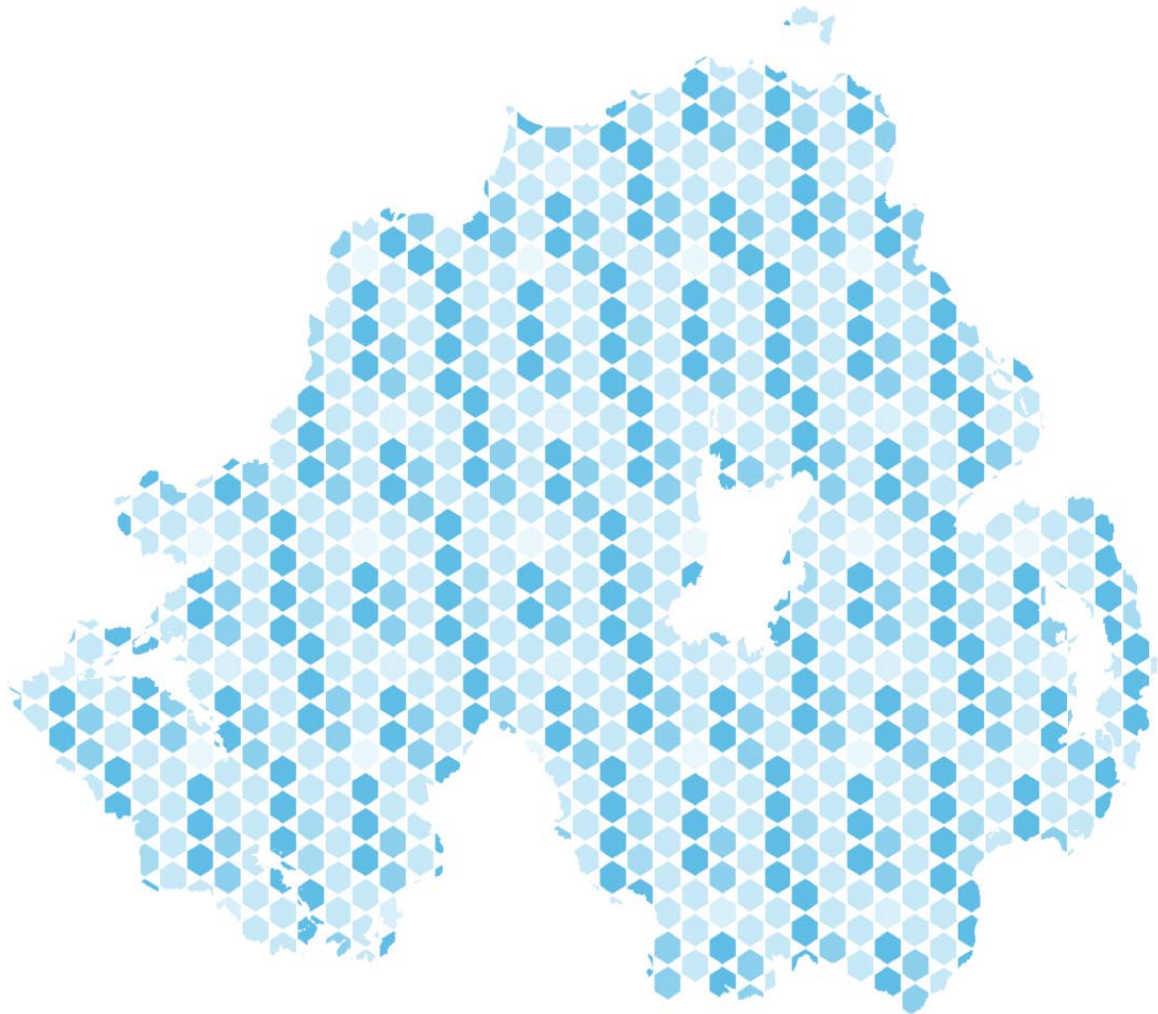


# PRIMARY INSPECTION



Education and Training  
Inspectorate

Gaelscoil na Móna, Belfast

Report of an Inspection  
in November 2009

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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%

In assessing the various features of the provision, Inspectors relate their evaluations to six descriptors as set out below:

<b>DESCRIPTOR</b>
Outstanding
Very Good
Good
Satisfactory
Inadequate
Unsatisfactory

## BASIC INFORMATION SHEET (BIS) - PRIMARY SCHOOLS

- A. i. **School: Gaelscoil na Móna** iii. **Date of Inspection: W/B 30/11/09**  
 ii. **School Reference Number: 104-6671** iv. **Nature of Inspection: Focused**

B.

School Year	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10
Year 1 Intake	10	19	14	19	24
<b>Enrolments</b>					
Primary	45	66	72	86	96
Reception	0	0	0	0	0
Nursery Unit	0	0	0	0	0
Special Unit	0	0	0	0	0
Irish Medium Unit	0	0	0	0	0

The enrolment for the current year is the figure on the day of notification of inspection. For previous years it is the figure in the annual return to the Department of Education.

The calculations at C and D should be based on the total of the primary and reception enrolments only.

- C. Average Attendance for the Previous School Year  
 (expressed as a percentage): 90.47%

**Primary & Nursery Special Irish Medium  
 Reception Unit Unit Unit**

- D. i. Number of Teachers  
 (including the principal and part-time teachers): 5          0          0          0  
 (Full-time equivalent = 25 teaching hours)
- ii. PTR (Pupil/Teacher Ratio): 19.2          NI PTR: 20.4
- iii. Average Class Size: 24
- iv. Class Size (Range): 23 to 26
- v. Ancillary Support:  
 Number of Hours **Per Week**:
- i. Clerical support: 1
  - ii. Foundation Stage Classroom Assistant Support: 32
  - iii. Additional hours of other classroom assistant support: 85
- vi. Percentage of children with statements of special educational needs: 3%
- vii. Total percentage of children on the Special Needs Register: 38.5%
- viii. Number of children who are **not** of statutory school age: 0
- ix. Percentage of children entitled to free school meals: 51%
- x. Percentage of children at the end of Key Stage 2 for 2008/09 who attained level 4 and above at English and maths: **English** 45.45%          **Maths** 54.54%

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 SCHOOL CONTEXT

Gaelscoil na Móna is situated in temporary accommodation close to the Mona Link in west Belfast. The school was established in 2000 and achieved grant-aided status in 2004. The enrolment has increased steadily over the past five years. There are currently 96 children enrolled at the school with 24 in year 1; the numbers in the key stage (KS) 2 classes are small. The children come mainly from the immediate vicinity of the school, and just over half of them are entitled to free school meals. The school has identified almost 39% of the children as requiring additional support with aspects of their learning.

### 1.2 FOCUS

The inspection focused on the children's achievements and standards in literacy and numeracy; the quality of provision for learning; the quality of leadership and management and the school's arrangements for pastoral care including child protection. In addition, the contribution of information and communication technology (ICT) to promoting and supporting learning was evaluated.

### 1.3 THE VIEWS OF THE PARENTS, TEACHERS, GOVERNORS AND CHILDREN

The arrangements for the inspection included the opportunity for parents and teaching staff to complete a confidential questionnaire prior to the inspection, as well as meetings with representatives from the Board of Governors (governors), and the children in year 6.

Seventy questionnaires were issued to parents; 32 (46%) were returned to Inspection Services Branch and 18 contained additional written comments. The responses from the questionnaires and the written comments indicate strong satisfaction with the work of the school. The parents value, in particular, the welcoming ethos of the school, the commitment and hard work of the Principal and the teachers, and the close links between the school and the parents and the local community. The few issues raised in the questionnaires were discussed with the Principal and the governors.

The children in year 6 report that they feel safe and happy in school, and know where to get help in the event of any concerns they might have.

The governors are very supportive of, and well-informed about, the work of the school. They expressed a high degree of satisfaction with the work of the Principal and the staff to promote a safe and happy learning environment for all the children. They value particularly the very close links the school has fostered with the local community, and the organisation of events such as Play Days to encourage parents to come into the school and become involved in their children's education.

All of the teachers completed a confidential questionnaire and their responses indicate a high level of satisfaction with the school's provision.

### 1.4 PASTORAL CARE

The pastoral care of the children is good. The school has a welcoming and caring ethos and there are good working relationships between the staff and the children. All staff, teaching and non-teaching, contribute effectively to the children's well-being.

The children are courteous and well-behaved. The school promotes positive behaviour and has developed a range of rewards to celebrate the children's achievements and efforts. The children appreciate the value of the different cross-school groupings in the school including the 'buddy schemes' whereby older children offer friendship and support to the younger children in the school.

## 1.5 CHILD PROTECTION

The staff have created a secure learning environment for the children in which the children feel valued and safe. There are very good child protection arrangements in place, which reflect fully the guidance issued by the Department of Education.

## 1.6 HEALTHY EATING AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

The school gives very good attention to promoting healthy eating and physical activity. The school's breakfast club provides fruit and other healthy options for the children; the children eat a piece of fruit for morning break and another at lunchtime. Drinking water is available in all areas, and workshops are arranged to support parents in promoting healthy lifestyles for their families. To encourage the children to lead active, healthy lives, the school organises a range of sporting activities during the school day and as part of their Extended Schools programme.

## 1.7 LINKS WITH PARENTS AND THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

Parents are kept well-informed about their children's progress and about the life of the school. Parents and employees from the local community are encouraged by the school to undertake accredited courses in for example, Irish and child care.

The school's extra-curricular provision adds greatly to the children's experiences through a wide range of sporting, musical and cultural activities and a homework club for children whose parents do not speak Irish.

The school has established important links with a wide range of external agencies, including St Gerard's Educational Resource Centre, Barnardo's, the Upper Springfield Extended Schools Cluster, Glór na Móna, Ardmonagh Family Support and SureStart.

## 2. ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS

### 2.1 LEARNING

The children have a positive attitude to school and are keen to talk about their work. When given the opportunity, they take time to think and give considered responses. The children are attentive and listen well to each other and to their teachers.

An analysis of the KS2 assessment data shows that, when benchmarked against schools of a similar free school meals category, the levels of attainment in English and mathematics are below the average.

### 2.2 IRISH, ENGLISH AND LITERACY

The overall quality of provision in Irish and English is inadequate and the children's achievements and their standards in literacy are low.

A detailed and useful policy document has been prepared to guide the work in Irish and English. English is introduced formally to the children's curriculum in year 3.

Language skills are developed through phonics across all key stages and there is an appropriate emphasis on spelling and punctuation. Many of the younger children require further support in acquiring basic vocabulary. Talking and listening are promoted effectively in most classes through whole-class questioning and the teachers encourage extended oral responses from the pupils with varying degrees of success: too often, however, teachers accept one word answers. The older children have opportunities for group reading in Irish and the texts are exploited well by the teachers to gain maximum language development. While good use is made of class novels read aloud by the teachers in both Irish and English, the pupils need to experience a more systematic approach to reading, including reading for enjoyment, through more group and individual novel work. A greater emphasis is required on reading in all key stages.

In English and Irish the children's ability to write independently develops too slowly. The children have insufficient opportunities for retelling favourite stories or analysing characters and situations in novels. Their overall experiences of personal writing are too limited, and more varied approaches are required to cater effectively for the wide range of abilities.

### **2.3 MATHEMATICS AND NUMERACY**

The overall quality of provision in mathematics is inadequate. Evidence from the school's own data, together with inspection findings, indicate that a significant number of children experience difficulties in mathematics. In order to raise the standards the children achieve in numeracy, the staff need to evaluate all of the available data to enable them to identify whole-school trends and to ensure appropriate challenge for all of the children.

The teachers plan the children's experiences in mathematics using whole-school guidance that provides a broad and balanced coverage of number, shape and space, measure and handling data. The children are given opportunities to help develop their mathematical knowledge and understanding through a range of experiences using practical equipment, including programmable devices such as the Bee-Bot.

During the inspection, while the children demonstrated their knowledge of some important ideas and concepts, the majority of the children in KS2 were unsure of the most effective strategies in mental mathematics and lacked flexibility in their thinking. The co-ordinators need to develop appropriate whole-school action plans in order to guide the development of mathematics across the school.

## **3. THE QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING**

### **3.1 PLANNING**

The teachers plan conscientiously for the children's learning across the curriculum and produce 6-weekly, weekly and daily plans. They meet each week to discuss and evaluate planning in order to promote consistency and progression. However, the school has not yet established a clear baseline position to inform the teachers' planning. The planning lacks sufficient detail to ensure that the needs of all pupils are met and should be developed further to give details of the Irish language to be promoted across the curriculum.

### 3.2 TEACHING

The teaching observed during the inspection was always satisfactory or better; in just over half the lessons observed, it was good or very good. The most effective lessons are characterised by good relationships, teachers' effective use of resources (including the interactive whiteboard) and good questioning skills. The lessons are lively and fun; the children are engaged well in their learning; and the teachers use a range of approaches including whole-class, group, and paired work. In a minority of lessons, whole-class work predominates, there is a lack focus on specific learning intentions, expectations are too low, there is insufficient challenge, and the needs of all the children are not met effectively.

### 3.3 PLAY-BASED LEARNING

The children in the younger classes have regular sessions of play-based learning, and the activities are based on topics relating to their learning in other areas of the curriculum. The children in years 3 and 4 also experience regular sessions of activity-based learning which enable them to explore and consolidate aspects of their learning through a range of practical activities. The quality of approximately half of the activity-based lessons observed during the inspection was good; they were well-organised and the children were well-settled, enthusiastic and motivated. In other instances, the contribution of play to the children's learning was less effective and the activities were not always matched sufficiently to the children's various stages of development.

Appropriately, the school has identified the need to review and develop the planning for play to ensure that the children's experiences are consistently challenging and that there is sufficient opportunity for them to make progress in the activities provided throughout KS1.

### 3.4 ASSESSMENT

The teachers mark the children's work regularly and often praise the children's efforts and write positive, personal comments; however, they place insufficient emphasis on marking for improvement. The school's approach to assessment lacks rigour, particularly in the Foundation Stage and KS1. The teachers need to establish a clear baseline for all the children as early as possible, and track their progress throughout their years in the school.

### 3.5 SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

The quality of the school's provision for special educational needs (SEN) is inadequate.

The role of the special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO) is currently shared by two teachers. The school has identified 35 children (39%) as requiring additional help with their learning. Teachers need to work more effectively to identify barriers to learning as early as possible and to provide appropriate intervention. The main provision for the children is within normal class teaching; classroom assistants provide additional support for several of the children. A small number of children requiring specialised help receive further assistance through, for example, the outreach and peripatetic support programme provided by the Belfast Education and Library board and St Gerard's Resource Centre. Appropriate links are maintained with the parents and with external support agencies.

The extent to which the teachers take account of the children's different needs within classes varies, and at best, is satisfactory. The class teachers write individual education plans (IEPs) for the children in their classes; these plans identify, for the most part, broad targets and support strategies to promote improvement. Overall, the targets in the IEPs are not focused enough to facilitate effective evaluation. Consequently, there is insufficient rigour in the monitoring of the progress made by individual children.



The teachers need to review the effectiveness of the current planning for special needs and the extent to which the arrangements lead to improvements in the standards achieved by the children. There is also a need to support more effectively the children who experience difficulties in their learning in mathematics and to determine, monitor and record the progress made by these children.

#### **4. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

##### **4.1 LEADERSHIP**

The Principal has been in post since the school's establishment. She is committed to the work and life of the school and to the welfare of the children and the staff. She works hard to foster a collaborative approach to decision-making; she is heavily involved in work to secure the school's future viability and in planning future structural development work. However, the quality of leadership across the school is inadequate. The Principal and the co-ordinators need to be involved more strategically in developing the curriculum and monitoring and evaluating the school's provision to promote improvement and raise the standards achieved by all of the children.

##### **4.2 PLANNING FOR IMPROVEMENT**

The school has a developing commitment to action planning. In order to meet fully the requirements of the School Development Plans Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2005, the school needs to audit the quality of its provision in all key areas and to agree carefully prioritised action plans and effective processes to monitor and evaluate progress.

##### **4.3 STAFF DEVELOPMENT AND DEPLOYMENT**

The teachers are positive in their approach the process of Performance Review and Staff Development. The governors and Principal need to build on this by reviewing development needs in light of the inspection and providing well targeted support for the teachers as they work to meet the needs of all the children more effectively.

Currently, the organisation of teaching groups is over-complicated resulting in teachers having insufficient class contact time which is not in the best interests of the children. These arrangements need urgent review.

##### **4.4 RESOURCES, FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE**

The governors are committed to the life of the school and, with the rest of the school community, have worked hard to establish the school and secure its viability. The governors need to continue to support the school in the years ahead so that the Principal and teachers focus their attention clearly on improving curricular provision for the children and on raising the standards they achieve.

#### **5. CONCLUSION**

##### **5.1 The strengths of the school include:**

- the welcoming and caring ethos and the quality of the of the arrangements for pastoral care;
- the courteous, well-behaved children;

- the wide range of extra-curricular activities;
- the links with external agencies and the wider community; and
- the support of the parents and governors for the work of the school.

5.2 The areas for improvement include the need:

- to review thoroughly the school's provision for special educational needs;
- to review the current deployment of staff and the organisation of classes; and
- for effective strategic leadership, to include a well-devised school development plan, underpinned by formal and rigorous processes to monitor, evaluate and improve the currently low standards achieved by the children.

5.3 In almost all of the areas inspected, the quality of education provided by this school is inadequate; the areas for improvement outweigh the strengths in the provision. The inspection has identified significant areas for improvement in standards, in learning and teaching, and in leadership and management, which need to be addressed urgently if the school is to meet effectively the needs of all of the children. The school will require well-focused, external support to help them take forward the areas identified for improvement.

The Education and Training Inspectorate will monitor and report on the school's progress in addressing the areas for improvement, over a 12-18 month period.

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