

PRIMARY INSPECTION



Education and Training
Inspectorate

Victoria Primary School and
Nursery Unit, Carrickfergus

Report of an Inspection
in October 2011



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In this report, proportions may be described as percentages, common fractions and in more general quantitative terms. Where more general terms are used, they should be interpreted as follows:

Almost/nearly all	-	more than 90%
Most	-	75%-90%
A majority	-	50%-74%
A significant minority	-	30%-49%
A minority	-	10%-29%
Very few/a small number	-	less than 10%

In assessing the various features of the provision, Inspectors relate their evaluations to six descriptors as set out below:

DESCRIPTOR
Outstanding
Very Good
Good
Satisfactory
Inadequate
Unsatisfactory

BASIC INFORMATION SHEET (BIS) - PRIMARY SCHOOLS

- A. i. **School: Victoria Primary** iii. **Date of Inspection: W/B 17/10/11**
 ii. **School Reference Number: 301-3330** iv. **Nature of Inspection: Focused**

B.

School Year	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
Year 1 Intake	68	52	75	69	65
Enrolments					
Primary	497	460	467	441	471
Reception	0	0	0	0	0
Nursery Unit	52	52	52	52	52
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): 95.8% **NI Avg Att: 94.7%**

Average Attendance for those children on the Special Educational Needs Register: 89.89%

Primary & Reception	Nursery Unit	Special Unit	Irish Medium Unit
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- D. i. Number of Teachers (including the principal and part-time teachers): 19 1 0 0
 (Full-time equivalent = 25 teaching hours)

- ii. PTR (Pupil/Teacher Ratio): 24.78 NI PTR: 20.2

- iii. Average Class Size: 26.1

- iv. Class Size (Range): 18 to 31

- v. Ancillary Support:

Number of Hours Per Week:	i. Clerical support:	46
	ii. Foundation Stage Classroom Assistant Support:	96
	iii. Additional hours of other classroom assistant support:	240.45

- vi. Percentage of children with statements of special educational needs: 1.48%

- vii. Total percentage of children on the Special Needs Register: 14.48%

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

- ix. Percentage of children entitled to free school meals: 14.86%

- x. Percentage of children at the end of Key Stage 2 for 2010/11 who attained level 4 and above in English and mathematics, and Irish (in Irish-medium schools):
- | | | |
|----------------|--------------------|--------------|
| English | Mathematics | Irish |
| 78% | 83% | N/A |

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 SCHOOL CONTEXT

Victoria Primary School is situated on Coronation Road in Carrickfergus, Co Antrim. The majority of the children come from the local area. The enrolment of the school has decreased over recent years and is currently 471 including 52 children in the nursery unit. Approximately 15 % of the children are currently entitled to free school meals. The school has identified approximately 14% of the children who require additional support with aspects of their learning.

1.2 FOCUS

The inspection focused on the quality of the children's achievements and standards in literacy and numeracy, the quality of provision for learning, the quality of leadership and management and the school's arrangements for pastoral care and child protection. The inspection also evaluated the contribution of information and communication technology (ICT) in promoting and supporting learning.

1.3 THE VIEWS OF THE PARENTS, TEACHERS, SUPPORT STAFF, GOVERNORS 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), a group of the children from year 6 and a group of children from the School Council and Eco-committee.

One hundred and twenty-three questionnaires were issued to the parents of children in the primary school; approximately 59 % were returned to Inspection Services Branch (ISB) of which 33 contained additional written comments. The parents appreciated the commitment and hard work of all of the staff in providing a caring and supportive environment for their children, including placing a strong emphasis on their academic and social development.

Fifty-two questionnaires were issued to the parents of children in the nursery unit, approximately 46% were returned to ISB including nine which contained additional written comments. The parental returns indicated a very high level of satisfaction with the provision.

Nine of the teachers and 15 members of the support staff responded to the online questionnaires. Almost all of the responses commented positively on the very good working relationships across the school and the dedicated teamwork of the staff which focuses on developing the school in the best interests of all the children.

The governors expressed their strong support for the school and the dedication of the staff, the regular opportunities to be informed about developments within the school and the recent focused work in response to a number of the issues highlighted by the school's internal questionnaire. They discussed their concerns about some accommodation issues and a few aspects of the school provision.

The children in year 6 spoke confidently and positively of their experiences at school, in particular, their access to a wide range of extra-curricular activities. They indicated that the playground 'buddy system' and their participation in the School Council provide them with valuable opportunities to participate in the life and work of the school. The children were aware of how they should behave, and they knew where to seek help if they had a concern.

The Education and Training Inspectorate (Inspectorate) reported to the Principal and representatives of the governors the mainly positive messages emerging from the questionnaires and the few concerns relating to the school's safeguarding procedures and opportunities for parental consultation.

1.4 PASTORAL CARE

The quality of the arrangements for pastoral care in the nursery unit is very good and in the primary school is good. In the nursery unit, there is a very happy and caring atmosphere which develops well the children's personal, social and emotional well-being. The children in the primary school are courteous and mannerly; the overall standard of behaviour is very good. An effective reward system and a good range of opportunities for participation in music, sport and other extra-curricular activities develop the children's self-esteem and confidence. In addition, their learning experiences widen through trips to places of educational interest. The school is committed to developing the children's awareness and appreciation of other cultures, for example, through the Comenius Project. The children are aware of the needs of others and raise significant funds for charity. The recently formulated School Council provides the children with an appropriate forum through which they raise issues of interest and it involves them more fully in the decision-making process in the school. The pastoral care co-ordinator has made a very useful start to ascertain the views of the parents regarding aspects of the pastoral care provision through an appropriate audit.

1.5 CHILD PROTECTION

The school and nursery unit have satisfactory arrangements in place for safeguarding children. These arrangements broadly reflect the guidance issued by the Department of Education. The area for improvement identified includes the need to consult with the parents and the children when revising policies to ensure that all are fully aware of the child protection and other related policies.

1.6 HEALTHY EATING AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

The school and nursery unit give very good attention to promoting healthy eating and physical activity. The children are encouraged to bring healthy breaks to school and access a good range of sport, such as, football, hockey and cross country programmes. The key stage (KS) 2 children attend swimming lessons each year and the children enjoy various sporting competitions linked to their House team. The outdoor adventure play area provides all the children with good opportunities for physical play.

1.7 LINKS WITH THE PARENTS AND THE WIDER COMMUNITY

The school and the nursery unit enjoy very good links with the local community. The parents receive regular communication by newsletter and information about events in the school and the nursery unit. The school website, including electronic mail, contains updated information about school life and events.

The school has developed very effective links with local schools and organisations through for example, sports, music and their involvement in schemes, such as, the Young Enterprise programme.

2. ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS

2.1 LEARNING

Almost all of the children work well in class, demonstrating good levels of motivation and perseverance in their work. At the foundation stage (FS), in most classes, the children demonstrate high levels of independence; they are self-resourcing and confident in their learning as it is well matched to their ability. Most of the children experience an effective play-based curriculum which provides them with very good opportunities to be imaginative and creative. The teachers integrate appropriately the key literacy and numeracy skills into the play activities. In KS1 and KS2, the children demonstrate positive attitudes to learning, show enjoyment in their achievements and are keen to talk about their work, their interests and their school. The majority of children work well in pairs and groups, take turns, encourage, and support one another. They respond well to activities that challenge and extend their thinking and understanding, especially when the tasks are of an investigative nature.

An analysis of the KS2 assessment data over the past four years shows that in English and mathematics, the school's performance is in line with the Northern Ireland (NI) average. Compared with schools in the same free school meals category, the levels of attainment are slightly below the average.

2.2 ENGLISH AND LITERACY

The overall quality of provision in English and literacy is good.

The children benefit from a wide range of talking and listening activities, which develop well their oral language skills. In the FS, the children listen to and respond to stories, and talk purposefully about their learning. In KS1 and 2, they express their opinions and deepen their understanding of what they have read. By year 7, almost all of the children can offer their ideas and viewpoints confidently. The children can converse well with their peers and adults alike.

The school has a systematic approach to improving the children's reading skills and reading is a strength in the literacy provision. In the FS and KS1, there is a good focus on developing the children's phonological awareness and on teaching them a wide range of reading strategies. The children benefit from good quality shared and modelled reading experiences. As the children progress into KS1, these experiences are built upon with more opportunities for developing greater independence in their reading. The school has invested recently in improving the quality and breadth of its reading stock and it now has a sizeable number of high quality reading materials that are matched to the needs, abilities and interests of all of the children. By year 7, the children are able to read with fluency, use appropriate strategies to help them with any difficulties they encounter in their reading and demonstrate a good level of comprehension. There are missed opportunities to link the reading provision to more challenging writing and talking and listening activities, in order to raise standards further, particularly at KS2.

The development and quality of the children's writing in the FS and KS1 is mostly good or better. In the more effective examples, there are appropriate opportunities for the children to develop their writing skills from the construction of words, sentence formation and extended writing to producing better quality independent writing. By KS2, the children write in a range of appropriate forms and while the quality is good, it is not always consistent. In KS2, there is an over-emphasis on the use of writing frames, in English and in the World Around Us, which limit the breadth and depth of the children's written responses, particularly the more able children. The school, rightly, is reviewing its writing provision.

There is evidence of good development work completed in literacy in recent years. The school has a good quality policy for literacy, which guides and supports the work well and has a range of documentation to support its work in developing reading, writing and phonics. The school staff has begun to gather and analyse performance data and uses this to set targets for the children. The teachers have begun to scrutinise the children's books, as part of a monitoring and evaluating exercise. The school has appropriately identified writing as an area for further development. There was insufficient reference to differentiation and teacher evaluation in the documentation presented for inspection, including the teachers' medium and short-term plans.

There is variability in the use of ICT in literacy. In the effective lessons observed at KS2, the use of ICT enhanced the children's learning. There are very good examples, across the year groups, of the children using ICT to draft, edit and improve the quality of their work and the school has a very enthusiastic group of children in KS2 who use ICT to produce a newsletter for parents.

The standards in English are good. Almost all of the children make good year-on-year progress. Most of the children achieve a good standard by year 7 and the children's books, while variable in terms of quality, demonstrated good progression.

2.3 MATHEMATICS AND NUMERACY

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

The children are enthusiastic about numeracy and engage in a wide range of mathematical experiences. A cross-curricular approach to numeracy is well developed across the key stages. In the FS, the children's early mathematical language develops well, and the children demonstrate good levels of recall and a good understanding of shape and space and early number concepts. In most of the FS classes, the children engage in very good practical mathematical activities and effective play-based sessions that develop their knowledge, understanding and enjoyment in mathematics.

In KS1, in the effective practice, the children benefit from good mental mathematics activities to start the lesson, leading into the practical application of mathematics in real life contexts. The teachers use all of the resources available to them, both inside and outside of the classroom, to develop the children's understanding of mathematical concepts.

In KS2, ICT is used well to support numeracy, and real life contexts are skilfully used to create stimulating topics of investigation for the children.

During the inspection, the most able children in year 4 demonstrated good levels of understanding of place value. The most able children in year 7 demonstrated good levels of competence in processing and data handling. It is appropriate that the school has identified number as an area for further development.

The school's internal performance data indicates that, nearly all of the children make progress in mathematics commensurate with their ability. The whole-school programme for mathematics provides guidance for the teachers to plan for a broad and balanced coverage of the mathematics curriculum.

The numeracy co-ordinators work well with the numeracy team to monitor the delivery of the whole school mathematics scheme. The school has recently reviewed its provision in number, and continues, through action planning associated with the school development plan (SDP), to review other areas of the numeracy provision and is appropriately focused on improving further the children's standards and achievements. Planning for differentiation and the evaluation of learning are not yet an integral part to the numeracy scheme.

3. THE QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING

3.1 PLANNING

The curriculum planning is generally comprehensive; there is a range of helpful policies including yearly schemes, termly, half-termly and weekly plans. The teachers work together in year groups to develop their lesson plans and this encourages a uniformity of approach. The effective planning focuses on the children's learning; this practice needs to be developed more consistently across the school. It is important that the teachers plan for all the abilities within their classes and evaluate systematically the extent of the children's learning to ensure progression in the children's knowledge and understanding across the three key stages.

3.2 TEACHING

During the inspection, the quality of the teaching observed ranged from inadequate to outstanding. The majority of the lessons were very good or good; a small number of lessons observed were outstanding, while a significant minority had areas for improvement. In the most effective lessons, the teachers provide the children with relevant and challenging tasks that are matched well to their needs and develop their thinking skills and their independent learning. Further, the teachers make effective use of resources, and ask good questions to extend the children's learning. In a number of classes, the support staff, guided by the teachers, provide valuable learning assistance to the children.

Where the teaching was less effective, the lessons were overly directed by the teacher, had a slow pace and provided insufficient challenge to develop learning for all of the children. In these lessons, the standards being achieved were not high enough. In a small number of lessons, the quality of classroom management was poor.

3.3 ASSESSMENT

There are appropriate procedures and records for keeping the parents informed about their children's progress, for example, one written report, two formal parent-teacher consultations and an 'open-door' policy for informal consultations. Most of the children transfer directly from the nursery unit to the primary school. The teacher-in-charge of the nursery unit shares valuable information on the children's achievements with the year 1 teachers which enhances the transition process.

The assessment co-ordinator has been in post for four years and provides good support to his colleagues. The assessment action plans are derived from the school's monitoring procedures which include the review of every child's books in literacy and numeracy. The teachers receive useful feedback on their work based on agreed criteria. Furthermore, the teachers review a suitable range of internal information and standardised assessments to gain an overview of the children's performance. These practices have begun appropriately to inform planning on a whole school basis.

In a majority of classes, the teachers mark for improvement by providing the children with written comment and guidance to develop their learning. In a minority of the classes, the quality of the marking was inconsistent. The effective practice needs to be developed further, across all key stages, by agreeing a consistent whole-school approach to recording and evaluating the extent of the children's learning to better inform the planning and to provide evidence of the children's progress.

3.4 SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

The quality of the provision for children with special educational needs is satisfactory.

The school identifies well, and at an early stage, the children who would benefit from additional support with aspects of their learning and individual education plans (IEP) are drawn up and the support of external agencies is sought, as appropriate. The quality of the IEPs is variable; the school has recognised appropriately, that there needs to be greater consistency. The school needs to prioritise a review of the IEPs, to ensure that all have measurable and realistic targets that are linked more clearly to the overall planning for learning and teaching.

Support for the children with special educational needs is provided through a combination of withdrawal and in-class support. The children who receive the withdrawal sessions are benefiting from effective individual or small group teaching based on sound knowledge of their needs. This intervention helps them develop positive attitudes to learning. The quality of the in-class support varies; the teachers need to ensure that all lessons meet the range of individual needs within the classroom.

The school's performance data is beginning to demonstrate that by the end of KS2, the majority of children with special educational needs are making good progress in their learning and are achieving in line with their potential, and that significant progress is being made by those children who are supported by the Reading Partners programme. The recently appointed Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO) is committed to improving the school's provision for children with special educational needs and has identified key areas for development; these include a review of current policy and practice and the need to improve staff capacity through professional development. The school needs to draw up detailed action plans to guide this work. Plans will need to include time and support for the SENCO to develop her role and to work with the numeracy and literacy co-ordinators to create a coherent approach to the leadership and management of this aspect of the school's provision.

4. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

4.1 LEADERSHIP

The quality of leadership and management within the school is satisfactory.

The Principal has been in his leadership role for 15 years and he is committed to the pastoral and educational welfare of the children, the school as a 'Rights Respecting School' and its projection within the community and beyond. The Vice-principal ably supports the Principal in the management of the school.

The school recognises that the monitoring and evaluation of the children's work requires more rigour. This needs to happen within learning and teaching across all classes to improve further the standards achieved by all the children. The school needs to take greater account of the outcomes and analysis of the performance data to inform and improve learning and teaching. The school needs to have a greater cohesion and effective team working to realise more fully the capability of all of the staff and to improve further the children's attainment and their learning experiences.

4.2 PLANNING FOR IMPROVEMENT

The SDP meets the requirements of The Education (School Development Plans) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2010. It identifies appropriate priorities regarding the development of aspects of literacy and numeracy. The action plans need to specify more clearly the steps required to achieve consistency and rigour in evaluating the children's progress and in raising further their attainment.

4.3 RESOURCES, FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE

The governors report that they are well informed; however, they need to become more involved with the strategic planning and policy development of the school.

4.4 ACCOMMODATION

The staff creates a bright and attractive learning environment, with examples of the children's art, written and topic work, and evidence of their achievements displayed and celebrated throughout the school. The school accommodation has been organised and resourced well to support the children's learning, in particular, the development of the outdoor learning play areas and the good resources for ICT and play-based learning. The accommodation is maintained to a high standard and the children take pride in helping the teachers and support staff to care for their learning environments.

5. CONCLUSION

5.1 The strengths of the school include:

- the exemplary behaviour of the children and their courteous, positive disposition towards learning;
- the good or better quality of the teaching in the majority of the lessons observed;
- the good standards attained by the children in literacy and numeracy;
- the good quality of education in the nursery unit; and
- the opportunities provided for the children to participate in a wide range of extra-curricular activities.

5.2 The areas for improvement include the need:

- to ensure greater consistency in the quality of the teaching and in the children's learning experiences; and

- for the senior leadership team to ensure that the self-evaluation process is rigorous, effective and leads to further improvement in the children's attainments.

5.3 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 standards, learning and teaching and 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.

6. THE NURSERY UNIT

6.1 KEY FINDINGS

- There is a very happy, caring atmosphere in the nursery unit. The children are very well settled for the time of year, are eager to explore new learning, make full use of the learning environments, respond positively to the staff's expectations and demonstrate very good behaviour. The vast majority persevere with tasks and seek help when needed.
- There are good opportunities for learning in all areas of the pre-school curriculum; the promotion of the children's personal, social and emotional development and the development of the children's language and mathematical awareness are particular strengths. More attention needs to be given to the range of resources available in certain areas, such as the imaginative, sand and water areas of play to provide greater choice and challenge in the children's learning.
- The quality of the interaction between the staff and the children is consistently of a high standard. They engage the children in purposeful discussion about their work and use skilful questioning to develop their thinking and language.
- The staff provides a varied programme for the children throughout the year based on themes and topics. The written planning is used to guide the staff in their work and is evaluated regularly to take account of the children's responses and differing needs.
- A useful start has been made to monitoring and recording the children's progress and development. Further work is required to ensure that all staff contributes to this important aspect of the work.
- The teacher-in-charge has a clear vision for developing the work within the nursery unit. The staff is hard working and dedicated and all contribute to the overall effectiveness of the nursery unit.

6.2 Areas for improvement include the need to:

- develop further the methods of record-keeping and assessment; and
- develop and implement an appropriate method of self-evaluation in order to identify and bring about further improvements in the provision within the nursery unit.

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

STATISTICAL INFORMATION ON VICTORIA PRIMARY SCHOOL NURSERY UNIT

1. Details of Children

Number of children:	Class 1	Class 2
Attending full-time	0	0
Attending part-time	26	26
Under 3 years of age*	0	0
With statement of SEN**	0	0
At CoP stages 3 or 4***	1	0
At CoP stages 1 or 2***	1	0
With English as an additional language	0	0

* 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.	9.6%
Average attendance for the previous year.	93.8%

2. Duration of Sessions

Full-time	Part-time: am	Part-time: pm
	2 hours 30 minutes	2 hours 30 minutes

3. Details of Staff

Number of:	Full-Time	Part-Time
Teachers	1	0
Nursery Assistants	1	1
Qualified Nursery Assistants	0	0

Number of: ****	
Students	0
Trainees	1

**** Total placements since September of current year

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

Number issued	52
Percentage returned	46.15%
Number of written comments	9

HEALTH AND SAFETY

- The security of the access arrangements to the school building and temporary mobile classrooms needs to be reviewed.

ACCOMMODATION

- The mobile accommodation falls far short of current standards; there is limited toilet provision for the children.
- The children's toilets in the school building are in need of refurbishment.
- The provision for separate male staff toilet facilities is inadequate.

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