

PRIMARY INSPECTION



Education and Training
Inspectorate

St Peter's Primary School,
and Nursery Unit, Cookstown

Report of an Inspection
in May 2011



CONTENTS

Section		Page
	STATISTICAL INFORMATION	
1.	INTRODUCTION	1
2.	ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS	2
3.	THE QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING	5
4.	LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT	6
5.	CONCLUSION	7
6.	THE NURSERY UNIT	8
	STATISTICAL INFORMATION (NURSERY UNIT)	
	APPENDIX	

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 SCHOOL CONTEXT

St Peter's Primary School, Moortown, is situated in the parish of Ardboe, about ten miles east of Cookstown on the shore of Lough Neagh. The children come from the local and surrounding areas. The enrolment has remained stable in recent years and stands currently at 167. Approximately 34% of the children are entitled to free school meals (FSM). The school has identified almost 15% of the children as requiring additional support with aspects of their learning, including a few with a statement of special educational needs.

A nursery unit was opened in 2000 and provides a daily full-time session catering for 26 children.

At the time of the inspection, around one-half of the permanent members of the teaching staff were absent; they were replaced by four substitute teachers.

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 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 children from year 6.

One hundred and sixty questionnaires were issued to parents. Approximately 42% of the parental questionnaires were returned to the Inspection Services Branch: 17 contained additional written comments.

The parents expressed a high level of satisfaction with the educational and pastoral arrangements provided by the school. In particular, they acknowledged the caring and helpful teachers, the wide-range of extra-curricular activities and the high standards of cleanliness.

Seven teachers and eight support staff completed the confidential online questionnaire. Almost all of the responses were positive about most aspects of the work of the school.

In the nursery unit, almost 50% of the parents responded to the questionnaires and three included additional written comments. The responses indicated that the parents regarded the unit highly; they valued the work of the committed staff in developing the children's confidence and social skills.

The governors expressed their strong support for the Principal and staff. They mentioned the high esteem with which the school is held in the community, the very good attention afforded to the children with learning difficulties and their role in quality assuring the school's policies and practices.

The year 6 children value the care and support of their teachers and they are aware of the school rules. In discussions, they talked openly about their experiences in the school, the subjects they enjoy and the wide range of activities that they can take part in after school. They indicated that they felt safe and happy in school. They know where to seek help in the event of any concern.

The Education and Training Inspectorate (Inspectorate) has reported to the Principal and the Chairperson of the governors the very few issues emerging from the questionnaires.

1.4 PASTORAL CARE

The quality of the arrangements for pastoral care is very good. The school is characterised by the friendly and well-mannered children and their excellent behaviour; the very good working relationships between the adults and the children, and between and among the children when working together. The teachers praise and encourage the children regularly for their endeavours. The children's learning and social development are enhanced through trips to places of educational interest, visits to the school by individuals and organisations, and the wide-ranging after-school programme. The older children are given positions of responsibility, for example, they carry out duties in the canteen at lunch time. The children's self-esteem and confidence are developed through the celebration of their work and achievements during the weekly assemblies.

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 LINKS WITH PARENTS AND THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

The school and nursery unit have procedures in place to keep parents informed, including annual written reports, the school website, a plasma screen on entering the school, formal parent-teacher meetings and through text messaging. The school is very active in the community and has an open door policy for less formal meetings. There are links with two nearby primary schools as part of the Extended Schools Programme and with the local secondary schools. In particular, a strong partnership has been established with a local post-primary school which provides ICT and sporting activities for the children.

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 was consistently below the average for Northern Ireland. Compared with similar schools in the same FSM category, the children's levels of attainment in English and mathematics were also below average. There is, however, evidence of an improving trend in the last two years.

According to the school's internal data and standardised scores, most of the children are attaining in line with their ability in English, and a majority are attaining in line with their ability in mathematics. The school has prioritised raising standards in English and numeracy within the school development plan (SDP).

At the foundation stage (FS), the children learn through a range of play-based and more formal activities. Given that nearly all of the children in year one have attended the school's nursery unit, much greater consideration needs to be given to building on the children's experiences, standards and levels of achievement prior to entering the FS. The teachers need to develop further the play-based learning provision and review the use of all available space in order to promote the children's independence, skills and learning, especially in literacy and numeracy. The school has identified appropriately the need to develop the outdoor areas used by the nursery unit and the FS children respectively.

Throughout the school the children settle quickly into their work and demonstrate high levels of motivation and engagement in their learning. They respond particularly well when the learning activities are matched closely to their varying abilities. The children benefit from practical activities, and in the best practice, they develop important concepts in pairs and groups within their classes.

The school makes good use of support from the Speech and Language, Sensory and Advice support service, and the Language and Communication team of the Southern Education and Library Board Curriculum Advisory and Support Service. The children respond well in lessons where the resources and teaching are differentiated to provide for their individual needs and abilities. Appropriate targets are outlined in the children's individual education plans (IEPs).

The children in years 4 and 7 are entered for the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment Information Technology Accreditation Scheme and they achieve good levels of attainment. In addition, the older children are gaining from useful, collaborative work with a partner post-primary school using a virtual learning environment. The children produced attractive and inter-active pieces of work, including podcasts, animations and digital videos.

2.2 ENGLISH AND LITERACY

The quality of provision for English and literacy is good.

The literacy co-ordinator has conducted an audit and there is an appropriate action plan in place; the Principal is over-seeing currently the implementation of this action plan in the co-ordinator's absence.

Across the school the teachers provide the children with a wide range of opportunities to talk about their learning and to share their views through whole class discussions. In the best practice, the teachers plan for opportunities to develop the children's oral skills and use a range of strategies to promote extended responses from them; on a minority of occasions, opportunities were missed for supporting the development of the children's language. By year 7, most of the children demonstrate very good listening skills when taking part in whole class and paired or group tasks.

A range of reading materials and strategies is used to develop the children's reading skills and, throughout the school, the children enjoy listening to stories. The school library was refurbished recently and all classes use this facility regularly. There is a structured programme in place for the teaching of reading supported by a whole-school phonics programme. The teachers are beginning to make good use of a reading record to monitor

the children's progress. In the nursery unit class, the children experience a book-rich environment. Across the school, guided and shared reading are provided and the children have access to a wide range of texts linked well to their class topics. By year 7, most of the children have made satisfactory progress in their ability to read.

All of the teachers make good use of the children's interests, the local environment, educational visits and visitors to the school to stimulate the children's writing. In the nursery unit the children experiment with letter and word formation through play-based activities. In the FS, the teachers support the children in the development of letter formation, to write words and to express ideas in simple sentences. Throughout KS2, most children continue to make good progress in their writing and they have ample opportunities for writing across the curriculum. By the end of KS2, most of the children are capable of expressing their opinions and ideas in more extended pieces of writing, for example, the year 7 children, supported by their parents, produced informative booklets about aspects of interest in their local area.

The children's written work is well presented and shows increasing accuracy. In the best practice, the teachers have appropriately high expectations of what the children are capable of achieving; they have also made a good start in marking for improvement and providing opportunities for the children to assess their own work in order to improve the quality of their writing. The children have opportunities to use ICT to refine the presentation of their work and for research purposes.

It will be important for the staff to plan more consistently to take account of the children's identified needs and varying levels of ability. They need to provide more appropriately challenging activities in writing, and to ensure that there is greater pace and challenge for the better readers and increased opportunities for the children to read a wider range of group novels and other books.

2.3 MATHEMATICS AND NUMERACY

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

The action plan for numeracy was revised recently; it sets out a number of suitable priorities to be developed, with a clear focus on raising standards, mental mathematics and differentiation. The recently appointed numeracy co-ordinator monitors the provision for mathematics through sampling the children's work and analysing their performance data. The teachers have created a numeracy rich environment throughout the school. They have revised their short-term planning and are developing currently the long-term planning for numeracy. Overall, the planning for numeracy is inconsistent and lessons are often not planned to build sufficiently on prior learning. The teachers need to be more rigorous in their use of the wide range of data collated to target and support children who are identified as underachieving.

In KS1 and 2 the children demonstrate an appropriate understanding of number, measure, shape and handling data. They engage well in pairs and small groups in problem solving activities and investigative work. There are regular and effective sessions of mental mathematics in all of the classes. In the best practice observed, the teachers used good questioning to motivate and challenge the children and encouraged them to reflect on and explain their learning using suitable mathematical language. In the less effective practice, the activities lacked sufficient challenge, in particular, for the more able children, and the teachers missed opportunities to engage the children fully in quality mathematical thinking.

Throughout the school, ICT is used effectively 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; as a result, the teachers are gaining a deeper understanding of the children's progress across the year groups. By the end of KS2, a majority of the children enjoy their learning in mathematics and numeracy and make good progress in line with their ability.

3. THE QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING

3.1 PLANNING

The school has developed a wide range of important policies and plans to guide its work. The teachers have revised their short-term planning for numeracy and now require a clearer overview setting out progression and continuity in mathematics. Although the planning for English and literacy identifies the learning outcomes for the children in each class, the teachers need to tailor their existing planning formats to place greater emphasis on the differentiated experiences to be provided for the children and the teacher's evaluations of whether the learning has been achieved for individual children and groups of children.

3.2 TEACHING

During the inspection, most of the teaching was good or better; the remainder of the lessons were always satisfactory.

In the best practice observed, there was an appropriate focus on meeting the learning outcomes and the children achieved standards in line with their abilities. The lessons were well-structured; the activities were pitched at a level to challenge all of the children in their learning and the lessons were conducted at a brisk pace. The children worked purposefully on tasks in groups and pairs. The teachers set out clearly the learning intentions at the beginning of lessons and summarised the progress made in plenary sessions. The teachers developed the children's oracy and thinking skills through effective questioning. Information and communication technology was used well to support the learning.

In the less effective practice, in one-fifth of the lessons observed, the work was overly directed by the teacher with few opportunities for the children to develop independence. In addition, the work was not well matched to the children's levels of ability and lacked sufficient challenge to promote learning and raise standards.

3.3 ASSESSMENT

The school makes good use of assessment data; the children's progression and attainment are monitored regularly using an appropriate range of assessment tools. The range of assessment strategies needs to be evaluated in a more strategic manner to become more effective. The teachers mark the children work regularly, and in the best practice, provide useful written comments. The good start made in developing assessment for learning strategies needs to continue with a specific focus on marking for improvement, including providing the more able pupils with suitable challenge.

3.4 SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

The quality of the provision for children with special educational needs (SEN) is good. The special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO) has worked with staff to revise the format of the IEPs in order to ensure that the targets are more focused and include clear success criteria. In the best practice, evidence of the children's work towards meeting their targets is retained to support and inform the regular review of the IEPs and to identify further areas for

development. The teachers and classroom assistants provide good in-class support for the children. They respond well in lessons, in particular, when the resources and teaching are differentiated to provide for their individual needs and abilities. There is very effective withdrawal support provided by the classroom assistants; in addition, the external support provided for speech and language by the support teacher and therapists is linked well to the ongoing class work. The majority of children receiving additional support make good progress and can participate in whole-class activities, work increasingly on their own or in small groups and know when and how to seek help when required. The SENCO needs to assess the quality of the interventions that are put in place and to ensure that the work set in lessons is more closely matched to meet the needs of all of the children; this is an area for improvement.

4. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The overall quality of leadership and management is good.

4.1 The Principal has been in post since 2002; he provides effective leadership and has guided important curricular developments during the recent periods of absence of key members of staff. He works closely with the senior leadership team (SLT) and the governors. The Principal has a strategic vision for developing curricular leadership within the school and for raising teacher expectations. He provides the co-ordinators with sufficient time and resources to develop their areas of responsibility. The Principal monitors systematically the school's policies and practices with a view to raising the children's standards of achievement. The children's work and the teachers' planning are evaluated regularly. The school has begun to develop a culture of self-evaluation, for example, through a recent audit of the school's provision. The SLT meets regularly and provides sound guidance and direction to the teaching staff in implementing the priorities identified in the SDP. The SLT now need to focus more sharply on the children's learning and outcomes as an integral part of their continuing focus on raising standards.

4.2 PLANNING FOR IMPROVEMENT

The school gives good attention to, and meets the requirements of the School Development Plans Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2005, and has produced a wide range of associated action plans. Whilst the plans focus on suitable priorities, the SLT should prioritise the action plans more strategically in order to adopt a more cohesive approach to school improvement. The SLT needs to reduce the number of action plans and prioritise them more strategically on school improvement.

4.3 ACCOMMODATION

The school accommodation consists of a main building which comprises six permanent and two temporary classrooms, an assembly hall, a library, a small teaching space for SEN and a staff room. The standard of caretaking and cleaning is excellent. A strong feature of the school is its very attractive and inclusive learning environment.

4.4 RESOURCES, FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT and GOVERNANCE

The governors are highly committed and they provide valuable support and expertise to the Principal. They are involved fully in the strategic policy development of the school. The overall management of the school's resources is good.

5. CONCLUSION

5.1 The strengths of the school include:

- the quality of the teaching which was good or better in most of the lessons;
- the very good quality pastoral care provision and the exemplary behaviour of the children;
- the outstanding provision in the nursery unit;
- the broad curricular provision and the extensive use made by the teachers of the local environment to promote learning;
- the very good use made of ICT to support literacy and numeracy; and
- the effective leadership of the Principal, in particular, during a period of long-term absence of many staff.

5.2 The areas for improvement include the need:

- for the teachers to evaluate more effectively the learning in order to ensure that the work is matched appropriately to the children's needs and abilities; and
- for the SLT to develop further their approaches to analysing data with a view to identifying underachievement and targeting support and challenge where required.

5.3 In the areas inspected, the quality of education provided by this school is good. The school has important strengths in most of its educational provision and very good pastoral provision. The inspection has identified areas for improvement which the school has demonstrated the capacity to address. The Inspectorate will monitor the school's progress in the areas for improvement.

6. THE NURSERY UNIT

6.1 A temporary teacher has been employed in the nursery unit since 2007; the school reports that the permanent teacher will be resuming her position at the start of the new academic year. At the time of the inspection, the nursery unit classroom assistant was also temporary.

6.2 The key strengths in this nursery unit include:

- the welcoming learning environment which promotes the children's development as independent and creative learners;
- the happy, settled and well-behaved children who engage confidently with their learning;
- the breadth, balance and progression in all areas of the pre-school curriculum;
- the comprehensive arrangements in place for monitoring and recording the children's progress and development;
- the close attention paid to meeting the needs of individual children, including those with additional needs; and
- the very good quality of the staff's interaction and involvement which sustains the children's play and learning.

6.3 In the areas inspected, the quality of education provided by this nursery unit is outstanding. The nursery unit is meeting very effectively the educational and pastoral needs of the children; and has demonstrated its capacity for sustained self-improvement.

ACCOMMODATION

- There are instances of dampness in two classrooms and the nursery unit.
- Ventilation is a problem in several classrooms
- The security and alarm systems require upgrading

STATISTICAL INFORMATION ON NURSERY UNIT

1. Details of Children

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

* 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.	
Average attendance for the previous year.	

2. *Duration of Sessions*

Full-time	Part-time: am	Part-time: pm

3. Details of Staff

Number of:	Full-Time	Part-Time
Teachers		
Nursery Assistants		
Qualified Nursery Assistants		

Number of: ****	
Students	
Trainees	

**** Total placements since September of current year

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

Number issued	
Percentage returned	%
Number of written comments	

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