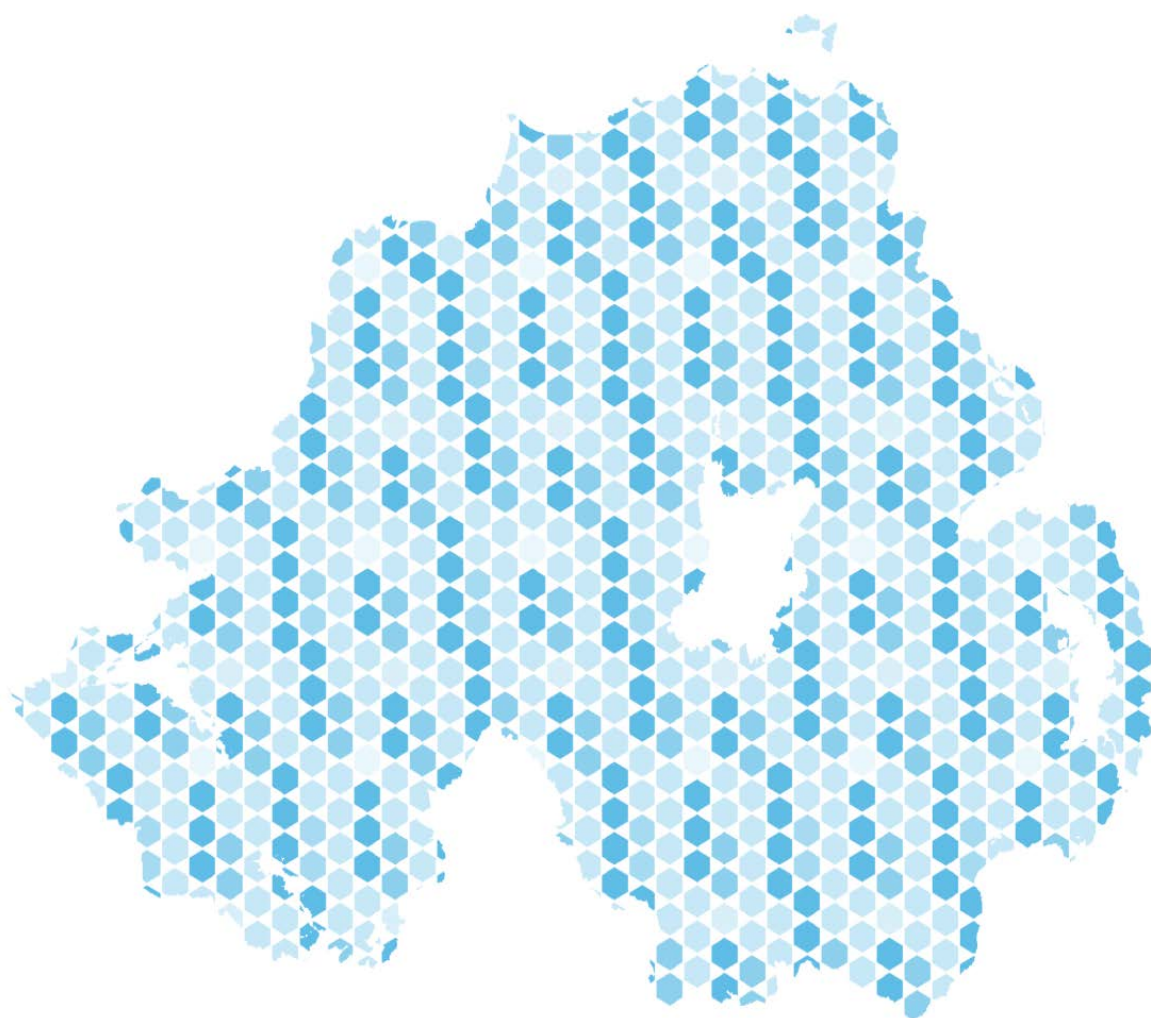


PRIMARY INSPECTION



Education and Training
Inspectorate

Our Lady and St Patrick
Primary School, Downpatrick,
Co Down

Report of an Inspection in
January 2014

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		34	10%	18
Teaching staff		20	91%	10
Support staff		7	70%	*

* 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.

In their responses to the confidential questionnaires the parents indicated a high level of satisfaction with all aspects of the work of the school and the Irish-medium unit. Almost all of the teachers and the support staff completed questionnaires and their responses were very positive; they emphasised, in particular, the successful management of the amalgamation and the very good working relationships throughout the school.

2. Context

Our Lady and St Patrick Primary School opened in September 2011 as an amalgamation of St Patrick's Primary School and Convent of Mercy Primary School. The amalgamation enjoyed strong support from the governors, staff, parents and the wider community. The school is situated on the former Convent of Mercy site which has limited space for play and sports. The Irish-medium unit is housed in temporary accommodation. The school and Irish-medium unit (IMU) are regularly over-subscribed.

Our Lady and St Patrick Primary School	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14
Enrolment	N/A	411	412	424
% Attendance (NI Average)	N/A	94.3%	93.6%	-
FSME Percentage ¹	N/A	36%	37.1%	39.7%
% (No) of children on SEN register	N/A	20.7% (83)	18.7% (67)	24.5% (105)
No. of children with statements of educational needs	N/A	10	7	8
No. of newcomers	N/A	3	3	2

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 the Irish-medium unit (IMU); and
- the quality of leadership and management.

4. Overall finding

Overall Performance Level	Good
Achievements and Standards	Good
Provision	Good
Leadership and Management	Good
Irish Medium Unit	Good

Key findings of the inspection

5. Achievements and standards

- Almost all of the children are well motivated and have positive dispositions to learn; they settle quickly to work and engage actively in their lessons. The children are courteous and communicate effectively with their peers and adults. They co-operate well when working in pairs or small groups and contribute readily to class discussions.

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 2011-12² 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 well above the average. The school's internal performance data shows that most children, including those who require additional support with aspects of their learning, make good progress in English and mathematics in line with their ability or above expectation.
- By the end of key stage (KS) 2, the children read with fluency, expression and enjoyment and can discuss their favourite novels and authors. Throughout the school, the children have good talking and listening skills and they write to a good standard. The most able children in year 7 demonstrated high levels of competence in all areas of the mathematics curriculum, and very good use of mathematical language. By the end of KS2, most of the children achieve very good standards in mathematics.
- The children who require additional support in their learning work well alongside their peers and make good progress towards their targets in English and mathematics.
- Almost all of the children in the IMU are highly motivated and take pride in their work. By the end of KS 2, they achieve standards in Irish, English and mathematics in line with their ability or above expectation. They are able to talk and listen, read and write with fluency and competence in Irish and English, attaining high standards of bi-literacy. Throughout the IMU, the children display a very good understanding of mathematical strategies and apply them with confidence in different contexts.
- The children use information and communication technology (ICT) confidently and they enjoy using animation and PowerPoint programmes to present their ideas to a range of audiences.

6. Provision

- The quality of the teaching observed ranged from very good to satisfactory, with most of the teaching evaluated as good or better. In the most effective practice, in one-quarter of the lessons, the teachers were skilful in using real-life contexts and open-ended questioning techniques to help the children connect their learning and develop their thinking skills and oral responses. The teachers have been updating their medium-term and short-term planning formats and, where this is being used most effectively, the teachers plan for and provide appropriately differentiated learning opportunities. They make good use of their evaluations of the children's learning to inform their future planning. Where the teaching was less effective, in one-fifth of the lessons, the teachers needed to improve both classroom organisation and management of learning; the children were unclear about the learning being developed and a small number of the activities were not sufficiently challenging.

² There is only one year of performance data for the school because it opened in September 2011; due to the current transition period in the arrangements for statutory assessment, the analysis of the end of key stage 2 performance data for the school year 2012/13 is not included.

- All of the teachers mark the children's work regularly with positive and supportive comments; however, there is a variation in the quality of the marking to effect improvement. All of the teachers need to indicate more clearly to the children how they will improve their work, especially in literacy, and ensure that the children are given opportunities to make improvements and corrections in order to raise further the standards of their work.
- The school's current literacy scheme provides a useful overview for the development of the children's learning. The children experience a wide range of reading resources and the grammar and punctuation activities are linked, where appropriate, to the reading materials. In the majority of classes, the children have had experience of writing across a narrow range of writing types; it will be important for them to have more opportunities to write extensively and creatively in their own words and use their writing skills effectively in other curricular areas.
- All aspects of the mathematics curriculum are covered with sufficient frequency in each year group to support the development of the children's knowledge and understanding of mathematics. In the very good sessions, in a minority of the mathematics lessons evaluated, the teachers develop the children's use of mathematical language and their acquisition of mental mathematics strategies. They provide the children with very good opportunities to use practical apparatus, explain their thinking and apply their mathematical knowledge to other areas of learning. This very good practice needs to be disseminated across all key stages, particularly throughout key stage (KS) 1, to ensure consistent, high quality mathematical learning experiences for all of the children.
- All of the teaching and learning observed within the IMU was good or very good, with the majority being evaluated as good. A strong feature of the work of the IMU is the focus in the foundation stage on the high-quality, open-ended questioning in Irish to support the immersion strategies used by the teachers. This good start is enhanced by the effective deployment of the classroom assistant. The strong links with local and regional Irish language agencies enrich the children's learning experiences, including for example, the Irish language youth club and summer camp. The well-attended workshop on Irish language phonics has increased the opportunity for parental engagement with the children's work.
- The children who have difficulties with their learning are identified early and benefit from well-targeted withdrawal sessions for literacy and numeracy. The special educational needs co-ordinator keeps detailed records of the children's progress which informs well the planning for future support. The classroom assistants provide appropriate in-class support and make a good contribution to the children's learning. The children's individual education plans have been reviewed and updated, but the short-term targets require further refinement in order to evaluate the children's progress incrementally. In the best practice, in a minority of the classes, the teachers' medium-term planning is matched closely to the needs of the children who have individual education plans; in these instances, the children's learning in the withdrawal sessions complements their work in class.

- The very good provision for pastoral care is characterised by the caring and welcoming ethos and the highly effective working relationships at all levels. The children's behaviour is exemplary; they work very well together and respect the views and opinions of others. They are very loyal to their school and display a strong sense of community, particularly through the participation of the senior children in the 'Buddy' system. The children have very good opportunities to contribute to decision-making, notably through the active school council and eco council.
- The school gives very good attention to promoting healthy eating and physical activity, thereby encouraging the children to adopt healthy lifestyles, through the effective emphasis on healthy snacks and lunches, the wide range of equipment available for play at break and lunch times and the good opportunities for sporting activities as part of the after-school programmes.

7. Leadership and management

- The senior leaders and governors planned strategically for, and managed the process of, the amalgamation very effectively; they worked hard to foster successfully a new school identity, with a cohesive staff team. They demonstrate a strong commitment to the welfare of all of the staff and children at the school. The senior leadership team (SLT) makes good use of data to identify underachievement and has implemented an effective motivational mentoring scheme to track and improve the children's attitudes to school life and to improve the standards they attain.
- The school development planning process is well informed by regular consultation with the children, the parents, the staff and the governors. The co-ordinators and SLT monitor regularly their areas of the responsibility using an appropriate range of methods. The SLT has identified appropriately the need to ensure that their evaluations are sharply focused on improving the quality of learning and teaching. The current action plans do not identify clearly how the improvements are going to be made. The SLT needs to provide more structured staff development opportunities in order to bring about a shared understanding of the learning and teaching strategies required to provide literacy and numeracy programmes which meet more effectively the needs of all of the children.
- The school has developed very good links with the parents who are well informed about their children's progress and the work of the school through curriculum and parent/teacher meetings, regular whole-school and class newsletters, and an annual written report. The parents' association is active in raising funds for new resources and in organising social events. The school's participation in, for example, the Extended Schools initiative and the very good co-operation with the community youth centre, has enhanced the children's learning experiences with a wide range of after-school activities.
- Based on the evidence presented at the time of inspection, the parents, staff and school community can have a high degree of confidence in the aspects of governance evaluated. The governors are well informed about all aspects of provision in the school. They played a pro-active role in ensuring the success of the amalgamation and continue to support well the life and work of the school.

- 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 is good. The school has important strengths in most of its educational and pastoral provision. The inspection has identified areas for improvement which the school has demonstrated the capacity to address. The ETI will monitor, through district inspection activity, the school's progress on the areas for improvement.

The areas for improvement are the need to:

- ensure that the teachers plan for, implement and evaluate the use of a range of learning strategies in order to meet more effectively the needs of all of the children and raise further the standards that they attain; and
- develop further the role of the senior leaders and co-ordinators in order to ensure that there is a sharper focus on evaluating the quality of the learning and teaching and effecting sustained improvements.

Health and safety/Accommodation

- There is a need for an urgent review of the children's safety at drop-off and pick-up times due to limited parking at the main entrance and the difficulties in accessing the school safely from the main road.

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