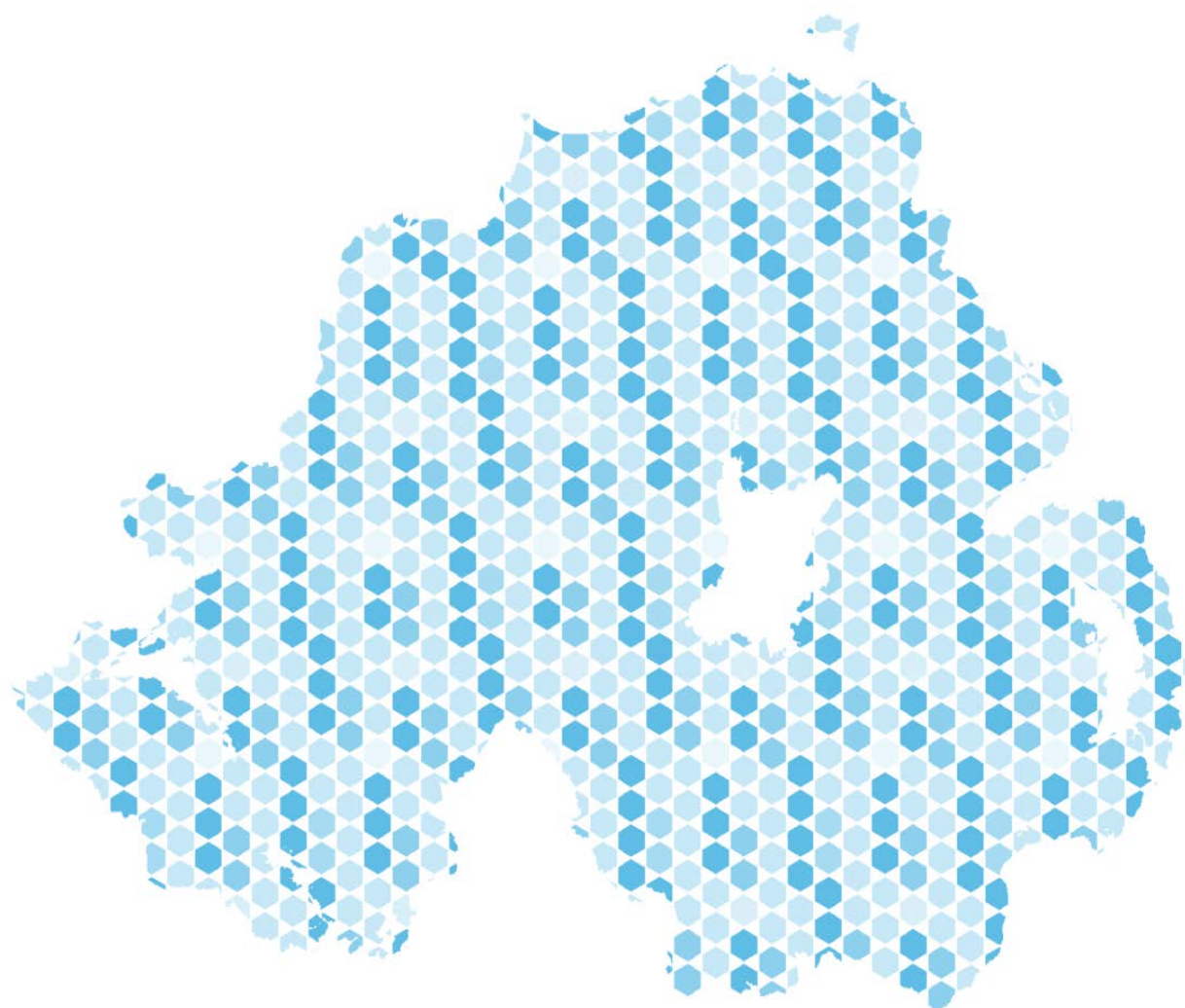


PRIMARY INSPECTION 2014-15



Education and Training
Inspectorate

St Mary's Primary School,
Altinure, Co Londonderry

Report of an Inspection in
June 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

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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, parents and staff with specific responsibilities.

The arrangements for this inspection included:

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

Sixty-five percent of parents responded to the questionnaires. The responses from the parents indicated very high levels of satisfaction with the life and work of the school. In particular, the parents commented on the important focus the staff place on the all-round development of each child, the excellent reputation of the school and the long-established and close links with the local community. Ninety-three percent of the teaching and non-teaching staff responded to the questionnaires and their responses were also very positive; they emphasised their focus on availing of opportunities and initiatives to benefit the children's learning and development.

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

Saint Mary's Primary School, Altinure is situated on a spacious site in the village of Park in County Londonderry. The children come from the local community, the surrounding rural area and further afield. At the time of the inspection, 21% of the children have free school meals entitlement and 22% of the children have been identified as requiring additional support with aspects of their learning. Over the past four years, the enrolment has declined. The school has important links with a controlled primary school which provide good opportunities for the children to learn about community relations, equality and diversity through effective curricular work. The staff have benefited from this work through shared staff development on literacy. The children's attendance is above the Northern Ireland average. At the time of the inspection, the principal has been in post for almost two years.

St. Mary's Primary School, Altinure	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
Enrolment	190	180	173	177
% Attendance	98	97	98	97
FSME Percentage ¹	22	17	14	21
% of children on SEN register	47	41	28	22
No. of children with statements of educational needs	*	*	*	*
No. of newcomers	0	0	0	0

Source: data as held by the school.

* fewer than 5

4. Overall findings of the inspection

Overall Performance Level	Outstanding
Achievements and Standards	Outstanding
Provision	Outstanding
Leadership and Management	Outstanding

5. Achievements and standards

- The children engage enthusiastically with their learning and demonstrate very high levels of enjoyment and motivation. They are courteous and respectful towards each other, the staff and visitors to the school. The children's behaviour is excellent; they respond very well to the positive ethos in all of the classrooms and display a pride in their school and community. They demonstrate increasing levels of independence and self-confidence as they progress through the school and are very well prepared for the next stage of their learning.
- The school's performance data shows that most of the 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.
- Throughout the school, the children have very good listening skills and talk confidently about their learning. From year 1, they articulate clearly their views and opinions with appropriate justification. By year 7, the children evaluate effectively progress in their own and the learning of their peers. The children read fluently with expression and understanding and display high levels of interest in reading for enjoyment. The quality and accuracy of the children's written work across the curriculum is of a very high standard, showing year-on-year progress across the key stages.

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

- In the foundation stage (FS), the children participate with confidence in the very well planned play-based activities and develop a good understanding of key concepts in mathematics. As they progress through the school, the children complete calculations with very good levels of accuracy and demonstrate flexibility in applying mathematical strategies to complete investigations and solve problems in other areas of the curriculum. By year 7, the most able children demonstrate a very good knowledge and understanding of key concepts across the mathematics curriculum and apply skilfully their learning in a variety of relevant contexts through their project and topic work. The children reflect, with increasing maturity, upon their learning in mathematics, use a wide range of strategies, and suggest ways in which they can improve the processes they use to complete their work.
- Across all of the key stages, the children use effectively information and communication technology (ICT) to support their learning. The teachers and support staff, working in collaboration with the parents, help the children to use confidently a wide range of software programmes and programmable devices both in school and at home. This important work supports systematic progression in the acquisition and development of the children's ICT skills.

6. Provision

- The teachers' planning, teaching and assessment for learning are highly effective. The teachers, working effectively with the highly skilled classroom assistants, make excellent use of assessment data to inform future planning. As a result, the planning is coherent for all areas of the curriculum and promotes continuity and progression in the children's learning. The skilful use of target-setting for, and with, the children is well-embedded ensuring that the needs, abilities and interests of all of the children are identified and are addressed appropriately.
- In the most effective practice, in most of the lessons observed, the teachers asked skilful questions and built upon the children's responses to develop their thinking skills and encourage them to explain their answers to their peers. The learning was set in meaningful contexts which engaged the children and encouraged them to think for themselves. A key strength of these lessons is the very effective use of plenary sessions in which the teachers recap key points, deepen the children's understanding and provide opportunities and time for the children to organise their thinking and extend their responses. In the less effective practice, there was, at times, an over-emphasis on adult direction of the activities which curtailed the opportunities for the children to contribute more fully their own ideas.
- In literacy, the blend of reading with opportunities for talking and listening and independent writing provides progression and continuity for all children across the key stages. The teaching of writing is highly effective and is a particular strength of the school; the children have very good opportunities, from an early age, to plan, edit and redraft their work, writing pieces of a very high standard in meaningful contexts across the curriculum. There is an appropriate whole-school focus on spelling and the development of the children's reading skills. The teachers use effectively, a wide range of guided reading initiatives, to develop the children's fluency, understanding and enjoyment of reading. A key feature is the engagement of parents, peers and older children in the highly effective, inter-related reading and spelling programmes.

- Across the key stages, the children show a high level of enthusiasm for and enjoyment of their work in mathematics; they are developing a very positive attitude to this core curriculum area. The children engage well in a wide range of activities which have an increasing emphasis on problem-solving and on planning and completing investigations. The teachers' skilful use of STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) topic work and well-planned, cross-curricular tasks, delivered within meaningful contexts, 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 the process of how they achieved their answers. Importantly, the teachers continue to expand the opportunities for the children to explain with confidence and clarity the wide range of strategies they use to solve problems.
- The school has a very inclusive approach to the special educational needs provision with almost all support being in class. There is a high priority placed on the professional development of both teachers and classroom assistants to ensure prompt identification, intervention and individually tailored support for the children with special educational needs. Individual education plans contain specific and measurable targets and are integrated well into each class teacher's planning and evaluation.
- The school gives outstanding attention to promoting healthy eating and physical activity thereby encouraging the children to adopt healthy lifestyles. The children engage in regular physical activity and health events, including 'Walk to school week'. The children participate enthusiastically in a wide range of extra-curricular activities and have opportunities to enter competitions beyond the school with notable success.
- The quality of the working relationships at all levels underpins the ethos of the school community where staff, parents and governors regard the needs and interests of the children as paramount. The children are proud of their school and acknowledge their part in influencing decision making through their active roles in the Eco-council and school council. The teachers, parents and grandparents make very good use of the local environment to support and enhance the children's learning and their personal development.

7. Leadership and management

- The senior leadership team has placed a clear focus on maintaining a reflective approach to school improvement. The very well-embedded processes for self-evaluation have been informed by meaningful and highly effective consultation with staff, parents, governors and children. The senior leadership team, working in close collaboration with all the staff, has used very effectively a wealth of relevant data to support the identification of the key priorities for future improvement. As a result, there is clear evidence of ongoing improvements in the priorities identified in the most recent school development plan and in the associated action plans.

- The school has highly effective arrangements in place for consulting with parents to engage them meaningfully in their children's education and the ongoing development of the school. The school's staff maintain very good links with the local playgroup which enables the teachers to build on the children's previous learning.
- The very well-informed governors play an active role in the life and work of the school, including consultation on and implementation of the priorities agreed in the school development plan. They are fully committed to ensuring the school plays an effective role in supporting community development and to improving the quality of the pastoral and educational provision. 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.
- 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 and 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 this school is outstanding; the quality of pastoral care is also outstanding. The school has demonstrated its capacity for sustained self-improvement.

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