

# PRIMARY INSPECTION 2014-15



Education and Training  
Inspectorate

St Malachy's Primary School  
and Nursery Unit, Castlewellan,  
Co Down

Report of an Inspection in  
January 2015

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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.

A minority of the parents and almost all of the staff (teaching and non-teaching) responded to the questionnaires. The responses to the parental questionnaires indicated high levels of satisfaction with the life and work of the school. In particular, the parents highlighted how happy their children are at the school and the professionalism and commitment of the staff. The staff that completed questionnaires was very positive about their work. They emphasised: the dedication of the principal and the high standards he sets; the strong collegiality of the staff; and, the child-focused caring ethos within the school. The governors expressed their appreciation for the hard work and dedication of the principal, vice-principal and staff. The ETI has reported to the principal and representatives of the board of governors the main findings emerging from the questionnaires and the discussions.

## **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 for literacy and numeracy in the school; and
3. the quality of leadership and management.

## **3. Context**

St Malachy's Primary School and Nursery Unit is situated in the town of Castlewellan. A majority of the children live in the town and the remainder come from the surrounding rural area by bus and car. In addition to the nursery unit, which has 26 children attending full-time, the school has a learning support centre (LSC), which currently has 20 children arranged in three classes. The total enrolment, including those attending the nursery unit, has risen by 9% over the last two years and currently stands at 356 children. Over the last

four years, the percentage of children entitled to free school meals and the percentage of children on the Special Education Needs Register have fluctuated slightly. The number of newcomer children has decreased and currently stands at seven. The school promotes shared education through information and communication technology (ICT) and sporting programmes with two controlled primary schools.

St Malachy's Primary School and Nursery Unit	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
Total enrolment (yrs 1 – 7; including learning support centre)	299	300	309	330
nursery unit children	26	26	27	26
learning support centre children	23	17	18	20
% Attendance	93%	93%	94%	
FSME Percentage <sup>1</sup>	34%	36%	30%	36%
% (No) of children on SEN register	30%	29%	31%	31%
No. of children with statements of educational needs	27	22	22	27
No. of newcomers	16	9	7	7

**Source:** data as held by the school.

#### 4. Overall findings of the inspection

<b>Overall Performance Level</b>	<b>Very Good</b>
<b>Achievements and Standards</b>	<b>Very Good</b>
<b>Provision</b>	<b>Very Good</b>
<b>Leadership and Management</b>	<b>Outstanding</b>
<b>Nursery Unit</b>	<b>Very Good</b>
<b>Learning Support Centre</b>	<b>Outstanding</b>

#### 5. Achievements and standards

- The children are happy and well-motivated; they settle quickly to their learning and respond positively to the activities provided by their teachers. They can work individually, in pairs and in groups, and increasingly show a level of independence and maturity as they progress through the school. The children's behaviour is exemplary both in class and as they move around the school; they are respectful towards their peers, the staff and visitors to the school.
- The school's internal assessment data shows that almost all children, including those who require additional support with aspects of their learning, make very good progress in English and mathematics in line with their ability or above expectation.
- Overall the standards achieved by the children in literacy are very good. They engage maturely in presentations, in whole-class discussions and in group or paired activities. They articulate clearly their ideas and justify confidently their opinions. The children in year 7 read with high levels of understanding; they speak enthusiastically and knowledgeably about their favourite books and

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

authors. In their writing, the children use spelling, punctuation and grammar with increasing accuracy and write competently for a range of purposes and audiences. A notable strength is the quality of persuasive writing, particularly at key stage (KS) 2.

- Overall the standards achieved by the children in numeracy are very good. They show a positive attitude to, and enthusiasm for, engaging with and solving mathematical questions and are successful in applying their mathematical skills across the curriculum. By year 7, the more able children are secure in their knowledge of important mathematical ideas and concepts, such as place value and two- and three-dimensional shapes; they use and apply readily a wide range of mental mathematics strategies.
- The children in the learning support centre (LSC) make outstanding progress in literacy and numeracy; their progress is tracked and evaluated regularly. All of the children demonstrate improvement on their previous learning, and enhanced social and independence skills.
- The children in the nursery unit co-operate well with the staff and their peers, listening attentively to stories and joining in keenly with songs and action poems. Almost all follow simple instructions accurately and show very good levels of independence and self-management in response to the adults' high expectations. The children are making very good progress in all areas of the pre-school curriculum; a significant minority demonstrate early writing skills and can share their early understanding of key mathematical and scientific concepts using the appropriate vocabulary.
- The children attain high standards across the full range of information and communication technology (ICT) skills; for example, the year 7 children have successfully used video conferencing software to complete a joint project with the children from a controlled primary school.

## **6. Provision**

- The teachers' planning is comprehensive and well informed by a thorough evaluation of the children's previous learning and detailed knowledge of their individual needs. A notable strength of the planning is the effective integration of the key skills of communication, using mathematics and ICT through a topic-based approach. In the most effective lessons, in about one-half of the lessons observed, there were outstanding working relationships, effective questioning that resulted in thoughtful discussions, and appropriate opportunities for the children to develop their thinking skills. In addition, the teachers used a range of effective strategies, they often linked learning to other areas of the curriculum, and they used ICT well to enhance the quality of learning. In the small number of less effective lessons observed, there was a lack of pace and challenge and the work was not matched sufficiently well to cater for the wide range of abilities within the classes.

- The school's programme for language and literacy ensures progression across the key stages in talking and listening, reading and writing. The children at all stages benefit from purposeful, well-conceived opportunities to talk and listen to one another. Through the balanced and systematic reading programme, the children's development as independent readers and their enjoyment of reading are fostered effectively. While most of the children have appropriate opportunities to write independently in meaningful and engaging contexts, in a minority of instances, there is insufficient challenge for the most able children.
- There is a consistent approach to numeracy planning across the school arising from detailed and thorough long-term planning which provides effective guidance to ensure progression. The numeracy lessons are well-structured and start with appropriate mental mathematics activities through which the children are given opportunities to explain their thinking. All the teachers plan regularly to match the work and activities to the abilities of the children. In the most effective practice, this differentiated approach focused on varying the level of thinking as well as the content in order to provide appropriate challenge for the more able children. It is appropriate that the school has identified the need to provide further support for the children who are high-achievers in numeracy.
- The provision for special educational needs is well organised and focused on the holistic development of the children in an inclusive and caring environment. The children who require additional support with aspects of their learning are identified early and are supported sensitively and effectively by the teachers and classroom assistants. The staff have participated recently in an intensive training programme, exploring factors affecting children's literacy development, which has enabled them to become more adept at developing and implementing, for example, multi-sensory strategies. The staff maintain close contact with a wide range of statutory and voluntary agencies.
- The provision for the children in the LSC is highly effective. The teachers use a wide range of evidence to plan, monitor and evaluate the children's progress very well. The children benefit from the well-structured and enjoyable learning opportunities, and the interaction between the children and staff is of a very good quality. There is a regular, well-planned system of inclusion for the children with their peers and teachers in the main school as they learn to tolerate change and an increased level of sensory stimulation.
- The nursery unit is presented to a high standard; the well resourced learning environment is enhanced further by attractive and engaging displays incorporating much of the children's own art work. The staff plan an interesting and varied programme that provides appropriate challenge and progression for the children throughout the year. An appropriate blend of methods is used to gather information about the children's progress and development; this information is used well to inform the future planning to meet the children's individual needs. The quality of the interaction between the staff and the children is consistently of a 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 parents are kept well informed about their child's progress and how they can support their child's learning.

- The outstanding quality of the arrangements for pastoral care in the school is characterised by the inclusive, supportive and child-centred ethos, the strong sense of teamwork and collegiality and the high degree of mutual respect amongst all members of the school community. Through the very effective school council, the children make meaningful contributions to the decision-making processes within the school; they avail of many appropriate opportunities to evaluate the quality of their experiences, to negotiate with the staff and to make decisions which influence school life. The positive approach to promoting good behaviour is well embedded throughout the school; it supports effectively the children's sense of personal responsibility and self-management.
- The school gives very good attention to promoting healthy-eating and physical activity through both the curriculum and the varied range of extra-curricular physical activities available to the children, thereby encouraging them to adopt healthy lifestyles. The school's promotion of Gaelic football, camogie and hurling has been recognised by a national award.

## **7. Leadership and management**

- The leadership and management of the school are outstanding. Over the last seven years, the senior leaders have overseen successfully: an increase in enrolment by nearly a quarter; the extensive refurbishment of the buildings; and the appointment of nearly one-half of the teaching staff. The senior leadership team (SLT) itself has been, and still is, in the process of change. Throughout this time, the SLT has acted strategically and maintained a very clear focus on improving the children's pastoral and curricular experiences and their achievements. Alongside this improvement, and central to it, has been the professional development of the staff. The main curricular areas are developed very effectively through a team approach, each led by a committed and enthusiastic co-ordinator. In particular, the nursery management team, which includes the principal, oversees the development of its provision and ensures appropriate integration with the work of the foundation stage.
- The school's use of performance data is very effective: the SLT and teachers monitor the progress of the children, distinguish between low and under-achievement, diagnose individual children's difficulties and also use it to identify aspects of literacy and numeracy which need to be developed further in the curricular planning.
- The school development planning process is highly effective and is underpinned by wide consultation with staff, governors, parents and children and by the reflective evaluations compiled by the SLT, curricular teams and co-ordinators. These evaluations are based appropriately on lesson observations and the review of the work in the children's books in conjunction with the teachers' planning. The school development plan is continually under review and appropriately reflects and informs the very effective improvement work of all of the staff.



- The school has outstanding links and partnerships with the parents and the wider community which enrich and extend the children's learning experiences. The staff value the parents as partners in developing their children's learning and arrange events in order that parents are informed about aspects of the curriculum, for example, numeracy and the phonics programme. There are appropriate procedures in place to keep parents informed about their child's progress.
- The governors are well informed of the work and life of the school, they are actively involved in the school development planning process and provide an appropriate challenge function for the work of the principal and vice-principal. Based on the evidence presented at the time of the inspection, the ETI's evaluation is that there can be a high degree of confidence in the aspects of governance inspected.
- 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. These arrangements reflect the guidance issued by the Department of Education. In discussions with the inspectors, the year 6 children reported that they feel very secure 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.

**Health and safety**

1. There is traffic congestion due to a lack of appropriate car parking facilities at the school. This presents safety concerns during drop-off and collection times for the children.
2. The surface of the playground is very uneven and presents trip hazards to the children and staff.

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