

# PRIMARY INSPECTION



Education and Training  
Inspectorate

St Mary's Primary School and  
Nursery Unit, Newcastle

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 Mary's Primary Newcastle** iii. **Date of Inspection: W/B 22/03/10**  
 ii. **School Reference Number: 403-6635** iv. **Nature of Inspection: Focused**

B.

School Year	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10
Year 1 Intake	35	50	45	41	35
<b>Enrolments</b>					
Primary	337	349	332	310	273
Reception	0	0	0	0	0
Nursery Unit	52	52	52	52	51
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): 94% **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): 15.1 1 0 0  
 (Full-time equivalent = 25 teaching hours)
- ii. PTR (Pupil/Teacher Ratio): 18.08 NI PTR: 20.4
- iii. Average Class Size: 22.75
- iv. Class Size (Range): 17 to 28
- v. Ancillary Support:  
 Number of Hours **Per Week:**
- |   |     |
|---|-----|
| i. Clerical support:  | 46  |
| ii. Foundation Stage Classroom Assistant Support:           | 60  |
| iii. Additional hours of other classroom assistant support: | 135 |
- vi. Percentage of children with statements of special educational needs: 5.86%
- vii. Total percentage of children on the Special Needs Register: 25.64%
- viii. Number of children who are **not** of statutory school age: 0
- ix. Percentage of children entitled to free school meals: 24.91%
- x. Percentage of children at the end of Key Stage 2 for 2008/09  
 who attained level 4 and above in English and mathematics:
- |                |                    |
|----------------|--------------------|
| <b>English</b> | <b>Mathematics</b> |
| 75%            | 76.67%             |

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 SCHOOL CONTEXT

St Mary's Primary School currently operates on a split site, with each key stage being accommodated, a mile apart, in the town of Newcastle. The majority of the children come from the town, with a small number coming from Castlewellan, Annalong and Dundrum. Over the past three years the enrolment has shown a steady decline dropping from 401 in 2006/07 to 324 in 2009/10. Approximately twenty five per cent of the children are entitled to free school meals. The school has identified 26% 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 educational and pastoral provision within the nursery unit.

In addition, the contribution of information and communication technology (ICT) in promoting and supporting learning and the school's arrangements for pastoral care, including child protection, were evaluated.

### 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 and support staff in both the primary school and nursery unit 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 children from year 6.

One hundred and thirty-seven questionnaires were issued to parents; approximately 49% of the parental questionnaires were returned to the Inspection Services Branch. Thirty of the returns contained additional written comments. The majority of the responses from the parental questionnaires were highly affirmative, indicating strong support for the life and work of the school. In particular, the parents acknowledged the caring and supportive learning environment, the dedicated and hard-working staff and principal and the importance of the school within the local community.

Seventeen teachers completed the confidential online questionnaire with ten teachers including additional written comments. Five members of the support staff also returned written comments. Almost all of the responses were positive about nearly all aspects of the work of the school.

In the nursery unit almost 50% of the parents responded to the parental questionnaire; seven parents made additional written comments. The responses indicate a good level of satisfaction with the overall quality of the provision. In particular, they appreciate the friendly, caring and professional approach of the staff. All of the key findings from the responses have been shared with the staff and the management team.

The small number of concerns that was raised in the questionnaires for both the school and the nursery has been discussed with the governors and the Principal.

The governors expressed their strong support for the Principal and staff. In particular, they highlighted the welcoming atmosphere in the school and the very good working relationships between the staff and pupils. The year 6 children talked openly and positively about their experiences in the school. They value the helpful, caring and approachable teachers and the range of educational visits provided for them by the school. They also indicated that they feel happy in the school and know whom to turn to if they have any concerns regarding their work, safety or well-being.

#### **1.4 PASTORAL CARE**

The quality of the arrangements for pastoral care in the school is very good. The key features of the pastoral care include: the inclusive, supportive ethos throughout the school and nursery unit; the very good working relationships at all levels; the pleasantly confident and generally well-behaved children; the bright attractive displays in the classrooms and corridors that celebrate the children's work; the effective merit system in place to reward positive behaviour and the effective leadership of the head of pastoral care.

The quality of the arrangements for pastoral care in the nursery is very good. The strengths include the happy, relaxed and supportive ethos, the good quality of the working relationships between the staff and the children, and the support provided for children with special educational needs.

#### **1.5 CHILD PROTECTION**

Both the nursery and the school 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 nursery and the school give very good attention to promoting healthy eating and physical activity, for example, the Science/Health week and Annual Walk to School Day, which encourage the children to adopt healthy lifestyles; in the nursery and year 1 the children are provided with a healthy snack and they have good opportunities to participate in energetic physical play.

### **2. ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS**

#### **2.1 LEARNING**

In almost all of the classes observed, the children settled quickly to work; generally their behaviour was very good. In the majority of classes observed they worked well in collaborative activities and, when given the opportunity, they responded in a confident and articulate manner.

Overall, the children achieve good standards.

An analysis of the school's assessment data over the past three years shows that, in English, at key stage (KS) 1, performance has been consistently above the Northern Ireland (NI) Average for similar schools; at KS2 it has remained below the NI average. The teachers need to address the fact that the performance of boys in KS2 assessments is not as strong as that of the girls.

In Mathematics, in KS1 performance is consistently above the NI Average. In KS2, the performance has been slightly below the NI Average.

## 2.2 ENGLISH AND LITERACY

The overall quality of provision in English is good.

The school has rightly prioritised the development of particular areas of literacy in the School Development Plan (SDP) and associated literacy action plans. The current priorities are appropriate. The Literacy policy, which is currently under review, guides the work in literacy and promotes the development of the core skills. The teachers plan for literacy through medium-term planning and these are, in most cases, accompanied by short-term plans; these were most effective where they identified more detailed progression of the learning.

The school has a coherent approach to improving the children's reading skills. In the foundation stage (FS) and KS1, there is a good focus on linguistic phonics and on providing children with good quality shared, modelled and guided reading experiences. As the children progress into KS2, these are built upon with more opportunities for developing greater independence. In the lessons observed, the children read with increasing accuracy and expression. They had good strategies to help them overcome difficulties with pronunciation and which helped them to make better sense of what they had read. Additionally, in areas such as World Around Us, the children were able to find, select and manage information from a range of sources. Based on data from 2009's cohort, the majority of P7 children left the school with reading ages at or above their chronological ages.

The development of writing in the FS and KS1 is good, in particular at KS1. The children are provided with opportunities for shared, modelled and independent writing and are taught how to construct basic sentences. This is well supported through providing good writing opportunities across the curriculum. As their skills develop, the children's independent writing is promoted more extensively so that by the end of KS1, the majority of children can express their ideas in a more extended, structured and coherent way. By the end of KS2, most children can write with increasing accuracy and confidence to a variety of audiences and across a range of genres.

Talking and listening is planned for across all year groups. It is promoted effectively in most classes, through open questioning, paired and small group work. When given the opportunity, the children are able to pick up and respond to the views of others and can communicate their ideas and feelings using an expanding vocabulary.

The data the school provided detailing the outcomes from standardised test scores in English is good. An evaluation of the children's work in literacy across all classes judged the majority of the children's work as good or better.

The use of ICT in English/literacy is satisfactory. Some teachers made good use of the Interactive Whiteboards and the IT room to stimulate the children's interest and to help explain things more clearly. There was also evidence of three classes being involved in an animation project. All the children need opportunities to engage with a wider range of digital technology and ICT linked tasks, in order to develop further their Literacy skills and teachers need to target improvements on the performance of boys at KS2 with the view to raising standards in line with that of the girls.

## 2.3 MATHEMATICS AND NUMERACY

The overall quality of provision in mathematics is good.

The co-ordinator supports effectively the staff in implementing the planned programme. She monitors the children's mathematical learning through, for example, analysing available data, sampling of the children's work, class visits and providing individual support when necessary. Recent in-service training in numeracy has helped raise the profile of mental mathematics and the use of games, visual stimuli and concrete materials in the teaching of mathematics throughout the school. The teachers have identified appropriately the need to review the lines of development and align these more closely to the themes and topics in the teachers' medium term planning. While the teachers have made a good start to evaluating the children's responses to the planned activities, more needs to be done to ensure the information gained through the evaluations is used effectively to meet the needs of individuals and to inform future planning.

In the FS the teachers are developing appropriate mathematical concepts, skills and language through a variety of games, activities and practical mathematics lessons. The children clearly enjoy these opportunities and acquire a sound understanding of number, measures, handling data, shape and space. The teachers need to develop this further during the play-based learning sessions.

In KS1, the majority of the children engage co-operatively, show increasing independence and can talk confidently about their mathematical learning. During the inspection they demonstrated confidence in their understanding of time and money, could work flexibly with number and engaged in a range of problem-solving activities. Many of the learning opportunities make good use of a broad range of practical equipment and, in the best practice, ICT is used effectively to support learning and teaching in mathematics. By the end of KS1 the children achieve good standards in mathematics.

In KS2, the lessons provide the children with opportunities to consolidate and extend their learning from KS1 through an appropriate range of teaching approaches such as paired and group work, practical activities and investigative and problem-solving tasks. The work addresses the key areas of mathematics including number, shape and space, measures and handling data and is frequently linked to real life situations. In general, these aspects are chosen sufficiently frequently to allow steady progress to be made. During the inspection, the older children demonstrated good understanding of place value, are aware of the properties of two-dimensional (2D) and 3D shapes and showed flexibility in their mathematical thinking. Sessions of mental mathematics were a feature at the start of the lessons and were used well to enhance the children's understanding. In the best practice, the children were given opportunities to develop their ability to reason, explain and present their mathematical findings and to broaden their mathematical language. By the end of KS2, the children achieve good standards in mathematics. Staff are aware of the need to raise further the standards in mathematics and have taken positive action to address this including workshops for parents and introducing a topic approach in mathematics lessons.



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

#### **3.1 PLANNING**

The teachers have worked collaboratively to develop effective long and medium-term planning. There is some variation in the short-term planning throughout the school. In order to provide consistency in short-term planning, the models of good practice that already exist in the school need to be shared to help guide teachers more effectively in their day-to-day teaching.

During the inspection, some good examples of the use of evaluations to inform future planning and teaching were observed. This good practice needs to be disseminated more widely with a clear emphasis on improving learning.

#### **3.2 TEACHING**

During the inspection, the quality of the teaching observed ranged from inadequate to outstanding, with the majority of lessons being very good. In the most effective practice, the lessons were well-paced with ample opportunities for active learning through group and paired work; teachers built on prior knowledge, establishing effective connections across the areas of learning and making the learning relevant to the children's own experiences.

In the less effective practice, there were missed opportunities for collaborative work and promoting the children's thinking skills; there were insufficient classroom management strategies to guide and progress the children's learning; the pace of lessons was slow and unfocused: learning intentions and instructions were not clearly conveyed to the pupils.

#### **3.3 ASSESSMENT**

The parents are kept well informed of their children's progress through parental interviews and written reports, and the school maintains information and performance data on the children's progress. The teachers have made a good start to using the results from standardised tests and DE benchmarking data to assess the level of the children's achievement in literacy and numeracy and to set realistic targets for improvement. The teachers mark the children's work regularly and supportively.

#### **3.5 SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS**

There is good provision for children with special educational needs (SEN). Twenty-six per cent of the children have been identified by the school as being in need of additional learning support, including children with learning difficulties in literacy and numeracy, and a small number with special needs of a behavioural nature. The provision recognises effectively the importance of early identification through classroom observation and the analysis of assessment data.

The special educational needs co-ordinator, provides good quality support for the children. She readily avails of appropriate training and was recently involved in the South-Eastern Education and Library Board's SEN Training and Monitoring Project. As a result she is working closely with teachers to support them in writing their own individual education plans and recognises the importance of monitoring and evaluating this development. She is assisted in her work by the Vice-principal and together they provide support in both literacy and numeracy. This work is carried out both in class and during withdrawal sessions in a systematic, patient and effective manner and is benefiting the children involved.

The school works effectively with a number of outside agencies to further enhance the provision for SEN.

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

##### **4.1 LEADERSHIP**

The quality of the leadership provided by the Principal is good. She has successfully overseen the amalgamation of St Mary's Boys' and St Mary's Girls' school and has worked very hard to enhance the standing of the school within the local and wider community. The Principal is committed to the care and education of the children; she is supportive of her staff, both teaching and non-teaching, and shows commitment to their welfare and continued professional development. She is very effectively supported by the Vice-principal.

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

The SDP meets fully the requirements of DE's School Development Planning Regulations/Schedule 2005/19. It is appropriate for the Principal, with staff to review the current school development plan in the light of this report in order to identify the key priority areas for development; such as the need to develop short term planning. Appropriate action plans should be prepared, success criteria identified, and clear strategies to monitor and evaluate progress agreed and implemented.

##### **4.3 ACCOMODATION**

The senior management team (SMT) and staff have worked hard to ensure that the split site nature of the school has little negative impact on the learning experiences of the children. Despite the deficiencies in operating between a split site the SMT and staff work hard to ensure minimal negative impact on the children's learning experiences. Currently the internal and external environments of both campuses are pleasant and well-maintained; the standard of caretaking is very good.

#### **5. CONCLUSION**

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

- the confident and generally well-behaved children;
- the very good arrangements for pastoral care;
- the good standards achieved by most of the children in literacy and numeracy;
- the quality of the teaching observed, the majority of which was very good;
- the good quality of the leadership of the Principal, well supported by the Vice-principal; and
- the good quality support provided for children with additional needs including the very effective links with outside agencies.

The areas for improvement are the need to:

- improve the effectiveness of short-term planning; and
- disseminate the very good practice that exists within the school in order to raise further the standards for all children.

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 Education and Training Inspectorate will monitor the organisation's progress on these areas for improvement.

## **6. THE NURSERY UNIT**

6.1 St Mary's nursery unit is accommodated in a classroom of St Mary's Primary School. There are two part-time nursery sessions; the children in the morning session are in their pre-school year while almost all of the children in the afternoon session are younger and will have two years in the nursery. The nursery operates a job share with both the teaching and support staff. One set of staff works for four days each week and the other for one day.

6.2 The key strengths of the nursery include:

- the attractive and stimulating learning environment and the wide range of interesting activities provided for the children;
- the very good interaction of the nursery staff with the children which promotes the children's care, learning and development;
- the good quality of the pre-school curriculum for the children and the many examples of concentrated and productive play;
- the early identification and good support being provided for children with speech and language difficulties;
- the support for children identified as having special educational needs; and
- the effective leadership provided by the teacher-in-charge.

6.3 The priority for development is the need:

- for the staff to continue to develop their methods for planning, evaluation of the programme and assessment.

6.4 In the areas inspected, the quality of education provided by this nursery unit is good. The nursery has important strengths in most of its educational and pastoral provision. The inspection has identified an area for improvement which the nursery has demonstrated the capacity to address. The Education and Training Inspectorate will monitor the Nursery's progress on the areas for improvement.

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

## **1. Details of Children**

<b>Number of children:</b>	<b>Class 1</b>	<b>Class 2</b>
Attending full-time	0	0
Attending part-time	25	26
Under 3 years of age*	1	18
With statement of SEN**	0	0
At CoP stages 3 or 4***	0	1
At CoP stages 1 or 2***	5	1
With English as an additional language	0	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.	0%
Average attendance for the previous year.	94.2%

## **2. Duration of Sessions**

<b>Full-time</b>	<b>Part-time: am</b>	<b>Part-time: pm</b>
-	2½ hours	2½ hours

## **3. Details of Staff**

<b>Number of:</b>	<b>Full-Time</b>	<b>Part-Time</b>
Teachers	1	0
Nursery Assistants	0	0
Qualified Nursery Assistants	1	0

<b>Number of: ****</b>	
Students	0
Trainees	5

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

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

Number issued	52
Percentage returned	48.7%
Number of written comments	7

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