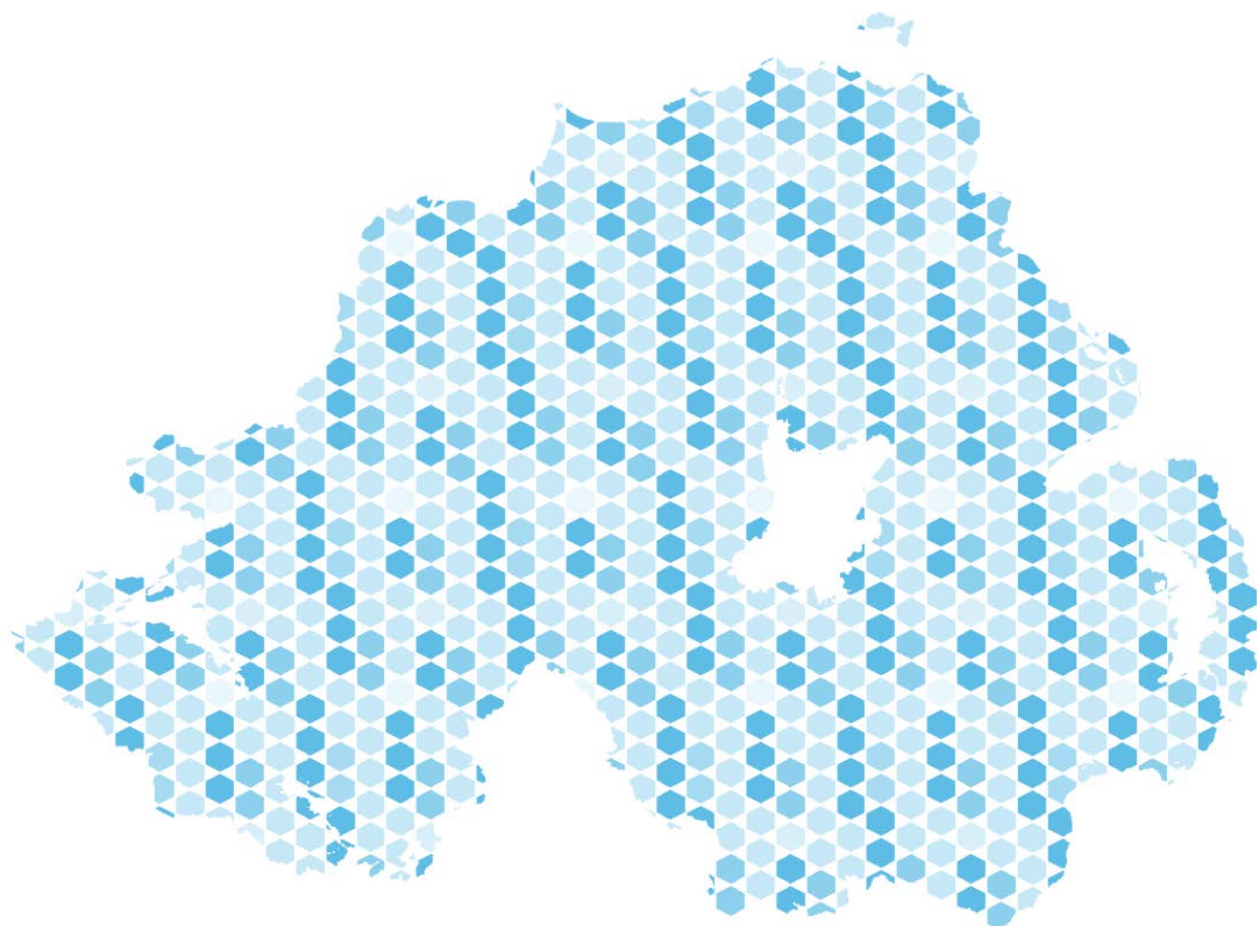


# PRIMARY INSPECTION



Education and Training  
Inspectorate

Sion Mills Primary School, Nursery  
Unit and Speech and Language  
Unit, Strabane, County Tyrone

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.

# Contents

<b>Section</b>	<b>Page</b>
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	5
8. Overall effectiveness	6

## **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.etini.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 representatives from the governors;
- meetings with groups of children; and
- the opportunity for the parents, teaching and support staff to complete a confidential questionnaire.

Thirteen percent of parents and a majority of the teaching and support staff responded to the confidential questionnaires. The responses to the parental questionnaire indicated satisfaction with the life and work of the school. In particular, the parents valued the commitment by staff to supporting the care, dignity and well-being of their children. All of the parents agreed that their children enjoy learning at the school. The teaching staff and support staff's responses were positive and emphasised the care and commitment shown to the children. The ETI has reported to the principal and representatives of the board of governors the 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 including the nursery unit and the speech and language unit; and
- quality of leadership and management.

## **3. Context**

Sion Mills Primary School is a controlled primary school with a Nursery Unit and a speech and language unit. It is situated in the historic linen village of Sion Mills, close to Strabane. All of the children come from the village and the surrounding rural area. The nursery unit has effective links with Sure Start which is located on the school premises. The speech and language unit was opened in 2012 and currently has twelve children enrolled. They come from several feeder primary schools, are educated in the unit for four days per week, and return to their own school each Friday. Placement duration is from one term to two years. The enrolment in the primary school is stable although it has been operating below capacity for more than four years. The nursery unit's enrolment is at full capacity. The principal has been in post for one year.

Sion Mills Primary School	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17
Enrolment	228	217	228	218
% School attendance	95.2	94.1	94.7	N/A
% NI Primary school average	95.6	95.4	N/A	N/A
FSME Percentage <sup>1</sup>	36%	45%	42%	30%
No. of children on SEN register	61	87	80	64
% of children on SEN register	22%	34%	30%	28.5%
No. of children with statements of educational need	7	10	9	7
No. of newcomer children	*	*	*	*
Nursery Unit Enrolment	44	38	40	52

**Source:** data as held by the school.

\* fewer than 5

N/A not available

#### 4. Overall findings of the inspection

Overall effectiveness	Capacity to identify and bring about improvement
<b>Achievements and standards</b>	Good
<b>Provision for learning</b>	Good
<b>Leadership and management</b>	Good
<b>Nursery Unit</b>	Good
<b>Speech and Language Unit</b>	Very good

#### 5. Achievements and standards

- The children achieve good standards in literacy. Throughout the school, they develop systematically a range of reading strategies and, by year 7, the most able children can read fluently and talk enthusiastically about favourite authors and reading preferences. In the foundation stage, the children's talking and listening skills are well-developed; however, the quality of their early writing is of too low a standard. In key stage (KS) 1 and 2, the children are confident in engaging with adults and peers and can ask questions of each other. Self-editing skills are evident in the children's completed samples of work but these skills should be integrated further into daily classroom practice, in all forms of writing. By year 7, the children are able to produce interesting and well presented writing in a variety of formats using different mediums, for example, power point presentations.
- Standards achieved by the children in numeracy are good. In the foundation stage, the children's numeracy concepts and language are at an early stage of development and greater account should be taken of their prior learning, particularly of the children who transfer from the nursery unit. By year 7, the most able children demonstrate an understanding of numeracy concepts; however, they have limited understanding of the mental strategies to use when presented with numeracy problems. Children have a positive disposition to their

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

learning in numeracy and engage well in tasks and activities. There are good opportunities to use information and communication technology (ICT) to support the children's learning in numeracy, for example, through using data handling programmes.

- Most of the children who require support with aspects of their learning in literacy, and a majority of the children who require support with aspects of their learning in numeracy, are making progress.
- The children, including the underage pre-school children, in both of the nursery unit classes, are very well-settled and are able to follow the routines of the day. They are keen to explore the authentic materials and to represent their ideas through the art and drawing activities. The children are adventurous and imaginative in role play and listen attentively during the story sessions. The children's progress and development of social skills and language are very good.
- The well-motivated children in the speech and language unit are making very good progress in the development of their language skills. They engage enthusiastically in their play-based learning and apply effective communication skills within role play and imaginative social play contexts. The children understand instructions and are able to sustain concentrated scientific learning arising from the baking and planting activities. They demonstrate increasing levels of confidence to make choices and to problem-solve, and are keen to engage in sensory learning experiences.
- The children are considerate when relating to their peers and are confident and articulate when interacting with adults; their behaviour is exemplary. They are eager to work independently and enjoy taking responsibility. The school engages in numerous educational initiatives that provide scope for the children to embrace challenges, be resourceful, to work in teams and to reach agreement on decisions. The 'book buddy' and 'playground buddy' schemes develop maturity in managing friendship with others and develop leadership skills. The children listen attentively in class and delight in opportunities to express themselves. They respond enthusiastically to questions and apply themselves well to tasks.

## **6. Provision for learning**

- Most of the lessons observed were good or better though there is variation in the quality of planning, which impacts on teaching and learning. In the best practice: a significant minority of lessons, the planning was differentiated to meet the range of abilities within each class, including the more able children; and, evaluations informed future learning. Marking for improvement in literacy and numeracy is variable across the school and, in the best practice, provides support and direction for the children in improving the quality of their work.
- The needs of the children who require additional support with their learning are identified at an early stage and interventions include in-class support, and literacy and numeracy withdrawal classes. The staff has received recent training in writing education plans and while there is a variety of formats, the targets are appropriate, specific and reviewed regularly. Where appropriate, information and assessments by outside agencies are used to inform appropriately the education plans. Parents are consulted regularly about their child's progress and, in the best practice, the children have opportunities to contribute to their learning plans.

The school has placed a particular emphasis on supporting children within the autistic spectrum and is proactive in training staff to provide appropriate intervention strategies. The skilled team of classroom assistants make an effective contribution to supporting and empowering children who require support with their learning.

- The school has placed an emphasis on promoting reading throughout the school through the use of: a computerised reading programme; a well stocked central library; provision of class libraries; and, special events, such as, visits by authors; 'World Book Day' and a 'no pens/pencils day'. The literacy policy has been recently reviewed and there is appropriate whole school planning for the key areas of literacy. The use of drama is integrated well throughout the literacy curriculum which engages the children in a range of imaginative and creative role play situations. Information and communication technology (ICT) is used well throughout the curriculum to support the children's learning.
- In the most effective practice for numeracy, in a significant minority of the lessons, the classroom management was skilful and the children worked industriously either individually or in groups on numeracy tasks, which had an appropriate level of challenge. There was a good range of practical learning experiences to develop further the children's understanding of key mathematical concepts. In the least effective practice, in a significant minority of lessons, the teachers' expectations of the children's learning were too low and the medium-term numeracy planning did not take account of the range of abilities or specific needs. The long-term planning of numeracy should be reviewed to ensure that the learning and teaching follows clearly understood lines of progression.
- The play provision provides many good opportunities for developing learning across the curriculum. However, the planning in the nursery unit and the foundation stage lacks progression in the curricular areas. The promotion of literacy and numeracy, at an appropriately challenging level, needs to be included in the planning, teaching and assessment arrangements.
- The quality of provision in the nursery unit is good. The learning environment is well-organised and stimulating. The interesting activities and authentic resources provide very good opportunities for the pre-school children to learn in all areas of the pre-school curriculum. The staff interaction is often skilful in promoting the children's language and learning. They track the children's progress; however, aspects of the learning expectations are not well-matched to the developmental needs of all the children. The programme for the underage children requires differentiation and development with the associated age appropriate resources and activities to meet their specific needs.
- The quality of the provision for the children in the speech and language unit is very good. The teacher, speech and language therapist, and classroom assistant know the children well and work collaboratively to provide an effective speech and language programme. The educational psychologist reports are used to inform the staff who plan effectively to meet the specific language needs of the children.

- The quality of the pastoral care provision is very good. The learning environment is stimulating and the children are happy, cared for and respected. Successes are celebrated through a comprehensive merits and awards system and children gain confidence in expressing themselves through art, drama, music and sport.

## **7. Leadership and management**

- A new school development plan for 2016-19 has been devised, informed by effective evaluation by the whole school community and wider consultation. It identifies appropriate key priorities and provides strategic direction for the school's improvement. The school is developing the use of performance data to identify priorities. The action plans require clarity of purpose to provide consistent progression in learning, as children make the transition from one year or phase to the next, particularly in the core curricular area of numeracy.
- In the nursery unit, the action to promote improvement is taken forward by the nursery unit teacher with evidence of improvements in the provision for learning; however, the self-evaluation and action planning process is restricted due to the lack of time for planning and monitoring the children's progress with the classroom assistant.
- Within the speech and language unit, the action to promote improvement clearly identifies the partnership and training arrangements to develop staff to ensure consistent approaches to supporting language development. Service level agreements with the schools and consultation with parents and the children inform the ongoing development of the language unit. While the teacher-in-charge works with the literacy and numeracy co-ordinators in the evaluation of the children's standards, the monitoring and evaluation of the numeracy provision for the children is at an early stage of development.
- The school is embedded in the heart of the community with musical and sporting activities of an intergenerational nature that engender respect across the generations. Projects based on the local traditions of the linen industry and the railway promote a sense of pride in the community's history. The school has effective links with local primary and post-primary schools, and engagement in initiatives such as the Department of Education's Signature Project for Shared Education are part of the school's established identity. The school has a second green flag in the Eco Schools' programme. The Incredible Parents group and the Parents, Friends and Teachers' Association contribute significantly to the life and work of the school, for example, by raising funds for new resources and supporting the staff and children in school productions.
- The board of governors has several new members and all are working with the new principal to bring about further improvement. Based on the evidence available at the time of inspection, the ETI's evaluation is that there can be confidence in the aspects of governance evaluated. There are aspects of governance to review, namely to: build further on the existing good working relationships with the new principal and several recently appointed members of the board of governors; and, to exercise the challenge function in monitoring and evaluating improvement, particularly in the area of numeracy.



- 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 KS2 reported that they are happy and secure in school and know what to do if they have any concerns about their well-being. The children are particularly secure in e-safety procedures.

## **8. Overall effectiveness**

Sion Mills Primary School and Nursery Unit demonstrates the capacity to identify and bring about improvement in the interest of all the learners.

There is an area for improvement that the school has demonstrated the capacity to address. The area for improvement is:

- to develop further the role of the co-ordinators to monitor and evaluate, to ensure greater consistency and progression in learning, particularly in the curricular area of numeracy.

The ETI will monitor how the school sustains improvement.

© CROWN COPYRIGHT 2016

This report may be reproduced in whole or in part, except for commercial purposes or in connection with a prospectus or advertisement, provided that the source and date thereof are stated.

Copies of this report are available on the ETI website: [www.etini.gov.uk](http://www.etini.gov.uk)