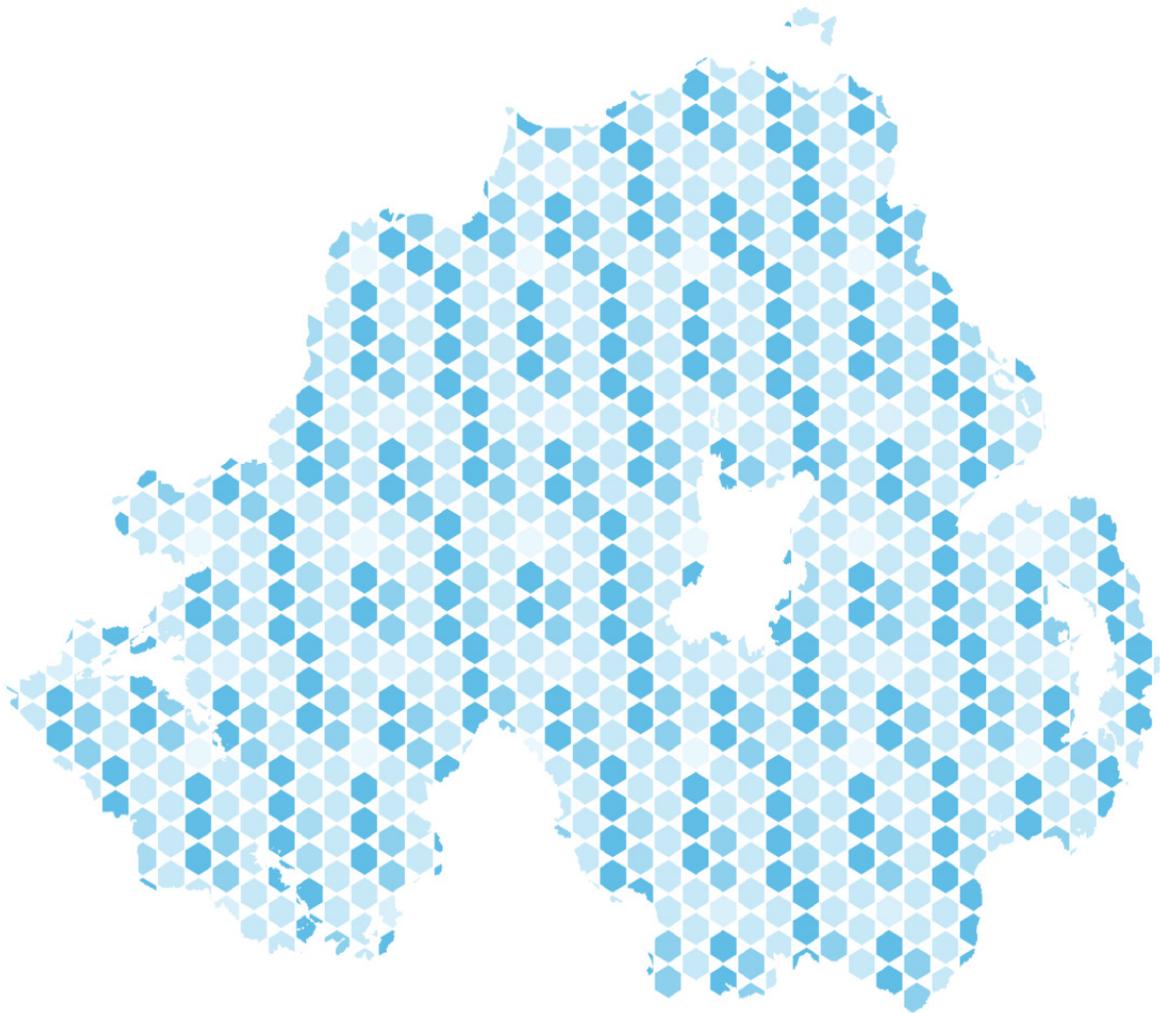


PRIMARY INSPECTION



Education and Training
Inspectorate

St Matthew's Primary School,
Ballygawley, Dungannon

Report of an Inspection
in June 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

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 CONTEXT

St Matthew's Primary School is situated in the townland of Garvaghy, about five miles from Ballygawley in Co Tyrone. The enrolment has remained steady over recent years and stands currently at 31. Almost all of the children come from the surrounding rural area. At the time of the inspection, around 6% of the children were entitled to free school meals (FSM). The school has identified approximately 13% of the children as requiring additional support with aspects of their learning, including 9% who have statements of special educational needs (SEN).

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 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, the teaching and support staff to complete confidential questionnaires prior to the inspection. Meetings were held with representatives from the Board of Governors (governors), and the children from year 6.

Fifteen questionnaires were issued to the parents; approximately 87% were returned to Inspection Services Branch: six contained additional written comments. An analysis of the questionnaires and the comments made by the parents and the staff were shared with the Principal and the governors. All of the responses indicated a very high level of satisfaction with the educational and pastoral work of the school. In particular, the parents acknowledged the high regard with which the school is held in the community, the care and support provided by the Principal and the staff for the children and the child-centred ethos of the school.

Two teachers and three support staff completed the on-line questionnaire. The staff returns were wholly positive in relation to all areas of school life.

The governors expressed their appreciation of the work of the school, the commitment of all the staff to the children and the excellent leadership provided by the Principal.

In discussions the year 6 children talked enthusiastically about all aspects of school life. They spoke confidently about the wide range of extra-curricular activities which they enjoy. They also indicated strongly that they feel happy in school, enjoy their learning and know what to do if they have any worries about their safety.

1.4 PASTORAL CARE

The quality of the arrangements for pastoral care in the school is outstanding; there is an inclusive atmosphere and a strong community ethos permeates the life of the school. All the staff are committed to the care and welfare of the children. There is mutual respect between the adults and children which is reflected in the exemplary behaviour observed in all classes during the inspection. There is a strong emphasis on listening to the opinions and concerns of the children, and on involving them in planning and decision making. The children's learning experiences are enhanced through a wide range of extra-curricular activities, including music, drama and sport, and through visits to places of educational interest. The colourful displays in classrooms and corridors celebrate the children's work and achievements.

1.5 CHILD PROTECTION

The school has very good arrangements in place for safeguarding children. These arrangements reflect the guidance issued by the Department of Education (DE).

1.6 HEALTHY EATING AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

The school gives very good attention to promoting healthy eating and physical activity, for example, through the provision of the fruit break, the healthy lunch scheme and the wide variety of sporting opportunities, all of which encourage the children to adopt a healthy lifestyle.

1.7 LINKS WITH PARENTS AND THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

The school encourages the parents to be involved actively in their children's learning and has consulted them on a range of school matters; parental opinions are valued and acted upon. Regular, informative newsletters, parent information evenings, and formal and informal parent/teacher meetings ensure that there is on-going contact between the teachers and the parents. There is a very active Parent-Teacher group which provides additional support and resources for the school and has helped to develop strong links with the local community. The school has also established effective links with local schools and colleges through the Extended Schools Programme. The opportunities provided help to strengthen relationships at all levels and to enhance the children's educational and social skills.

2. ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS

2.1 LEARNING

An analysis of the key stage (KS) 2* assessment data indicates that in English and mathematics, over the past four years, the school's performance was slightly above the Northern Ireland average and the average for other primary schools within the Western Education and Library Board (WELB).

In the same period, the standards achieved at the end of KS2 in English and mathematics were closely aligned to other schools in the same FSM band.

* 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.

The children are friendly, courteous and very welcoming to visitors. They are highly motivated and display excellent levels of engagement and enjoyment in their learning. They experience a range of appropriately challenging learning activities and display very good levels of independence and self-management skills; they take responsibility for their own learning by setting personal targets for improvement and by contributing to topic planning. They take pride in their work and often make connections in their learning across topics and subject areas. Working relationships between the teachers, the support staff and the children are positively affirming, and as a result the children learn well in a supportive environment.

The school's provision for the children with special educational needs is very good.

The school has identified just over 13% of the children with additional learning or behavioural needs, including a few children with statements of educational need. The children receive appropriate in-class support for language and literacy. They are supported well by the special needs classroom assistant. In addition, a small number of children are taught individually for extra reading by teachers from the peripatetic and outreach services of the WELB.

The special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO) has devised a comprehensive policy and individual education plans (IEPs) containing realistic targets. The teachers retain samples of the children's work which indicate progress towards meeting their targets. Regular reviews are carried out and support is discontinued where the success criteria have been achieved; in some instances, further areas for development have been identified.

2.2 ENGLISH AND LITERACY

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

Most of the children display very good communication skills and they speak confidently to their peers, teachers and the other adults in the school. In the foundation stage (FS) and KS1, the children's oral skills are developed through the lively interactions of the adults during play based learning. During literacy lessons, the teachers make good use of effective questioning and role-play to develop further the children's oracy. In KS2, the children engage in a wide range of activities across the curriculum designed to develop their communicative confidence and competence; they participate enthusiastically in debates and they give presentations to their peers on a range of topics.

The children attain very good standards in reading. A range of strategies is used to promote and develop the children's skills and they learn to read using a good range of reading material. The children read with fluency, expression and understanding. The children were able to discuss their text preferences, favourite authors and characters. The school has an attractive, well-stocked central library and regular access to a mobile library, which enrich further the children's reading experiences. The class libraries are used well and they contain books that match the interests and abilities of the children.

In the FS, the children are well supported to develop letter formation, to write words and to express their ideas in simple sentences. In KS1 the children display increased accuracy, fluency and clarity in their writing. They are becoming more independent and have excellent opportunities to extend their writing through a wide range of genres and across the curriculum. In KS2, the children write proficiently across the curriculum and evaluate their work regularly. They write for a variety of audiences and produce extended pieces of writing

in which they express their opinions and ideas clearly; most of the work is presented neatly. Information and communication technology is used effectively throughout the school to support the promotion of literacy; in particular the development of research skills using the internet and the creative use of word processing to enhance the presentation of written work. The standards achieved in writing by most children are very good.

The co-ordinator provides thoughtful leadership to the development of literacy throughout the school. The teaching of reading has undergone a review; guided reading and the introduction of a phonological awareness programme are the current priorities. The co-ordinator places a strong emphasis on improving the children's standards in reading and writing, and monitors and evaluates their work regularly.

2.3 MATHEMATICS AND NUMERACY

The quality of provision for mathematics and numeracy is very good.

The teachers plan for the full ability range within their composite classes and match the work appropriately to the children's varying needs. The children develop their understanding of number, shape and space, measures and data-handling in useful contexts. A strong feature of the work in mathematics is the cross-curricular approaches used by the teachers. The school is reviewing systematically the schemes of work and the FS stage has been completed.

In lessons, there is a suitable emphasis placed on development of mathematical language; the teachers use effective questioning strategies in order to test the children's understanding and thinking around key mathematical concepts. The children can explain their strategies and show flexibility in their calculations. In the FS and KS1, there is a good focus placed on practical mathematics and the use of concrete materials to consolidate learning. During play sessions, the children have good opportunities to develop basic number work. In KS2, topics are well chosen and include problem solving activities linked to the application of mathematics to real life situations. When handling data the children can analyse the results and explain and interpret the findings from the graphs. Information and communication technology including the use of programmable devices, is used well to support learning and teaching across the school.

The current priorities for mathematics are appropriate. An action plan has been drawn up to take forward mathematical processes and mental mathematics. In addition, the teachers are placing a renewed emphasis on investigations throughout the school. Most of the children make good progress in mathematics in relation to their abilities.

3. THE QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING

3.1 PLANNING

The teachers prepare their work diligently and are guided by the principles of the revised curriculum; long, medium and short-term planning is comprehensive, and useful, topic webs support connected learning across the curriculum. Planning for the composite classes identifies appropriately the learning intentions, ensures progression and is matched appropriately to the children's varying abilities. The children's learning is evaluated effectively in order to adjust teaching strategies and inform future planning.

3.2 TEACHING

The quality of the teaching observed was either good or very good; the majority being very good. The teachers have appropriately high expectations and match the work to challenge and support the children. The children engage meaningfully in lessons and acquire systematically the skills of literacy and numeracy; a wide range of teaching approaches is employed, including whole-class teaching and opportunities for group and paired work during practical activities. Cross-curricular topics enrich the experiences of the children. The teachers share the learning intentions with the children and plenary sessions are used well to summarise and consolidate learning. The classroom assistants make a significant contribution to the learning and teaching throughout the school. Information and communication technology is used creatively in all classes, with teachers making good use of computer programs, programmable devices and websites to support learning and teaching across the curriculum. All of the classrooms are equipped with interactive whiteboards and the teachers and children use them confidently and proficiently.

3.3 ASSESSMENT

The school makes extensive and effective use of performance data, including standardised tests and DE benchmarking information, to inform its practice. The teachers, in close consultation with the children, set monthly targets for literacy and numeracy. The children engage in peer and self-assessment tasks on a regular basis; the teachers act on this feedback and on their own evaluation of the learning in order to inform their planning and teaching. Additionally, the teachers evaluate samples of the children's written work to complement the analysis of data. The teachers mark the children's work systematically and annotate the work well with encouraging comments. Oral feedback is given to the children on how their work can be improved further.

4. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

4.1 LEADERSHIP

The quality of leadership and management in the school is outstanding.

The hard-working, dedicated Principal has been in post for just over ten years. She has a clear vision for the school which she has shared with the staff, parents, children, governors and the wider community. The Principal provides excellent strategic leadership and has developed a range of helpful policies to inform and guide the work of the school. She sets a positive tone through her holistic approach to learning and teaching and has embedded a culture of inclusivity and openness to building partnerships in and with the local community.

4.2 PLANNING FOR IMPROVEMENT

The school development plan (SDP) and associated action plans contain suitable priorities; they are based on sound professional judgements and thorough consultation with parents and governors alike. There is a clear focus on continuous improvement, target-setting and on raising attainment for the children in literacy and numeracy. The school's policies are reviewed and evaluated regularly; and good account is taken of pupil performance data. 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 is involved fully in the school's strategic planning and policy development and supports the Principal and the staff in the implementation of the SDP. The governors has managed efficiently the financial needs of the school to sustain staffing levels and to meet the identified priorities in the SDP.

4.4 ACCOMMODATION

The school building is very well maintained. The children and staff 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 courteous and well-behaved children who demonstrate very positive attitudes to their learning and display high levels of respect for the staff and for one another;
- the broad and balanced curriculum provided by the school, including the wide range of extra-curricular activities available to the children;
- the quality of the teaching observed, the majority of which was very good;
- the very good standards achieved by most of the children in literacy and numeracy; and
- the excellent leadership of the Principal, and the purposeful engagement of the staff with the parents and the local community.

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

It will be important that the employing authority, school governors and the staff plan for, and manage, issues related to the sustainability of the school provision and school budget, in order to address the current and future needs of the children and the staff.

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