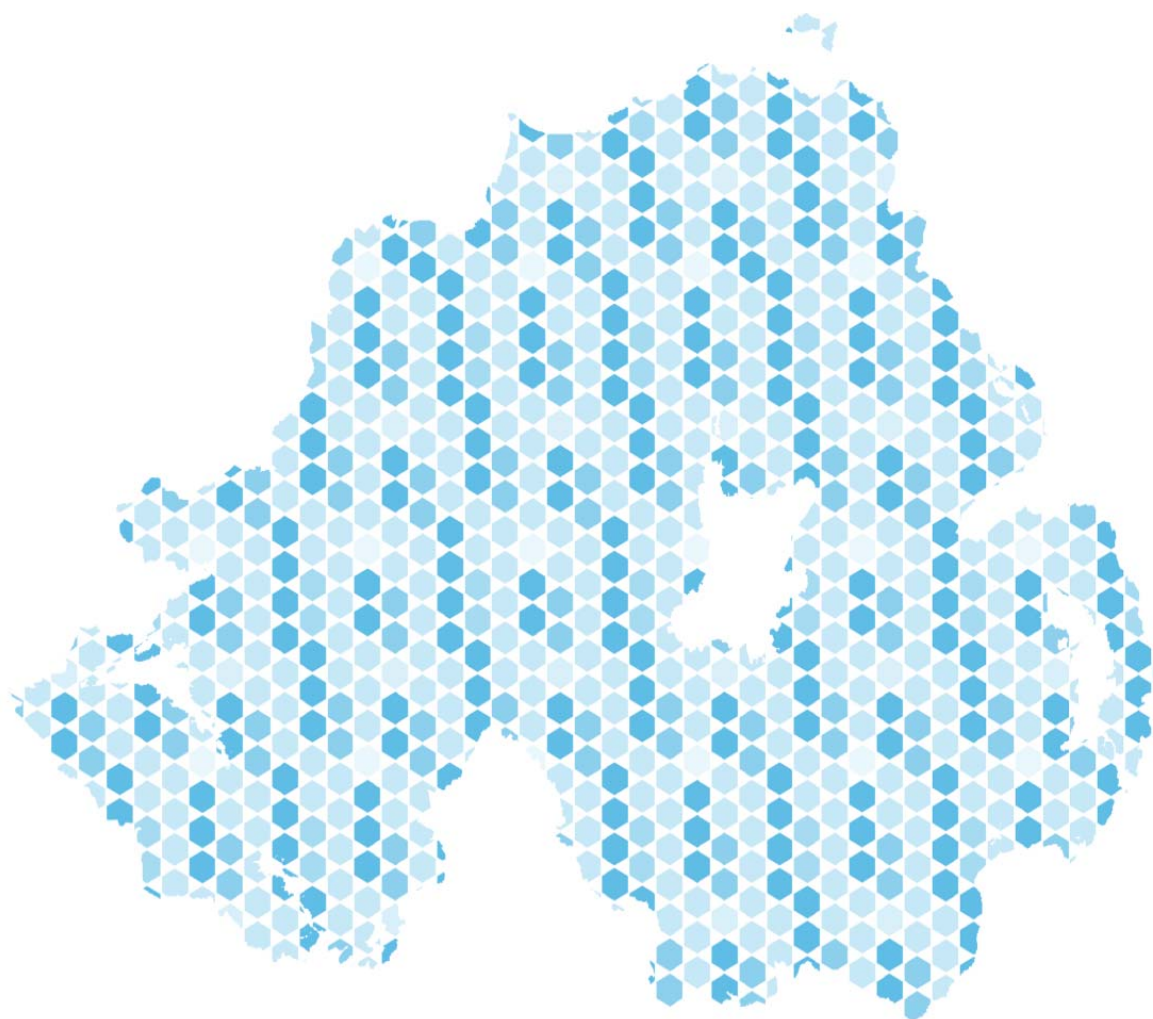


PRIMARY INSPECTION



Education and Training
Inspectorate

St Patrick's Primary School,
Hilltown, Newry

Report of an Inspection
in January 2011

CONTENTS

Section		Page
	STATISTICAL INFORMATION	
1.	INTRODUCTION	1
2.	ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS	2
3.	THE QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING	4
4.	LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT	6
5.	CONCLUSION	7

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 Patrick's Primary School, Hilltown, Newry** iii. **Date of Inspection: 10/01/2011**
 ii. **School Reference Number: 503-3025** iv. **Nature of Inspection: Focused**

B.

School Year	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
Year 1 Intake	35	40	32	40	57
Enrolments					
Primary	266	277	271	268	289
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): 95.1% **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): 12 0 0 0
 (Full-time equivalent = 25 teaching hours)

- ii. PTR (Pupil/Teacher Ratio): 24 NI PTR: 20.7

- iii. Average Class Size: 28.9

- iv. Class Size (Range): 31 to 28

- v. Ancillary Support:
 Number of Hours **Per Week:**
- i. Clerical support: 41
 - ii. Foundation Stage Classroom Assistant Support: 50
 - iii. Additional hours of other classroom assistant support: 120

- vi. Percentage of children with statements of special educational needs: 3.1%

- vii. Total percentage of children on the Special Needs Register: 14.87

- viii. Number of families in school 194

- ix. Percentage of children entitled to free school meals: 24%

- 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** 64.71% **Mathematics** 58.82%

- xi. Number of children who are not of statutory school age: 0

- xi. If there is a composite class with reception children in it, please indicate the numbers of children in the other year groups: **Year 1** 0 **Year 2** 0 **Year 3** 0

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 SCHOOL CONTEXT

St Patrick's Primary School is situated in the townland of Ballymaghera, about half a mile outside Hilltown, Co Down. The enrolment has fluctuated slightly over the past five years and currently stands at 289. Almost all of the children come from the village of Hilltown and the surrounding rural area. At the time of the inspection 24% of the children were entitled to free school meals and 15% of the children were identified as requiring help with aspects of their learning. There are two children who have English as an additional language.

The school has experienced a number of staffing difficulties over the past two years. This has impacted on the school's development, particularly at middle and senior management level.

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 teachers 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 groups of children from years 6 and 7.

Of the 134 questionnaires issued to parents 40 (30%) were returned to Inspection Services Branch, including 12 which contained an additional written comment. Almost all of the responses from the questionnaires indicated a high level of satisfaction with the provision in the school. In particular, the parents valued the happy, caring environment and the regular information about their children's progress. The very small number of concerns raised has been discussed with the governors and the Principal.

Almost all of the teachers and support staff completed the questionnaire. Their responses were wholly supportive of the Principal and of the work of the school.

The governors expressed appreciation of the hard-working staff, the teachers' commitment to the care and well-being of the children and the wide range of extra-curricular activities provided to extend the children's experiences.

In discussions held with the year 6 children, they spoke enthusiastically about the many aspects of school that they enjoy. They also indicated that they are aware of what to do if they have concerns about their safety or well-being.

1.4 PASTORAL CARE

The quality of the arrangements for pastoral care is very good. Among the strengths are the inclusive and supportive ethos throughout the school, the commitment of the staff to the children's care and well-being and the children's participation in a wide range of extra-curricular activities which support their social development and enrich their learning experiences. In addition, the children have the opportunity to contribute to decision-making for the school through the recently established school council.

1.5 CHILD PROTECTION

The school has 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 very good attention to promoting healthy eating and physical activity. This is evidenced through the quality and regularity of communications with parents regarding healthy eating and the 'Good Food Week', which encourage the children to adopt healthy lifestyles.

1.7 LINKS WITH PARENTS AND THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

Communication with the parents is maintained through regular newsletters, curriculum and progress meetings and the school website. There are effective strategies in place to encourage and enable the parents to support their children in their learning. The children benefit from participation in science projects with a local specialist post-primary school and the school makes effective use of local facilities, to enhance the children's learning. The school choir has had noteworthy success and recognition in both the local and wider community. The school is well supported by the parent teacher association.

2. ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS

2.1 LEARNING

The children are friendly and welcoming. The majority of them settle quickly in class; they work co-operatively with their peers and teachers and they are keen to learn.

At the foundation stage, the children learn through a range of play-based and formal activities. However, there is inconsistency in the quality of planning, adult interaction, expectations and teaching strategies. There is a need for more effective collaboration and sharing of good practice between the teachers.

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 below the Northern Ireland average and below the average attained by schools in a similar free school meals category.

The school is conscious of the need to improve the children's levels of attainment in literacy and numeracy and has implemented a number of additional programmes to support the more able children and those who are experiencing difficulty with aspects of their learning. The school's records and observation of the children working indicate that these

programmes are beneficial in raising the children's confidence and in affecting appropriate improvement in their learning. The school needs to consider how the strategies used in these support programmes can be used in class to support all children in their learning.

2.2 ENGLISH AND LITERACY

The overall quality of the provision for English and literacy is satisfactory.

At the time of the inspection, an acting literacy co-ordinator had been in post for approximately ten months. During that time she conducted an audit, initiated the review of the literacy policy, monitored the revised planning format and supported staff in levelling samples of the children's written work.

Whilst the action plan for literacy identifies a range of areas for development, there is a need for it to focus on priorities which will lead to an improvement in the standards achieved by the children.

A majority of the children demonstrate good oral communication skills. In the most effective practice the teachers encourage the children to provide extended responses; they support them skilfully in structuring their ideas and in extending their range of vocabulary. In the less effective practice, there are limited opportunities for the children to express their opinions and to engage in meaningful discussion with their peers. In almost all of the classes there is a need for the teachers to promote the development of the children's listening skills.

A majority of the children achieve satisfactory or better standards in reading. They acquire basic reading skills through a structured phonics programme and exposure to modelled, shared and guided reading across a range of texts. The school has, appropriately, identified the development of the children's understanding of non-fiction text as an area for whole-school improvement.

During the inspection, groups of children from years 4 and 7 read with fluency, expression and understanding. The children were enthusiastic about reading and were able to discuss their preferences in relation to genres, authors and characters.

The overall standard of writing in the school is satisfactory. The children have the opportunity to write in a range of contexts across the curriculum. However, there is a need to ensure continuity and consistent progression in the children's learning experiences.

The quality and presentation of the children's written work varies considerably across the school.

2.3 MATHEMATICS AND NUMERACY

The overall quality of provision in mathematics and numeracy is satisfactory.

The co-ordinator has been in post for six years. He has led the staff in the review of the numeracy policy and programme and has begun to monitor their implementation through lesson observation and consideration of the children's written work. He has recently begun to use the outcomes from standardised testing to identify areas of the numeracy curriculum which the children find challenging.

The school's numeracy programme provides general guidance on topics to be covered in each half term. There is a need for it to be reviewed and developed further in order to ensure consistent progression in the development of key mathematical concepts, skills and language.

The numeracy action plan outlines a range of tasks to be completed by the teachers and co-ordinator. There is a need for the plan to focus more specifically on priorities which will lead to an improvement in the standards achieved by the children.

In the most effective lessons, the teachers set the learning within practical and meaningful contexts for the children; they use effective questioning to extend the children's understanding, provide opportunities for the children to work collaboratively in pairs and small groups and encourage them to justify their chosen strategies using appropriate mathematical language. In the less effective lessons, the learning activities lack challenge and there is insufficient differentiation to meet the needs of all of the children.

Most of the lessons observed incorporated a mental mathematics activity. In the most effective practice, the activities were appropriately challenging, well paced and provided the children with opportunities to make connections across the mathematics curriculum. In the less effective sessions, the activities lacked structure and they were too long.

In discussions with the children a small number of the more able children demonstrated flexibility in their thinking and applied a range of strategies in completing mental calculations. However, the majority of the children lacked confidence in their ability, were overly dependent on the use of basic mathematical resources and demonstrated a reliance on pencil and paper methods of calculation.

By the end of KS2 a majority of the children achieve satisfactory standards in mathematics

During the inspection, the interactive whiteboards were used effectively to introduce new concepts in mathematics, to promote the development of the children's mental agility, to support their understanding of phonics and to carry out online research. Records and displays of the children's work contain a range of examples of how they use a variety of software programmes to develop and present their learning. Digital cameras are used effectively to record the learning activities in all key stages. In a small number of the lessons observed, the use of ICT impeded the focus on learning.

3. THE QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING

3.1 PLANNING

The teachers have translated the long-term planning in English and mathematics into generic half-term plans which outline the planned learning outcomes, the teaching and learning activities and the assessment strategies to be used in each year group. There is a need for the plans to identify clearly how the teachers plan to meet the range of ability within the class and for them to be used more flexibly to accommodate the composite class arrangements. Most of the teachers complete extensive evaluations of the written planning. In the best practice, these evaluations are well focused and used effectively to inform the future planning.

3.2 TEACHING

During the inspection, the quality of the teaching observed ranged from very good to inadequate. In most of the lessons it was good or better. However, in almost 20% of the lessons there was a need for improvement in the quality of teaching.

Most of the teachers are dedicated, hard-working and reflective in their work. In the best practice observed, the teachers made the intended learning explicit for the children, all of the available time was used effectively to achieve the planned learning outcomes and the

plenary session was used skilfully to encourage the children to reflect on the quality of their learning. In the less effective lessons the teachers had low expectations of what the children could achieve; the learning activities did not meet the range of ability within the class, and there was insufficient challenge, particularly for those children in the middle ability range. These lessons lacked pace; they were over-directed by the teacher and there were missed opportunities to develop and consolidate the children's understanding of key concepts and language.

There is a need for an overall improvement in the quality of teaching in order to meet more effectively the needs of all of the children and to raise the standards they attain in literacy and numeracy.

3.3 ASSESSMENT

In the best practice, the teachers mark the children's written work frequently and regularly and they provide constructive feedback to the children, orally or in writing, on how their learning can be improved. There is a need for this good practice to be shared, developed and implemented more consistently throughout the school.

The school's assessment co-ordinators, together with the special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO) and class teachers, employ a wide range of standardised testing to obtain, and communicate information about individual children's progress, to identify the more able children and those who require additional learning support. They have appropriately highlighted the need to use this information more strategically to identify areas for whole-school development, to track individual progress and to identify those children of average ability who are underachieving.

The parents are kept well informed about their children's learning through formal and informal parent-teacher consultations and an annual written report.

3.4 SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

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

The SENCO manages effectively the provision and liaises well with class teachers, learning support staff and outside agencies. The class teachers take responsibility for the implementation of individual education plans (IEPs) and record evidence of the children's progress in meeting their targets. In the best practice, the IEPs outline concise and well focused targets to address specific needs with appropriate strategies to guide the work of the teachers and support staff. It is appropriate that the action plan for SEN identifies the need to implement more consistently the best practice in target-setting.

The children who require additional support with aspects of their learning are identified early and additional support in literacy and numeracy is provided through withdrawal sessions with the learning support teacher. In KS2, the highest attaining children are identified for more challenging support. A particular strength of the provision is the flexibility in the deployment of the learning support teacher to meet the needs of the children.

In the withdrawal sessions observed, the children were motivated by and engaged in a range of challenging activities. The sessions were well planned with a clear focus on the learning. The children who require additional support work well alongside their peers in class. However, there is variation in the extent to which the class teachers take account of the children's needs and abilities.

The school's records indicate that the children who require additional support make good progress and that the withdrawal sessions are effective in raising the children's levels of attainment, confidence and self-esteem.

4. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The overall quality of leadership and management is satisfactory.

At the time of the inspection, the Vice-principal had just been appointed to the permanent position of Principal. She is committed to meeting the needs of all the children in the school and to raising their overall levels of attainment.

The leadership and management in the school currently lacks cohesion. The Principal and governors have identified the need to review the management structures and responsibilities in order to ensure a more strategic approach to curriculum and staff development. They further recognise the need to increase the membership of the management team in order to ensure that decision-making and planning for the school's development reflects the needs of the school as a whole. The Education and Training Inspectorate (Inspectorate) endorses these as key priorities for development. It will also be important for the Principal, management team and co-ordinators to undertake appropriate management training in order to raise the quality of leadership at all levels, to ensure the strategic monitoring and evaluation of all aspects of learning and teaching and to bring about the necessary improvements in the standards achieved by the children.

4.1 PLANNING FOR IMPROVEMENT

The school is at an early stage in the process of self-evaluation to promote improvement. There is a need for self-evaluation to focus more specifically on the quality of learning and teaching within the school and for the outcomes to be used more strategically to identify key priorities for development and to inform the school development plan and associated action plans.

4.2 ACCOMMODATION

The accommodation within the main school building and temporary classrooms is generally used to good effect. However, in light of the inspection findings, it will be important for the Principal and governors to review the arrangements, particularly in relation to the use of the second temporary classroom.

The standards of caretaking and cleaning are excellent.

4.3 RESOURCES, FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE

The school is adequately resourced to support learning and teaching. The resources are well maintained, easily accessible and fit for purpose.

The governors are very supportive of the work of the school. They have a general awareness of the challenges which the school faces in relation to standards, staffing and finance. In considering how to address these issues it will be important for them to review the arrangements for the deployment of staff and the organisation of class groupings. They have agreed a plan with the Southern Education and Library Board to address the current financial deficit over the next three year period.

5. CONCLUSION

The strengths of the school include:

- the friendly, co-operative children who have a positive attitude towards learning;
- the very good arrangements for pastoral care;
- the effective strategies to help parents support their children's learning;
- the effective withdrawal provision for the children with additional needs and the good progress they make; and
- the hard-working Principal, teachers and support staff.

The areas for improvement include the need to:

- improve the overall quality of teaching in order to raise the children's levels of attainment in literacy and numeracy; and
- develop and improve the quality of leadership at all levels.

In most of 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 teaching, leadership and management which need to be addressed if the needs of all the learners are to be met more effectively. The Inspectorate will monitor and report on the school's progress in addressing the areas for improvement.

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