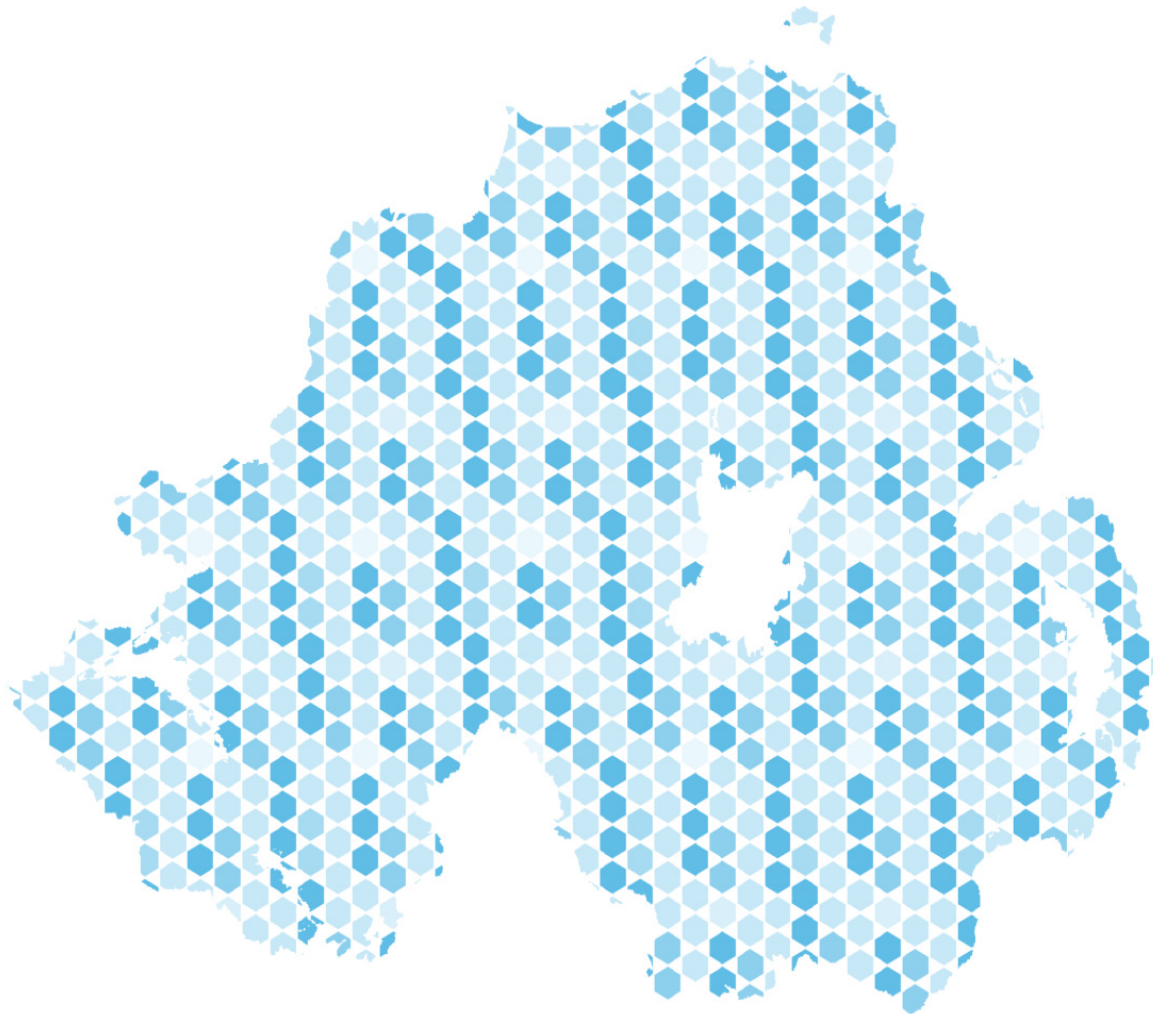


PRIMARY INSPECTION



Education and Training
Inspectorate

The Holy Family Primary
School, Teconnaught,
Downpatrick

Report of an Inspection
in November 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

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 SCHOOL CONTEXT

The Holy Family Primary School is situated on a pleasant rural site in the townland of Teconnaught, approximately three miles from the village of Crossgar. The children come from within an eight-mile radius of the school. The enrolment of the school has remained steady over the past three years and currently stands at 187. Approximately 6% of the children are entitled to free school meals (FSM). 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; 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 groups of children from years 6 and 7.

One hundred and thirty-four questionnaires were issued to parents. Approximately 37% of the parental questionnaires were returned to the Inspection Services Branch: 29 contained additional written comments. The responses from the parental questionnaires were highly affirmative, indicating very strong support for the life and work of the school. In particular, the parents acknowledged the caring and supportive ethos in the school; the welcoming and approachable Principal and staff; and the high standards of learning and teaching.

Seven teachers and nine support staff completed the confidential online questionnaire with two including additional written comments. Almost all of the responses were positive about all aspects of the work of the school.

The governors expressed their very strong support for the Principal and staff. In particular, they highlighted the strong pro-active management team and the quality of communication between the Principal and governors.

The year 6 children talked openly, positively and with great enthusiasm about their experiences in the school. They value the help and support of their teachers and enjoy the wide range of after-school activities. The children indicated that they know what to do and who to turn to if they have any concerns regarding their work or their safety and well-being.

The Education and Training 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 in the school is outstanding. The school has a caring and friendly atmosphere and there are excellent working relationships at all levels characterised by mutual respect. All of the staff are committed to the care and welfare of the children; they work together to promote and maintain a supportive and very inclusive environment for learning for all the children.

Among the strengths are the exemplary behaviour of all the children; the positive reward systems which value both academic and personal achievements; the School Council wherein the children's views and opinions are sought and valued; and the year 6 and 7 'Buddy System' which develops the children's attitudes of sharing and responsibility.

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 (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 promotion of healthy breaks, the Save our Smiles award and the dissemination of regular health information to the parents and children, which encourage the children to adopt healthy lifestyles.

1.7 LINKS WITH PARENTS AND THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

The school maintains very effective links with the parents through regular newsletters and an electronic mailing system. In addition, the school website is used effectively to update parents with homework planners and provide a forum for comments, feedback and queries. Parents are invited to attend curriculum and workshop evenings and parent/teacher meetings; they also receive an annual written report on their child's progress. The communication with parents regarding the children with special needs is excellent, and the parents are kept fully informed about their child's programme and progress.

The views and opinions of parents are actively sought through a range of questionnaires which inform the school development planning process. The very supportive parents' association, 'Friends of Holy Family', has successfully raised money to provide a new outdoor play area as well as class and curricular resources.

The school has developed a range of effective links with the wider community. These include an annual community sports day and the use of school facilities by the local playgroup and girl guides. The school also hosts information evenings for the wider community when some of the emergency services are invited to give talks on health issues, home security and fire prevention. Long-standing links with external agencies effectively broaden the children's' educational experiences and promote health and well-being topics. Effective links with local post-primary schools are also well established.

The school facilitates effectively a wide range of curricular and extra-curricular activities. These include coaching in Gaelic games through a partnership with the local Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA); music tuition in tin-whistle and singing facilitated by a local post-primary; and Irish teaching as part of the South-Eastern Education and Library Board (SEELB) modern languages programme.

2. ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS

2.1 LEARNING

An analysis of the key stage (KS) 2 assessment data indicates that in English, over the past four years, the school's performance has been consistently above the Northern Ireland (NI) average. In the past two years the standards achieved have been significantly higher when compared to schools in the same FSM band. The school's performance in mathematics, at the end of KS2, has been above both the NI average and that of schools in the same FSM band in three of the past four years.

Appropriate and succinct targets are outlined in the individual education plans (IEPs) drawn up for each child who requires support in his/her learning in both literacy and numeracy. These IEPs are of very good quality and outline appropriate strategies to promote improvement. The school's own detailed internal data indicates that the children meet these targets, make excellent progress and achieve standards commensurate with their ability.

All year 7 children in 2010 were awarded Level 4 in the Council for Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) ICT Accreditation; the school is currently extending the range of ICT tasks across all classes to provide the children with a richer programme of activities.

Throughout the school the children demonstrate high levels of motivation and engagement with their learning. The children interact well with one another and co-operate fully in paired and group work. In class discussions, they are responsive and articulate.

2.2 ENGLISH AND LITERACY

The quality of provision for literacy in the school is very good.

The literacy co-ordinator has been in post for six years and the literacy action plan identifies appropriate areas for development which are integral to the school's development plan and which have helped maintain the high standards achieved by the children in English. As part of the school's monitoring processes, the co-ordinator has appropriately identified the need for greater consistency in planning for literacy across the year groups.

The children display very good talking and listening skills. In the foundation stage (FS) the children's oral language is developed through shared reading, songs, rhymes and age-appropriate ICT software. The children in KS1 and KS2 are keen to talk about their work and play an active role in whole-class discussion, paired activities and group work sessions. The teachers use effective questioning to enable the children to make extended oral contributions in a range of different contexts.

The enjoyment of reading is promoted through the provision of attractive new reading materials, well-stocked class libraries, book sales, visits to local libraries and a celebration of World Book Day. In the FS, phonological awareness is developed effectively through a range of strategies and resources. Throughout the school the children experience a variety of approaches to reading including shared, guided and independent reading. By the end of KS1, most of the children display confident word attack skills and read with increasing fluency and expression. The children achieve very good standards in reading and by the end of KS2 most read at a level above their chronological age. The children in year 7 spoke enthusiastically about their reading and the wide range of literature available to them.

The standards achieved by the children in writing are very good. Their written work is celebrated in attractive, stimulating displays in the classrooms and corridors throughout the school. The recent whole-school focus on the forms of writing has resulted in a systematic plan to support the development of writing and ensure progression across the year groups. The teachers encourage the children to use dictionaries and thesauri in order to become increasingly independent writers. There is a strong focus on the children improving the quality of their work by planning, drafting, assessing and editing.

Information and communication technology is integrated fully in the teachers' planning. The children use ICT effectively for research, storyboarding, animation and to improve the presentation of their writing.

Those children with additional needs in literacy receive very good support from the Special Needs teacher and from the classroom assistants trained in the Reading Partnership programme. All the children involved in Reading Partnership made significant progress.

2.3 MATHEMATICS AND NUMERACY

The overall quality of the provision for numeracy is very good.

The mathematics co-ordinator leads effectively the development of the mathematics programme. Under her leadership, the teachers have devised an action plan for mathematics which has a strong focus on the development of greater opportunities for investigative and problem-solving activities, early intervention strategies for individual children and the analysis of data to inform future planning. The co-ordinator makes good use of classroom observations, regular reviews of the teaching plans, the children's work and the analysis of performance data to monitor the children's mathematical learning.

In the best practice observed, the teachers plan for the full range of ability within the class, and promote learning in mathematics which is matched well to the needs of individuals and groups of children. The use of practical materials and opportunities for discussion deepen the children's understanding of key mathematical concepts. Links are made with previous lessons and learning intentions are shared at the start, and revisited during the course of, the lesson. There is a suitable emphasis on the promotion of mathematical language, and the teachers use effective questioning strategies to check the children's understanding and mathematical thinking.

The children have a positive attitude to mathematics; they work well individually, in pairs and in groups and co-operate freely during practical sessions. The mathematics lessons often commence with mental mathematics sessions in which the children respond well to a variety of interesting activities and are given sufficient time to reflect and explain their responses.

The teachers use ICT effectively to support the children in their mathematical learning and provide opportunities for the children to apply their learning in everyday contexts and across the curriculum. The school is well-equipped with interactive whiteboards, programmable devices and computers; these are used effectively to motivate and engage the children.

In the FS, there is a good focus on practical mathematics and the children are developing mathematical language and an understanding of mathematical concepts. In the lessons observed, the children displayed a secure grasp of number. At KS1, the children use mathematical language with increasing fluency and demonstrate a good understanding of number, measure, shape and space and handling data. There is a need to develop further

the children's flexibility in their application of mathematical processes. During the inspection, the older children in KS2 demonstrated their secure knowledge of important mathematical concepts, including, for example, place value, measures and shape and space. By the end of KS2, the children attain very good standards in mathematics and demonstrate flexibility in their thinking and problem-solving.

3. THE QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING

3.1 PLANNING

The quality of the planning to support the learning and teaching is very good.

The teachers' individual planning is very well structured with ideas for connected learning clearly identified and the integration of appropriate ICT. The teachers' evaluations of their planning are in most cases very good and in the best practice outstanding in assessing the learning achieved and informing future lessons.

The quality of the planning for children with special educational needs (SEN) is outstanding. The school makes extensive provision for the children who require additional support with their learning through the services of an SEN teacher, deployed to support small groups of children withdrawn from class to work with a focus on literacy and numeracy. The special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO) works closely with the class teachers to create appropriate IEPs for the children who need support with their learning or guidance with their behaviour.

There is a need to develop further the planning for activity-based learning and opportunities for independent writing within the FS in order to ensure that there is appropriate progression and challenge for the children and that numeracy and literacy skills are developed naturally through all areas of play.

3.2 TEACHING

The quality of the teaching observed ranged from satisfactory to outstanding. Most of the teaching was good or better, with almost one-fifth evaluated as being outstanding.

In the best practice, teachers differentiated very effectively to ensure the full inclusion of every child and liaised well with the Learning Support teacher in relation to the children's work and progress. The very good working relationships within the classrooms promote calm, focused and purposeful learning environments in which the teachers have high expectations for the children's behaviour and work. The teachers convey clearly the learning they wish to promote and make explicit for the children the class targets which recent assessments have highlighted. Incidental mistakes are used effectively to explore with the children better ways to find solutions and develop strategies. The teachers use effective questioning and there is a strong emphasis on giving the children time to think and make investigations, resulting in a high level of extended responses from the children. Information and communication technology is used effectively to support the learning.

In the less effective practice, there was a lack of pace and challenge in the lessons. There was a need for more effective differentiation to meet the needs of all learners.

The quality of the learning and teaching observed in the withdrawal sessions during the inspection was very good. The SEN teacher is very well informed about the learning needs of the children, and the sessions are conducted in a supportive and inclusive learning environment. The programme is closely linked to the children's work in class through co-operative planning and regular liaison with the class teachers.

3.3 ASSESSMENT

The school makes very effective use of the analysis of performance data. The Assessment Team have led the teachers in analysing and tracking the performance of children at individual, class and whole-school level. The targets are then used well to inform both the school development planning process and the teachers' own planning.

Early intervention for children with additional learning needs is a feature of the SEN provision. Through the use of extensive diagnostic assessments, including computer software, and the teachers' judgements, effective intervention programmes are put in place for those children requiring support with their learning.

The parents are kept well-informed of their children's progress through annual parental interviews and written reports, and the school maintains information and performance data on the children's progress.

The children's work is marked regularly and supportively; the teachers' oral and written comments help the children improve the quality of their work. The teachers make very effective use of assessment for learning strategies within class, encouraging children to begin to assess their own learning and that of their peers.

4. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

4.1 LEADERSHIP

The quality of leadership and management within the school is outstanding. The Principal has been in post for five years and has shared very effectively, with all members of staff, his strategic vision for the development of the school. He is reflective and evaluative in his approach to school development and has high expectations. The Principal has established an effective collaborative approach to leadership and ensures teachers have appropriate opportunities for professional development which are focused on the needs of the children.

The Principal is ably supported by the innovative and dedicated Vice-principal, who has worked effectively to develop the curriculum within the school. Curriculum co-ordinators reflect strategically on their role and the development of their subject. The provision for special educational needs is a priority within the school's development plan. The vision for special needs provided by the SENCO and the SEN teacher ensures that staff development in SEN is given a high priority. As a result of the excellent range of in-service training opportunities, including the school's involvement in the recent Modernisation Project organised by the SEELB and DE, staff are well-placed to meet the needs of the children who are having difficulty with their learning. There is effective liaison with outside agencies working with the children with SEN.

4.2 PLANNING FOR IMPROVEMENT

The school development plan (SDP) meets fully the requirements of the Department of Education School Development Planning Regulations/Schedule 2005/19.

In drawing up the current SDP, there was wide consultation with the staff, the governors, the children and the parents. The literacy and numeracy action plans are based firmly on the analysis of data and on identifying the children's needs. Monitoring and evaluation procedures are firmly embedded within the school's self-evaluation process and very effective use is made of the 'Together towards Improvement' indicators. The school's approach is strategic; the aim is to raise standards and there is evidence that all initiatives have an impact on the whole school.

4.3 RESOURCES, FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE

The governors are fully involved in the strategic planning and policy development for the school and support the Principal and the staff very effectively in the implementation of the SDP.

4.4 ACCOMMODATION

The internal and external environments of the school are very pleasant and well-maintained. There are many bright and colourful displays depicting aspects of school life and celebrating the children's work. These are well used to demonstrate progression across the school in the literacy and ICT focus areas.

5. CONCLUSION

5.1 The strengths of the school include:

- the outstanding quality of the pastoral care and working relationships at all levels;
- the outstanding quality of the provision for the children with special educational needs;
- the quality of the teaching observed, most of which is good or better;
- the very good standards achieved by the children in both literacy and numeracy;
- the well-developed processes for and highly effective analysis of performance data to raise standards; and
- the outstanding strategic leadership of the Principal, effectively supported by the dedicated and innovative Vice-principal.

5.2 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.

HEALTH AND SAFETY

- The Principal has highlighted the need to increase the security of the perimeter fencing of the school and install controlled access systems to all school buildings and work is currently underway to address these issues. It will be important, for the safety and security of all children, that these minor works are completed at the earliest opportunity.

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