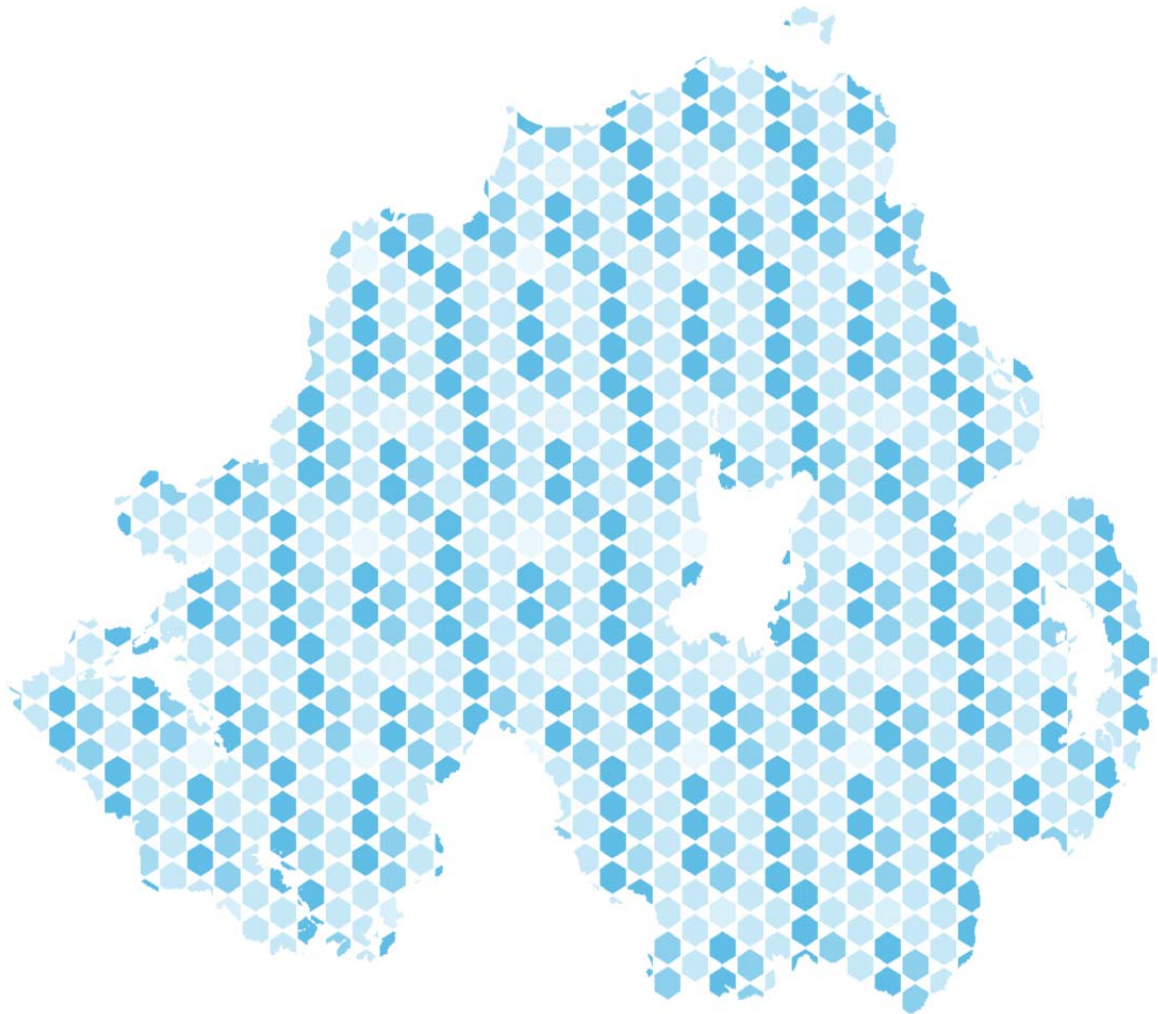


PRIMARY INSPECTION



Education and Training
Inspectorate

St Bride's Primary School and
Nursery Unit, Belfast

Report of an Inspection
in January 2010

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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, the Inspectorate relate their evaluations to six descriptors as set out below:

DESCRIPTOR
Outstanding
Very Good
Good
Satisfactory
Inadequate
Unsatisfactory

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 SCHOOL CONTEXT

St Bride's Primary School is situated in south Belfast. It occupies two sites, the main building, fronting on Derryvolgie Avenue accommodates the children in years 1 to 4 and the double nursery unit, while the Ashleigh building on Windsor Avenue accommodates the children in years 5 to 7. The current enrolment in the school is 762 children in the primary school and an additional 52 children in the nursery unit; these figures have remained stable in recent years. The children come mainly from the local parish of St Brigid's with a minority of children coming from further afield. Less than three percent of the children are entitled to free school meals and approximately 16% of the children in the primary school are identified as having special educational needs (SEN). The steady increase in newcomer pupils to just over 13% of the school population, from a wide range of cultural and linguistic backgrounds, has created a changing profile in the school population in recent years.

1.2 FOCUS

The inspection focused on:

- the quality of the children's achievements and standards in literacy and numeracy;
- the quality of provision for learning;
- the quality of leadership and management;
- the contribution of information and communication technology (ICT) in promoting and supporting learning;
- the school's arrangements for pastoral care, including child protection; and
- the educational and pastoral provision within the nursery unit.

In addition, the school was selected as part of a sample to monitor the implementation of the healthy food in schools initiative.

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

The arrangements for the inspection included the opportunity for the parents and the teaching staff to complete a confidential questionnaire prior to the inspection, as well as meetings with representatives from the Board of Governors (governors) and a group of the children from year 6 and year 7.

Almost 40% of parental questionnaires from the primary school were returned to Inspection Services Branch (ISB). Thirty five returns included additional written comments and a small number of the parents communicated their views directly to the inspection team. The parents expressed a very high level of satisfaction with the educational and pastoral provision being provided by the school. In particular, many indicated the value they place on the very high quality of the caring, professional and hard-working school staff, the high standards of education being provided and the very good support being offered to all of the children. A significant minority of parents were less satisfied with the current provision to develop physical activity and sport throughout the school.

The responses to the staff questionnaires indicate that almost all of the staff consider that they enjoy their work, work well as a team and value the training opportunities provided; they recognise the Principal as providing effective leadership.

Almost 35% of the parents from the nursery unit responded to the questionnaires, eight of whom wrote additional comments. The parents indicated a very high level of satisfaction with the provision in the nursery unit. In particular, many parents indicated that they value the nursery as a happy, caring environment with dedicated staff who provide a wide range of learning opportunities for their children.

The governors reported their confidence in the professional work being carried out by the hard-working and committed teaching and support staff, led by the Principal and senior management team (SMT).

The small number of issues raised through the questionnaires have been shared with the Principal and the governors.

The children in year 6 indicated that they enjoy school, they feel welcome, safe and secure and know who to go to if they have any concerns. They reported that they enjoy mathematics, particularly mental mathematics, and all aspects of English including reading and writing creative stories.

1.4 PASTORAL CARE

The quality of the arrangements for pastoral care in both the school and the nursery unit is very good. The strengths of the pastoral care provision include:

- the inclusive and supportive ethos where the contributions of the children are valued;
- the high level of commitment to inclusion reflected in the very good work being developed to support newcomer children and those with additional needs;
- the friendly and welcoming children and their exemplary behaviour;
- the promotion of the children's self-esteem and confidence and celebration of the children's work and achievements;
- the interesting and stimulating learning environment; and
- the progress being made to involve the children more fully in the decision-making process about issues which affect them in school through the establishment of a School Council.

1.5 CHILD PROTECTION

The school and the nursery unit have very good comprehensive arrangements in place for safeguarding children. These arrangements reflect the guidance issued by the Department of Education (DE).

1.6 HEALTHY EATING AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

The school gives very good attention to promoting healthy eating. Effective policies to cater for special dietary requirements and the use of health promoting organisations encourage the children to adopt healthy lifestyles. There are good opportunities for the children to engage in a range of physical activities both through regularly timetabled physical education lessons and a range of extra curricular activities for children in key stage (KS) 2. The inspection team endorses the school's plan to develop further the opportunities for outdoor learning and physical play for the children in KS1. The children in the nursery unit are provided with a healthy break and very good opportunities for outdoor energetic play.

1.7 LINKS WITH PARENTS AND THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

There are very good links with other local schools, community groups, charities and external agencies. The school is also involved in the Comenius Project and has educational links with schools in England, Romania and Poland. There are well established links with the parents who are all provided with information about policies, events and school life through curriculum meetings, the school website and newsletters.

2. ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS

2.1 LEARNING

An analysis of the KS2 assessment data over the past four years shows that in mathematics and literacy the school's performance is consistently above the Northern Ireland (NI) average. Compared with schools in a similar free school meals category, the levels of attainment in mathematics and literacy are above the average. Those who require additional support are identified at an early stage and receive good support and attain good standards in their work. Almost all of the children make very good progress in their learning

The children are highly motivated and demonstrate very good levels of engagement and enjoyment in their learning. The level of their oral communication is often outstanding. They make confident oral presentations to the class, ask questions and give extended answers. In the best practice they are provided with opportunities to display their very good levels of independence and self-management skills and are able to transfer their skills and capabilities to other meaningful contexts. The children demonstrate interest and skill in learning collaboratively though group and paired work. The children need to be given more consistent opportunities to use their skills and knowledge to explore, investigate and be creative in their learning.

2.2 ENGLISH AND LITERACY

The overall quality of provision for English and literacy is very good.

The children's oral language skills are developed very effectively throughout the school. In the foundation stage (FS) and KS1, the children benefit from opportunities to listen and respond to stories and display an understanding of the feelings and the thoughts of the characters. The children's skills are developed systematically throughout KS2 and, by year 7, most children are capable of mature and confident contributions in class based on their own ideas and making their own judgements.

By the end of year 7, most of the children can read with expression, accuracy and very good comprehension. The standard of reading attained by many children is very good. The teachers introduce an appropriate range of strategies to develop the children's capabilities to decipher unfamiliar text, and to infer meaning and enjoyment from a broad range of

increasingly complex texts as they move through the school. The teachers use novels effectively from year 3 as appropriate starting points for writing, and talking and listening. The well-stocked school and class libraries are used by the children to read for enjoyment, to find information and to research class topics. The development of the children's research skills includes accessing Internet sources and at its most effective, this work involves the development of their skills of skimming and scanning, analysing the text, summarising key points and note-making.

The development from emergent to extended and independent writing is promoted effectively throughout the school. The children's knowledge and understanding of the forms of writing develop systematically through teacher-modelled, shared and guided writing sessions. Most of this work reaches a high standard. Children write in a wide variety of forms across the learning areas, especially in the World Around Us. In KS2, for example, the River Lagan project provides a meaningful context for groups of children to design scripts and to use digital media in the production of a film for use by partner-schools in the European Comenius project.

ICT is used effectively to provide the children with valuable opportunities to enhance their reading, writing and design skills.

The literacy co-ordinator and the staff have worked together to construct a comprehensive English and literacy policy which provides coherence, progression and continuity in the children's learning across the year groups.

2.3 MATHEMATICS AND NUMERACY

The overall quality of provision for mathematics and numeracy is very good. The children in years 4 and years 7 are able to think mathematically across all areas of the numeracy programme and to talk with confidence about their experiences. Almost all have a very good understanding of mathematical concepts and are able to work flexibly with numbers. The standards achieved by most of the children in mathematics are very good.

The programme for mathematics provides the children with a suitably wide range of experiences. The teachers have high expectations for the children's mathematical knowledge, understanding and skills, and the children work conscientiously to meet these expectations. Teachers make good use of a variety of standard and non-standard practical equipment to develop a secure understanding of mathematical concepts. For example, the children in FS are able to use non-standard measures to investigate the length of common objects, while at KS1 and KS2 straws, cubes and structured apparatus help develop the children's understanding of fractions and place value. The children regularly engage in a variety of problem-solving and investigative tasks; they are systematically being taught the strategies they require to approach this work. The school needs to ensure there is a better balance between teaching the strategies the children require and providing sufficient opportunities for the children to use these strategies more independently to explore and find solutions in collaboration with their peers.

Mental mathematics is used effectively to engage and motivate the children, challenge their thinking and to encourage them to explain their strategies.

The children are able to use their mathematical knowledge in meaningful contexts across the curriculum. Very good examples observed included the meaningful discussion of measurement which was linked effectively to a reading activity about penguins in year 3 and the presentation of statistics linked to the World War One topic in year 7. This is further enhanced through the creative use of the wider environment and through special events such as a Maths Week and the celebration of World Maths Day.

In many of the lessons ICT is used effectively to motivate children and support learning and teaching in mathematics. The best practice need to be disseminated and used more consistently across the school.

The mathematics co-ordinator provides very effective leadership; she regularly teaches in partnership with other colleagues to develop and embed practical and investigative approaches to mathematics. The co-ordinator monitors and evaluates the children's mathematical learning through classroom visits, sampling of books and analysis of data. The school is currently revising the scheme of work for numeracy; this process, and the resulting documentation, is providing useful guidance to class teachers to aid medium- and short-term planning, ensuring continuity and progression in the children's learning.

3. THE QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING

3.1 PLANNING

The quality of the planning to support the teaching and learning is very good. The school is making excellent progress to date in aligning their planning and practice to the changes in the Northern Ireland Curriculum. The staff plan conscientiously and in the majority of written plans are evaluated effectively and are adapted to take full account of the range of ability within the class. In a significant minority of the planning the link between classroom practice and targets for individuals and groups of children needs to be more explicit. Good progress is being made towards involving the children in the planning of topic work.

Individual education plans (IEPs) are used effectively to support the children identified as having additional needs.

3.2 TEACHING

The quality of the teaching observed ranged from satisfactory to outstanding; more than half of the lessons were evaluated as very good or outstanding. The teachers show commitment to and enthusiasm and enjoyment for their work. Almost all of the classes are well managed with well established routines which promote the children's independence. Most of the teachers use very effective questioning to encourage thinking and to promote extended responses from the children. The teachers use ICT confidently to support teaching and learning in their classrooms and in the ICT suite. Team teaching is being developed to share practice and to build the capacity and expertise of the staff. The classroom assistants make a significant contribution to the effective teaching and learning within the classrooms.

In the best practice, evident in the majority of lessons observed, the teachers help the children to make effective connections in their learning, both from their prior learning and across the curriculum. The teachers have suitably high expectations of the children and provide challenging experiences which are well matched to the children's ability. During effective paired and group work the children make sustained responses, handle different opinions and extend their thinking skills.

In the less effective practice the children are given limited opportunities to try and compare a range of approaches to solve problems. At times, the pace of lessons is too slow, is overly teacher directed and lacks sufficient use of concrete materials and experiences; this leads to the children becoming less engaged in the learning process.

3.3 ASSESSMENT

The arrangements for assessment and target setting are very good.

The school's assessment policy is of a very good quality and is implemented well. The SMT make extensive and effective use of a wide range of performance data, including a detailed analysis of standardised tests and DE benchmarking information. This information is used well to track the children's progress and is distributed effectively to all of the teachers, most of whom use the information very well to set targets for individuals or groups of children in their classes.

The teachers mark the children's written work regularly and, the majority provide useful written feedback which gives appropriate praise for good work and, equally, allows the children to correct any mistakes. In many classes observed, the teachers provided prompt oral feedback from which the children improved their learning immediately. In a minority of lessons excellent use of clear learning intentions and success criteria was being used effectively to help the children to assess aspects of their own work and find solutions to improve it. The school has identified appropriately the development of a more consistent implementation of marking for improvement, self and peer assessment.

There are appropriate procedures and records for keeping the parents well informed about their children's progress through, for example, written reports, formal parent-teacher consultations and an open-door policy for informal consultations. The annual written reports for parents provide necessary information about their children's progress and the standard they reach.

3.4 SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

The school demonstrates an outstanding commitment and sensitive approach to the inclusion of the children with special educational needs (SEN). Very effective leadership and management is provided by the acting special educational needs coordinator (SENCO). He is very well supported by a small team of experienced teachers who provide excellent support for both individual and groups of children through withdrawal and in-class learning activities. The SEN team are continuing to develop their breadth of knowledge and expertise; they facilitate staff development and are working collegially to meet the diverse needs of the children.

Information from a wide range of appropriate sources is used well to inform appropriate intervention strategies. IEPs are drawn up in collaboration with the parents and, where appropriate, the children, and are reviewed regularly. The targets are clear, focused and achievable. The learning support provided is focused clearly on the individual needs of the children and is linked closely to the IEPs. The school has very good links with a range of external support agencies. There is clear evidence that children who have been identified as having SEN are making good progress and benefiting from the support they receive.

The school policy for special educational needs and learning support has been reviewed recently. The current SEN action plan identifies appropriate areas for continued development.

4. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

4.1 LEADERSHIP

The Principal provides very effective leadership and management of the whole school. He has a clear strategic vision for the development of the school and has worked with the staff to implement change using a well-planned, systematic and well-paced approach. He fosters collaborative decision making and encourages engagement and contributions from his staff. The Investors in People Award achieved by the school provided very positive affirmation of this collegial approach. The Vice-principals work closely with the Principal as a part of the SMT who are all fully committed to the children and the continued development of the school.

All of the co-ordinators provide very good curriculum leadership within their areas of responsibility. In addition to the work being developed in literacy, numeracy and SEN a wide range of additional curricular work is being developed and led effectively, including the development of ICT, the World Around Us and support for newcomer children.

The teachers would benefit from further opportunities for collaborative evaluation of the children's written work and the learning experiences for English across year groups and between key stages.

4.2 PLANNING FOR IMPROVEMENT

The Principal and staff demonstrate a strong commitment to self-evaluation leading to continuous improvement in the interest of all of the children. The school development plan (SDP) is compliant with the Department of Education School Development Planning Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2005/19. There is evidence of steady and continuous improvements in the key areas of curriculum development identified on the plan. The effective use of assessment data to set appropriate targets for further whole-school improvement, linked to the SDP serves as a model of very good practice. An important feature of the next SDP needs to be the effective dissemination of the outstanding practice observed during the inspection.

The teaching and support staff have very good opportunities for ongoing professional development including in service training, visits to other schools and training provided by external agencies such as the Belfast Education and Library Board. There is evidence that this continued professional development is impacting positively on the quality of provision for the children.

4.2 ACCOMMODATION

The quality of the accommodation is satisfactory. The two buildings are well maintained and the staff work hard to create an attractive and stimulating learning environment in all of the available space. There is insufficient hall space for the size of the school. This limits the opportunities for the school to meet together as a whole school community and impacts negatively on the organisation of indoor space for physical education. The school uses facilities in Queen's University Belfast to provide additional opportunities for the children in KS2.

4.3 RESOURCES, FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE

The resources to support the children's learning are very good. The school recognises the staff as the key resource within the school and has invested in the appointment of non-classroom based teaching staff to lead and develop areas of the curriculum. The resources within the classrooms are well organised promoting the children's own independence and self-management. Teachers have worked hard to design some of their own additional resources which contribute to the children's learning very effectively.

The Governors fully support the work of the Principal and the staff. They have relevant training, are well informed of developments and contribute to the financial overview and recruitment process within the school.

5. CONCLUSION

5.1 The strengths of the school include:

- the inclusive and supportive ethos of the school and the children's exemplary behaviour;
- the high quality of the teaching which was very good or outstanding in the majority of the lessons observed;
- the very good standards achieved by the children in literacy and numeracy;
- the highly motivated children and their active engagement in the learning process;
- the outstanding quality of the provision for children who require additional support with aspects of their learning; and
- the very good leadership of the Principal and the professional involvement and commitment of the whole staff.

5.2 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.

6. THE NURSERY UNIT

The main strengths within the nursery unit's educational and pastoral provision are as follows:

- the bright and colourful learning environment created both indoors and outdoors, including the stimulating displays of children's own work around the nursery;
- the satisfactory to very good opportunities for learning in all areas of the curriculum particularly the promotion of the children's language development and early mathematical concepts, and the good quality of the opportunities for learning outdoors;
- the well organised daily timetable which provides good opportunities for the children to make free choices, explore the range of activities provided and learn through the necessary routines;
- the good links that the staff have established with speech and language therapists and other relevant support agencies and the very good efforts to identify, address and monitor children with additional needs;
- the many examples when the staff provided the children with sustained support during play encouraging the children to make observations and develop their thinking skills; and
- the good links that have been established with the adjoining primary school.

The staff are committed to the continuous development of the work within the nursery unit. The nursery unit has a development plan which identifies relevant targets for improvement. The staff have consulted appropriately with the parents to seek their views on aspects of the quality of the provision.

In the areas inspected, the quality of education provided by this nursery unit is very good. The unit is meeting very effectively the educational and pastoral needs of the children and has demonstrated its capacity for sustained self-improvement.

STATISTICAL INFORMATION ON THE NURSERY UNIT IN ST BRIDE'S PRIMARY SCHOOL, BELFAST (103-6075)

1. Details of Children

Number of children:	Class 1	Class 2
Attending full-time	26	26
Attending part-time		
Under 3 years of age*		
With statement of special educational needs	1	1
At CoP stages 3 or 4**		
At CoP stages 1 or 2**		
With English as an additional language	5	5

* On 1 July.

** The stages refer to those set out in the Code of Practice for the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs.

Percentage qualifying under DE admission criteria 1 or 2.	30.76
Average attendance for the previous year.	94%

2. Duration of Sessions

Full-time	Part-time: am	Part-time: pm
9.00 am – 1.45 pm		

3. Details of Staff

Number of:	Full-Time	Part-Time
Teachers	1	2
Nursery Assistants	2	
Qualified Nursery Assistants	2	

Number of: ***	
Students	1
Trainees	1

*** Total placements since September of current year

4. Parental Questionnaires

Number issued	52
Percentage returned	38.5%
Number of written comments	8

APPENDIX

HEALTH AND SAFETY

- The speed of cars on Windsor Avenue presents a health and safety hazard for the children who cross this road regularly to gain access to one of the two school sites.

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