

PRIMARY INSPECTION



Education and Training
Inspectorate

St Kieran's Primary School,
Belfast

Report of an Inspection
in March 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, Inspectors relate their evaluations to six descriptors as set out below:

DESCRIPTOR
Outstanding
Very Good
Good
Satisfactory
Inadequate
Unsatisfactory

BASIC INFORMATION SHEET (BIS) - PRIMARY SCHOOLS

- A. i. **School: St Kieran's Primary Belfast** iii. **Date of Inspection: W/B 01/03/10**
 ii. **School Reference Number: 403-6480** iv. **Nature of Inspection: Focused**

B.

School Year	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10
Year 1 Intake	59	63	37	57	57
Enrolments					
Primary	457	437	387	363	329
Reception	0	0	0	0	0
Nursery Unit	0	0	0	0	0
Special Unit	11	11	11	10	10
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): 92.2% **NI Avg Att: 94.9%**
- | | Primary &
Reception | Nursery
Unit | Special
Unit | Irish Medium
Unit |
|--|------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|----------------------|
|--|------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|----------------------|
- D. i. Number of Teachers
 (including the principal and part-time teachers): 21.64 0 1 0
 (Full-time equivalent = 25 teaching hours)
- ii. PTR (Pupil/Teacher Ratio): 14.9 NI PTR: 20.4
- iii. Average Class Size: 19.4
- iv. Class Size (Range): 15 to 28
- v. Ancillary Support:
 Number of Hours **Per Week:**
- | | |
|---|-----|
| i. Clerical support: | 36 |
| ii. Foundation Stage Classroom Assistant Support: | 12 |
| iii. Additional hours of other classroom assistant support: | 180 |
- vi. Percentage of children with statements of special educational needs: 5.8%
- vii. Total percentage of children on the Special Needs Register: 27%
- viii. Number of children who are **not** of statutory school age: 0
- ix. Percentage of children entitled to free school meals: 74.6%
- x. Percentage of children at the end of Key Stage 2 for 2008/09
 who attained level 4 and above in English and mathematics:
- | | |
|----------------|--------------------|
| English | Mathematics |
| 37.5% | 51.56% |

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 SCHOOL CONTEXT

St Kieran's Primary School is located between West Belfast and Lisburn in the Poleglass area. The enrolment in the primary school has decreased gradually over the past four years and stands currently at 329 children, including ten children in the moderate learning difficulty (MLD) unit. The school also provides a nurture class. At the time of the inspection, approximately 75% of the children were entitled to receive free school meals and approximately 27% of the children were identified as having special educational needs.

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; and
- the quality of leadership and management.

In addition, the use of information and communication technology (ICT) to support learning, and the school's arrangements for pastoral care, including child protection, were evaluated.

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

The arrangements for the inspection included the opportunity for the parents and the teaching and support staff to complete confidential questionnaires prior to the inspection, as well as meetings with representatives from the Board of Governors (governors) and a group of children from years 6 and 7. One hundred and fifteen questionnaires were issued to the parents; 26% were returned to the Department of Education (DE) and eleven contained additional written comments. The responses from the questionnaires indicated that almost all of the parents appreciate the dedication of the Principal, the professional work of the staff and the good range of experiences provided for their children in school.

The governors spoke positively about the very welcoming ethos within the school. They talked appreciatively about the energy of the Principal and the commitment of the staff to work well collectively in the best interests of the children.

Sixteen of the teaching staff and six members of the support staff responded to the online questionnaires. The responses were almost wholly positive and expressed high levels of satisfaction with the life and work of the school.

The year 6 children spoke with confidence about what to do if they have any concerns about their safety and well-being and reported that the teaching and support staff are always approachable and caring.

The Education and Training Inspectorate (Inspectorate) has reported to the Principal and representatives of the governors the main messages emerging from the questionnaires and the discussions.

1.4 PASTORAL CARE

The quality of the arrangements for pastoral care in the school is very good. There is a holistic, nurturing approach to the children's development and the school meets well their personal, social and emotional needs. An effective reward system develops the children's self-esteem and confidence and promotes a strong sense of community. The overall standard of the children's behaviour, both in and out of class, is excellent. An important counselling service is available for the children, financed by the Integrated Development Fund (IDF). The staff, teaching and non-teaching, are committed to the children's welfare and contribute significantly to promoting and maintaining an inclusive ethos and pleasant working environment.

The children's work and achievements are celebrated in the bright and attractive displays in the classrooms and corridors throughout the school. The children's capacity to make a positive difference to the lives of others is encouraged and is evident in the many charitable activities with which the school is involved.

The development of the pastoral care programme is co-ordinated effectively by the Vice-principal. There are appropriate plans for the ongoing development of the pastoral provision. This includes the creation of a school council to provide a forum for the children to raise issues of interest and become involved more fully in the decision-making process.

1.5 CHILD PROTECTION

The school has very good arrangements in place for safeguarding children. These arrangements reflect the guidance issued by DE.

1.6 HEALTHY EATING AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

The school gives very good attention to promoting healthy eating and physical activity. The staff organise a popular 'Five-a-Day' shop and Healthy Eating Week, which encourage the children to improve their eating habits.

1.7 LINKS WITH PARENTS AND THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

The school provides an extensive range of extra-curricular activities including opportunities for the children to become involved in programmes supported by local sports clubs and other cultural groups. The activities, which include Gaelic games, football, drama and music, help the children to develop further their social skills and sense of inter-dependence through working with one another. The parents receive regular and useful information about the life of the school through news sheets, letters and the school's website. The children's learning experiences are enhanced through visitors to the school and trips to places of educational interest that includes participation in the Schools' Community Relations programme that links with other schools both locally and further afield. The school operates a flourishing breakfast club funded by the IDF and a successful homework club provided through the Extended Schools' initiative.

2. ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS

2.1 LEARNING

The children are motivated and enthusiastic learners. They respond well when encouraged to play an integral role in their own learning by listening to the opinions of others and by taking on different roles and responsibilities in paired work and well conceived group activities. In the foundation stage (FS), the quality of the play-based learning is very good. In the more effective practice throughout the three key stages, the children contribute to the development of topic work and reflect on their learning through purposeful plenary sessions or through peer assessment opportunities.

2.2 ENGLISH AND LITERACY

The quality of the provision in English and literacy is good.

On entering the school, a majority of the children have difficulties with their learning in English, such as speech and language needs and low levels of reading. The school uses data effectively to identify such needs in order to inform the support that is required. At the end of key stage (KS) 1, the majority of children's attainment in English is good and compares very favourably with similar schools. By year 7, the majority of children achieve satisfactory standards in English when measured against their ability and against similar schools. The school's internal performance data indicates that most of the children are making good progress.

Talking and listening is planned for across all year groups. It is promoted effectively, in the majority of classes, through open questioning and when given the opportunity, the children respond to the views of others and can plan and structure their talk purposefully.

The children acquire basic reading skills through the development of phonological awareness and by experiencing good shared, modelled and guided reading practices used by the teachers. A commercial reading scheme and reading records underpin the development of the children's reading. The use of a systematic phonics scheme, differentiated learning in class and the additional withdrawal support are all having a positive influence in helping the children become better readers. In KS2, the children extend their reading experiences with novels and other texts that match class, group and individual needs.

The development of writing in the FS and KS1 is good. The children are taught how to form letters clearly and how to construct and write basic sentences. This is well supported through practical resources, such as the 'have a go' or 'try' books. As their skills develop, the children's independent writing is promoted appropriately and by the end of KS1, the majority of children can express their ideas in a more extended way and with reasonable fluency. A minority of children, however, are developing their writing skills more slowly and would have a standard that is below what is expected for their age.

At KS2, the teachers give the children sufficient time and support to construct and complete their writing. There is good use of merits to acknowledge and praise children who have produced good writing, such as recognition at school assemblies. There were good examples of extended writing observed, particularly in areas such as World Around Us. All teachers need to exploit the opportunities presented across the areas of learning, which can enable the children to write more extended and imaginative responses using a wide range of writing styles. The KS2 teachers, in particular, need to be more incisive and informative when marking the children's writing in order to raise standards.

The use of ICT in English is satisfactory. A majority of teachers make good use of the interactive whiteboards to stimulate the children's interest and to help explain key concepts more clearly. The staff need to provide the children with greater opportunities to engage with a wider range of digital technology and ICT linked tasks, in order to develop further the children's literacy skills.

2.3 MATHEMATICS AND NUMERACY

The quality of provision in mathematics and numeracy is good.

By the end of KS2, the majority of the children make satisfactory progress in mathematics in relation to their abilities and the school's performance data suggests that their attainment is better than that suggested by end of key stage outcomes. A significant minority of the children have difficulties with their learning in mathematics displaying poor concentration and retention skills.

The teachers plan for the full ability range and they provide a varied programme that covers the processes in mathematics, number, measures, shape and space and handling data in a comprehensive manner. There is a suitable emphasis on the promotion of mathematical language; the teachers use effective questioning strategies in order to check the children's understanding and mathematical thinking around key concepts.

In the FS and KS1, there is a good focus on practical mathematics, the use of concrete materials and games to consolidate learning. In the lessons observed, the children displayed a secure grasp of number and had acquired the key characteristics of two and three-dimensional shapes. The KS2 children were involved in investigative activities using a wide range of resources. Information and communication technology is used well to support learning and assessment in KS2.

The current priorities for mathematics are appropriate. They include greater opportunities for problem-solving activities linked to the application of mathematics to more relevant contexts. There is a renewed focus on raising the children's attainment in mathematics which is a key challenge for the school. Several useful intervention strategies have been implemented to address this area. The teachers promote learning in mathematics which is matched to the needs of individuals and groups of children. This approach is supplemented with ongoing formative assessment.

3. THE QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING

3.1 PLANNING

The teachers prepare detailed schemes of work that set out an appropriate range of topics from the areas of learning. Most teachers make good use of six-weekly and fortnightly plans and prepare well for individual lessons. In a majority of the classes, the effective planning has identified meaningful opportunities for integrating the children's learning experiences across the areas of learning. The teachers plan across the year groups, facilitating a sound focus on progression. The staff need to plan for greater opportunities for the children to assess their own performance and to advise the children on ways to improve the quality of their work.

3.2 TEACHING

During the inspection, the quality of most of the teaching was good or very good, and a small number of lessons observed were outstanding. In the effective practice observed, the teachers used a wide range of teaching approaches, including effective differentiated work, enjoyable and engaging practical activities and good individual and small group support. In addition, the learning was paced appropriately and imaginative extension activities were used to challenge the children's thinking. In a minority of lessons, when the practice was less effective, the teaching was over-directed, the extent and quality of the interactions between the teacher and children were too low, or the planning for learning was insufficiently well-developed. The staff should take further opportunities to embed the effective practice throughout the school. The nurture class provides an outstanding quality of provision for children who require additional support with their particular learning needs. In addition, the classroom assistants make a valuable contribution to the life and work of the school.

3.3 ASSESSMENT

The Principal is leading the staff in the review of the use of performance data; he is making good progress in implementing an appropriate and manageable assessment system to monitor and evaluate the children's progress. The staff have made a good start to analysing assessment outcomes in order to raise standards. There is a need for this process to be embedded further and for the co-ordinators and staff to have a clear understanding of how to use the data to identify appropriate priorities for whole school improvement.

The teachers mark regularly the children's written work. In the majority of classes, the marking is of a supportive nature. In the effective practice, the teachers are beginning to implement assessment for learning strategies and can advise the children on how to improve the quality of their work. This good practice needs to be shared, further developed and applied more consistently throughout the school, as identified appropriately in the current school development plan.

The parents are kept well informed about their children's progress through parental interviews and written reports. The school maintains information and performance data on the children's progress. The annual written reports provide detailed information about progress in learning.

3.4 SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

The provision for additional learning support in the mainstream classes is focused in years 3 to 7. The quality of the support for each individual child, during the withdrawal sessions, is very good. The teachers are skilled practitioners, know the children well and ensure that each child is learning essential literacy skills and vocabulary to improve their reading and listening standards. The majority of the children make good progress according to their ability, motivation and baseline assessment information. The children enjoy the withdrawal sessions, interact very well with the teachers and are learning basic literacy skills which support their learning in class and develop their confidence and self-esteem.

It would be opportune for the school's leadership team to review the present system to take account of a more focused level of support for children in years 1 and 2 to promote language and communication during play-based learning and additional intensive support for those children in year 4. In addition, learning support for mathematics needs to be considered and, where appropriate, individual children falling significantly behind should be supported to improve their attainment levels.

3.5 MODERATE LEARNING DIFFICULTY UNIT

The school manages an MLD unit for ten children whose educational, social and emotional needs require intensive support in a small class setting.

The majority of the children make good or better progress achieving the literacy, numeracy and behaviour targets set in their individual education plans and fortnightly group planning sheets. While their attainments remain low, almost all of the children have developed a good understanding of number recognition, simple addition and subtraction and two-dimensional shapes, they can read and recall the main features of short stories. All of the children demonstrate improvement over their previous learning. In all their activities, the children will continue to require support.

The quality of the provision in the unit is good and characterised by well-planned lessons with a strong emphasis on practical learning and individual support. The teacher and classroom assistants work together well and are very patient and caring in how they deal with individual children to encourage their full participation in the learning process. Planning is thorough and based on a detailed knowledge and assessment of each child's needs. Progress is monitored carefully and targets are repeated when they have not been achieved. Good opportunities are provided for each child to join their peers in mainstream lessons. The procedures for the admission to the unit and monitoring and reporting of progress are well established and effective.

4. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

4.1 LEADERSHIP

The Principal has been in post for just over two years and provides very good leadership. He is committed to the life and work of the school and to the well-being of the children and the staff. The Principal promotes a collegial approach to developing the pastoral care and curricular provision in the school, notably through the appropriate action plans relating to the school development plan (SDP). In the effective practice, the co-ordinators monitor the progress made in relation to the action plans, review the teachers' evaluations of learning and they examine the standards of the children's work. They need to extend this good practice across all areas of learning to evaluate the quality and consistency of the children's learning experiences, within and across key stages, in order to raise further the standards of literacy and numeracy. The school is well placed to address the areas for further improvement that are identified in this report.

4.2 PLANNING FOR IMPROVEMENT

The SDP is appropriate and sets out clearly the school's priorities. It is based on clear evidence about raising attainment for the children. The school gives very good attention to, and meets fully, the requirements of the School Development Plans Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2005.

4.3 RESOURCES, FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE

The governors are fully involved in the overall strategic planning and policy development for the school. With advice from the Principal and the school's management team, the governors have managed effectively the financial needs of the school. The governors give very good support to the Principal and the staff in the implementation of the SDP.

5. CONCLUSION

5.1 The strengths of the school include:

- the very good quality of the pastoral care provision for the children, which fosters successfully the caring and inclusive ethos and promotes the children's excellent behaviour;
- the very good quality of the leadership provided by the Principal;
- the quality of the teaching observed, most of which ranged from good to very good;
- the good progress made in using assessment data to inform the strategic direction of the school and to set targets for improvement;
- the effective support for, and commitment to, meeting the needs of the children who have special educational needs; and
- the wide range of extra-curricular activities and the effective links made with the local and wider communities that enhance the children's learning and broaden their experiences.

5.2 The area for improvement includes the need to:

- share and disseminate the good practice in order to raise further the standards in literacy and numeracy.

5.3 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 areas for improvement which the school has demonstrated the capacity to address.

The Inspectorate will monitor the school's progress on the areas for improvement.

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