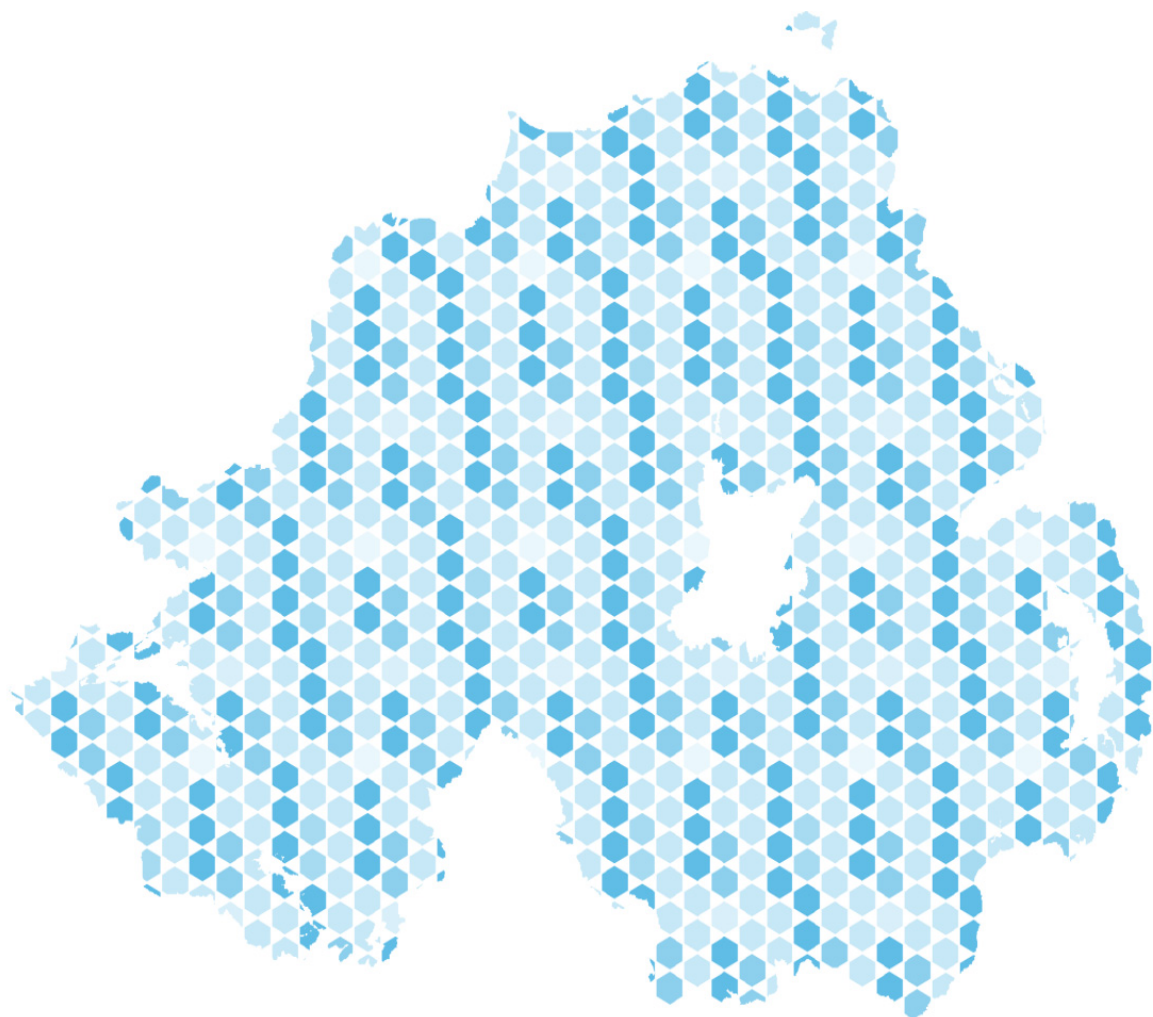


PRIMARY INSPECTION



Education and Training
Inspectorate

Victoria Park Primary School,
Belfast

Report of an Inspection
in January 2011

CONTENTS

Section		Page
	STATISTICAL INFORMATION	
1.	INTRODUCTION	1
2.	ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS	3
3.	THE QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING	5
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, 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: Victoria Park Primary Belfast** iii. **Date of Inspection: W/B 10/01/11**
 ii. **School Reference Number: 101-6655** iv. **Nature of Inspection: Focused**

B.

School Year	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
Year 1 Intake	42	53	52
Enrolments			
Primary	306	308	319
Reception	0	0	0
Nursery Unit	0	0	0
Special Unit	0	0	0
Irish Medium Unit	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): 92% **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): 15.5 0 0 0
 (Full-time equivalent = 25 teaching hours)
- ii. PTR (Pupil/Teacher Ratio): 1.21 NI PTR: 20.7
- iii. Average Class Size: 23
- iv. Class Size (Range): 16 to 27
- v. Ancillary Support:
 Number of Hours **Per Week**:
- | | |
|---|----|
| i. Clerical support: | 71 |
| ii. Foundation Stage Classroom Assistant Support: | 80 |
| iii. Additional hours of other classroom assistant support: | 0 |
- vi. Percentage of children with statements of special educational needs: 3.4%
- vii. Total percentage of children on the Special Needs Register: 34%
- viii. Number of children who are **not** of statutory school age: 0
- ix. Percentage of children entitled to free school meals: 42%
- 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** 61% **Mathematics** 66%

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 SCHOOL CONTEXT

Victoria Park Primary School is situated in the Sydenham area of East Belfast. The school is a complex amalgamation of three schools with different educational models; Mersey Street School (year 1-7), Sydenham Infants' School (year 1-3) and Strand Primary School (year 4-7). The school opened on its present site in September 2008. The children come from a very wide catchment area, with a small number travelling from Millisle, Bangor and Dundonald. The enrolment of the school has increased steadily in the last two years, with an additional 18 children enrolling in September 2010 due to the closure of Beechfield Primary School. The school enrolment currently stands at 319 children. The percentage of children entitled to free school meals (FSM) has increased significantly, from 25% in 2008 to the current 42%. The school has identified 34% of the children as requiring additional support with aspects of their learning. Over the past three years there have been eight occasions when children were suspended from school for short periods.

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 confidential questionnaires 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 three questionnaires were issued to parents. Approximately 20% of the parental questionnaires were returned to the Inspection Services Branch; eight contained additional written comments. The responses from the parental questionnaires indicate that most of the parents are very supportive of the life and work of the school. In particular, the parents acknowledge the happy and caring ethos in the school and the hard-working and approachable Principal and staff.

Fifteen teachers and eight support staff completed the confidential online questionnaire, with six including additional written comments. The majority of the responses were positive about most aspects of the work of the school.

The governors expressed their very strong support for the Principal and commented on the good quality of communication between the Principal and governors. They acknowledged the hard work undertaken to create a new school identity and praised the strong links developed between the school and the wider community. The governors also expressed their concerns regarding the limitations of the current accommodation and their disappointment that a new school build has not progressed.

The year 6 children indicated that they feel very happy and safe in school and that they are aware of what to do if they have any concerns about their safety or well-being. The children talked with great enthusiasm about their experiences in the school and particular reference was made to their enjoyment of their lessons, the support they receive from their teachers and the wide range of enrichment activities, such as visitors to the school, trips and after school clubs that are available to them. The children reported that the House System for rewarding good work and behaviour encourages them to give of their best.

The Education and Training Inspectorate (Inspectorate) has reported to the Principal and the governors all the outcomes from the questionnaires.

1.4 PASTORAL CARE

The quality of the arrangements for pastoral care in the school is very good. The school has a welcoming atmosphere and a supportive and inclusive ethos. The children are friendly and during the inspection, they displayed good manners and exemplary conduct; this is underpinned by an effective whole school approach to promoting and rewarding positive behaviour. The school places a very good focus on pastoral issues such as anti-bullying and good relations, which are addressed well during organised theme weeks, visits and special events. Very good links have been established between the school and the parents, and the provision of a wide range of extra-curricular activities and learning opportunities, including those provided through the Extended Schools' funding, contributes significantly to the children's personal development.

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, for example, through the well-established healthy breaks scheme and the effective links with the catering supervisor, which endorse the whole-school approach to healthy eating and encourage the children to adopt healthy lifestyles.

1.7 LINKS WITH PARENTS AND THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

The school has developed excellent links with others who support and enhance the children's learning experiences. The staff have worked hard to encourage the parents to become actively involved in their child's learning and opportunities such as training in Linguistic Phonics for parents have been provided to enable them to give more informed support to their children.

The parents receive regular newsletters and information and there are planned opportunities for the parents to consult with the teachers both formally and informally and to give their views on aspects of school life through the annual questionnaire. The very supportive parents' association has successfully raised money to provide additional learning resources.

The school makes very good use of the expertise of other schools, statutory organisations, educational outreach services and external agencies to enhance the provision for the children, while the excellent links with local businesses and the community extend the children's understanding of the wider world.

2. ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS

2.1 LEARNING

As the school has been operating for only two years, trends in data have not yet been well-established. An analysis of the available key stage (KS) 2 assessment data indicates that in both English and mathematics the school's performance has been below the Northern Ireland average. When compared to schools in the same FSM band the school's performance has been below the average in English in both years and below the average in mathematics last year.

The special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO) supports the class teachers in writing individual education plans (IEPs) for those children who require support with their learning or guidance with their behaviour. These IEPs outline appropriate targets which are reviewed each term. Analysis of the IEP targets indicates that most children make good progress in their learning.

Throughout the school the children demonstrate good levels of perseverance with their tasks and engagement with their learning. The children interact well with one another and co-operate fully in paired and group work. In the foundation stage (FS) classes, they demonstrate very good independence and self management skills.

In the majority of the classes, the teachers create a purposeful, stimulating learning environment which ensures that the children with special educational needs (SEN) engage with their learning and are motivated by the activities planned for them. During the support sessions for children with special educational needs, the children behave well and are keen to participate and to learn. They enjoy their work and respond well to the praise and encouragement they receive.

2.2 ENGLISH AND LITERACY

The quality of provision for English is good.

The literacy action plan is integrated well in the school development plan (SDP). The targets are realistic and the success criteria are clear. The literacy co-ordinator has accessed appropriate support and the senior management team (SMT) has enabled her to avail of staff development days to develop further, for example, writing across the curriculum as a whole-school focus. She has established a range of effective procedures for monitoring and evaluating the quality of the provision for literacy, including the collation of writing portfolios from each class, and gives the teachers helpful feedback on their work. The literacy and assessment co-ordinators are beginning to use a wider range of diagnostic testing and benchmarking data to set targets for the children in order to raise further the standards in English.

In the FS, KS1 and KS2, the children are all keen to talk about their work. Through regular opportunities to interact in pairs and small groups, the children develop good thinking, talking and listening skills. In whole-class discussions, the children listen attentively to the opinions of others and are encouraged to use a widening vocabulary in their own responses or presentations. Most of the teachers use open-ended questioning regularly to enable the children to make substantial oral contributions in class and play a more active role in their own learning.

The standard of reading is satisfactory. The school's standardised testing suggests that half the children are reading at a level higher than their chronological age. The enjoyment of reading is stimulated through the use of the school's well-stocked central library, the strong links with the local library, the recently updated reading resources for FS and KS1 classes, timetabled silent reading in KS1 and KS2 and special events such as the annual book fair which coincides with World Book Day. Across the year groups the children benefit from a range of approaches to reading, including shared, modelled and guided reading. The children's phonological awareness is developed through a whole-school phonics programme which ensures continuity across the key stages. The teachers also use other word recognition strategies as appropriate to extend the skills in reading new words. The literacy co-ordinator, the SENCO and the learning support teacher liaise effectively to support those children who have additional needs in literacy.

The standards attained by the children in writing are good. Their achievements in writing are celebrated in attractive displays in the classrooms and corridors. In the FS, the children are encouraged to write their own words and sentences and there are very good examples of early independent writing. The children in KS1 and KS2 develop as writers through well-structured guided and modelled writing lessons. In the children's workbooks, there are good examples of extended and independent writing in a range of genres across the curriculum. The children are encouraged to improve the quality of their writing by planning, drafting and editing their work.

The effective use of ICT engages the children well and supports their learning in literacy. Children use ICT to express themselves through their work in literacy and to improve the quality of their presentation.

2.3 MATHEMATICS AND NUMERACY

The quality of provision for mathematics and numeracy is satisfactory.

The development of mathematics within the school is led very effectively by the numeracy co-ordinator. He has a good understanding of the areas which require further improvement and has put in place good strategies to address these. There is a growing and developing awareness of the stage of development, within the whole school, of individual children based on the outcomes of standardised assessments undertaken at well-planned times, coupled with the teachers' professional judgement. This performance data is now being used more strategically to inform target setting and teaching. This operation is well devised and is being monitored closely by the co-ordinator and the Principal for the improvements it is bringing about.

The children enjoy a wide range of experiences in number, shape and space, measures and data-handling. The recently revised scheme of work is helping to ensure that gaps identified in the previous programme no longer exist and the provision for the children is now more developmental and progressive across the seven years. The children are provided with practical activities which help to develop their understanding of key mathematical concepts. In the best practice observed, they undertake problem-solving and investigative activities; this good practice in which the children are challenged to use and apply their mathematical

thinking in different contexts needs to be incorporated more fully throughout the mathematics programme. Mental mathematics is an integral part of the mathematics lessons and where the quality of the questioning is good, in a majority of classes, the children are engaged and motivated, and are able to explain the processes they use in coming to an answer. The methods of recording work provided for the children are variable; where they are best, the children are able to devise their own methods and to produce good quality work; in other instances there is an over-reliance on the completion of worksheets.

The standards attained by the children are satisfactory and for a majority need to be improved. By year 7, the most able children show a good understanding of place value, are able to work flexibly with numbers and attain well in their shape and space and data-handling work. To address the incidence of low attainment, the children need to be provided with activities that are more closely matched to their level of ability and yet provide sufficient challenge to ensure they make more sustained progress.

Good use is made of ICT to support the children's learning in mathematics both in class, through the competent use of the Interactive White Board by the teachers and the children and class-based computers, and through work in the school's computer suite. In work undertaken in year 7, for example, the children were able to compose a spreadsheet showing the wages earned by a variety of workers in Victorian times within a World Around Us theme.

3. THE QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING

3.1 PLANNING

The quality of the planning to support the learning and teaching is good. The individual planning of most of the teachers is very comprehensive, with appropriate differentiation and ideas for connected learning clearly identified. The teachers make very good evaluations of their planning which focus on the learning achieved; these are used to inform future lessons. In a minority of cases where the teachers' planning is less effective, there is a need for more detail to address more effectively the needs of all the children.

There is a need to review the planning and organisation for activity-based learning within the FS in order to ensure that there is appropriate progression and challenge for the children and that the available outdoor space is used effectively.

3.2 TEACHING

The quality of the teaching observed ranged from inadequate to outstanding. Most of the teaching was good or better, with one third evaluated as being very good or outstanding.

In the best practice, teachers have high expectations of the children and use a variety of appropriate teaching and learning strategies. The work is thoroughly planned and differentiated very effectively with appropriate levels of challenge. The teachers convey clearly the learning they wish to promote and help the children to review their learning both during and at the end of lessons. Through the use of probing, open-ended questions they encourage the children to develop thinking and problem-solving skills. The development of the children's learning is further enhanced by the effective deployment of classroom assistants who support the children well.

The part-time teacher of SEN provides appropriate and effective intervention through both in-class teaching, and through withdrawal sessions, to support the younger children who require help in literacy and numeracy. This support is of a very high quality.

In the less effective practice, within a significant minority of the lessons observed, activities were mundane and did not stimulate or invigorate the children. Planning for these lessons was insufficiently differentiated to match the children's abilities. There is a need for more active learning opportunities for the development of skills and for fostering the children's independence.

3.3 ASSESSMENT

The school is beginning to make effective use of the analysis of performance data. The Principal and the assessment co-ordinator have led the teachers in analysing the performance of children at individual, class and whole-school level. In the best practice, the targets are used to inform the teachers' own planning and systems have been put in place to enable the children's progress to be tracked.

Systematic observation and monitoring of the progress of children with special educational needs is at an early stage, and is leading to the increasingly effective analysis of the achievements of these children.

The parents are well-informed about their children's progress, through biannual parental interviews and written reports, and the school maintains information and performance data on the children's progress. The parents of children with special educational needs are well informed about the learning targets in the IEPs and the progress their children make.

The children's work is marked regularly and supportively. Most of the teachers use oral and written comments to help the children improve the quality of their work. They also make good use of some assessment for learning strategies within class; however, enabling children to begin to assess their own learning and that of their peers is still at an early stage.

4. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

4.1 LEADERSHIP

The quality of leadership and management within the school is very good.

The Principal has been in post in Victoria Park Primary School for two years and was the Principal of Strand Primary School for three years prior to the amalgamation. She has a clear strategic vision for the development of the school and has led the staff very effectively through a challenging amalgamation process. Her positive outlook and collegial approach have enabled her to establish a team approach among the staff. The Principal is focused clearly on the attainment and achievements of the children and has put in place processes to raise achievements and standards and broaden the whole educational experience of each child.

She is ably supported by her two Vice-principals who work well as a SMT and carry out their roles very effectively. Curriculum co-ordinators give very effective curricular leadership in their respective areas of responsibility.

The quality of the leadership in SEN is very good. The SENCO has put in place effective strategies for the early identification of special needs and for early intervention to address those needs.

4.2 PLANNING FOR IMPROVEMENT

In drawing up the current SDP, the Principal and SMT undertook an initial evaluation of the strengths and areas for development within the new school. The teachers had the opportunity to contribute to the SDP during an annual school development planning day. The views of parents were sought through questionnaires and their concerns are being addressed. Appropriate monitoring and evaluation procedures have been put in place as part of the school's self-evaluation process, with a clear focus on raising standards.

The further development of SEN provision has a clear focus in the SDP, and is supported by an appropriate action plan to guide development. Staff development in SEN has been identified by the school as a key priority in order to ensure continuity, coherence and consistency in the provision for SEN.

The SDP meets fully the requirements of the Department of Education School Development Planning Regulations / Schedule 2005/19.

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. The curriculum co-ordinators report biannually to the governors on improvements made to the areas under focus.

4.4 ACCOMMODATION

The school is currently sited in the building of one of the original schools. Additional temporary accommodation has been added to the main building to facilitate the four FS classes. This temporary accommodation does not include toilet facilities and children must be accompanied by an adult so that they can safely use the toilets in the main building. This is disruptive to learning and impedes the development of independence in the younger children.

The addition of the temporary classrooms and two large storage containers have greatly reduced the available playground space for the children. The necessary organisation and management of the lack of playground space reduces the opportunities for the children to socialise across year groups and take part in certain outdoor activities such as football at break and lunchtimes. The lack of outdoor space also restricts the opportunities for outdoor learning.

Within the school, the teachers make very good use of the available accommodation and there is a high standard of caretaking. There is a lack of storage space throughout the school and the small classroom sizes makes practical activities difficult. There is also a lack of available space for outreach support teachers and other SEN support work.

5. CONCLUSION

5.1 The strengths of the school include:

- the friendliness, good manners and exemplary behaviour of the children and their positive attitudes to and engagement with their work;
- the strong and effective links fostered with the parents and the wider community;

- the very effective leadership of the Principal, Vice-principals and co-ordinators in leading and managing the school;
- the quality of the teaching observed, with one third evaluated as being very good or outstanding;
- the very good arrangements for pastoral care within the school; and
- the good processes now in place to monitor and track the children's progress.

5.2 Areas for Improvement include the need to:

- raise further the standards achieved by the children in English and mathematics; and
- disseminate the excellent practice in teaching in order to ensure consistently high quality across all classes.

5.3 In most of the areas inspected, the quality of education provided by this school is satisfactory; the strengths outweigh the areas for improvement in the provision. The inspection has identified areas for improvement in standards and teaching 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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