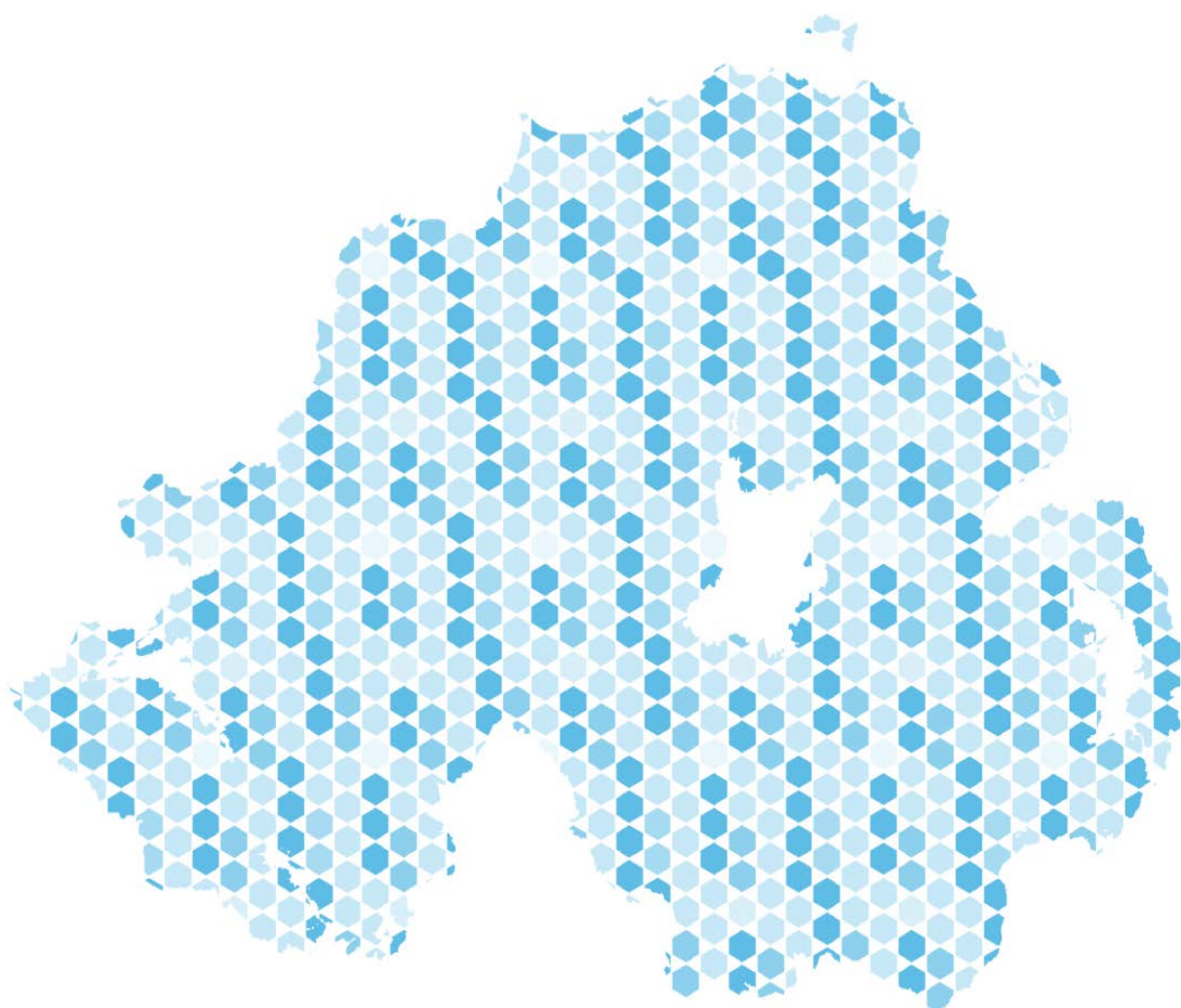


PRIMARY INSPECTION 2014-15



Education and Training
Inspectorate

St Michael's Primary School,
Finnis, Co Down

Report of an Inspection in
May 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
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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.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 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.

Seventy-three percent of parents responded to the questionnaires. Almost all of the responses indicated high levels of satisfaction with the life and work of the school. In particular, the parents highlighted the supportive, approachable staff, the holistic development of the children, and the school's place at the heart of the community. Almost all of the staff completed questionnaires and their responses were wholly positive. They emphasised the high quality of the working relationships at all levels and the cross-community links with local schools. The ETI has reported to the principal and representatives of the board of governors the main findings, including a small number of concerns, emerging from 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 for numeracy in the school; and
3. the quality of leadership and management.

3. Context

St Michael's Primary School is situated in the townland of Finnis, within the Parish of Dromara, and recently celebrated its 50th anniversary. The children who attend the school travel from the surrounding rural area. Over the past four years, the school's enrolment has increased by almost 25% to its present figure of 74 children; approximately 4% of the children have been identified as requiring additional help with their learning and around 14% are entitled to free school meals. The current principal took up post in September 2013.

St Michael's Primary School, Finnis	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
Enrolment	60	60	61	74
% Attendance (NI Average)	98%	97%	98%	93%
FSME Percentage ¹	12%	15%	13%	14%
% (No) of children on SEN register	3%	5%	3%	4%
No. of children with statements of educational needs	*	*	*	*
No. of newcomers	*	*	*	*

Source: data as held by the school.

* fewer than 5

4. Overall findings of the inspection

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

5. Achievements and standards

- The children are highly motivated and engage readily in their learning. Their behaviour is exemplary. The children co-operate maturely in pairs and small groups, listen respectfully to one another, share their ideas and articulate their thinking clearly. They take pride in the presentation of their work.
- The school's 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 in mathematics in line with their ability or above expectation.
- The most able children in year 7 are confident in applying mental mathematics strategies in a range of contexts. The children have a very good understanding of key concepts across the mathematics curriculum and use appropriate mathematical language to articulate their thinking.
- The children make good use of information and communication technology (ICT) to research information and present their work in a variety of formats.

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

6. Provision

- The teachers' yearly and medium-term planning is detailed and provides a good framework for progression and guides the learning and teaching well. In the most effective practice, the planning is underpinned and informed by the teachers' evaluations of the children's learning. The short-term planning is currently and appropriately under review and requires a clearer focus on the intended learning and higher levels of challenge for the most able.
- Most of the teaching observed during the inspection was effective. In the most effective lessons, the teachers establish excellent working relationships at all levels in the classroom, engage the children in practical activities, and enthuse them to learn through relevant, real-life contexts which often reflect the school's rural setting. The children's work is marked regularly and positively, but, in the less effective practice, marking for improvement strategies are not used consistently across the year groups.
- Overall, the children experience a balanced mathematics programme. In the foundation stage, the teacher introduces mathematical concepts and ideas appropriately through the play and regular routines. In the best practice, the teachers use effective questioning and mental mathematics activities to extend the children's thinking and check their understanding of mathematical concepts and processes, the staff need to disseminate more consistently the good practice across the year groups. As they progress through the school, the children often complete worksheet-based tasks which do not include sufficient opportunities to apply their knowledge and skills through open-ended investigative approaches.
- The very good pastoral provision is underpinned by the supportive, inclusive ethos and the mutually respectful relationships across the school. The children's achievements are valued and celebrated. A particular strength of the pastoral provision is the children's active participation in decision-making, through responding to surveys and through the school council. They appreciate and benefit from the extensive after-school programme and opportunities for educational visits.
- The additional learning needs of the children are identified at an early stage and a very good range of appropriate strategies, including a Reading Partnership programme, is used very well to support the children's learning. Through the regular monitoring of the individual education plans the parents are kept well informed of their child's progress. The individual education plans are used competently by the staff to track the children's attainment against their targets and to inform the future learning and teaching strategies.
- The school gives very good attention to promoting healthy eating and physical activity thereby encouraging the children to adopt healthy lifestyles. The play spaces are used well at break and lunch, and there is sports coaching available for a range of in-school and extra-curricular activities.

7. Leadership and management

- The staff team works and plans collegially to meet the individual needs of the children and to enhance their learning. The programme for curricular meetings and staff development is well conceived and supports this collegial approach. They inspire high degrees of confidence and respect amongst the school community.
- Currently, there is a temporary numeracy co-ordinator and no literacy co-ordinator. It will be important for the school's management to review leadership roles and responsibilities and plan for the appointment of post-holders in these key curricular areas as changes in staffing arise.
- The school development planning process is informed by consultation with the children, the parents and the staff, and by the analysis of assessment outcomes. The appropriate strategic actions taken by the leadership and management to promote improvement include initiatives to enhance the children's learning in mathematics, reading, writing and ICT. The action plans are purposeful and clearly focused on bringing about improvement.
- The children's learning experiences are extended and enriched as a result of the links and partnerships which the school has developed with the local community, including local businesses, sports clubs and schools. Very good links have been established with the parents through regular newsletters, curricular evenings, the informative website, concerts and social events throughout the year. The supportive Parent-Teachers' Association is highly active in raising funds and purchasing resources to enhance the quality of the children's learning.
- Based on the evidence presented at the time of inspection, the ETI's evaluation is that there can be a high level of confidence in the aspects of governance evaluated. The governors are well informed about the school's finances, the development planning process, learning and teaching, and the children's attainment.
- 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 children reported that they feel secure in school and know what to do if they have any concerns about their safety or well-being.
- It will be important that the employing authority, school governors and the staff plan for, and manage, issues related to the sustainability of the school provision and school budget, in order to address the current and future needs of the children and the staff.

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 an area for improvement which the school has demonstrated the capacity to address.

The area for improvement is the need to:

- appoint curricular co-ordinators and develop their capacity to monitor and evaluate the provision in English and mathematics.

The Education and Training Inspectorate will monitor, through district inspection activity, the school's progress on the area for improvement.

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