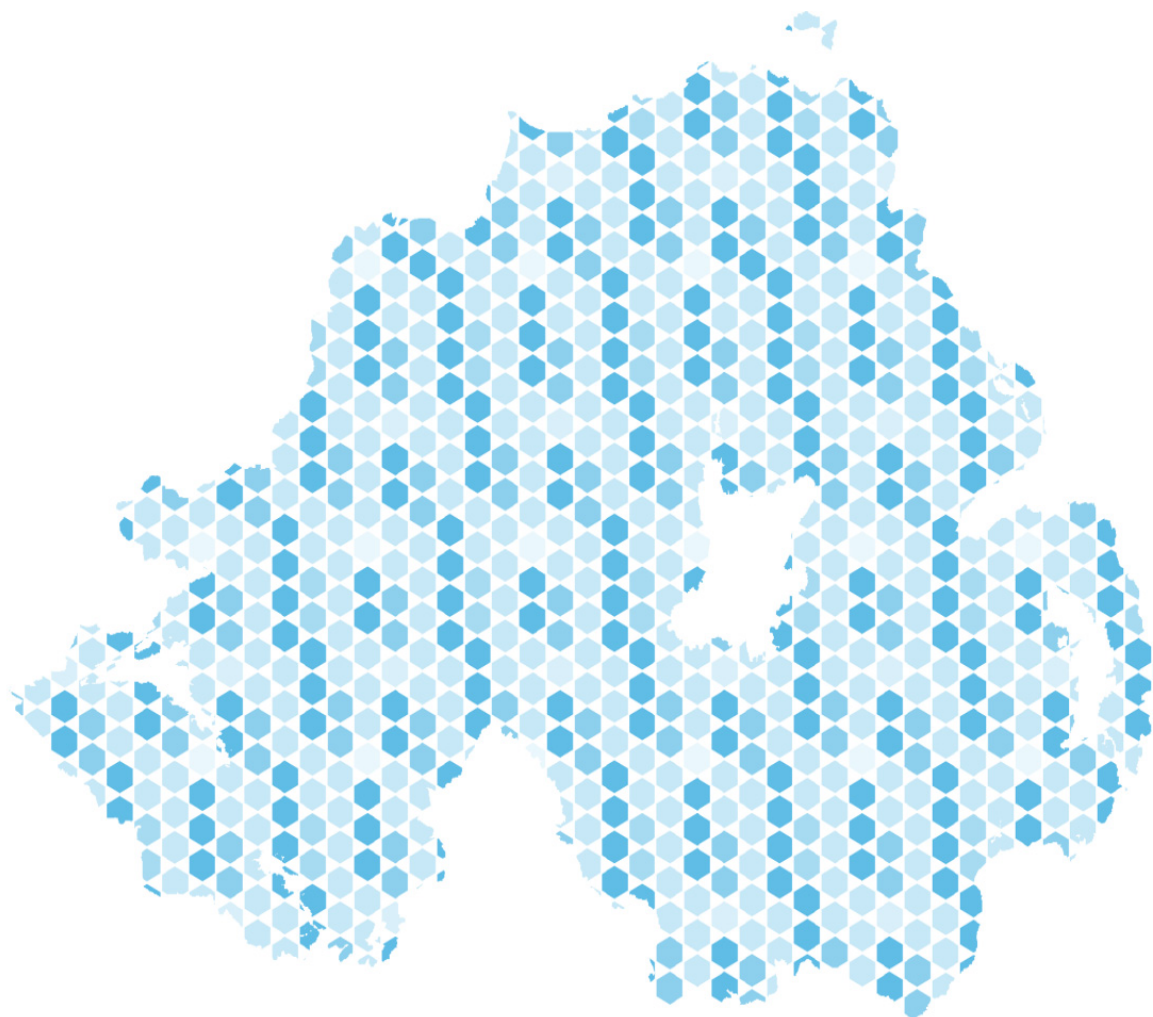


# PRIMARY INSPECTION



Education and Training  
Inspectorate

St Mary's Girls' Primary School  
and Nursery Unit, Strabane

Report of an Inspection  
in November 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 |

# BASIC INFORMATION SHEET (BIS) - PRIMARY SCHOOLS

- A. i. **School: St Mary's Girls' Primary School** iii. **Date of Inspection: 29/11/2010**  
 ii. **School Reference Number: 203-6096** iv. **Nature of Inspection: Focused**

B.

| School Year       | 2006/07 | 2007/08 | 2008/09 | 2009/10 | 2010/11 |
|-------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Year 1 Intake     | 39      | 38      | 31      | 29      | 41      |
| <b>Enrolments</b> |         |         |         |         |         |
| Primary           | 300     | 296     | 266     | 247     | 255     |
| Reception         | 0       | 0       | 0       | 0       | 0       |
| Nursery Unit      | 54      | 52      | 52      | 52      | 52      |
| 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): 93% **NI Avg Att: 94.9%**
- |   | Primary & Reception   | Nursery Unit                | Special Unit | Irish Medium Unit |
|---|---|-----------------------------|--------------|-------------------|
| D. i. Number of Teachers<br>(including the principal and part-time teachers):<br>(Full-time equivalent = 25 teaching hours) | 13  | 2                           | 0            | 0                 |
| ii. PTR (Pupil/Teacher Ratio):  | 20.5  | NI PTR: 20.7                |              |                   |
| iii. Average Class Size:  | 25.6  |                             |              |                   |
| iv. Class Size (Range):   | 21 to 34  |                             |              |                   |
| v. Ancillary Support:<br>Number of Hours <b>Per Week</b> :  | i. Clerical support:  |                             | 45           |                   |
|   | ii. Foundation Stage Classroom Assistant Support:           |                             | 50           |                   |
|   | iii. Additional hours of other classroom assistant support: |                             | 35           |                   |
| vi. Percentage of children with statements of special educational needs:  |   |                             | 0.64%        |                   |
| vii. Total percentage of children on the Special Needs Register:  |   |                             | 24.75%       |                   |
| viii. Number of children who are <b>not</b> of statutory school age:  |   |                             | 0            |                   |
| ix. Percentage of children entitled to free school meals:   |   |                             | 32.79%       |                   |
| x. Percentage of children at the end of Key Stage 2 for 2009/10 who attained level 4 and above in English and mathematics:  | <b>English</b><br>92.1%                                     | <b>Mathematics</b><br>87.2% |              |                   |

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 CONTEXT

St Mary's Girls' Primary School is situated on the Melmount Road in Strabane. The majority of the children come from the local and surrounding area. The enrolment of the school has declined from 497 in 1996 to its current level of 307; this includes 52 children who are enrolled in the double nursery unit. The school has identified approximately 20% of the children as requiring additional support with aspects of their learning. Approximately 33% of the children are entitled to free school meals.

### 1.2 FOCUS

The inspection focused on:

- 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 teaching and 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 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.

Of the 124 questionnaires issued to the parents of the primary school approximately 48% were returned to Inspection Services Branch of which 17 contained additional written comments. Nearly all of the responses indicated a high level of satisfaction with the educational and pastoral provision provided by the school. In particular, the parents highlighted the approachable, hard-working and dedicated staff, the opportunities provided for the children to participate in extra-curricular activities, the support provided for the children and the parents, and the school's approach to developing the children's self-esteem and confidence.

Of the 52 questionnaires issued to the parents of the nursery unit children, 42% were returned, four of which contained additional comments. The comments were wholly positive.

Sixteen teachers and 22 members of the support staff completed the online questionnaire. Nearly all of these responses were wholly positive and highly affirmative of the work of the school. In particular the staff commented on the very good opportunities for staff development provided by the school leadership.

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

The governors spoke of the very good working relationships at all levels. They are appreciative of the work of the school and feel that their contribution to the management of the school is valued.

In discussions held with year 6 pupils they talked enthusiastically about all aspects of school life. They indicated strongly that they feel happy and safe in school and know what to do if they have any worries or concerns.

#### 1.4 PASTORAL CARE

The quality of the arrangements for pastoral care in the school is outstanding. The welfare and well-being of the children is central to the work and life of the school. Among the strengths are: the very caring, inclusive and supportive ethos; the dignity and respect that is afforded every child; the exemplary behaviour of the children, their positive engagement with the learning process and the emphasis placed on promoting positive behaviour. The school places great importance on enhancing the children's experiences through their involvement in educational trips and extra-curricular activities.

#### 1.5 CHILD PROTECTION

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

#### 1.6 HEALTHY EATING AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

The school gives outstanding attention to promoting healthy eating and physical activity, for example, through the Smoothie Mornings and Bring Your Parents to Lunch Week, which encourage the children to adopt healthy lifestyles. The nursery unit provides healthy snacks and dinners for the children. The school has recently achieved the Gold Mark in the Health Promoting Schools Award.

#### 1.7 LINKS WITH PARENTS AND THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

The school has developed excellent links with parents and the local community. Parents receive clear and regular information about school policies and activities through letters, newsletters and text alerts, and their views are sought, valued and acted upon. Parents are encouraged to become actively involved in promoting their child's learning and the school provides workshops and information sessions to support this. There are planned opportunities for the parents to consult with the teachers both formally and informally about their child's progress and the annual 'Grandparents Week' promotes the involvement of the wider family circle in school life.

The staff in the nursery unit communicate effectively with the parents about the life and work of the unit through newsletters, the parent notice board and progress meetings which are held throughout the year.

## **2. ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS**

### **2.1 LEARNING**

An analysis of the key stage (KS) 2 assessment data over the past four years shows that in English and mathematics the school's performance is consistently well above the Northern Ireland (NI) average. Compared with schools in the same free school meals category, the levels of attainment in English and mathematics are also well above the average.

The children's behaviour in the primary school and nursery unit is exemplary; they demonstrate very positive attitudes to their learning and high levels of engagement and enjoyment in their work. As the children progress through the school, they engage actively in a broad range of learning experiences. They have good opportunities for collaborative learning and are able to communicate effectively with their peers and adults. They display a high level of independence and take great pride in the presentation of their work.

Throughout the school, the children use ICT with increasing confidence to enhance their learning and to record and communicate their ideas. All classrooms have been equipped with interactive whiteboards and the effective dissemination of good practice has ensured that the teachers are very competent in the use of them. The children are able to use the whiteboards effectively and to use digital photography when recording aspects of their work. In year 7 the children were compiling a database related to their World Around Us topic. The school participates in the Council for Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment Accreditation scheme and achieves standards in ICT that are well above the NI average.

The school is fully committed to meeting the needs of the children who require support with aspects of their learning. This commitment is exemplified by the extensive additional resources allocated to meeting these needs. Most of the children make very good progress and the improvements in their learning are sustained once the additional support has been discontinued. Consequently, by the end of year 7, most of the children are achieving standards which are in line with their ability.

### **2.2 ENGLISH AND LITERACY**

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

The literacy co-ordinator has been in post for three years and gives very effective leadership in the development and promotion of literacy throughout the school. The annual 'Literacy Festival' is a school-run initiative, the purpose of which is the promotion and celebration of all forms of literacy. It includes events such as a book fair, library and author visits, and a performance by a travelling theatre company. During the two-week festival children from all classes take part in literacy competitions, dressing-up events and book swaps. The co-ordinator has led the staff in developing an appropriate line of progression in literacy. She monitors and evaluates the teachers' planning and the children's work regularly and has conducted audits with teachers and children regarding the reading materials being used. A direct result of the audit was the updating of reading resources throughout the school, which staff began to band into reading levels last year.

Across the key stages nearly all of the children demonstrate very good oral communication skills and speak confidently to peers, teachers and other adults in the school. The teachers provide a literacy-rich environment in which the children develop their spoken language well. In the foundation stage (FS) and KS1, activity-based learning is used to provide effective opportunities for children to develop their oracy skills. Role-play and performance are used effectively in FS classes to promote confidence in speaking in front of an audience and are

recorded by the children using digital cameras. 'Hot-seating' is used effectively in KS1 to develop their comprehension and to explore character development in class novels. The children in KS2 have opportunities to lead class assemblies which are of a very high standard. The school also stages performances which take place in the local theatre and which give the children very good opportunities to develop their language and drama skills.

The children achieve very good standards in reading. Phonological awareness is developed through an effective, structured phonics programme. A very effective programme of targeted withdrawal support is in place for those children identified as needing additional help with the development of phonics. The school's performance data indicates that the short programme is having a significant impact on the children's reading scores and this is sustained when the programme ends. Within the FS children complete a wide range of literacy activities and excellent use is made of task boards for both classroom organisation and the development of children's independence. In KS1 and KS2 very good use is made of novels to develop the children's reading, particularly their understanding of the development of characters. In KS 2 excellent use is made of topics which develop reading and writing in real-life contexts across all areas of learning. An effective 'Paired Reading' scheme, involving the parents of year 3 and 5 children, is used well to support and enhance the children's reading. The school's performance data indicates that the majority of children taking part made significant progress in their reading scores. The school has also hosted a parents workshop through the extended schools programme, to help the parents develop their story-telling techniques and to demonstrate the use of story sacks. By year 7 almost all of the children read with fluency, expression and understanding. They are able to discuss their text preferences, favourite authors and characters. The school has an attractive, well-stocked central library which further enriches the children's reading experiences.

The standard of written work achieved by the children is very good and is often celebrated in attractive, stimulating displays. The development from emergent to extended and independent writing is promoted effectively throughout the school. In the FS the children engage enthusiastically in writing activities during activity-based learning. Teacher-modelled, shared and guided writing sessions are used effectively to develop systematically the children's knowledge and understanding of the forms of writing. Children write in a wide variety of forms across the learning areas, especially in the World around Us.

A particular strength in the literacy provision is the opportunities provided for the children to develop and use their skills in talking, listening, reading and writing in meaningful contexts across the curriculum. Information and communication technology is very effectively integrated into classroom activities; the children take pride in producing their best work and make very good use of ICT to draft, edit and present their work to a high standard.

## 2.3 MATHEMATICS AND NUMERACY

The quality of provision for mathematics and numeracy is outstanding.

The co-ordinator provides excellent leadership and has a clear vision for the development of mathematics within the school. She is an excellent role-model for good practice and supports effectively her colleagues in implementing the agreed strategies. She monitors and evaluates the quality of the mathematics provision through the sampling of the children's work and the analysis of performance data. She promotes very effectively the dissemination of best practice throughout the school.

The programme for mathematics provides the children with a wide range of experiences in number, shape and space, measures and data-handling. In the FS the children develop their mathematical language and ideas through play-based learning. They benefit from the frequent and appropriate use of practical materials which consolidate very effectively their



mathematical learning. In KS1 and KS2 the teachers continue to make use of a range of practical equipment to develop the children's understanding of important concepts such as place value and three-dimensional shape. The teachers have realistically high expectations for the children and the well-planned teaching consistently promotes progression in their understanding of mathematical ideas and concepts. The children engage well in a variety of problem-solving and investigative mathematics. A scheme of work for mental mathematics enables the teachers to plan for, and develop, effective progression of the children's mental mathematics strategies. In nearly all of the lessons observed, the pace was good, and the activities engaged, challenged and motivated the children; the teachers provided very good opportunities for the children to develop mathematical language and to articulate, clarify and extend their mathematical thinking.

A particular strength of the provision is the excellent opportunities the children have to use their mathematical learning in a range of different contexts across the curriculum and in everyday life. In year 6, for example, the children displayed graphically a variety of information they had collected about healthy eating; they appropriately analysed the graphs to make several recommendations about their diet. The children frequently write detailed descriptions and analysis of the mathematical activities and investigations in which they have engaged. The teachers make outstanding use of a range of ICT, including interactive games, websites and programmable devices to support learning and teaching in mathematics.

The standards achieved by the children in mathematics are outstanding. By year 7 they are able to think mathematically across all areas of the numeracy programme and to talk with confidence about their experiences.

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

#### **3.1 PLANNING**

The teachers prepare diligently long-, medium- and short-term planners to guide the learning; they have developed themes and topics which support very effectively connected learning across the curriculum. The planning clearly identifies learning outcomes to meet the needs of all the children and highlights the key language to be developed through each topic. The teachers complete useful evaluations of the quality of the children's learning in order to inform future planning.

#### **3.2 TEACHING**

The quality of almost all of the teaching observed was good or better with four-fifths being very good or outstanding. The staff engage very effectively with the children generating an excitement for learning and making very good use of incidental learning opportunities. Classroom routines are well established. The teachers share the intended learning intentions with the children and have very high expectations of their learning. The lessons are well paced and challenging and provide very good opportunities to develop the children's thinking skills through investigative and collaborative activities. The teachers make excellent use of ICT to enhance the children's learning.

The children who require additional support with their learning are identified appropriately at an early stage through the teachers' observations, diagnostic tests and the analysis of standardised assessment data. In-class and withdrawal support is provided, in both literacy and numeracy. The quality of the teaching observed in the withdrawal sessions during the inspection was mostly very good and, on occasions, outstanding. The sessions are

conducted in a supportive atmosphere where the teachers are well-informed about the specific learning needs of the children. A particular feature of the provision is the extent to which the teachers providing the withdrawal support plan co-operatively with the class teachers to ensure that the work covered in the sessions supports and complements the work the children are doing in their own class.

### **3.3 ASSESSMENT**

The arrangements for the continual assessment of all the children are outstanding. The teachers use a range of standardised and end of KS tests to evaluate the children's learning. This performance data is analysed thoroughly and informs the setting of targets for improvement in aspects of literacy and numeracy. Where there is evidence from these assessments, supported by the professional judgement of the teachers, that children are either under-achieving or are having difficulty with aspects of their learning, the school is quick to put in place effective intervention strategies which address these concerns.

The teachers mark the children's work regularly and supportively and provide the children with helpful comments on how their learning can be improved. The children are encouraged, through peer assessment, to reflect upon and improve the quality of their own work and that of others.

The children's achievements and standards are reported to the parents regularly through an annual written report, a formal parent-teacher meeting and informal contacts between teachers and parents as the need arises. The annual written reports are prepared to a high standard by the class teachers and provide the parents with a comprehensive evaluation of their children's progress and attainment.

## **4. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

### **4.1 LEADERSHIP**

The quality of the leadership and management in the school is outstanding. The hardworking, dedicated Principal has been in post for 24 years. She provides excellent strategic leadership and has an appropriate vision for the school which she has shared effectively with the staff, parents, children and governors. The Principal is very well supported by the Vice-principal and senior management team (SMT) who have worked hard to develop an effective team spirit and to promote the leadership roles of the curriculum co-ordinators.

The quality of the leadership within special educational needs is outstanding. The vision provided by the Principal and the special educational needs co-ordinator, and the supporting structures they have introduced, ensures that all staff place a high priority to meeting the needs of all the children who are having difficulty with aspects of their learning.

The quality of leadership within ICT is also outstanding. The co-ordinator ensures that ICT permeates the life and work of the school. Through constant evaluation and the dissemination of good practice, the expertise of the staff is regularly updated. Excellent use is made of resources which are designed to address the specific needs of the school. The co-ordinator has put in place effective procedures for the assessment of ICT.

## 4.2 PLANNING FOR IMPROVEMENT

The school gives very good attention to, and meets fully, the requirements of the School Development Plans (SDP) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2005. The Principal and SMT promote a culture of self-evaluation and reflection, with an appropriate range of policies and action plans, including literacy and numeracy, supporting effectively the process of school improvement. The Principal gives a high priority to staff development; in addition to in-service training opportunities for the staff, appropriate school based training has been provided for various areas of the curriculum.

## 4.3 RESOURCES, FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE

The governors are fully involved in the strategic planning for, and development of, the school and support effectively the Principal and the staff in the implementation of the SDP. The governors have managed the financial needs of the school efficiently to sustain staffing levels and to meet the identified priorities in the SDP.

## 4.4 ACCOMMODATION

Very good use is made of all the available space in the school. The staff and children have worked hard to create bright, informative displays in the classrooms and corridors. The standard of caretaking is very good.

## 5. CONCLUSION

5.1 The strengths of the school include:

- the outstanding quality of the pastoral care which is exemplified by the inclusive and supportive ethos of the school;
- the excellent behaviour of the children who display high levels of motivation and engagement in their learning;
- the high standards achieved by the children in literacy, numeracy and ICT;
- the outstanding provision for children requiring additional support with aspects of their learning;
- the dedicated and hardworking staff and the high quality of the teaching observed which was very good or outstanding in four fifths of the lessons; and
- the outstanding leadership of the Principal, SMT, and governors in leading and managing the school and in developing a culture of self-evaluation leading to improvement.

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 children 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 staff create a friendly and welcoming atmosphere in the nursery unit. The children's behaviour is very good and on arrival they appear happy and settled. There is a wide range of varying needs and stages of development; the staff are becoming familiar with these in order to identify those children in need of additional help and support to help them to learn. Most of the children are engaging well with one another and display very good levels of self-control and curiosity in the playroom.
- The children display satisfactory to very good levels of interest in the wide range of very good quality activities and resources provided in the indoor and outdoor learning environments. The staff work very hard to ensure that the children's learning experiences are broad across all areas of the pre-school curriculum. The staff make good use of incidental opportunities as they arise to develop the children's learning; for example, they used the context of a snowfall to develop the children's language and their expression.
- The staff prepare appropriate planning for a broad and balanced pre-school programme. In the best practice observed, they interact effectively to promote learning arising from the activities and as a result the children have acquired a good range of creative and mathematical skills. Effective links are established with a range of support agencies for those children with additional learning needs.
- The staff maintain detailed assessment records for each child and are using the information effectively gathered to make adjustments to the planned programme to meet the children's individual needs.
- The hard-working nursery unit teacher-in charge is in post nine years and has developed the nursery provision effectively from the outset of the pre-school expansion programme. She develops good teamwork among the dedicated teaching and support staff and is committed to the further development of the nursery. The Principal is supportive of the work of the staff in all areas for development; for example, the organisation of the open plan playrooms is appropriately identified as a priority for improvement on the school development plan. There are useful links established with the foundation stage staff in order to support transitions and progression in planning. A useful start has been made in self-evaluation to support continuous improvement in the quality of the pre-school programme.
- The industrious classroom assistants provide good levels of support in all aspects of the work in the nursery and contribute well to the attractive displays and stimulating learning environment.

**The inspection has identified the following areas for improvement.**

- The quality of the staff interaction with the children needs to be of a consistently higher level to ensure greater learning from the activities and to extend the children's language development.
- There is a need to review the organisation of the day and to ensure that the transitions and routines support more effective use of time for learning and the involvement of the parents.

In most of the areas inspected the quality of education provided in the nursery unit is satisfactory; the strengths outweigh areas for improvement in the provision. The inspection has identified areas for improvement in learning and teaching and leadership and management which need to be addressed if the needs of all the children are to be met more effectively.

The Education and Training Inspectorate will monitor and report on the nursery unit's progress in addressing the areas for improvement.

# **STATISTICAL INFORMATION ON ST MARY'S GIRLS' PRIMARY SCHOOL NURSERY UNIT, STRABANE**

## **1. Details of Children**

| <b>Number of children:</b>             | <b>Class 1</b> | <b>Class 2</b> |
|--|----------------|----------------|
| Attending full-time                    | 26             | 26             |
| Attending part-time                    | 0              | 0              |
| Under 3 years of age*                  | 0              | 0              |
| With statement of SEN**                | 0              | 0              |
| At CoP stages 3 or 4***                | 0              | 2              |
| At CoP stages 1 or 2***                | 0              | 0              |
| With English as an additional language | 1              | 0              |

\* On 1 July.

\*\* Special Educational Needs.

\*\*\* 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. | 9.61% |
| Average attendance for the previous year.                 | 90.3% |

## **2. Duration of Sessions**

| <b>Full-time</b> | <b>Part-time: am</b> | <b>Part-time: pm</b> |
|------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| 4½ hours         | -                    | -                    |

## **3. Details of Staff**

| <b>Number of:</b>            | <b>Full-Time</b> | <b>Part-Time</b> |
|------------------------------|------------------|------------------|
| Teachers                     | 2                | 0                |
| Nursery Assistants           | 0                | 0                |
| Qualified Nursery Assistants | 2                | 0                |

| <b>Number of: ****</b> |   |
|------------------------|---|
| Students               | 0 |
| Trainees               | 0 |

\*\*\*\* Total placements since September of current year

## **4. Parental Questionnaires (to be completed by Inspection Services Branch)**

|                            |     |
|----------------------------|-----|
| Number issued              | 52  |
| Percentage returned        | 42% |
| Number of written comments | 4   |

## **APPENDIX**

### **HEALTH AND SAFETY APPENDIX**

A risk assessment of the arrangements for children entering and leaving the school grounds is required.

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