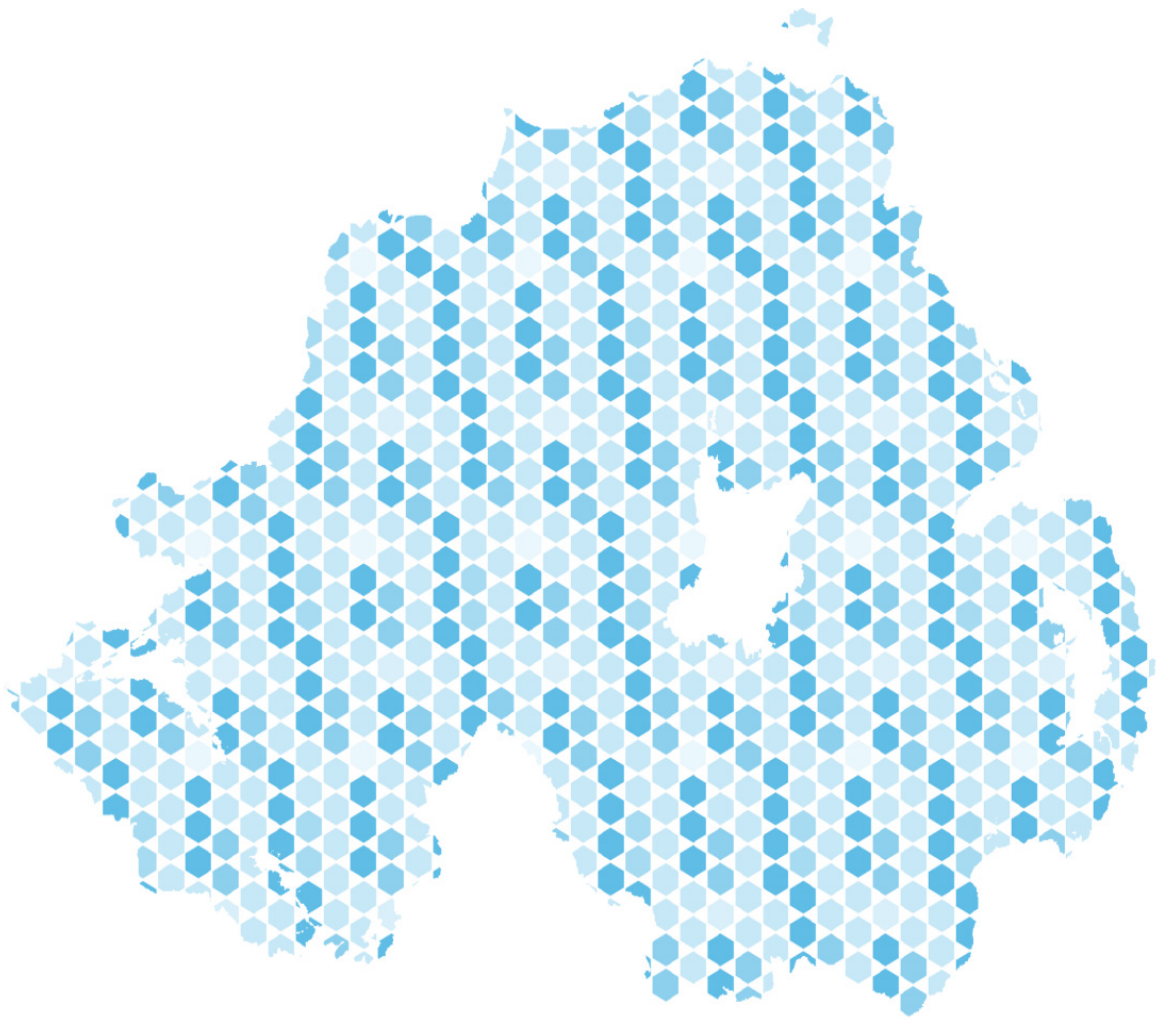


# PRIMARY INSPECTION



Education and Training  
Inspectorate

St Mary's Star of the Sea  
Primary School, Belfast

Report of an Inspection  
in May 2011



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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 Star of the Sea Primary**      iii. **Date of Inspection: W/B 16/05/11**  
 ii. **School Reference Number: 103-6048**      iv. **Nature of Inspection: Focused**

B.

<b>School Year</b>	<b>2006/07</b>	<b>2007/08</b>	<b>2008/09</b>	<b>2009/10</b>	<b>2010/11</b>
Year 1 Intake	21	22	25	16	11
<b>Enrolments</b>					
Primary	168	163	149	144	119
Reception	0	0	0	0	0
Nursery Unit	0	0	0	0	0
Special Unit	0	0	0	0	0
Irish Medium Unit	0	0	0	0	0

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

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

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

94.9%

**NI Avg Att: 94.9%**

Primary & Reception	Nursery Unit	Special Unit	Irish Medium Unit
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- D. i. Number of Teachers  
 (including the principal and part-time teachers): 7.32      0      0      0  
 (Full-time equivalent = 25 teaching hours)
- ii. PTR (Pupil/Teacher Ratio): 16.2      NI PTR: 20.7
- iii. Average Class Size: 17
- iv. Class Size (Range): 11 to 20
- v. Ancillary Support:  
 Number of Hours **Per Week**:
- |   |     |
|---|-----|
| i. Clerical support:  | 35  |
| ii. Foundation Stage Classroom Assistant Support:           | 30  |
| iii. Additional hours of other classroom assistant support: | 100 |
- vi. Percentage of children with statements of special educational needs: 4.2%
- vii. Total percentage of children on the Special Needs Register: 23.3%
- viii. Number of children who are **not** of statutory school age: 0
- ix. Percentage of children entitled to free school meals: 44.2%
- x. Percentage of children at the end of Key Stage 2 for 2009/10 who attained level 4 and above in English and mathematics:      **English** 64%      **Mathematics** 64%

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 SCHOOL CONTEXT

St Mary's Star of the Sea Primary School is situated on the Shore Road in north Belfast. The enrolment has decreased over the past five years and currently stands at 119 children. Almost all of the children who attend the school come from the Parish of Greencastle. Approximately 44% of the children are entitled to free school meals (FSM). The school has identified 23% of the children as requiring additional support with aspects of their learning.

### 1.2 FOCUS

The inspection took place at the request of the Board of Governors (governors) and 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 communications 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 staff to complete a confidential questionnaire prior to the inspection, as well as meetings with representatives from the governors and a group of the children from year 6.

Just over 23% of the parental questionnaires were returned to Inspection Services Branch. Seven returns included additional written comments. The parents expressed a high level of satisfaction with the educational and pastoral provision provided by the school. In particular, they acknowledged the pleasant and approachable staff and how happy their children were at the school.

All of the teachers and 13 members of the support staff responded to the online questionnaires. Almost all of these responses were very positive and highly affirmative of the work of the school.

The governors expressed strong support for the school. In particular they commented on the hardworking teachers and the very good engagement of the school with other schools and with the local community. They expressed their concerns about whether each child is currently reaching the standard that he/she is capable of, and the need for governors to be more involved in school development planning. The governors also expressed concern regarding the very narrow access road to the school and the lack of visibility which they consider to be a health and safety issue especially at drop off and pick up times.

In discussions, the children in year 6 said that they feel very safe and secure in school and are aware of what to do if they have concerns about their safety or well-being. They talked confidently about the subjects and activities they enjoy; in particular the children appreciate the help the teachers and other adults give them with their work and the wide range of activities that they can take part in after school.

## 1.4 PASTORAL CARE

The quality of the arrangements for pastoral care in the school is very good.

Among the strengths are: the friendly and well-mannered children and their excellent behaviour; the very good working relationships between the adults and the children, and between the children when they are working together; the very good use made by the teachers of effective strategies to promote good behaviour; the development of the children's self-esteem and confidence and the celebration of their work and achievements; and the wide-ranging after-school programme.

## 1.5 CHILD PROTECTION

The school has satisfactory arrangements in place for safeguarding children. These arrangements broadly reflect the guidance issued by the Department of Education, but the following areas need to be addressed:

- a personal care policy, to guide the staff in their work with the children, needs to be agreed and the policy shared with the parents; and
- the development of procedures for the safe storage of prescription medicines and written parental permission for administering such items.

## 1.6 HEALTHY EATING AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

The school gives good attention to promoting healthy eating and physical activity, for example through the popular healthy eating week and the well-planned opportunities for the children to contribute to the school's healthy eating policies and practices.

## 1.7 LINKS WITH PARENTS AND THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

There are very good links with the school and the local community. Regular communication keeps the parents well-informed about school life and events. Parents are invited to attend a curriculum morning and one formal parent-teacher consultation per year and in addition they receive one written report on their child's progress. A recent successful art initiative, organised through an external community group, has involved all children working with a parent or family member on the creation of attractive murals and display work based on a variety of themes.

The school has developed a range of effective links with the wider community. There are good links with the local nursery school and post-primary schools and a well established cross-community partnership with a local controlled school. The children participate in a variety of valuable educational activities and visits in the local and wider community which enhance their learning. In addition, the school makes good use of the expertise of statutory organisations and external agencies to enhance the provision for the children.

## 2. ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS

### 2.1 LEARNING

The children demonstrate good levels of engagement in their learning. They interact confidently with their teachers and with one another, and when given the opportunity they respond well in group discussions. When presented with more challenging activities they demonstrate an enthusiasm to solve problems and complete tasks to the best of their ability.

The teachers need to maintain appropriately high expectations of what the children can achieve and to include sufficient challenge in their work.

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 below the Northern Ireland (NI) average. Compared with similar schools in the same FSM category<sup>1</sup>, the children's levels of attainment in English and mathematics are also below the average. The school's internal data indicates that in the last two years there is evidence of improvement in standards in English and mathematics.

To improve further the standards the children achieve the Principal and senior management team (SMT) need to compare the children's standardised scores in English and mathematics with baseline tests of ability to identify more clearly the children who are working at a level below their ability.

## 2.2 ENGLISH AND LITERACY

The quality of provision for literacy in the school is satisfactory.

The literacy co-ordinator has been in post for one year. In that time she has provided effective leadership for the strategic development of literacy within the school and is a very good role model for the teaching of literacy. She is clearly focused on raising standards in all areas of literacy and has begun to monitor and evaluate the current practice and provide teachers with effective feedback on areas for further development. There is currently no literacy policy or long-term planning to guide teachers in developing the children's literacy skills. The development of the literacy policy and long-term planning is a key priority in supporting the teachers in their planning and practice in order to raise standards further.

In the foundation stage (FS) effective use is made of the information obtained through the Communication and Education Together programme, which is used to produce a language profile for each child and to set targets for improvement. These targets are used effectively by the teachers to plan appropriate talking and listening activities and to assess each child's progress. In KS1 and KS2 most of the children demonstrate good oral communication skills and speak confidently to peers, teachers and other adults in the school. In the best practice, in the majority of the classes, teachers use open-ended questioning well to encourage the children to make confident contributions in class, based on their own ideas and making their own judgements.

The standard of reading is satisfactory. The children's phonological awareness is developed through a whole-school phonics programme which ensures continuity across the key stages. Across the year groups the children benefit from a range of approaches to reading, including shared, modelled and guided reading; however there is a need for the teachers to ensure that the children are taught a wider range of reading strategies to improve their fluency.

The introduction of 'Book Boxes' in the FS gives parents the opportunity to select appropriately attractive books to encourage their children to read at home and to develop their reading skills. The enjoyment of reading throughout the school is fostered through the use of the school's well-stocked central library and special events such as the annual book fair.

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<sup>1</sup> The key stage outcomes should be interpreted with caution for small primary schools as a large percentage change from year to year can often be attributed to a very small number of children.

During the inspection, the more able children from years 4 and 7 read with fluency, expression and understanding. The children were enthusiastic about reading and the reading resources available to them within the school; they discussed with confidence their favourite stories, novels and authors.

The standard of the children's writing is satisfactory. The recent whole-school self-evaluation of teaching and learning in literacy indicated that staff do not have an agreed approach to shared and guided writing. The children write in a variety of styles and, in the best practice, in a minority of classes, the writing is linked to current affairs and across the areas of learning. The teachers need to provide the children with a wider range of creative stimuli for writing for different purposes and audiences. The use of assessment for learning strategies including marking for improvement and peer and self-evaluation is under-developed across all classes. It will be important for teachers in KS1 and 2 to develop these strategies alongside the writing process in order to help the children to understand how to improve their writing and to raise the standards of their written work.

## **2.3 MATHEMATICS AND NUMERACY**

The overall quality of the provision for mathematics and numeracy is satisfactory.

The action plan for numeracy has been revised recently by the newly appointed co-ordinator for mathematics; it focuses on a review of the school's planning and practices in numeracy with a particular focus on number work. Although it sets out a number of suitable priorities to be developed, it requires a sharper focus on raising standards. With the help of Curriculum and Advisory Support Service of the Belfast Education and Library Board, the school policy for mathematics has been updated. In addition, the teachers have revised their half-termly schemes of work; the long-term planning for numeracy is at an early stage of development and the teachers need a clearer overview to guide their work in mathematics and to ensure continuity and progression in the children's learning experiences.

There are regular and effective sessions of mental mathematics in all of the classes, in which the children are encouraged to reflect on and explain their learning using suitable mathematical language. Building on this good work the teachers need to ensure the activities have sufficient challenge and use opportunities to engage the children fully in mathematical thinking. A significant minority of the children display difficulties in routine problem solving and in their grasp of basic mathematical processes and concepts; this restricts their ability to progress their mathematical learning across a wider range of areas.

The introduction of topics such as 'Fair Trade' and 'Financial Capability' provides opportunities for the older children to apply their learning in real life situations and across the curriculum. Throughout the school, ICT is used well to support and consolidate the children's learning in mathematics. It is timely that the co-ordinator for mathematics has initiated a whole-school audit of provision and has begun to monitor the children's work across the year groups in order for the teachers to gain a deeper understanding of the levels of assessment. By the end of KS2, a majority of the children are making satisfactory progress but the standard of learning for one-third of the children in mathematics falls below expected levels.

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

### **3.1 PLANNING**

The quality of curriculum planning across the school is satisfactory. The half-termly planning outlines appropriately the learning intentions, and the variety of activities and tasks which the children will participate in and complete. In the best practice, good use is made of



topic-based planning to enhance the children's learning. Building upon this work, the teachers need to identify more clearly continuity and progression in the children's learning. In the planning there is a need to match the work more closely to the needs of the children, in particular for the more able. In addition the teachers need to evaluate the children's completed work to inform more appropriately the future action for individuals and groups.

### 3.2 TEACHING

During the inspection, almost three-quarters of the teaching observed was good or very good.

In the best practice, well-paced teaching approaches and skilful use of ICT produced an enthusiastic response from the children. Very good questioning encouraged the children to organise their thinking and provide extended responses. In these lessons the teachers had high expectations of what the children could achieve. In the less effective practice, in a quarter of the lessons observed, the work was overly directed by the teacher with few opportunities for the children to develop independence in their learning. In addition the level of the work was not matched appropriately to the children's ability and lacked sufficient challenge to promote learning and raise standards.

The quality of provision for children with special educational needs (SEN) is good.

Special Educational Needs is given a high priority by the school. The acting special educational needs co-ordinator has been in post since February 2011. She has undertaken an important review of the provision to support the children with special educational needs. The well-conceived action plan, produced as a result of the review, focuses appropriately on the need to amend the SEN policy and agree education plans which focus more sharply on promoting further improvements in the children's learning. The school's data indicates that the majority of the children on the SEN register are achieving standards in line with their ability.

### 3.3 ASSESSMENT

Led by the Vice-principal, acting as assessment co-ordinator, the school is currently collating and analysing quantitative pupil performance data in order to promote improvement in the learning outcomes for the children. Broad group targets have been set with a particular focus on those children who are attaining at just below the average. It will be important for the SMT to target individual children's progress more specifically using a firmer baseline evaluation to ensure that sufficient challenge is provided for all of the children.

## 4. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

### 4.1 LEADERSHIP

The overall quality of leadership and management in this school is inadequate.

The Principal combines classroom teaching duties with efficient day-to-day management of the school, and has demonstrated a strong commitment to the pastoral welfare of the children in his care. However, he now needs to provide a more strategic overview and direction for the work of the school to promote improvement and raise further the standards the children achieve. In addition, the Principal needs to provide appropriate opportunities for consultation on the school development plan (SDP) within the school community, including the governors and the parents.

The newly appointed co-ordinators, supported well by the Vice-principal, have worked hard to evaluate the current practice and provision in the key areas for which they have responsibility. To improve the standards further, and meet the needs of all of the children more effectively, there is a need for the SMT to work more effectively together and to put in place a more systematic monitoring, evaluation and review of the provision.

#### 4.2 PLANNING FOR IMPROVEMENT

The Principal and SMT need to work together more effectively to create a culture of effective self-evaluation and increase the pace of improvement in standards for all of the children.

In addition, the Principal and SMT need to develop a collaborative approach to the school improvement process, taking account of the inspection findings to meet more fully the requirements of the Education (School Development Plans) Regulations NI 2005 Order.

#### 4.3 RESOURCES, FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE

The governors carry out their associated challenge function well and make a very positive contribution to the life and work of the school. They are keen to become more involved in the strategic planning and policy development and to support the Principal and 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 including the exemplary behaviour of the children;
- the good links with business and the wider community;
- the good use made of ICT to promote learning;
- the children's engagement in their learning;
- the quality of the teaching, the majority of which was good or better; and
- the comprehensive SEN provision and the good progress made by the majority of children who receive additional support with aspects of their learning.

5.2 The areas for improvement are:

- the need for the Principal to provide a more strategic overview and direction for the work of the school in order to raise standards; and
- the need for the Principal and SMT to work together more effectively to embed further a culture of self-evaluation, raise teacher expectations and effect improvement.

5.3 In the areas inspected, the quality of education provided in this school is satisfactory; the strengths outweigh areas for improvement in the provision. The inspection has identified areas for improvement in achievements and standards, learning and teaching, leadership and management, which need to be addressed if the needs of all learners are to be met more effectively. The Education and Training Inspectorate will monitor and report on the school's progress in addressing the areas for improvement over a 12-24 month period.

**HEALTH/SAFETY**

- A risk assessment is required, as a matter of urgency, regarding the traffic arrangements on the school premises particularly at the children's drop off and pick-up times.

**ACCOMMODATION**

- Some of the window frames which are constructed in wood or metal, allow water to come in.
- The staff toilets need to be re-furbished.

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