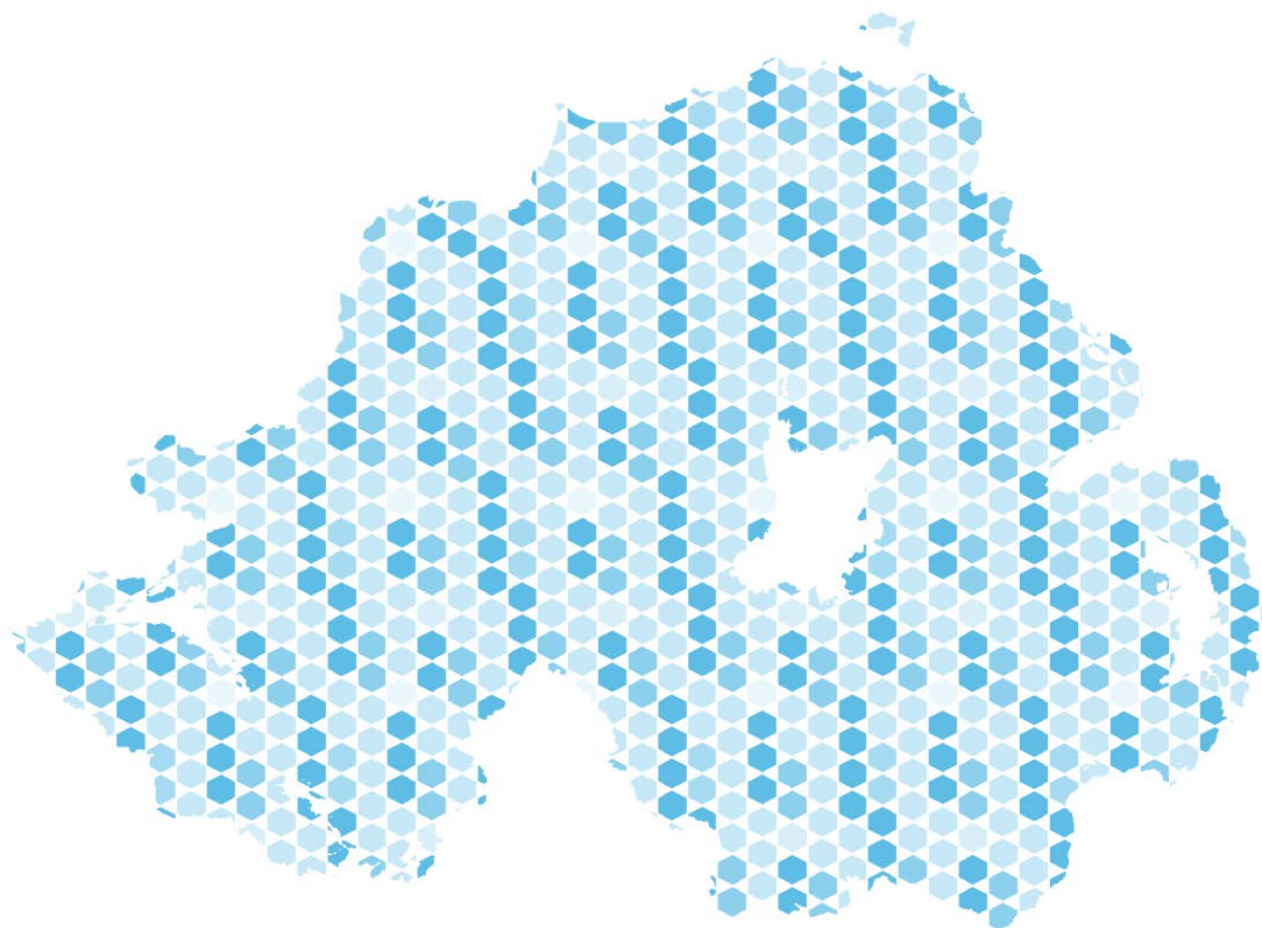


PRIMARY INSPECTION



Education and Training
Inspectorate

Alexander Dickson Primary
School, Ballygowan, County
Down

Report of an Inspection in
May 2016



The Education and Training Inspectorate
Promoting Improvement

Providing Inspection Services for:

Department of Education
Department for the Economy
Department for Communities

CUSTOMER
SERVICE
EXCELLENCE



Quantitative terms used by the Education and Training Inspectorate

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%

Performance levels

The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) use the following performance levels when reporting on Achievement and standards, on Provision for learning and on Leadership and management:

Outstanding
Very good
Good
Important area(s) for improvement
Requires significant improvement
Requires urgent improvement

Overall effectiveness

The ETI use one of the following inspection outcomes when evaluating the overall effectiveness of the school:

The school has a high level of capacity for sustained improvement in the interest of all the learners. The ETI will monitor how the school sustains improvement.
The school demonstrates the capacity to identify and bring about improvement in the interest of all the learners. The ETI will monitor how the school sustains improvement.
The school needs to address (an) important area(s) for improvement in the interest of all the learners. The ETI will monitor and report on the school's progress in addressing the area(s) for improvement. There will be a formal follow-up inspection.
The school needs to address urgently the significant areas for improvement identified in the interest of all the learners. It requires external support to do so. The ETI will monitor and report on the school's progress in addressing the areas for improvement. There will be a formal follow-up inspection.

Contents

Section	Page
1. Inspection method and evidence base	1
2. Focus of inspection	1
3. Context	1
4. Overall findings of the inspection	2
5. Achievements and standards	2
6. Provision for learning	3
7. Leadership and management	4
8. Overall effectiveness	5

1. Inspection method and evidence base

The key questions and quality indicators which guide inspection and self-evaluation of primary schools, which were applied to this inspection, are available in the ETI publication *Together Towards Improvement: a process for self-evaluation* at: <http://www.eti.gov.uk/index/together-towards-improvement/together-towards-improvement-primary.htm>.

Inspectors observed learning and teaching, scrutinised documentation and the children's written work and held formal and informal discussions with children, teachers and staff with specific responsibilities.

The arrangements for this inspection included:

- a meeting with a representative from the governors;
- meetings with groups of children; and
- the opportunity for the parents, teaching and support staff to complete confidential questionnaires.

Fewer than five parents and 25% of staff responded to the questionnaires. The responses to the parental questionnaire were positive; in particular, they highlighted the approachable, caring staff and the sense of community within the school. The responses to the staff questionnaire were also positive. There were no issues emerging from the questionnaires.

2. Focus of inspection

In order to promote improvement in the interest of all children, the purpose of inspection is, through effective linking of internal and external approaches, to evaluate the:

- children's achievements and standards in literacy and numeracy; including how the school is addressing low attainment and underachievement where applicable;
- quality of provision for learning in the school; and
- quality of leadership and management.

3. Context

Alexander Dickson Primary School is a controlled primary school situated in the village of Ballygowan. The children who attend the school come from the village of Ballygowan and the surrounding rural area. The enrolment has remained steady in recent years. The numbers of children entitled to free school meals and the numbers of children on the special educational needs register have remained broadly consistent over the past four years.

Alexander Dickson Primary School	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16
Enrolment	83	88	89	90
% School attendance	95.4	95.7	95.3	N/A
% NI Primary school average	94.9	95.6	95.4	N/A
FSME Percentage ¹	30	30	28	33
No. of children on SEN register	16	21	23	22
% of children on SEN register	20	23	26	23
No. of children with statements of educational need	*	*	*	5
No. of newcomer children	*	0	*	*

Source: data as held by the school.

*Fewer than five

N/A not available

4. Overall findings of the inspection

Overall effectiveness	Address urgently the significant areas for improvement
Achievements and standards	Important areas for improvement
Provision for learning	Important areas for improvement
Leadership and management	Requires significant improvement

5. Achievements and standards

- In a minority of lessons, the children learn well together in pairs and small groups. The children who require additional support with aspects of their learning are well-integrated mostly and demonstrate good behaviours for learning. The children are well behaved and, in most lessons, they demonstrate good self-management and positive dispositions for learning, settling quickly to complete the work set for them by their teachers.
- The school's internal data indicates that a majority of the children achieve at or above expectation in English and that a significant minority achieve below expectation in mathematics. A majority of the children who require additional support with aspects of their learning achieve below expectation in English and mathematics.
- The standards in literacy, as evidenced by the children's books and their responses during lessons, have important areas for improvement. By the end of KS 2, while the children can read competently they do so with limited expression and understanding. The development and standards of the children's writing skills are curtailed by the limited opportunities for extended writing across the curriculum. In a minority of the lessons observed, most of the children were able to give reasoned responses to the teachers' effective questioning. In the foundation stage, the children develop well their communication, self-management and handwriting skills. In key stage (KS) 1, the children read with confidence.

¹ The term 'FSME Percentage' refers to the percentage of children entitled to free school meals.

- By the end of KS2, the children achieve good standards in mathematics. There is, however, variation in their year-on-year progress across the key stages. In the foundation stage and upper KS 2, the children have a good knowledge of mathematical facts and are competent in applying their mathematical knowledge to a wide range of problem-solving activities. By year 7, the most able children have a good knowledge and understanding of number, using shape and space and measures, and handling data. They are confident in applying a good range of mental mathematics strategies to problem-solving activities. Across the key stages, the children do not have a sufficient understanding of how to approach mathematical investigations pertaining to real-life situations, and they are unable to identify and apply consistently the full range of mental mathematical strategies.

6. Provision for learning

- The provision for learning has important areas for improvement. In one-half of the lessons evaluated, the activities provided for the children were not matched well to their needs and abilities. These lessons lacked challenge and progression in learning and, on occasion, the children became disengaged with the lesson. In almost all of the lessons observed, the learning environment was welcoming and working relationships were good. In the good and better practice, in one-half of the lessons observed, the learning experiences were engaging and addressed appropriately the needs, abilities and interests of the children. The teachers provided well-paced, purposeful opportunities for the children to work together and independently and to make progress in their learning. Effective questioning was used to deepen the children's thinking and to develop their oral responses.
- Throughout KS1 and 2, the curriculum lacks coherence; the provision does not promote year-on-year progression in learning and does not support effectively the development of the children's skills and capabilities. In addition, across the school, the use of information and communication technology (ICT) is underdeveloped.
- The provision for special educational needs within the school has important areas for improvement. The monitoring of the progress of children who require additional support with aspects of their learning is not sufficiently rigorous and, within lessons, differentiated approaches to learning and teaching are not consistent in meeting the needs of the children. The strengths of the special educational needs provision include: the prompt identification of the children's needs; the effective working relationships with a range of external agencies to support the children; the weekly literacy intervention for a number of targeted children and the involvement of these children in reviewing their progress towards the targets set for them. The classroom assistants know the children well and provide very good support within lessons.
- In the teaching of literacy, the school adheres to a specific phonics system across all the key stages which develops well the children's ability to explore the sound content of language; however, the children do not have a sufficiently expansive range of vocabulary to call upon in order to enrich further the quality of the writing. The children's thinking and oral skills are not developed consistently across the key stages, with variability in the opportunities for them to give extended responses or discuss their learning in pairs and groups. Throughout the school, the children experience a variety of approaches to reading including

shared, guided and independent reading; however, the teachers do not promote effectively enough the skills of reading for information and inference, as well as enjoyment of reading. The opportunities for the children to develop their extended writing, including across the curriculum, are limited and the whole-school approach to marking for improvement is not consistent. The teachers do not plan effectively enough in order to support year-on-year progression in all aspects of the children's literacy.

- Overall, there is inconsistency in the level of challenge in the numeracy activities, particularly across KS 1 and 2 wherein the learning experiences and teaching strategies employed in each class do not match closely the range of the children's abilities. The teachers do not plan for and provide the children with enough meaningful, real-life opportunities to apply their mathematical thinking to problem-solving and investigative activities that link with other areas of the curriculum. In twenty percent of the mathematics lessons, the teachers used differentiated questioning to extend the children's mathematical language and flexibility in thinking through problem-solving activities that built on the children's prior knowledge.
- The quality of the arrangements for pastoral care is good. The school has a caring ethos and the staff's appropriate use of positive behaviour strategies leads to improved learning experiences for most of the children. Their achievements and contributions are celebrated through a range of rewards which they understand and value. The school's enrichment activities, such as Roots of Empathy and the intergenerational project, enhance the development of the children's interpersonal skills and provide opportunities for them to learn together with members of the local community. The school council provides limited opportunities for the children to take on more substantive leadership responsibilities and decision-making roles relating to their experiences in the school.
- The school gives good attention to promoting healthy eating and physical activity, through the encouragement of healthy snacks at break and a range of extra-curricular sporting activities which encourage the children to adopt healthy lifestyles.

7. Leadership and management

- The quality of leadership and management requires significant improvement. The senior leadership and learning co-ordinators do not monitor effectively the educational provision in order to ensure continuous improvement in the children's experiences and outcomes.
- The school's processes for self-evaluation leading to improvement are under developed. While the school leadership has begun to use the internal assessment data and responses from parental, staff and children's questionnaires to identify areas for improvement, the school development plan² has not been informed by effective evaluation of the previous plan and lacks strategic direction. The associated action plans for literacy, numeracy, special educational needs and ICT do not outline clearly the baseline position of the school and the targets for improvement. In addition, leadership at all levels does not implement a systematic and robust approach to monitoring and evaluating the impact of the action plans on the quality of the children's learning experiences.

² The school development plan is partially compliant with the requirements of the School Development Planning Regulations (NI) 2010.

- The school has effective working relationships with the main contributory pre-school provider in order to help the children settle into the school. There are good links with local post-primary schools, including through a number of curricular projects, which ensure that the children are well-prepared for moving to the next stage of their learning. Communication with parents is maintained through effective use of social media and through regular written communication.
- The governors do not exercise fully their support and challenge function regarding the standards attained by the children and the effectiveness of the school development planning process. Furthermore, there is an urgent need for the governors to review the current staffing arrangements in the school, in order to address the areas for improvement in the provision and outcomes for the children. Based on the evidence available at the time of inspection, the ETI's evaluation is that there can be limited confidence in the aspects of governance evaluated. The board of governors is, however, committed to the school and takes an active part in a range of school activities, including the management of the school website and social media account.
- On the basis of the evidence available at the time of the inspection, the school has satisfactory arrangements in place for safeguarding children. These arrangements reflect broadly the guidance issued by the Department of Education. The following area needs to be addressed:
 - to update all pastoral care and safeguarding policies to reflect current best practice.
- In discussions with the inspectors, the children in year 6 reported that they feel safe and happy in school and know what to do if they have any concerns about their well-being.
- It will be important that the employing authority, school governors and the staff plan for, and manage, issues related to the sustainability of the school provision and school budget, in order to address the current and future needs of the children and the staff.

8. Overall effectiveness

Alexander Dickson Primary School needs to address urgently the significant areas for improvement identified in the interest of all the learners. It requires external support to do so.

The areas for improvement are:

- to improve the quality and consistency of learning and teaching; and
- for leadership at all levels to implement a rigorous system of monitoring and evaluation in order to measure the impact of the school improvement work on the children's learning experiences and raising standards.

The ETI will monitor and report on the school's progress in addressing the areas for improvement. There will be a formal follow-up inspection in 18 to 24 months.

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