is variable; the targets need to be more clearly linked to the overall planning for learning and teaching.
- In the foundation stage (FS) and KS1, the children acquire the basic skills of reading through a structured phonics programme and modelled, shared and guided reading activities. A majority of the children show an enthusiasm for reading and, in the best practice, the teachers use effective questioning to extend the children's answers, develop higher level comprehension and embed the learning. In a minority of the classes, the children have very good opportunities to apply and develop further their talking and listening, reading and writing skills in interesting and meaningful contexts across the curriculum.
- The programme for mathematics provides clear guidance for the class teachers to plan effectively for a well-balanced coverage across the areas of mathematics, with well-staged progression through the school. In a majority of classes, the teachers provide the children with creative and engaging opportunities to use and apply their mathematics across the curriculum and in real life-situations, and include suitable challenge for the more able children. The teachers use appropriate questioning to develop further the children's thinking and mathematical language. In the best practice, information and communication technology (ICT) is used well to motivate the children and support their learning in literacy and numeracy.
- The quality of the provision in the nursery unit is good. The staff plan and provide a varied programme that meets effectively the needs of all of the children. They are caring in their approach and the quality of their interaction with the children is of a consistently high standard. The children who require additional help with aspects of their learning are identified at an early stage and appropriate support is put in place to address their individual needs. The staff need to adopt a less formal approach to their methods of observation and assessment, and use opportunities that arise naturally in the play activities and daily routines to assess the children's progress.

- The overall quality of the arrangements for pastoral care in the school is very good and, in the nursery unit, it is outstanding; this is characterised by, for example, the excellent working relationships and the supportive family atmosphere evident throughout the school and nursery unit. The children's achievements are celebrated regularly, for example, through the 'Ballymacash All Stars' awards, and there are opportunities for the children to participate in a range of extra-curricular activities. The opportunities for the school council to participate in decision-making on school matters need to be developed further.
- The school gives good attention to promoting a healthy lifestyle through the healthy break and lunch initiatives and through the range of physical activities on offer.

7. Leadership and management

- The principal has been in post for four years. He has worked effectively to develop links with the parents and wider local community and to develop a collegial culture amongst the staff. The school recognises that, currently, the role of the area of learning co-ordinators is underdeveloped. To support this development, there is now a need to strengthen significantly the communication and working links between management at all levels, focused sharply on developing more robust and effective processes for monitoring and evaluating the quality of the provision and disseminating the existing good practice.
- The school is currently entering a new school development planning cycle. The audit process appropriately included consultation with the parents, staff and children and identified a number of areas for improvement. It will be important that the leadership team prioritises, refines and reduces, if necessary, the many areas that it intends to address. The current action plans need to focus more sharply on the actions which will bring about further improvement in the children's learning; and, to be underpinned by more systematic monitoring and rigorous evaluation by management at all levels.
- The teacher-in-charge of the nursery unit provides good leadership and management; she is very committed to the children and engenders a team spirit among the dedicated staff. She has developed a self-evaluative approach to the future development of the provision and maintains a valuable link with the primary school.
- The school has effective links with the parents who are well informed about the life and work of the school through, for example, monthly newsletters and the comprehensive school website. There are a variety of links with other schools, with the wider community and with other agencies, which serve to enrich further the children's learning experiences.
- Based on the evidence presented at the time of inspection, the parents, staff and school community can have confidence in most aspects of governance evaluated. The governors are well informed about and engaged in decisions in relation to staff recruitment, deployment and attendance, finances, and health and safety assessments. Their contribution to the life and work of the school would be enhanced further through reviewing and challenging, where necessary, a greater range of evidence presented to them on the effectiveness of the action being led by the various post holders.

- On the basis of the evidence available at the time of the inspection, the school has satisfactory arrangements in place for safeguarding children. These arrangements broadly reflect the guidance issued by the Department of Education (DE) but the following area needs to be addressed: review the vetting requirements for private tutors working within the school. In discussions with the inspectors, the year 6 children spoke with enthusiasm and confidence about their experiences in school. They reported that they feel very happy and safe in school and know what to do if they have any concerns.

8. Conclusion

In the areas inspected, the quality of education provided by the school is good. The school has important strengths in most of its educational and pastoral provision. The inspection has identified an area for improvement which the school has demonstrated the capacity to address. This is the need:

- to strengthen significantly the communication and the working links between management at all levels, focused sharply on developing more robust and effective processes for monitoring and evaluating the quality of the provision.

The Education and Training Inspectorate will monitor, through district inspection activity, the school's progress on the area for improvement.

Health and safety

- The building which houses the nursery unit, numeracy support room, the library and music room does not have controlled access.

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