

PRIMARY INSPECTION 2014-15



Education and Training
Inspectorate

Ballysillan Primary School and
Nursery Unit, Belfast

Report of an Inspection in
February 2015

eti

*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.eti.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 a representative(s) from the governors;
- meetings with groups of children; and
- the opportunity for the parents, teaching and support staff to complete a confidential questionnaire.

The responses to the parental questionnaires indicated high levels of satisfaction with the life and work of the school and nursery unit. In particular, the parents highlighted the nurturing environment where their children feel comfortable, happy and reassured. In addition, the parents commented on how well the teachers know the children educationally and personally. The issues raised were discussed with the principal and representatives of the governors. Most of the teachers and support staff completed questionnaires and their responses were positive. In a discussion with the representatives of the governors, they emphasised their support for the school, the quality of the provision for the children and the strong focus on establishing and maintaining effective links with the parents and the local community.

2. 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.

3. Context

Ballysillan Primary School and Nursery Unit are situated in Belfast, County Antrim. The children attending the school and the nursery unit come from the surrounding area. The enrolment currently stands at 156 children, 27 of whom are in the nursery unit. At the time of the inspection, approximately 58% of the children were entitled to free school meals and around 34% of the children had been identified by the school as requiring additional support with aspects of their learning. The principal has been working in an acting capacity for the last seven years. The future of the school, and other primary schools in the area, is under consideration by the Belfast Education and Library Board as part of a wider area plan for primary education in north Belfast. The enrolment over the past two years has increased significantly and projections are that this trend will continue into the next academic year.

Ballysillan Primary School	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
Enrolment	124	119	130	156
% Attendance	95	93	94	
FSME Percentage ¹	43	51	53	58
% of children on SEN register	33	45	31	34
No. of children with statements of educational needs	5	6	10	12
No. of newcomers	6	4	12	15

Source: data as held by the school.

4. Overall findings of the inspection

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

5. Achievements and standards

- The children are enthusiastic learners, who enjoy engaging in discussions with their peers and the adults who care for them; they engage positively in the learning tasks and activities provided by their teachers. The children's behaviour is exemplary; they respond very well to the positive ethos in all of the classrooms and are proud of their school and keen to talk about their learning and achievements. The children would benefit from planned opportunities to think about, reflect on and suggest ways in which they can improve the quality of their work.
- The school's performance data indicates that the most of the children, including those who require additional support with aspects of their learning, make satisfactory progress in English and mathematics.
- The children in the nursery unit are well-settled and display very positive attitudes to their learning. They are making good progress in developing their language and social skills and are confident in making choices in their play. Most of the children take on specific roles in the well-resourced role-play areas and play collaboratively and with imagination. They develop very good early reading dispositions through the highly effective story-telling sessions.
- By the end of Key Stage (KS) 2 the most able children read fluently and discuss their favourite books and authors with enthusiasm. The quality of writing of these more able children is generally of a high quality. There is a need, however, to ensure that there is greater progression in the quality of this work as the children move through the school and that all of the children's work is of a suitable high standard. This progression should be informed by the teacher's evaluations of the children's work and their setting of appropriately high expectations of what

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

the children can achieve. There is a need for a more co-ordinated approach to the development of the children's literacy skills with an emphasis being given to the links between the strands of reading, writing and spelling skills and to raising the standards achieved by all the children across the ability range.

- The highest attaining children in year 7 demonstrated their knowledge of important mathematical ideas and concepts, for example, place value, shape, space and measures. While most of the children achieve standards in numeracy in the line with their ability or above expectation, the quality of their written work does not reflect this positive picture as much as it should. In general, there is too much variation in the quality of the work within and across the classes. In order to improve the standards achieved by all of the children in mathematics, the teachers' planning needs to identify more clearly how the differing needs of the children are to be met.
- The majority of the children receiving additional support sessions for literacy make good progress in reading, developing their fluency and understanding. They enjoy these withdrawal sessions and develop their self-confidence and social skills. There is good evidence of children on the special needs register making progress and becoming more independent in their learning.
- Across the school, the children have limited opportunities to work with a range of information and communication technology (ICT) devices in support of their learning. The school has identified the need to develop the children's competence in their use of ICT to prepare them more effectively for the next stage of their learning.

6. Provision

- The teachers have detailed knowledge of the learning needs of the children in their classes; almost all have high expectations of, and for, all of the children. However the teachers' planning does not always reflect these aspirations. There is a need for a coherent, whole-school approach to the arrangements for the planning and teaching of literacy and numeracy which incorporates a clearer focus on meeting the learning needs of all of the children.
- In the most effective teaching observed during the inspection, the key characteristics were; clear learning intentions which were shared with and understood by the children, appropriate use of practical apparatus, and the lessons being appropriately paced to ensure that the children remained actively involved in their learning throughout the lesson. In the less effective practice, the activities set did not match the range of ability within the class, the lessons were overly-directed by the teachers and, as a result, the children did not achieve the planned learning outcome.
- The teachers mark the children's work regularly and, in the best practice, provide meaningful guidance to the children on how they can improve their work further. As the children move through the school, to ensure consistency, the teachers need to focus more sharply on helping the children to assess accurately their own work and to measure their progress against suitably challenging targets they have set for themselves.

- A key feature of the literacy provision is the teachers' focus on the development of the children's talking and listening skills; the children communicate well orally and, when given the opportunity, explain their thinking. To build on this effective work there is a need for opportunities for children to justify opinions and ideas, evaluate and make inferences and draw appropriate conclusions through well-planned talking and listening activities embedded consistently across the key stages. The teachers use effectively guided reading sessions to develop the children's fluency, understanding and enjoyment of reading. Throughout the school, the teachers need to ensure that the children are given a wider range of opportunities to develop their writing skills with more extended writing in meaningful contexts. In addition, more effective use of the range of ICT resources would help support and extend the children's literacy skills.
- The work in the foundation stage and KS1 provides a sound basis for future developments in mathematics. The younger children enjoy a variety of appropriate experiences, including stories and rhymes. A suitable emphasis is placed on developing the children's understanding of mathematics through practical activities. In KS2, the teachers develop the children's understanding of concepts and promote effectively the children's skill in mathematical reasoning. Occasionally, brief investigations are given to the children to complete, but in the main they have limited access to open-ended tasks in which they can demonstrate the use and application of mathematics. The teachers need to plan opportunities for problem-solving activities and more open-ended investigative work, including those that require the gathering, collation and presentation of data.
- The quality of the provision in the nursery unit is good. The particular strengths of the play provision include the development of the children's oral language, their personal, social and emotional development and the children's early mathematical experiences. The quality of the interaction between the staff and the children is consistently of a good standard and, on occasions, very good. The needs of the children who require specific learning support are well met through the sensitive intervention strategies applied by the staff. The area for further development in the nursery unit is the outdoor play provision and associated planning to include the natural environment.
- The needs of children experiencing difficulties with aspects of their learning are identified early and the children are integrated very well into the life of the school. The special educational needs co-ordinator is committed to ongoing professional development and, in the limited time she has available, leads the staff effectively in developing their skills for supporting the children with additional learning needs. Useful systems have been introduced to assess and record the children's attainment and learning needs. The school has identified the need to make more effective use of this information to improve the provision in the classroom for the children. The inspection endorses this need to monitor, evaluate and track the children's progress more systematically. In addition, more effective use needs to be made of the information obtained from the assessment, combined with the teachers' knowledge of the children, to adapt the teaching strategies employed in the classroom to meet the learning needs of the children.

- The pastoral care provision within the school and the nursery unit is very good; this is evidenced through the inclusive, caring and supportive ethos, the good working relationships and the well-behaved and mannerly children. The staff provide a safe and caring learning environment in which the children feel valued, work well together and respect the views and opinions of others. The classroom assistants, in particular, add significantly to the supportive ethos and sense of team-work in the classrooms.
- The school and nursery unit give good attention to promoting healthy eating and physical activity, thereby encouraging the children to adopt and maintain healthy lifestyles.

7. Leadership and management

- The acting principal, in close collaboration with the staff and governors has placed an important focus on developing closer links with the community the school serves. There is emerging evidence of ongoing improvements in the areas identified in most recent school development plan. In particular, the focus on securing links between the nursery unit and transfer of children to primary one has proved successful. However, the current school development planning process began during a period of uncertainty regarding the school's future. There is now a need to re-focus the current school development plan and sharpen the associated action plans to monitor and evaluate the impact of the strategies designed to bring about improvements in the children's learning and the achievements they attain. In addition, the school needs to develop and embed agreed quality assurance arrangements to ensure that the priorities for improvement, agreed in the school development plan, are being achieved. As the school's enrolment continues to rise there is an increasing imperative for the senior and middle leadership teams to play a more active role in monitoring and evaluating the provision in the areas for which they hold responsibility.
- The school values and encourages the positive contribution the parents make to developing further their role in their children's education. The parents support the school through their active involvement in the parent/teacher association and through volunteering in the Reading Partnership initiative. The school has an extensive range of extra-curricular activities and after-school arrangements which benefit the children's learning and development and supports their families.
- The governors continue to support fully the acting principal and staff in ensuring that all of the children have the opportunity to reach their potential. Based on the evidence presented at the time of inspection, the ETI's evaluation is that there can be a high degree of confidence in the aspects of governance evaluated.
- At the time of the inspection there was no permanent principal or vice-principal. Both of these important senior management posts were filled in an acting capacity. The school reports that a feasibility study setting out various options for the future development of primary schools in the area has been conducted; it is important that, in the best interests of the children, the uncertainties surrounding the future of the school should be addressed as a matter of urgency.

- On the basis of the evidence available at the time of the inspection, the school and nursery unit have comprehensive arrangements in place for safeguarding children, which reflect the guidance issued by the Department of Education. In discussions with the inspectors, the children spoke enthusiastically about how the adults care for them and support them in their learning. They reported that they feel safe and secure in school and know what to do if they have any concerns about their well-being.

8. Conclusion

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 areas for improvement include the need for:

- the leadership and management to establish a more rigorous and systematic approach to self-evaluation and planning for improvement in which action plans are focused more effectively on improving the quality of learning and teaching and linked more closely to improved outcomes in the children's learning and achievements;

and for

- the teachers to develop further the systems for monitoring and evaluating, including more effective use of quantitative and qualitative information, to inform planning and track the children's progress to ensure that all children achieve their full potential.

The Education and Training Inspectorate will monitor and report on the school's progress in addressing the areas for improvement over a 12-24 month period.

Health and safety

1. The current arrangements for access to the school site, including the height of the fence in the vicinity of the nursery provision, and the missing floor tiles in the various floor spaces in the school building each give cause for concern, in terms of the health and safety of the children.

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