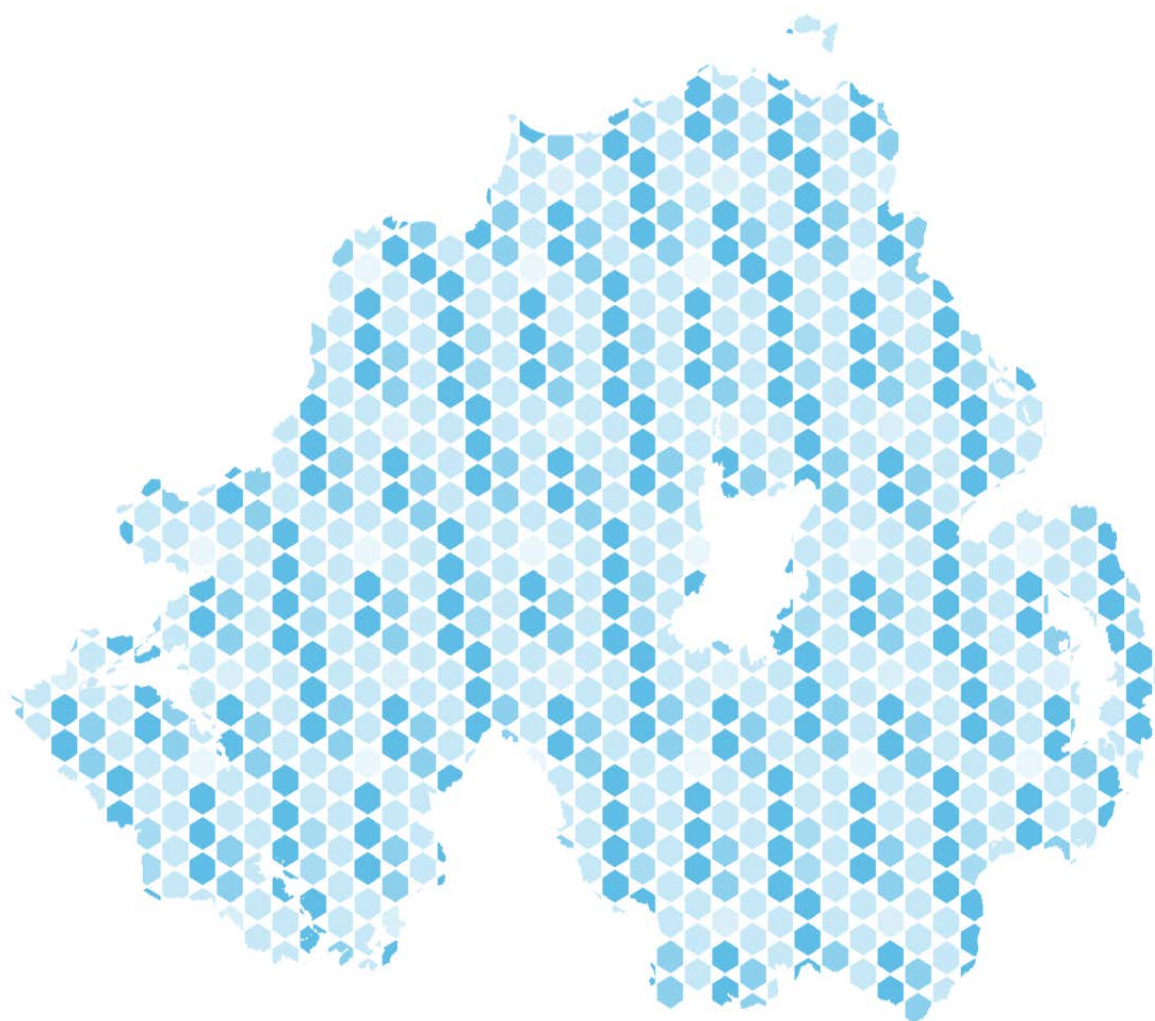


PRIMARY INSPECTION



Education and Training
Inspectorate

St Mary's Primary School
and Nursery Unit, Strabane,
Co Tyrone

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	701	78	11%	38
Teaching staff	31	22	70.9%	12
Support staff	41	26	63%	6

* 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.

The responses to the parental questionnaires indicated a very high level of satisfaction with the work of the school. In particular, the parents valued the efficient and thoughtful management of the amalgamation, the committed leadership of the principal and vice-principals and the hardworking and approachable staff.

A majority of the teachers and the support staff completed questionnaires and their responses were very positive; they emphasised the very good working relationships and the support provided by the senior leadership team. The small number of issues raised in the questionnaires was discussed with the principal and the board of governors.

2. Context

St. Mary's Primary School and Nursery Unit is in the parish of Melmount in the town of Strabane, County Tyrone. The school and double nursery unit opened in 2012 as a result of the amalgamation of St Mary's Boys' and St Mary's Girls' Primary Schools. In September 2013, Ballycolman Nursery School closed and re-opened as an additional double nursery unit under the management of St Mary's Primary school. There are currently 597 children in the primary school and 104 children in the nursery unit. Approximately 45% of the children are entitled to free school meals and 18.7% of the children require additional support with their learning.

St. Mary's Primary School and Nursery Unit	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14
Enrolment	N/A	N/A	648	701
% Attendance (NI Average)	N/A	N/A	92.7%	
FSME Percentage ¹	N/A	N/A	40.7%	45%
% (No) of children on SEN register	N/A	N/A	18.9%	18.7%
No. of children with statements of educational needs	N/A	N/A	14	15
No. of newcomers	N/A	N/A	20	32

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 nursery unit; and
- the quality of leadership and management.

4. Overall finding

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

Key findings of the inspection

5. Achievements and standards

- The children in the school are well-motivated learners; they display high levels of independence and maturity and their behaviour is exemplary. They respond positively to the learning opportunities provided by their teachers and they demonstrate very good personal and social skills. The children work collaboratively in pairs and groups; they are able to make decisions, think creatively and manage their own learning.

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

- The school's internal performance data* shows that almost all 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's talking and listening skills are very well developed, enabling them to articulate their ideas and feelings, engage in sustained discussions and justify their opinions. Almost all of the children are developing very good fluency and a deeper understanding of a variety of stimulating and increasingly challenging texts. From an early stage, most of the children approach writing activities with very good confidence and across all key stages they compose high-quality extended responses to a range of stimuli across the curriculum. Across the school, the children show very good recall and understanding of key facts and concepts across the areas of mathematics. By the end of year 7, the children are able to apply their mathematical knowledge to complete mental calculations competently, explain confidently their methods and offer alternative strategies.
- The children who require additional help with their learning achieve very well. They make very good progress in literacy and numeracy, show increasing self-confidence, independence and maturity as they move through the school.
- The children in the nursery unit are very well settled and demonstrate very good social skills and behaviour. Most have good levels of concentration and attention, spending sustained periods persevering and completing activities. The nursery children participate well in a wide range of songs and rhymes both during group sessions and informally with staff throughout the sessions.
- The children use information and communication technology (ICT) confidently and appropriately and their standards in ICT are very good.

6. Provision

- The teachers' planning is comprehensive and in the best practice it is informed well by thorough evaluation of the children's previous learning and knowledge of their individual needs. Almost all of the teaching observed ranged from good to outstanding; in just over two-thirds it was very good or outstanding. In the best practice, learning and teaching meets effectively the range of individual needs within the classroom and has good pace, challenge and progression. The teachers make skilful use of questioning to develop and extend the children's thinking and oral responses and ICT is an integral part of the learning. The teachers employ a wide range of assessment approaches to monitor and evaluate the children's learning. They use discerningly the internal performance data, together with classroom observations to inform the teaching and challenge further the children's learning. Marking is regular and consistent and the teachers provide effective feedback to the children both orally and written in their books. This feedback, together with the children's self and peer assessment, enables them to reflect on, and manage, their own learning. The children are well supported in their learning by the classroom assistants.

* Due to the current transition period in the arrangements for statutory assessment and the recent amalgamation of this school this analysis includes only internal data.

- The quality of the provision for the children who require additional support with their learning is very good. The strategies and targets outlined in the individual education plans are well conceived and reflect a detailed knowledge of each individual child. They indicate clearly the children's support needs and the intervention strategies put in place to meet those needs. The children benefit from a well-planned, collaborative programme which is provided through in-class support. Those children receiving withdrawal support in literacy and numeracy benefit from the interesting, relevant and well-paced teaching which is targeted skilfully at improving standards.
- Literacy is promoted well across the curriculum. The teachers place a strong emphasis on the development of language to enable the children to communicate clearly, on purposeful reading to extend their understanding, and on the systematic teaching of writing across many genres. The most effective literacy lessons integrate successfully the reading, writing and, listening and speaking elements through the provision of skilled connected learning and teaching in meaningful and engaging contexts; this is evident, for example, in their work on the World Around Us topics.
- The development of mathematics is systematic across the three key stages. The comprehensive whole school scheme guides well the teachers' planning and ensures there is broad and well-balanced coverage and well-staged progression across the areas of mathematics. Across the key stages, mental mathematics activities are well integrated into learning and teaching, and often provide an enjoyable and challenging start to learning. In addition, the teachers make very good use of practical activities to enable the children to apply their mathematical knowledge, extend their thinking and use of mathematical language and enhance further their enjoyment of mathematics.
- The staff in the nursery unit provide a stimulating learning environment in the playrooms. All of the staff team are developing well their skills to promote the children's vocabulary, extend their thinking, and promote settled play. The detailed short term planning guides the staff effectively in delivering good quality provision in most areas of the pre-school curriculum and there are appropriate systems in place for assessing the children's progress. The staff have appropriately identified the development of learning outdoors and the ongoing professional development of the new staff team as priority areas for further development
- The quality of the provision for pastoral care is outstanding. The senior leadership team and the staff have worked very hard to ensure that the whole school community adapted well to the amalgamation. Throughout the school and nursery unit, the quality of the working relationships at all levels is excellent. The holistic development of each child is central to and evident in the life and work of the school; it is a nurturing, inclusive, safe and secure environment. The children have very good opportunities to contribute to decision-making in the school, for example, through the school and class councils.
- The school and nursery unit gives very good attention to promoting healthy eating and physical activity thereby encouraging the children to adopt healthy lifestyles.

7. Leadership and management

- The principal and vice-principals have shown outstanding leadership in the planning, management and implementation of the amalgamation process. Their leadership and management of the school and nursery units is visionary, highly strategic and clearly focused on raising standards for all of the children and on the well-being and holistic development of the whole-school community. They inspire confidence and respect among the children, parents, staff, governors and wider school community. The curriculum coordinators have worked hard to ensure continuity and progression during the transition period and have made a very good start in developing a whole school approach to curriculum provision and to the process of monitoring and evaluating the quality of the learning and teaching. The staff of the nursery unit have made good progress in a short period of time, in building a strong team approach - and in developing close pastoral and curricular links between the nursery unit and the primary school.
- The school is developing well a culture of self-evaluation. There is a comprehensive school development plan (SDP) which is informed by the school's monitoring and evaluation processes, including an efficient use of performance data and the teachers' observation of the children's learning. A particular strength of the school development plan (SDP) is the consideration given to the views of all stakeholders. The associated action plans have a clear focus on improving further the provision for the children and raising the standards they attain.
- The school has a strong partnership with the parents, other schools, external agencies and the local community, which enhance further the learning opportunities for the children for example, the very good links established by the nursery unit with 'Sure Start' ensure progression in the children's learning and continuity in providing early focused support for the development of the children's language and communication skills and the year seven transition programme supports well the children transferring to post-primary school.
- 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 Board of Governors has guided well the amalgamation process and carries out very effectively its support and challenge functions.
- 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 and 7 children reported that they feel 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 learners; and has demonstrated its capacity for sustained self-improvement.

Accommodation

- The multiple site accommodation causes considerable difficulties to the necessary communication and movement of staff and children between phases and key stages.

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