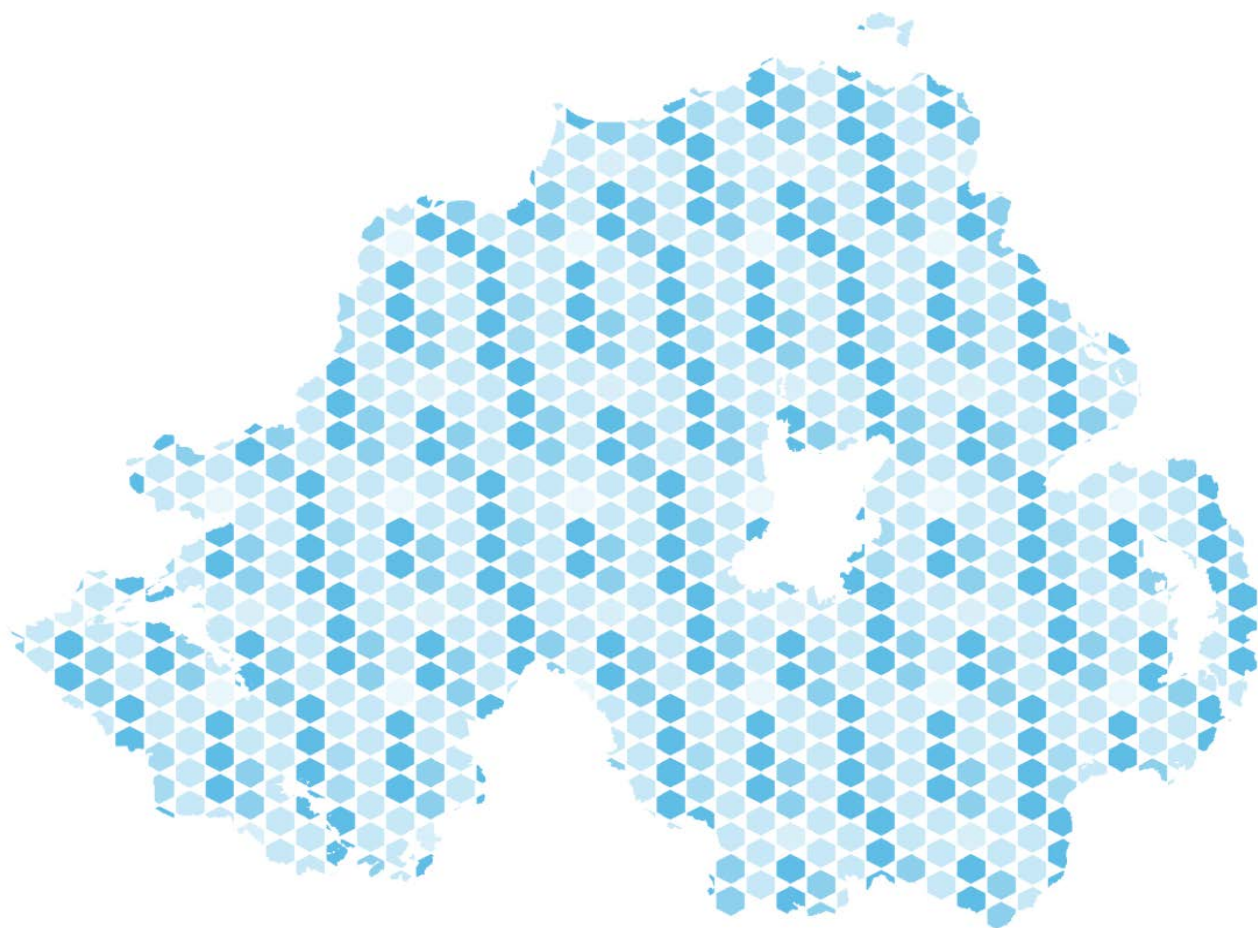


PRIMARY INSPECTION



Education and Training
Inspectorate

Castlewellan Primary School,
Castlewellan, County Down

Controlled, co-educational

Report of an Inspection in
October 2016

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.

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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: <https://www.eti.gov.uk/publications/together-towards-improvement-primary>.

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 a confidential questionnaire.

Twenty-two percent of the parents responded to the questionnaire; their responses indicated high levels of satisfaction with the life and work of the school. In particular, the parents highlighted the inclusive and friendly ethos, the recognition given by the staff to the specific talents of each child and the high level of support available for children with additional needs. Thirty-eight percent of the staff responded to the questionnaire; their responses were wholly positive. The ETI has reported to the principal and a representative of the board of governors the main points emerging from the questionnaires and the discussions.

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 including the provision for the children of reception age and for the children who have moderate learning difficulties; and
- quality of leadership and management.

3. Context

Castlewellan Primary School is a controlled primary school situated in the town of Castlewellan. Almost all of the children attending the school come from the town and the surrounding rural areas. The school has provision for children of reception age and has a class for children who have moderate learning difficulties. The enrolment has decreased by 20% over the past three years. In the same period, the percentage of children who have free school meals entitlement has remained steady while the proportion requiring additional help with aspects of their learning has increased.

Castlewellan Primary School	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17
Enrolment	64	58	52	51
% School attendance	94.3	94.7	94.3	N/A
% NI Primary school average	95.6	95.4	94.1	N/A
FSME Percentage ¹	31.3	41.4	36.5	45.1
No. of children on SEN register	26	27	27	26
% of children on SEN register	40.6	46.6	51.9	51.0
No. of children with statements of educational need	8	10	7	9
No. of newcomer children	*	*	*	*

Source: data as held by the school.

* fewer than 5

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	Important areas for improvement
Reception	Important area for improvement
Class for children who have moderate learning difficulties	Good

5. Achievements and standards

- Overall, the standards in literacy have important areas for improvement. As the children progress through the school, they draw upon a wider range of descriptive vocabulary in their writing. The children are limited, however, in their knowledge of the key features of the types of writing, and a significant minority of the children make frequent errors in basic spelling and grammar when writing independently. Most of the children achieve good standards in reading. From foundation stage, the children develop well their fluency when reading; by year 7, almost all of the children read with fluency and expression and are able to summarise the key events from their class novels. The children's comprehension skills are not developed sufficiently. Most of the children listen attentively to the teachers, classroom assistants and their peers and can communicate effectively in group activities. The children develop progressively a good range of appropriate information and communication technology (ICT) skills in literacy, for example, through the use of a range of applications to share their work with their parents and with children from other schools.

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

- Overall, the standards in numeracy have important areas for improvement. Across the key stages, the children's understanding of mathematical processes and their skills in mental mathematics are underdeveloped; however, the children make good progress in acquiring their knowledge of number. In general, they have insufficient opportunities to talk about and explain their thinking to one another and, consequently, they lack confidence and flexibility in applying their mathematical knowledge to solve problems and use mathematics across the curriculum. From an early stage, the children develop progressively good ICT skills related to numeracy in coding and in the use of programmable devices.
- Most of the children who require additional support with their learning make good progress in literacy and a majority make good progress in numeracy. During the inspection, the children who have moderate learning difficulties engaged confidently with the inspectors, expressing clearly what they enjoy about school and their aspirations for the future.
- The children of reception age are overly reliant on adults when engaging in play based learning. The overuse of templates is hindering the children's creativity. The children listen attentively to the stories, draw pictures, develop their mathematical knowledge through sorting and colour recognition, and use scissors to develop their physical skills.
- Almost all of the children settle quickly to their work and have effective personal and social skills. Their behaviour is excellent and they have very good working relationships with one another and with the staff. As the children progress through the school, they develop increasing levels of resilience and perseverance at set tasks and can work well independently. They demonstrate good skills in the creative and expressive areas of the curriculum.

6. Provision for learning

- The quality of the planning, learning, teaching and assessment is an important area for improvement.
- There is variability in the quality of planning across all areas of the curriculum; in particular, the planning does not focus sufficiently on the intended learning to meet the wide range of needs within the composite classes. While most of the lessons observed were good or very good, over one-fifth of the lessons had important areas for improvement. The quality of the teachers' marking is inconsistent across the school.
- Across the key stages, there is a lack of a systematic approach to the teaching of writing. Currently, there is an over-emphasis on the teaching of recount and procedural writing; the children need more opportunities to develop their writing skills across a wider range of forms and for a variety of purposes. In key stage 2, a recently introduced computerised reading scheme is beginning to help the children access books that are appropriate and challenging. However, the children's comprehension skills are underdeveloped: there is, therefore, a need to develop further the children's comprehension skills through investigating authors' writing styles, comparing and contrasting novels and providing the children with more frequent opportunities to articulate their thinking. Literacy is celebrated and promoted through attractive displays, school book fairs and World Book Day.

- There is insufficient planning for the progressive development of the children's mathematical language and their mental mathematical and problem-solving skills. The teachers provide the children with good opportunities for the development of most of the key mathematical concepts, including number, through the regular and effective use of concrete materials and games. Recent training in numeracy withdrawal support has been undertaken by staff but has not yet been implemented for over one-quarter of the children identified as underachieving in numeracy.
- The level of support provided for the children who require additional support with aspects of their learning is a strength of the school. All of the teaching staff and classroom assistants have accessed specialist training and have implemented successfully a wide range of strategies, which are incorporated into the children's individual education plans, to promote the children's social, emotional and educational development. The literacy needs of the minority of children identified as requiring additional support are met very well through withdrawal support and access to a wide range of support services. A team of dedicated classroom assistants contribute well to effective and inclusive classroom provision.
- The children who have moderate learning difficulties have regular opportunities to engage meaningfully with their peers in their respective year groups through an appropriate range of opportunities to participate in World Around Us, play-based learning and the Arts. A highly structured environment has been created where the children know the routines very well and are confident in moving in and out of the mainstream classes.
- The reception provision is an important area for improvement. Aspects of their learning are too formalised and do not provide sufficient opportunities for the children to develop their language, creativity and independence. The school needs to align more closely the provision for these children to the 'Curricular Guidance for Pre-school Education' and to tailor the provision to meet the children's needs and stage of development.
- The quality of the pastoral care provision is very good. A key strength of the school's provision is the consistent approach by all staff to the promotion of positive behaviour which has created an ethos of caring and trust and helps develop well the children's self-confidence and self-management. The children's successes are valued and celebrated through the school house system and the attractive displays, rewards and certificates.

7. Leadership and management

- Strategic leadership is an important area for improvement. The ineffective distribution of roles and responsibilities is impeding the capacity of the school to monitor and evaluate robustly the quality of the school's provision and to bring about improvement in key curricular areas in a collegial and timely manner. Too few members of staff undertake responsibility for the co-ordination of key curricular aspects of the work of the school. In particular, the strategic leadership of literacy and numeracy within the school requires significant improvement. The governors supported by the Education Authority, therefore, need to review the distribution of roles and responsibilities at senior and middle leadership level as a matter of urgency.

- Extensive consultation with all stakeholders, including the children, has informed appropriately the identification of a number of key priorities within the school development plan² and the associated action plans. Due to insufficient monitoring and evaluation of the provision, the school development plan now needs to be reviewed to take account of the findings of this inspection. There is variability in the quality of the action plans; the literacy and numeracy action plans do not focus adequately on improving the quality of the children's learning experiences. The action plans for ICT and the special educational needs provision are of a good quality; there is evidence that actions taken in recent years in these areas have brought about improvements in the quality of the provision and in the standards attained by the children, impacting positively on the social and emotional well-being of the children.
- Links with local primary schools are effective in supporting children's spiritual development and their social and language skills. A key strength of the school is the engagement with a wide range of external agencies to provide parenting programmes and a range of tailored support to develop the children's educational, health, social and emotional needs.
- 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. There are aspects of governance to review, namely to: develop further, in partnership with the principal, the capacity of governance to oversee the monitoring and evaluation of the school's provision and the outworking of the school development plan; and, review the roles and responsibilities of staff to support a more collegial, shared and timely approach to the school's development work, particularly with regard to the provision of key areas of the curriculum and the standards attained by the children.
- 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.
- On the basis of the evidence available at the time of the inspection, the school has comprehensive arrangements in place for safeguarding children. These arrangements reflect the guidance issued by the Department of Education. In discussions with the inspectors, the children in year 6 and year 7 reported that they are happy and secure in school and know what to do if they have any concerns about their well-being.

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

8. Overall effectiveness

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

The areas for improvement are to:

- develop further the planning across all areas of the curriculum to better meet the learning needs of all of the children and improve the standards they attain;
- improve the quality of the provision for the children of reception age;
- review the distribution of roles and responsibilities at senior and middle leadership level as a matter of urgency to effect improvement in, and to provide rigorous evaluation of, the provision and attainment; and
- strengthen the governance of the school.

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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