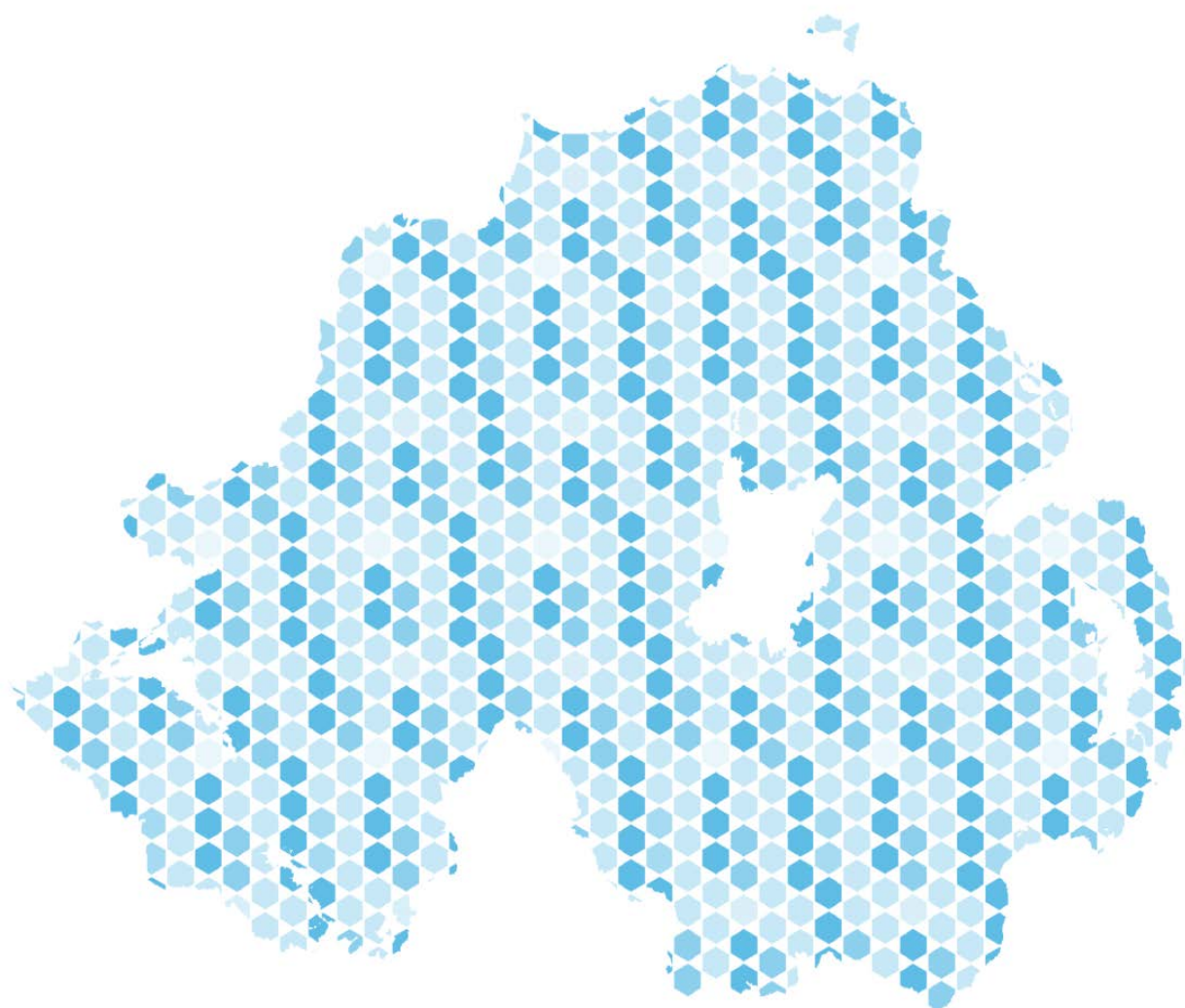


PRIMARY INSPECTION 2014-15



Education and Training
Inspectorate

Mercy Primary School,
Belfast

Report of an Inspection in
April 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
SERVICE
EXCELLENCE



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

Contents

Section	Page
1. Inspection method and evidence base	1
2. Focus of inspection	1
3. Context	1
4. Overall findings of the inspection	2
5. Achievements and standards	2
6. Provision	3
7. Leadership and management	5
8. Conclusion	5

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, parents 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.

Eight percent¹ of parents (12 in total) responded to the questionnaires. The responses of the parents indicated very high levels of satisfaction with the life and work of the school. In particular, the parents commented on the inclusive and welcoming ethos of the school, the excellent reputation of the school in the local community, and the high quality learning and teaching received by the children from all members of the school staff. Ninety-three percent (26) of staff (teaching and non-teaching) responded to the questionnaires and their responses were also very positive; they emphasised the school's focus on meeting the educational and pastoral needs of all of the children, the positive start made by the new principal in leading school improvement and the strong links with the parents and wider community. No significant issues were raised in the questionnaires.

2. Focus of inspection

The inspection focused on:

1. the children's achievements and standards in literacy and numeracy, in particular, how the school is addressing low attainment and underachievement where applicable;
2. the quality of provision in the school; and
3. the quality of leadership and management.

3. Context

Mercy Primary School is situated on a spacious, private site on the Crumlin Road in North Belfast. Almost all of the children come from the local community and other areas of North Belfast, drawing from, on average, eight contributory pre-schools and nurseries. At the time of the inspection, 63% of the children have entitlement to free school meals and 31% have

¹ The response rate may be low as the school carried out recently a similar parent survey for self-evaluation purposes.

been identified as requiring additional support with aspects of their learning. Over the past four years, enrolment has remained steady. Pupil attendance is in line with the Northern Ireland (NI) average. Almost one-third of the children achieved certificates for full attendance during the last academic year. At the time of the inspection, the principal has been in post for seven months.

Mercy Primary School, Belfast	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
Enrolment	204	212	212	203
% Attendance (NI Average)	95 (95.2)	94 (94.9)	95 (95.6)	n/a
FSME Percentage ²	61	65	70	63
% (No) of children on SEN register	31	28	28	31
No. of children with statements of educational needs	*	*	*	*
No. of newcomers	*	*	*	6

Source: data as held by the school.

* fewer than 5

4. Overall findings of the inspection

Overall Performance Level	Very good
Achievements and Standards	Very good
Provision	Very good
Leadership and Management	Very good

5. Achievements and standards

- The children engage well in their learning with high levels of enjoyment, self-confidence and motivation. They are courteous and respectful towards each other, the staff and visitors to the school. The behaviour of the children is exemplary in class, in the corridors and in the playground. They participate competently in well-planned paired and group work, working co-operatively and collaboratively, and demonstrate increasing levels of independence and self-management as they progress through the school.
- The school's performance data shows that almost all of the children, including those who require additional support with aspects of their learning, make good progress in English in line with their ability or above expectation.
- By Year 7, the standards achieved by the children in literacy are very good. Throughout the school the children's talking and listening skills are very well developed. Almost all of the children articulate well their ideas and opinions and engage readily in paired and group discussion. The most able children in year 7 read with confidence and display high levels of interest in reading for enjoyment. They respond with insight to the novels they have read in class, and discuss enthusiastically the fiction and non-fiction books which they have chosen. In the most effective practice, literature, including the class novel, is used effectively as a stimulus for the development of oral and written communication skills. The quality of the content and presentation of the children's written work is of a very high standard and the children write for a variety of purposes and audiences.

² The term 'FSME Percentage' refers to the percentage of pupils entitled to free school meals.

- The school's performance data shows that most of the children, including those who require additional support with aspects of their learning, make good progress in mathematics in line with their ability or above expectation.
- Across the school the children complete calculations with very good levels of accuracy and demonstrate increasing flexibility in applying mathematics strategies to complete investigations and solve problems. By year 7, the most able children demonstrate very good knowledge and understanding of key concepts across the mathematics curriculum and adapt and apply their learning in a variety of real life and relevant contexts.
- Across all of the key stages, the children use effectively information and communication technology (ICT) to support their learning. From foundation stage (FS), the integration of digital presentations and exchanges, podcasting and film making, and the use of a wide range of software programmes and programmable devices both in school and at home help to ensure that there is steady and systematic progression in the acquisition and development of the children's ICT skills.

6. Provision

- The teachers' coherent planning in all areas of the curriculum promotes continuity and progression in the children's learning. The teachers' evaluations of learning are used effectively to inform future planning. The teachers have identified through rigorous self-evaluation the need to develop further their competence in this area and there is evidence that actions taken have led to improvement in the quality of the children's learning experiences and the standards which they attain. The setting of individual learning targets for the children is being developed further to ensure that the needs, abilities and interests of all of the children are identified appropriately and addressed fully.
- All of the lessons observed were effective at promoting successful learning. They were characterised by: the learning set in real-life, contemporary and meaningful contexts which engaged the children; the use of skilful questioning by the teachers to develop the children's understanding and oral skills; the seamless integration of innovative uses of ICT to enhance the learning and teaching; and, the establishment of a stimulating learning environment where the children are encouraged to 'have a go', to influence the direction of the learning, to be creative and to learn from each other.
- The literacy programme is integrated well into all aspects of the curriculum. The children develop their reading, writing and talking and listening in meaningful contexts. They present their work using a range of traditional and multimedia techniques, and show a progressive competence in writing in a range of genre for a variety of readerships. Play-based learning provides highly effective and valuable experiences to develop the children's early literacy skills. Opportunities to promote literacy through other curricular areas are utilised skilfully and the curriculum is enriched by numerous events with a focus on literacy, including creative writing competitions, book fairs and World Book Day.

- Across the key stages, the children show a high level of enthusiasm for and enjoyment of, their mathematical tasks and are developing a very positive attitude to this core curriculum area. They engage well in a wide range of activities which have an increasing emphasis on problem-solving and investigation. Well-planned, cross-curricular tasks develop the children's mathematical knowledge and deepen their understanding of key concepts. Overall, the teachers' effective use of practical resources and skilful questioning encourages the children to extend their thinking, develop their mathematical language and explain their answers. The teachers have identified appropriately the need to continue to expand the opportunities for the children to explain with confidence and clarity a wider range of strategies to solve problems.
- ICT is used innovatively and effectively to support the children's learning in English and mathematics. For example, an online mathematics resource, accessible through the school website, is used effectively to challenge the children and encourage parental support in the completion of homework.
- The children who require additional support with their learning have access to a wide range of effective withdrawal support to meet well their social, emotional, physical and educational needs. A key strength of the provision is the work carried out by all staff to support the children's emotional health and well-being through explicit planning for the development of the children's self-confidence and resilience. All of the teachers and classroom assistants have undertaken substantial staff development to ensure they are adept at supporting children with very complex needs. The classroom assistants contribute skilfully to, and promote very effectively, the children's learning. The individual education plans (IEPs) are of a good standard, and are produced and reviewed in consultation with the child, the class teacher, parents and classroom assistant as appropriate. In most of the lessons, the IEPs are used well by the teacher to inform their work. In a few cases, the children would benefit from shorter-term targets to ensure that their efforts and progress are recognised and celebrated on a more regular and timely basis.
- There is an inclusive, welcoming and community ethos, underpinned by the core values of the school: *respect, embracing diversity, nurturing talents and celebrating the achievements of all*. The children are encouraged to undertake leadership roles in all aspects of the life and work of the school as classroom helpers, playground buddies, and through membership of an active School Council. There are excellent working relationships between the children, the teaching and the support staff. The care, guidance and support provided for the children and their parents is highly effective.
- The school gives very good attention to promoting healthy eating and physical activity thereby encouraging the children to adopt healthy lifestyles. A particular strength is the active involvement of the children, organised through the School Council, in the review of the healthy eating initiative.

7. Leadership and management

- The senior leadership team has developed, in consultation with the children, parents, staff and governors, a clear, shared and well articulated vision for school improvement in which the needs of the children is paramount. The senior leadership team uses very effectively a wealth of relevant data to support the identification of key priorities for future improvement. The role of coordinators of curricular areas in monitoring and evaluating the provision has been developed further during this school year; there is evidence that this work is enabling the coordinators to effect improvement in the quality of the children's learning experiences.
- Significant work has been undertaken by the senior leadership in preparation for the next cycle of the school development plan. Substantial consultation with all stakeholders, including the children, has been undertaken. The current action plans which guide improvement identify areas for further development and are of a very good quality. They focus appropriately on improving children's learning experiences and, ultimately, the standards they attain. The newly established methods of monitoring and evaluation support well the school development and help ensure that the actions taken bring about the required improvement.
- The school has very strong, effective links with parents and the local community which enhance the children's learning experiences. There are appropriate procedures in place to inform parents of their child's progress. The staff provide excellent opportunities for parents to engage with, and support, their child's learning in all areas of the curriculum. The school also provides a number of recreational and educational courses for parents and the local community. The extended schools programme, including the breakfast club, homework club and a wide range of extra-curricular activities, enrich further the provision and help develop the children's social skills and sense of belonging.
- The well-informed governors play an active role in the life and work of the school, including the development and implementation of the school development plan. They are fully committed to ensuring the school plays an important role in supporting families and the local community and to improving the quality of the pastoral and educational provision. Based on the evidence presented at the time of inspection, there can be a high degree of 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 feel safe in school and know what to do if they have any concerns about their well-being.

8. Conclusion

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

© CROWN COPYRIGHT 2015

This report may be reproduced in whole or in part, except for commercial purposes or in connection with a prospectus or advertisement, provided that the source and date thereof are stated.

Copies of this report are available on the ETI website: www.etini.gov.uk