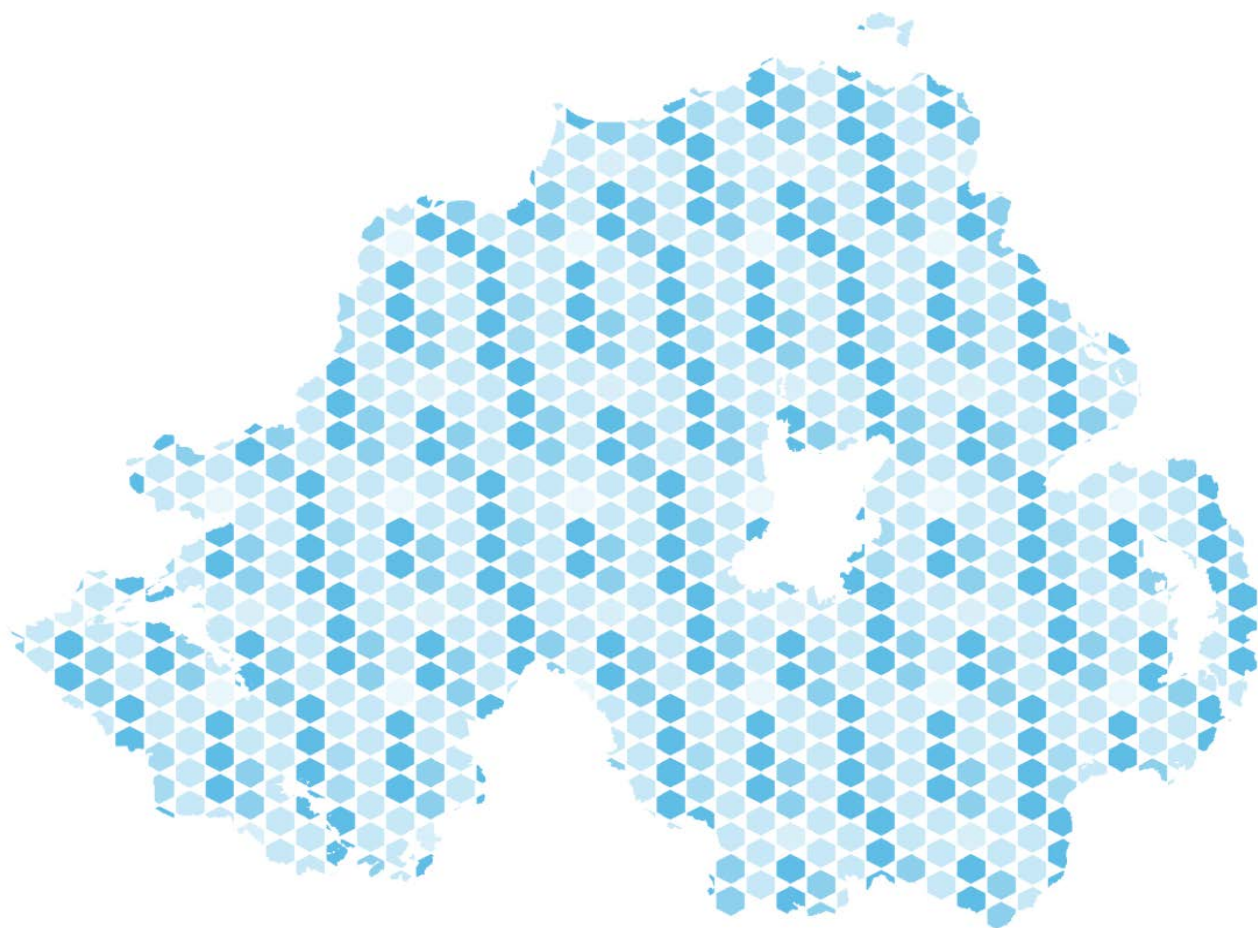


PRIMARY INSPECTION



Education and Training
Inspectorate

St Columba's Primary School
and Nursery Unit, Kilrea,
County Derry

Maintained, co-educational

Report of an Inspection in
November 2016



The Education and Training Inspectorate
Promoting Improvement

Providing inspection services for:

Department of Education
Department for the Economy
and other commissioning Departments

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 Achievements 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: [Together Towards Improvement Primary | Education and Training Inspectorate](#).

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-three percent of parents and most of the staff responded to the confidential questionnaires. Almost all of the parents' responses were highly affirmative of all aspects of school life. In their written comments, the parents praised unanimously the child-centred and nurturing learning environment in the nursery unit and the primary school and the staff's continuous focus on meeting effectively the children's individual learning and personal development needs. The staff responses to the confidential questionnaire were equally positive. The ETI has reported, to the principal and a representative of the board of governors, the main 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

St Columba's Primary School and Nursery Unit is situated on the outskirts of Kilrea, County Derry. The majority of the children come from the town with the remainder attending from a wide rural catchment area. The enrolment figure has risen steadily over the past four years including a recent notable increase in the number of newcomer children. In the same four-year period, the percentage of children entitled to free school meals has reduced while the proportion requiring support with aspects of their learning has increased. The principal came into post in 2014, followed by the appointment of a new vice-principal in 2015. Within the past two years, the overall staff number has also increased. The school prides itself on its diversity and inclusivity. St Columba's enjoys positive and longstanding working relationships with Kilrea Primary School with whom they partner in the Delivering Social Change (DSC) Signature Project for Shared Education. The nursery unit and the school also work closely with the Central Early Education Partnership and within the key stage (KS) 2/3 Transition Project respectively.

St Columba's Primary School and Nursery Unit	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17
Enrolment	207	232	246	247
% School attendance	96.2	95.7	96.6	N/A
% NI Primary school average	95.6	95.4	95.5	N/A
% FSME Percentage ¹	32	31	29	26
No. of children on SEN register	38	43	45	59
% of children on SEN register	20	18	17	23
No. of children with statements of educational need	*	*	*	5
No. of newcomer children	23	28	27	41

Source: data as held by the school.

N/A not available

*fewer than five

4. Overall findings of the inspection

Overall effectiveness	High level of capacity for sustained improvement
Achievements and standards	Very good
Provision for learning	Outstanding
Leadership and management	Outstanding
Nursery Unit	Very good

5. Achievements and standards

- The children achieve very good standards in literacy and numeracy. The staff track effectively the children's attainment through, the well-matched, challenging work in their books, and the evidence the teachers accumulate in the children's individual portfolios.
- The nursery children communicate readily with the adults and their peers expressing confidently their ideas and thoughts; most children show an interest in early mark making and can recall aspects of stories. In the foundation stage, the children talk and listen, read and write with increasing confidence. As they progress, the children write accurately and neatly in a wide range of forms and engage with texts that allow them to develop more demanding comprehension skills. By the end of KS 2, most of the children are independent in their reading and writing; they can use more sophisticated vocabulary and sentence construction in order to write for a varying range of audiences and purposes.

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

- The children in the nursery unit have a very good understanding of early mathematical concepts; they count orally, match, sort and continue patterns and use well some mathematical language associated with capacity. In the foundation stage, the children engage enthusiastically in mathematical activities, particularly the more open-ended, practical tasks. In all key stages, most of the children have a clear understanding of key mathematical concepts and use relevant mathematical vocabulary well to explain their reasoning. By the end of KS 2, the most able children are very competent across most of the key mathematical processes and concepts. They work well collaboratively in attempting unfamiliar problems and investigations.
- The children who require additional support with aspects of their learning make very good progress in line with their individual targets. They benefit well from the high quality support programmes and strategies tailored to meet their various needs.
- Across the school, the children are very confident and capable in their use of information and communication technology (ICT) as a learning tool. The staff enable the children to 'have a go' and be creative in using a wide range of software and mobile devices. In addition, the development of the children's interpersonal and problem-solving skills underpin their ability to use ICT in an infused and meaningful way across all aspects of their learning.
- The children are welcoming, polite and respectful of one another and adults, including visitors to the school; their behaviour is exemplary. From an early stage, they are motivated and independent learners who respond positively to the school's stimulating and challenging learning environment and to their teachers' high expectations. The children express and share their ideas with confidence producing informative and creative displays along with samples of exemplary digital work, which chronicle well their progress and attainment across the curriculum. They contribute meaningfully to the planning and transfer increasingly their knowledge and skills to other areas of the curriculum.

6. Provision for learning

- The quality of the planning, learning, teaching and assessment is outstanding; the teachers collaborate effectively to bring about progression and challenge in the children's learning and to promote consistency across the school. All of the teaching observed was effective in promoting learning; most of the lessons were very good and a significant minority were outstanding. The teachers build purposefully on the children's prior knowledge creating meaningful connections across well-linked topics which reflect well the children's interests, needs and experiences.
- The children benefit from a broad and balanced literacy programme. They have regular opportunities to discuss, review and explain their thinking. In the nursery unit, the interactions of the staff are of a high quality in building the children's early language and engagement with stories and factual print. In the foundation stage, the teachers provide engaging play-based learning opportunities for the children to apply and extend their developing literacy skills in real-life and imaginative contexts. As they progress, the children benefit from interacting with more complex reading and writing activities which enable them to explore unfamiliar and challenging texts, including from well-integrated digital sources.

- In the mathematics lessons, the teachers present well-structured activities to meet the children's needs and ask probing questions to help the children clarify and extend their mathematical thinking. The children experience a well-balanced coverage of number, shape and space, measures and handling-data across all key stages; overall, challenge and progression are maintained well from year to year. The children's mental mathematics skills could be improved further with a more systematic acquisition of the mental mathematics strategies and vocabulary to enable them to explain more precisely their mathematical thinking.
- Across the school and in the nursery unit, the teachers work closely and purposefully with the highly skilled classroom assistants to meet fully the needs of the children who require additional support. The children are provided with well-chosen strategies and interventions and high quality resources. The teachers use all of the available information effectively to inform the children's future learning targets and to bring about success in their learning.
- The provision for pastoral care is outstanding in promoting the well-being of the children and supporting well their individual learning needs. Through the school-and Eco-councils, and other positions of responsibility which they carry in the school, the children develop confident leadership, resilience and communication skills.

7. Leadership and management

- The quality of the leadership is outstanding. The highly skilled senior leadership has a clear and compelling vision for school improvement and has agreed, with the staff, a strategic direction for future developments in the school. The teachers work cohesively in interdependent collegial teams and are empowered to develop further their respective leadership roles and responsibilities. The co-ordinators are motivated and pro-active in improving the provision and raising standards further; an extensive range of well-connected monitoring and evaluation processes guide effectively the improvement work.
- The rigorous school improvement process and the highly effective arrangements for the staff's continuous professional development are linked purposefully to the recent improvement priorities; the impacts of both are evident in the classroom practice and the high quality of the children's learning experiences and achievements in literacy, numeracy and ICT.
- There are effective arrangements in place, including the informative school website and social media tools, for communicating and consulting with parents to involve them appropriately in their children's education and the ongoing work of the school. The widening links with other schools, external agencies and the community, enrich and deepen the children's learning experiences. Carefully planned curricular workshops provide practical guidance to parents on how to support their children's learning. The active PTA supports well the school in its community through successful social and fundraising events.
- The valuable and effective shared education link with the local controlled primary school is used to very good effect to broaden the curriculum and extend the range and quality of the children's learning experiences.

- The governors are well-informed about, and fully involved in, the life and work of the school. They carry out their challenge function thoroughly and constructively in the best interests of the children, the staff and the local community. Based on the evidence available at the time of inspection, the ETI's evaluation is that there can be a high degree of confidence in the aspects of governance evaluated.
- On the basis of the evidence available at the time of the inspection, the school and the nursery unit have 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 years 5, 6 and 7 reported that they are secure and happy in school and know what to do if they have any concerns about their well-being.

8. Overall effectiveness

St Columba's Primary School and Nursery Unit 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.

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