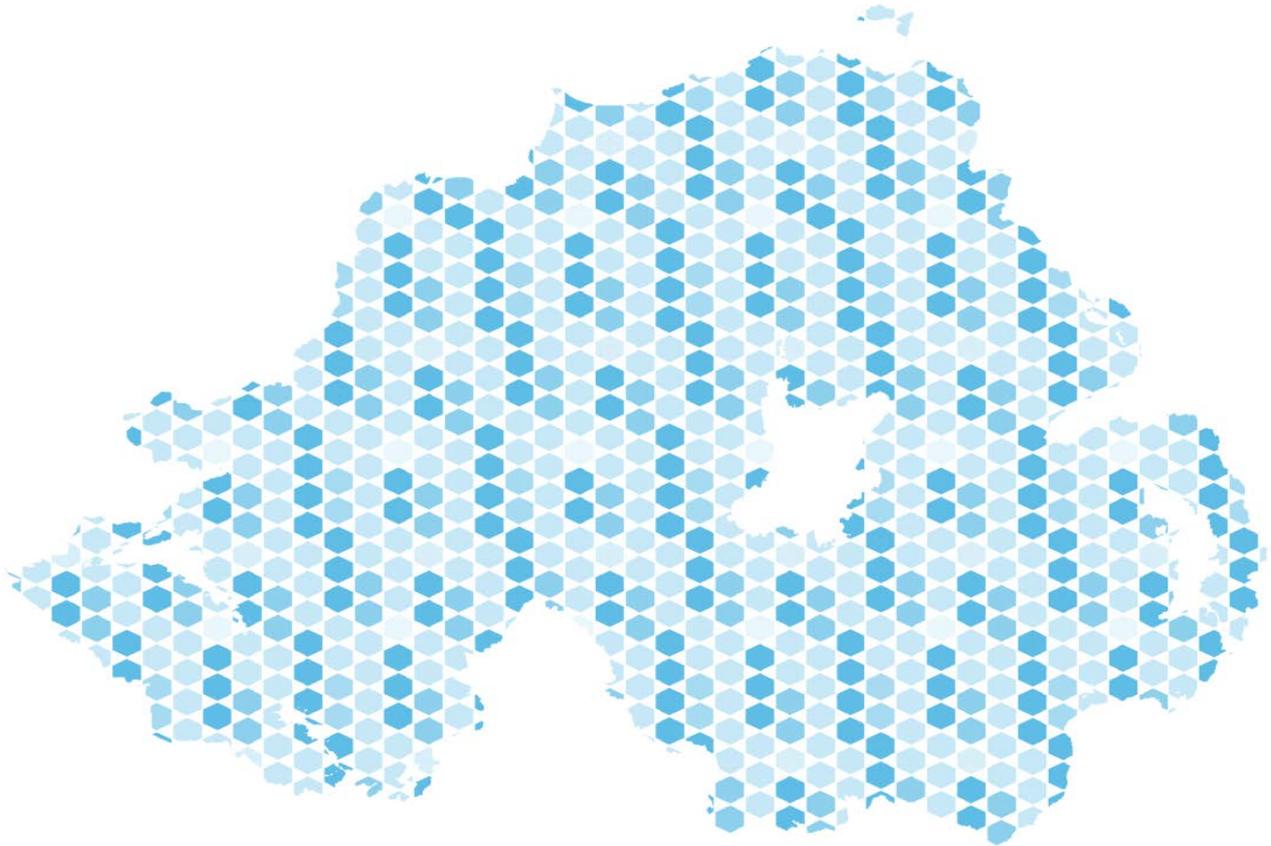


PRIMARY INSPECTION



Education and Training
Inspectorate

St Mary's Primary School,
Comber, County Down

Maintained, co-educational

Report of an Inspection in
June 2017



The Education and Training Inspectorate
Promoting Improvement

Providing inspection services for:

Department of Education
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INTRODUCTION

1. Context

St Mary's Primary School is a co-educational maintained primary school situated in the town of Comber, County Down. Almost all of the children attending the school come from the town and the surrounding rural area. Over the past four years, the enrolment has increased by around 20%. The children share sacramental preparation with a sister maintained school; they also participate regularly in sports events with two local controlled primary schools and an integrated post-primary school. Through its varied fund-raising initiatives, the active parent-teacher association has provided valuable reading, play and science resources to support the children's learning.

St Mary's Primary School	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17
Enrolment	59	62	65	71
% School attendance	92.3	92.7	95.4	94.5
% NI Primary school average	95.6	95.4	N/A	N/A
FSME Percentage ¹	14	11	15	14
No. of children on SEN register	18	18	14	20
% of children on SEN register	30	29	21	28
No. of children with statements of educational need	2	3	3	1
No. of newcomer children	12	9	9	13

Source: data as held by the school.

* fewer than 5

N/A not available

2. Views of parents and staff

Around 20% of parents and 92% of staff responded to the questionnaires. The responses to the parental questionnaire indicated high levels of satisfaction with almost all aspects of the life and work of the school. In particular, the parents highlighted their appreciation of the welcoming school community and the high quality of care provided by the dedicated, approachable staff. All of the responses to the staff questionnaire were highly affirmative; the written comments indicated that the staff value the supportive, collaborative ethos, underpinned by very good working relationships at all levels. The ETI has reported to the principal and a representative of the board of governors the main issues emerging from the questionnaires and the discussions.

3. Focus of the inspection

In order to promote improvement in the interest of all children, the inspection linked internal and external approaches to evaluate the:

- outcomes for children with a particular focus on literacy including how the school is addressing low attainment and underachievement;
- quality of provision; and
- quality of leadership and management.

4. Overall findings of the inspection

Overall effectiveness	Capacity to identify and bring about improvement
Outcomes for learners	Very good
Quality of provision	Good
Leadership and management	Good

KEY FINDINGS

5. Outcomes for learners

- In whole-class and group discussion, the children articulate their views clearly and confidently. There is a well-tailored programme of age-appropriate reading materials and events to foster the children's enthusiasm for, and widen their experience of, reading. The most able children in year 7 read fluently, and have good levels of inferential understanding. The current focus on writing across the curriculum has been successful in enabling the children to write with increasing independence and in a wide range of genres. The school's analysis of performance data indicates that almost all of the children are making year-on-year progress in line with their ability.
- Due in part to the lack of resources, the children have limited opportunities to use information and communication technology (ICT). They are able to carry out with confidence research tasks and draft their literacy work.
- The children are enthusiastic, inquisitive learners who can make connections between the different areas of the curriculum. They engage readily in their lessons. Their behaviour is exemplary; they listen respectfully to one another's views, work well with their peers and engage maturely with adults. The children develop leadership and team-working skills through the School- and Eco-councils, as well as through the playground 'buddy' scheme.

6. Quality of provision

- Almost all of the lessons observed were good or better; two-fifths were very good. The teachers plan collaboratively for progression and continuity in the children's learning, with a clear focus on the development of knowledge, skills and understanding. The whole-school planning for literacy provides a coherent structure for the progressive acquisition of oral, reading and writing skills. The development of the children's literacy is integrated holistically with other areas of the curriculum, notably the World Around Us. However, in the teachers' planning and practice, there are too few opportunities for the children to make decisions about their own learning, particularly at key stage (KS) 2.
- The children requiring support with particular aspects of their learning are identified accurately at an early stage and the teachers select the most appropriate strategies to address their needs in class. While most of the individual education plans set out clear targets and are reviewed in detail by the staff, the children are not sufficiently involved in the review of their own progress. A small number of individual education plans contain too many targets.

- Based on the evidence available at the time of the inspection, the school's approach to the care and welfare of the children impacts positively on learning, teaching and outcomes. The children contribute effectively to the wider life of the school and community through, for example, fund-raising for local and international charities. These activities reflect the school's community ethos and help the children develop a sense of social responsibility.

7. Leadership and management

- The leadership team in St Mary's Primary School enjoys the strong support of the whole school community and is a cohesive unit, whose members have complementary strengths. They have developed a collaborative, open ethos in which the sharing of good practice and professional development are facilitated. The co-ordination of literacy is highly effective: notable strengths include the action-planning process which is informed well by performance data and supported by teacher judgment; and the well-conceived arrangements for monitoring and evaluating both the provision and the children's outcomes. The whole-school action plans are equally robust in their baseline evaluations through which relevant targets are identified and actions implemented. The staff have identified appropriately ICT as a priority for school improvement and skills development, through extending its use as a tool to enhance the children's learning. While the strengths of the school development plan include the clear signposting of evidence in provision and policy, the evaluations are not informed sufficiently by the views of the children, parents and school staff.
- Based on the evidence available at the time of the inspection, the ETI's evaluation is that there can be confidence in the aspects of governance evaluated. The governors need to develop further their link roles with the co-ordinators in order to be better informed about, and monitor more closely, the key curricular developments.
- Based on the evidence available at the time of the inspection, the arrangements for safeguarding children reflect broadly the guidance from the Department of Education. The leadership needs to monitor more systematically the arrangements for safeguarding, in line with the guidance issued by the Department of Education (Circular 2013/16). In discussions with the inspectors, the children reported that they feel safe, secure and supported in school.
- 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

St Mary's Primary School has the capacity for sustained improvement in the interest of all the learners.

There are areas for improvement that the school has demonstrated the capacity to address.

The areas for improvement are:

- to integrate more consistently the use of ICT in the teachers' planning and practice to extend the children's digital skills; and
- to review and update the individual education plans.

The ETI will monitor how the school sustains improvement.

Health and safety / accommodation

1. The completion of the planned work to erect gates and control access to mobile classrooms, on both the school and church site, is a matter of urgency.

Inspection methodology and evidence base

The ETI's Inspection and Self-Evaluation Framework is available on the ETI website: [The Inspection and Self-Evaluation Framework \(ISEF\): Effective Practice and Self-Evaluation Questions for Primary | Education 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 representatives from the governors;
- meetings with groups of children; and
- the opportunity for the parents, teaching and support staff to complete a confidential questionnaire.

Reporting terms used by the Education and Training Inspectorate

Quantitative terms

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 ETI use the following performance levels when reporting on outcomes for learners, quality of provision and leadership and management¹:

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 in 12 to 18 months.
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 in 18 to 24 months.

¹ And the overall provision in a subject area or unit, as applicable.

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