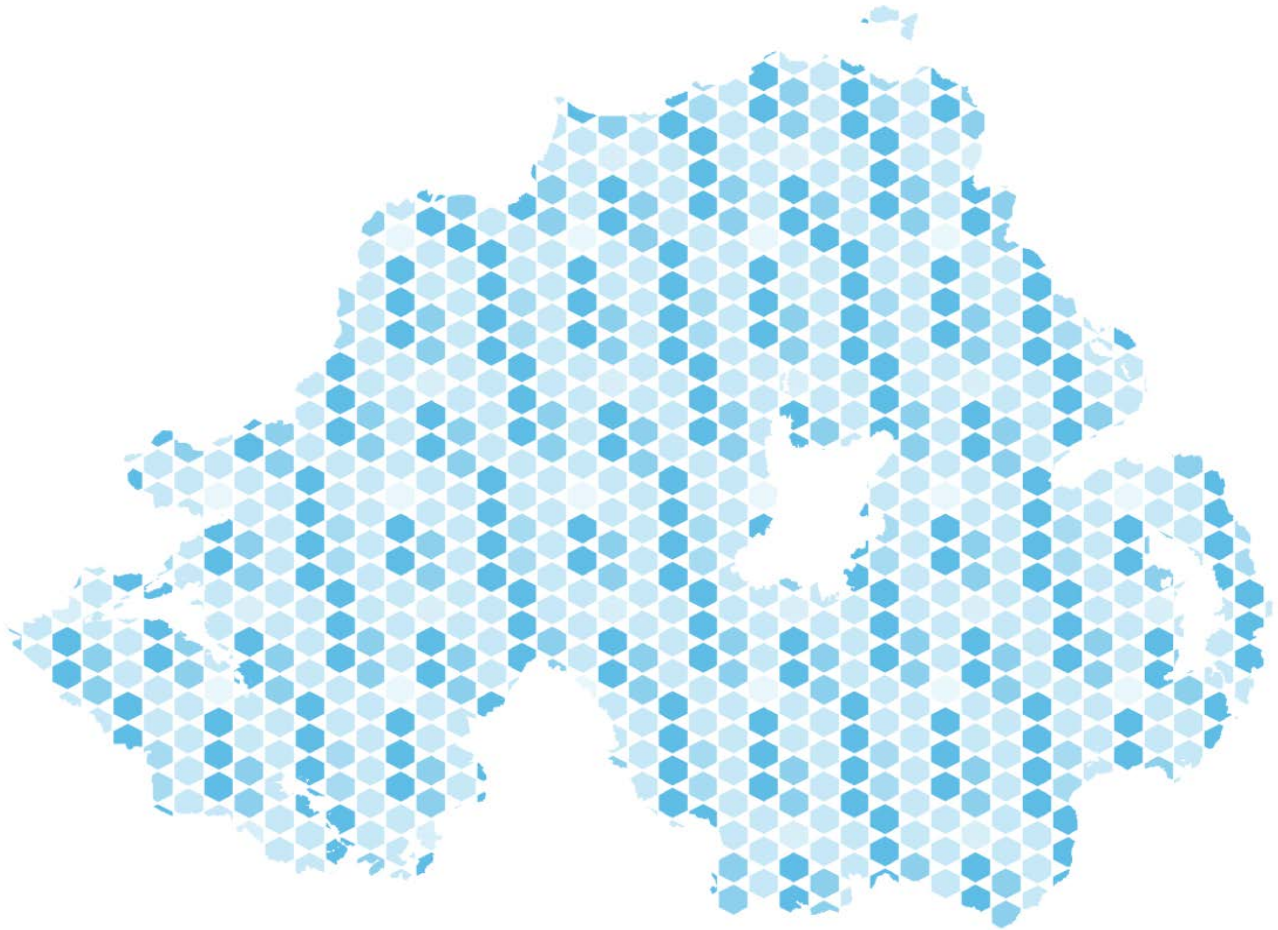


# PRIMARY INSPECTION



Education and Training  
Inspectorate

St Clare's Primary School and  
Nursery Unit, Belfast

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.

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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: <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 confidential questionnaires.

A small number of parents and 57% of the staff responded to the confidential questionnaires. In all of the responses to the parental questionnaire, the parents reported that their children enjoy school and that the staff support well the development of their children's personal, social and emotional skills. The staff responses were mostly positive; in particular, they highlighted the strong links and effective communication with parents, and their access to appropriate staff development opportunities which enable them to carry out their duties with confidence. The ETI has reported to the principal and representatives of the board of governors the small number of issues emerging from the parental and staff confidential 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 nursery unit; and
- quality of leadership and management.

## **3. Context**

St Clare's Primary School is a maintained primary school with a nursery unit, situated in West Belfast. The children attending the school come mainly from the surrounding area. Over the last four years, the enrolment has risen slightly although the school is not operating currently at full capacity. In this academic year, the percentage of children entitled to free school meals has increased and the proportion requiring additional help with aspects of their learning has also risen. The school's motto, 'Peace and Goodness', is lived out in the welcoming and inclusive ethos of the school and the focus of the work of the school on caring for one another, and their support for a wide range of charitable events. The number

of newcomer children has increased significantly in the last four years. The school has well established links with local maintained primary schools and is in partnership with a controlled primary school for a community-based initiative entitled, 'Moving Up, Moving On,' which aims to address the support needs of the children and their families.

St Clare's Primary School	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16
Enrolment	461	458	484	485
Enrolment in the Nursery Unit	52	52	52	52
% School attendance	92.7	94.3	93.3	N/A
% NI Primary school average	94.9	95.6	95.4	N/A
FSME Percentage <sup>1</sup>	65	67	65	71
No. of children on SEN register	124	135	158	170
% of children on SEN register	27	29.5	32.6	35
No. of children with statements of educational need	14	11	13	16
No. of newcomer children	6	14	17	22

**Source:** data as held by the school.  
N/A not available

#### 4. Overall findings of the inspection

Overall effectiveness	Address important areas for improvement
<b>Achievements and standards</b>	Important areas for improvement
<b>Provision for learning</b>	Important areas for improvement
<b>Leadership and management</b>	Important areas for improvement
<b>Nursery Unit</b>	Important areas for improvement

#### 5. Achievements and standards

- The children settle well to their learning and work co-operatively in pairs and in small groups. They respond enthusiastically when presented with learning activities set in contexts which meet their interests and provide appropriate challenge. All of the children, in particular, those who have complex social, emotional and behavioural needs, are developing well a range of strategies to aid self-management, including: increased perseverance; effective communication of their emotions; and conflict resolution.
- The school's performance data and the standards in the children's books show that most of the children, including those who require additional support with aspects of their learning, make progress in English and achieve in line with or above expectation. In mathematics, a majority of the children, including those who require additional support with aspects of their learning, make progress and achieve in line with or above expectation.
- The achievements and standards in literacy are good. Across the key stages, most of the children demonstrate good talking and listening skills. In most of the lessons, they contribute eagerly to class and group discussions and present and share their ideas confidently with their peers. From the foundation stage, the

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

children develop their ability to write independently and, by year 7, most children produce a good variety of extended writing across a range of forms for different purposes and audiences. The more able children in year 7 read with fluency, expression and understanding and can talk maturely about their reading. The older children help the younger children to develop their reading skills. A minority of children are, however, underachieving in literacy. Consistent in-class support for them, through appropriate differentiation by the class teachers, is required.

- Overall, the standards in numeracy are an important area for improvement. In a significant minority of the lessons, the children engage well in practical numeracy activities and can apply their mathematical learning to real-life situations and to other areas of learning. The more able children in year 7 demonstrate some flexibility in their mathematical thinking and have a good knowledge of the key mathematical concepts in number and measures; they are not secure in their knowledge of the key mathematical concepts in the areas of handling data and shape and space.
- Most of the children who require additional support with aspects of their learning are making very good progress and are meeting the targets outlined in their individual education plans.
- The children who attend the nursery unit achieve good standards. They spend lengthy periods at self-chosen activities and often engage in purposeful and concentrated play. Most of the children are well-behaved and show respect for each other and their environment. They can talk about their work and experiences and most can produce representational artwork of a good standard. The children enjoy and listen attentively to stories and most participate readily in songs and rhymes.
- The children achieve very good standards in information and communication technology (ICT). They engage in a wide-range of activities including desk-top publishing, animation and coding. The children are competent and confident in the use of a variety of programmes and applications. They are enthusiastic and knowledgeable about using ICT and use it effectively to enhance their learning.

## **6. Provision for learning**

- Most of the lessons observed were good or better, with just under one-quarter of them having important areas for improvement. The planning for key curricular areas, particularly numeracy, needs to be improved as it: lacks coherence; does not promote effectively appropriate continuity and progression in the children's learning; and is not tailored sufficiently to match the abilities of all of the children. In the very good practice, in two-fifths of the lessons observed, the teachers use a wide range of effective teaching strategies to assess the children's understanding, develop their creativity and appeal to their personal interests. The quality of the marking of children's work is variable; at times, there is insufficient accuracy in the teachers' marking and limited guidance on how the children can improve their work. The leaders at all levels need to disseminate more systematically the effective classroom practice which exists in the school, particularly in the assessment of the children's learning and in matching the level of challenge to each child's ability to ensure the needs of all of the children are met.

- The provision for children who require additional support with aspects of their learning is very good. Priority is given to the early identification of children's needs and appropriate individual learning targets are set, based on thorough diagnostic assessment, professional judgement and parental input. A key strength of the provision is the very well planned support for the holistic needs of the newcomer children and the children who require nurture support. The children benefit from very effective withdrawal sessions, most of which are for literacy. In the withdrawal sessions observed, the quality of the lessons ranged from good to outstanding, with most either being very good or better. The in-class provision for these children is more variable in quality; the mainstream class teachers need to ensure the children's learning needs are met fully in their classes. The highly skilled classroom assistants engage effectively with the children and support well their learning.
- Overall, the provision for literacy is good. Most of the lessons observed were effective in developing the children's literacy skills. Throughout the school, the children experience a variety of approaches to reading including shared, guided and independent reading. The teachers foster the children's enjoyment of reading through well-planned events, such as, visits by authors and educational trips to enhance the children's learning experiences. The guided reading activities are varied and interesting, with the integration of music and role play to help develop the children's creativity, imagination and communication skills. As they progress through the school, the children are provided with age-appropriate opportunities to develop, edit and redraft their writing with increasing independence; this is extending effectively the children's reading and writing skills.
- Overall, the provision for numeracy requires significant improvement. The key features of the more effective lessons are: the setting of mathematics in real-life contexts which engage the children; the use of concrete materials to support the children's understanding; and, open-ended questioning to provide the children with opportunities to explain their thinking and use appropriate mathematical language. In the less effective lessons, the work is not tailored effectively to meet the learning needs or ability of the majority of the children. As a consequence, the children's learning does not progress sufficiently. In order to improve the quality of numeracy provision within the school, there is a need to: develop further the planning at all levels; integrate more effectively mathematical concepts and processes through all areas of the mathematics curriculum; and provide the children with more opportunities to apply their mathematics in other areas of the curriculum, including through the World Around Us and play-based learning.
- The provision in the nursery unit is an important area for improvement. There is a friendly, caring atmosphere in the nursery unit and the working relationships between the staff and the children are mostly good. The pre-school programme provides a limited range of good opportunities for learning across all areas of the pre-school curriculum; strengths are, however, evident in the opportunities for the children to develop their curiosity and interest through the World Around Us. The planning does not identify clearly enough the intended learning outcomes. There is also a need to develop a more comprehensive approach to observing the children at play and to use more effectively the information gathered to inform the short-term planning.

- The quality of the arrangements for pastoral care in the school and nursery unit is good. Significant pastoral challenges face many of the children; the school has prioritised the ongoing development of innovative measures to meet their needs more effectively. Consequently, there is a nurturing and supportive ethos, underpinned by a range of well-considered strategies that are used sensitively to build the children's resilience and coping skills. These strategies include an anti-bullying week, paired reading, a positive rewards system, and the dissemination of strategies to promote a nurturing classroom environment. The classroom assistants make a valued and effective contribution to promoting positive behaviour. In the discussions with the children in year 6, they reported that they feel cared for, enjoy school life, and have an appropriate range of opportunities to undertake leadership roles through the 'buddy system', active school council and the eco-club.
- The school and nursery unit gives very good attention to promoting healthy eating and physical activity through; for example, the healthy snacks initiative, breakfast club and extra-curricular sports activities to encourage them to adopt healthy life styles.

## **7. Leadership and management**

- The senior leaders have led well improvement work to support the children in the development of positive dispositions to learning. The staff have focused extensively and successfully on addressing the sometimes complex, social, emotional and behavioural needs of the children in a positive and informed manner. They have also developed more meaningful links with parents to help them support their child's learning at home. At present, however, there is insufficient and ineffective monitoring and evaluation by key co-ordinators of their area of responsibility. The quality of the work of the co-ordinators also needs to be evaluated more robustly by the senior leaders. There is, therefore, a need to improve the quality of the leadership at all levels of key curricular areas. Furthermore, the senior leaders and governors need to communicate regularly with staff and parents about the nature of actions taken to effect improvement.
- The staff in the nursery unit work well as a team, and under the leadership of the newly appointed teacher-in-charge, they have made a start to the process of self-evaluation. Given the inspection findings, strategic leadership and management of the nursery provision needs developed further to ensure provision for learning meets more effectively the needs of all of the children in the nursery unit.
- The school has well-established practices for consulting with all stakeholders to help inform the identification of the school's priorities for improvement. The school development plan<sup>2</sup> is in its final year of implementation and has guided well the improvement work in the pastoral provision and in some areas of the curriculum, such as the Arts and the World Around Us. While the school development plan is informed by the analysis of the school's internal data, there is insufficient monitoring and evaluation of the quality of the children's learning experiences. Currently, there is inconsistency in the quality of the action plans and targets identified are too generic. The senior leaders and co-ordinators need to focus on the development of more robust self-evaluation practices in order to improve further the quality of the children's learning experiences and the standards they attain.

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<sup>2</sup> The school development plan meets the requirements of the School Development Planning Regulations (NI) 2010.



- The school has highly effective links with parents including information evenings, workshops and an active parents' group that contributes well to the life and work of the school. There are meaningful pastoral links with post-primary schools to ensure smooth transition for children to the next stage of their education. The school is involved in a high number of initiatives that involve outside agencies and organisations that are contributing well to the provision of the school, particularly in respect of additional support for children and families, such as, literacy support and counselling.
- 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. The governors are involved actively in the life and work of the school. They have a useful, varied skillset which supports their work and are aware of the standards attained by the children; they recognise the need to address more effectively the level of underachievement in numeracy. There is an aspect of governance to review, namely: to exercise appropriately their challenge function as they support the senior leadership in addressing the areas for improvement highlighted in this report.
- 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 areas need to be addressed, namely to:
  - update the safeguarding policy and procedures to reflect more fully Departmental guidance, including the use of risk assessments; and
  - ensure all of the parents are informed of the safeguarding arrangements at least every two years, using a suitable format.
- In discussions with the inspectors, the children in year 6 reported that they feel safe and know what to do if they have any concerns about their well-being.

## **8. Overall effectiveness**

St Clare's Primary School and Nursery Unit needs to address important areas for improvement in the interest of all the learners.

The main areas for improvement include the need to:

- improve the quality of the leadership at all levels of key curricular areas through the development of more robust self-evaluation practices in order to improve further the quality of the children's learning experiences and the standards they attain; and
- develop further the teachers' planning to ensure the learning needs of all of the children, including those in the nursery unit, are met fully.

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 12 to 18 months.

**Health and Safety / Accommodation**

1. Risk assessments for all educational visits must be carried out in a comprehensive manner and stored centrally in the school.
2. Given the increasing need for withdrawal support, the school accommodation lacks sufficient resource/teaching areas and storage space. The school library is located in the staffroom.
3. There is restricted playground space which the school is managing in order to minimise the impact upon the children's learning and play.

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