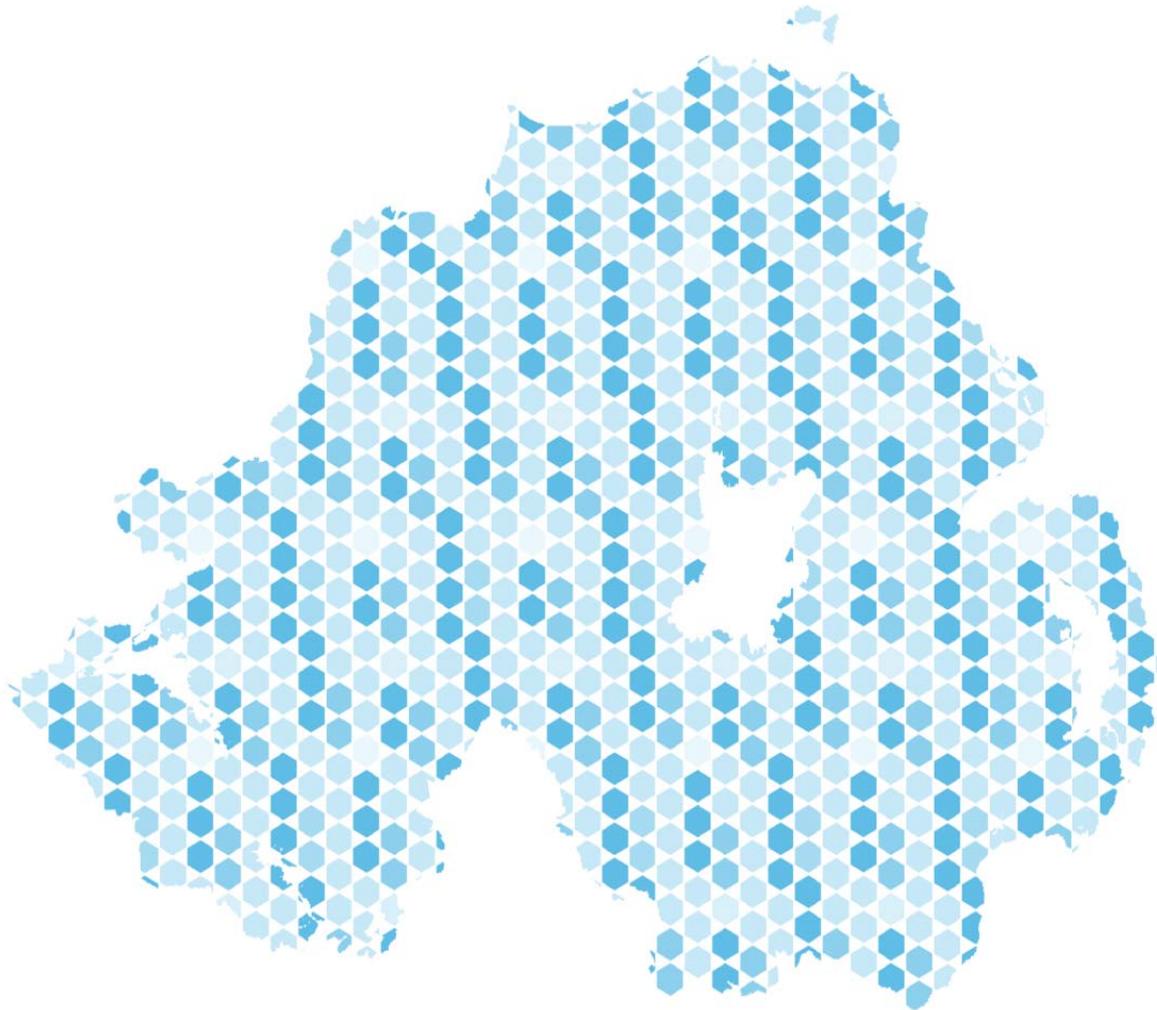


PRIMARY INSPECTION



Education and Training
Inspectorate

Woodburn Primary School,
Carrickfergus

Report of an Inspection
in February 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

Woodburn Primary School is situated in Carrickfergus, County Antrim. The children come mainly from the town and the surrounding rural area. The enrolment of the school has remained steady over the last ten years and presently stands at 191. Approximately 8% of the children are currently entitled to free school meals. The school has identified approximately 12% of the children who require additional support with aspects of their learning. At the time of the inspection, two teachers were on career breaks. Substitute teachers were employed in the year 3, and year 6 classes.

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, GOVERNORS AND CHILDREN

The arrangements for the inspection included the opportunity for the parents and the teaching 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 fifty-four questionnaires were issued to parents; approximately 44% were returned to Inspection Services Branch of which 33 contained additional written comments. Nearly all of the responses (90%) indicated a high level of satisfaction with the school. In particular, the parents highlighted the care and support provided by the staff, the dedication and effective leadership of the Principal, the priority given to the behaviour and welfare of the children, and the support given to the children in preparing them for post-primary schools. A small number of the parents took the opportunity to meet with the inspectors; they spoke of their high regard for the school and the quality of educational and pastoral support the school provides for the children.

A small number of the responses raised concerns particularly in relation to the quality of the accommodation, and aspects of teaching and learning.

Eight of the teachers completed the online questionnaire and seven made additional written comments. All of those who responded reported that the pastoral and educational needs of the children are met effectively, and that they enjoyed working in the school. They also commented positively on the effective and supportive leadership provided by the Principal and the whole-school approach to promoting improvement throughout the school.

The governors expressed their appreciation of the work of the Principal and all of the staff in promoting improvement in all aspects of the school provision and their support for the ongoing development of the school.

The children in year 6 spoke very positively and enthusiastically about all aspects of school life. They are aware of what to do if they have worries about their safety or well-being.

The views of the parents, the teachers and the children have been shared with the Principal and the governors.

1.4 PASTORAL CARE

The quality of the provision for pastoral care is very good. Among the strengths are the welcoming, inclusive and supportive ethos throughout the school, the effective strategies to promote positive behaviour and the consultation with the children, for example in the creation of the school rules. Individual merit systems are in place and are highly valued by the children; there is clear evidence that the reward system has a positive impact on the children's motivation, confidence and self-esteem. The working relationships between the children and the staff are very positive. In the playground the older children support the younger children well at play time through their role as 'Buddies.'

The school has appropriately identified the benefit of establishing a council in order to involve the children more in the process of school improvement and support more fully the significant work in maintaining a highly positive ethos.

1.5 CHILD PROTECTION

The school has very good comprehensive arrangements in place for safeguarding the children and these reflect fully 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, and to encouraging the children to adopt healthy lifestyles. The children enjoy a variety of healthy eating experiences and there is a strong focus on promoting physical activity throughout the school.

1.7 LINKS WITH THE PARENTS AND THE WIDER COMMUNITY

The Principal and the teachers have developed effective links with the parents and they work conscientiously to ensure that communication with parents is effective and maintained through regular newsletters, Open Days, an open door approach and information meetings. There are well-established and valued links with a number of local schools which enrich the children's educational and social experiences.

2. **ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS**

2.1 LEARNING

The children show interest and motivation in their work. They readily approach the adults to ask questions and seek support to further their learning. The majority of the children settle quickly to their work and have positive attitudes to learning; they work well in pairs and groups, taking turns and encouraging and supporting one another in their learning. At foundation stage (FS), the children learn through a range of songs, rhymes and enriched activity-based experiences and most are able to sustain extended periods of concentrated and motivated play. They access equipment independently, discuss their learning, and a few collaborate on shared tasks. During the inspection, the children demonstrated good observation, and investigation skills, imaginative and creative abilities through appropriately stimulating topics.

An analysis of the key stage (KS) 2 assessment data over the past four years shows that in English and mathematics, the school's performance is above the Northern Ireland average. Compared with schools in a similar free school meals category, the levels of attainment are, however, below the average. Appropriately, the school has prioritised in the school development plan (SDP) the need to improve further the standards in literacy and numeracy attained by the children.

2.2 ENGLISH AND LITERACY

The quality of the provision for English and literacy is good.

The programme for literacy provides a good framework for progression, but needs to identify more explicitly strategies for promoting the children's thinking skills and personal capabilities. The teachers' six-weekly plans provide well for the development of literacy through all areas of the curriculum.

In most of the lessons observed, the teachers used a range of effective strategies, including appropriate differentiation and ICT, to engage all the children in their learning. In whole-class discussion teachers used questioning well and gave the children time to think; as a result the children gave extended, mature, oral responses. The children are able to share their ideas and work collaboratively when discussing in pairs and small groups.

The children demonstrate good standards of reading. With the support of the North-Eastern Education and Library Board (NEELB), all teachers have been trained in a phonics programme and this has been used to help develop the children's phonological awareness and increase their confidence when decoding new words. This programme and the introduction of reading partners have resulted in improvements in the children's reading skills, as evidenced by the data held by the school.

The children write in a range of genres; there were good examples of creative and extended writing, including poetry, narrative, and reports, across the year groups. In the FS there were very good examples of stimulating, emergent and independent writing. In KS1 and KS2, the children used ICT effectively to draft and edit their work.

The literacy action plan clearly identifies a whole-school focus on writing to improve further the standards achieved by the children and, in particular, the more able children. As part of this focus, the teachers need to identify and implement consistently the strategies for assessing and commenting on the children's work.

2.3 MATHEMATICS AND NUMERACY

The quality of the provision for mathematics and numeracy is good. The school has adapted effectively guidance and support from the NEELB to inform aspects of teaching, the action plan and the programme for numeracy. The programme outlines clearly the learning intentions for each area of the mathematics curriculum and the lines of progression which the teachers translate effectively into their planning.

During the inspection, almost all of the teachers used a wide range of strategies and resources, including ICT, to good effect to promote and support the learning and teaching. In most of the mental mathematics sessions observed, the teachers used good questioning which enabled the children to reflect on and explain their thinking, using the appropriate mathematical language. In a minority of the sessions observed, the activities lacked challenge and the learning intentions were unclear.

The children demonstrated good understanding of key mathematical concepts and flexibility in their thinking. They were able to apply their learning in mathematics across the curriculum and in everyday contexts based on real life situations and experiences. They used ICT programmes and other practical resources with confidence and worked well in pairs and groups to complete investigative and problem-solving activities.

The action plan focuses appropriately on raising further the standards in numeracy. However, there is insufficient detail as to what all of the teachers are required to do, in order to bring about improvement and to ensure that the needs of the more able children are being met.

3. THE QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING

3.1 PLANNING

The teachers plan their work conscientiously and collaboratively. The short-term planning identifies the intended learning outcomes, the resources and the assessment strategies to be used. In most cases, the teachers complete detailed written evaluations of the quality of the children's learning which in the best practice, is honest and accurately reflects and informs future planning and teaching.

3.2 TEACHING

The quality of the teaching ranged from inadequate, in a small number (10%), of the lessons, to outstanding, in a minority of the lessons observed. In three quarters of the lessons observed, the quality of the teaching was good or better. In the most effective practice the lessons were well paced and had a developmental and effective structure, the learning outcomes were well focused so that the children were clear about what they were expected to learn and how to complete the tasks. In addition, the activities met the needs of all the children. In a minority of the lessons observed, the lessons lacked pace and, the activities had insufficient focus and challenge, particularly for the more able children. During these lessons, the children were unclear about the purpose of the tasks, and became less responsive or disengaged.

3.3 ASSESSMENT

The teachers use a suitable range of internal and standardised tests in order to gain an overview of the children's performance and to inform planning for the provision of additional learning support.

The teachers mark the children's work regularly, and there are examples of good marking for improvement and positive comments to encourage the children and help them improve their work. Some further development is needed in order to ensure greater consistency throughout the school in agreeing success criteria with the children and taking more account of marking for improvement. The parents are kept well informed of their children's progress through regular interviews and written reports.

The school has adopted data-handling software to help them track and evaluate the children's progress, identify trends and set appropriate targets in order to improve further the standards achieved by the children, and to inform their whole-school self-evaluation processes.

3.4 SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

The quality of the provision for children with special educational needs is very good. The school promotes a strong sense of inclusion in which each child is valued. High priority is given to early identification and intervention; appropriate screening and diagnostic tests are used to identify the children's learning difficulties or delays and to inform the individual education plans which set specific targets and appropriate support strategies for the children.

The children's needs are met through additional support teaching in withdrawal sessions involving individual children and small groups. During these sessions the learning support teacher was highly supportive of the children and used a good range of practical teaching strategies to develop the children's literacy skills. The school has very recently introduced small group sessions focusing on promoting numeracy understanding and development.

The special educational needs co-ordinator monitors the children's progress regularly, targeting help where it is needed. Actions taken have resulted in improvements in learning and teaching and are helping to develop the children's confidence and self-esteem. The children who make satisfactory progress in the additional learning support sessions are appropriately discontinued, but continually reviewed. Peripatetic support from the NEELB is also available for a small number of the children.

4. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

4.1 LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The Principal has been in post for 22 years and has managed the significant growth and expansion of the school well. She is highly effective, very hard-working with a sound knowledge and understanding of the needs of the school and the wider community. She sets a positive tone for the work of the school through her excellent working relationships with the children, the staff, the parents and the governors. She encourages a collegiate approach to decision-making within the school and provides effective support and guidance in the professional development of the staff. There is clear evidence of the impact of the Northern Ireland Curriculum training being disseminated and embedded throughout the school. There are effective structures in place to develop the role of curriculum and key stage co-ordinators and to monitor and evaluate aspects of the school's provision. The Principal monitors the children's experiences through classroom visits.

4.2 PLANNING FOR IMPROVEMENT

There is a collegial approach to school development planning which involves the staff in the audit of provision and in the setting of priorities and staff development needs. The SDP meets the requirements of The Education (School Development Plans) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2005.

4.3 RESOURCES, FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE

The governors are fully involved in the strategic planning and policy development for the school.

4.4 ACCOMMODATION

The school accommodation consists of a main building which contains three classrooms, an assembly hall which also functions as a gym and canteen, a small multi-purpose library and small group work area, a small office for the Principal and the school secretary, and a staff room. The other five classrooms are housed in temporary accommodation. The size of the early years' classrooms limits unduly the work of the teachers and opportunities for practical experiences for the children. The standard of caretaking is very good and the children take pride in helping the teachers and the support staff to maintain their school. The staff work hard to create bright and inviting classrooms and corridors celebrating the children's work. The accommodation falls short of modern standards and restricts the opportunities to provide aspects of the curriculum effectively.

5. CONCLUSION

5.1 The strengths of the school include:

- the well-motivated children who respond enthusiastically to, and are keen to talk about, their learning;
- the dedication and commitment of the teachers, the valuable contribution made by the classroom assistants, the support staff and the sense of team-spirit among all of the staff;
- the quality of the teaching observed, most of which was good or better;
- the high quality of the provision for children who require additional support with aspects of their learning;
- the developing use of quantitative data for monitoring and evaluating as an integral part of the school's self-evaluative process; and
- the dedication and commitment of the Principal in leading and managing improvement.

5.2 The area for improvement includes the need:

- to raise further the standards the children attain in literacy and numeracy.

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

ACCOMMODATION

- The accommodation falls short of modern standards and restricts the opportunities to provide aspects of the curriculum effectively.

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