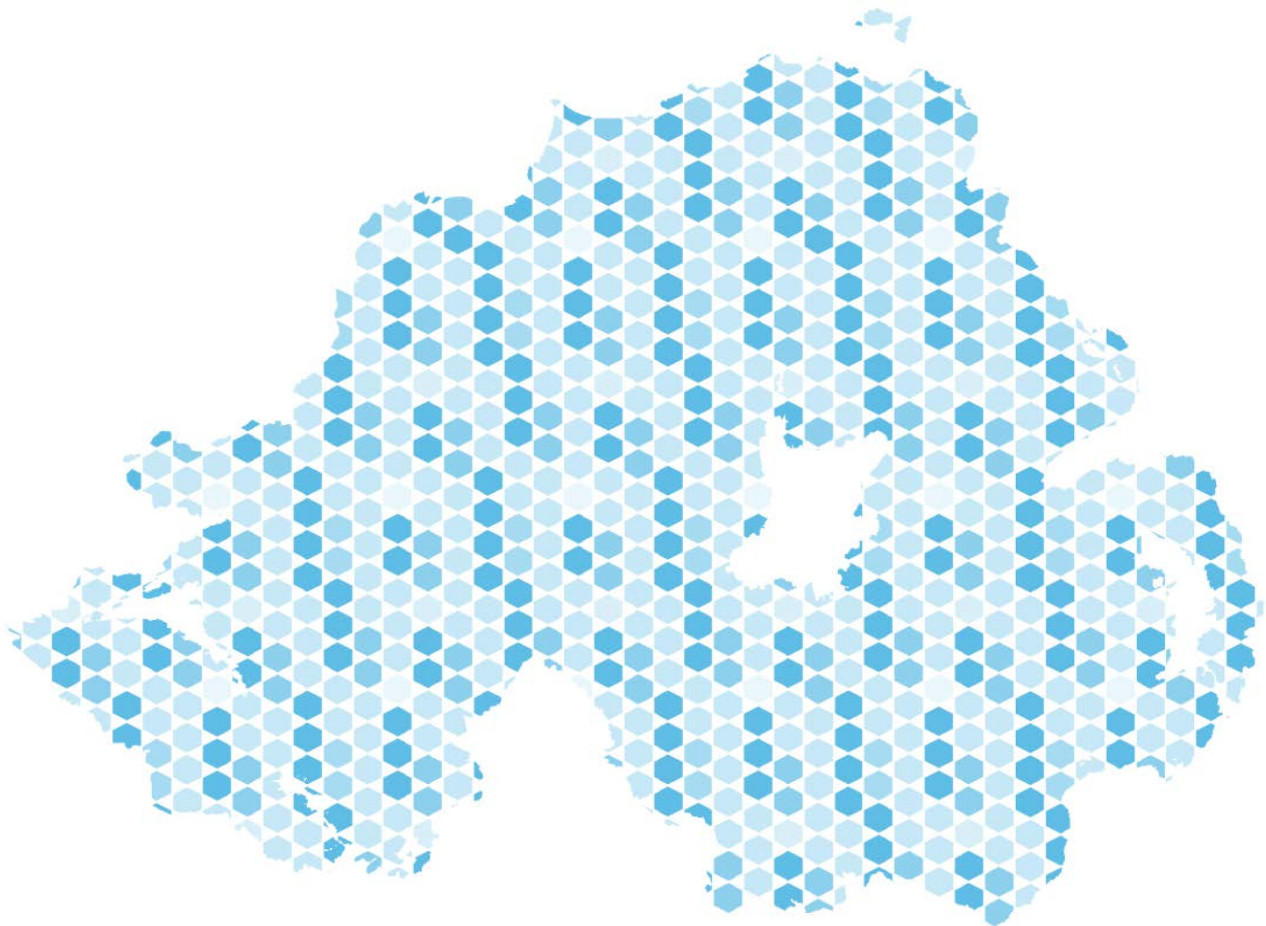


PRIMARY INSPECTION



Education and Training
Inspectorate

St Michael's Primary School,
Belfast

Report of an Inspection in
April 2016



The Education and Training Inspectorate
Promoting Improvement

Providing Inspection Services for:

Department of Education
Department for the Economy
Department for Communities



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

Section	Page
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
Appendix	

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.

Twenty-three percent of parents responded to the confidential questionnaire. Almost all of the parents reported that their child enjoys learning and is making good progress. In particular, the written responses of the parents highlighted the hard work of the teachers, the wide range of enrichment and after-school activities available for the children and the introduction of a range of initiatives to engage the children in their learning. A minority of the parents raised a concern regarding insufficient consultation on some aspects of school life. Most of the staff completed the confidential questionnaire and almost all of their responses were positive; they emphasised the many opportunities provided for continuing professional development, and the dedication and collegiality among staff. The ETI has reported to the principal and representatives of the board of governors the nature of the issues emerging from the parental and staff confidential 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 Michael's Primary School is a maintained co-educational primary school situated in South Belfast. All of the children attending the school come from the local area. The enrolment has remained steady over the past four years; the school is regularly over-subscribed and operates currently at full capacity. The percentage of children entitled to free school meals has increased slightly in this academic year, while the proportion of children identified as requiring additional help with aspects of their learning has decreased significantly in the same period.

St Michael's Primary School	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16
Enrolment	415	416	417	413
% School attendance	96.3	97.0	97.0	N/A
% NI Primary school average	94.9	95.6	95.4	N/A
FSME Percentage ¹	10.8	10.6	10.8	12.6
No. of children on SEN register	104	108	129	74
% of children on SEN register	25	26	31	18
No. of children with statements of educational need	8	7	7	8
No. of newcomer children	21	24	25	27

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

4. Overall findings of the inspection

Overall effectiveness	Capacity to identify and bring about improvement
Achievements and standards	Good
Provision for learning	Good
Leadership and management	Good

5. Achievements and standards

- The children are articulate, motivated and settle quickly to their learning. In most of the lessons observed, when the opportunities are well-planned, the children work productively in pairs, in groups and independently; they are well-behaved and respectful. As they progress through the school, the children develop a high capacity to transfer their knowledge and skills, particularly in literacy, across other areas of the curriculum.
- The school's performance data shows that most of the children, including those who require additional support with aspects of their learning, make progress in English and mathematics and achieve in line with their ability or above expectation.
- Overall, the standards achieved by the children in literacy are very good. Across the key stages, the children speak confidently and have well-developed oracy skills. In problem-solving activities, they make reasoned arguments, and reflect and evaluate with growing maturity on the approaches taken by others. The children write to a very good standard in a range of writing forms. By year 7, the most able children, read with good fluency and expression. They are enthusiastic about reading and can discuss their reading preferences with confidence.

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

- Overall, the standards achieved by the children in mathematics are good; they gain appropriate knowledge and understanding of key mathematical concepts and are successful in applying the associated skills. Across the key stages, the children enjoy learning mathematics, talk enthusiastically about their work and engage well with practical activities. The standard of the work in the children's books shows good progression. By year 7, the most able children demonstrate a good understanding of mathematical concepts whilst solving mathematical problems and are able to justify their answers; however, they need to improve further the flexibility in their thinking through a greater understanding of mathematical processes.
- The children who require additional support with aspects of their learning are making good progress. They develop well their interpersonal skills, alongside their skills in literacy and numeracy. The newcomer children also make good progress through their engagement in well-planned opportunities for developing their range of vocabulary and communication skills.
- The children develop well their skills in using information and communication technology (ICT) through their use of programming and a wide range of ICT devices and applications to enhance their learning.

6. Provision for learning

- The planning, teaching and assessment were effective at promoting successful learning in most of the lessons observed. In the most effective practice, which was in just under one-half of the lessons observed: the intended learning is made explicit to the children and they are provided with structured opportunities to reflect on, and assess, their own learning; the teachers use effective questioning to develop the children's oral skills and to develop their understanding; and, the work is linked well to other areas of the curriculum and to the world of work, being set in meaningful contexts which engage the children. In the less effective practice, in one-fifth of the lessons, the work was not set at an appropriate level of challenge to meet the learning needs of all of the children and the pace of the lesson was not conducive to effective learning. In a small number of classes, the quality of the marking is too low; the school has identified appropriately the need to improve the consistency in the quality of the marking of the children's work to ensure all of the children receive sufficient guidance on the strengths of their work and on how to improve further their work.
- The well-planned opportunities for the children to develop their talking and listening skills through inquiry and problem-solving approaches is a key strength of the literacy provision. The children are provided with creative and purposeful contexts to develop their literacy skills across the areas of learning. The good use of ICT engages the children well and supports their learning in literacy. The use of writing frameworks for the children to plan their writing is restricting the quality produced by the more able children in key stage (KS) 2. In the best practice, evidenced by the children's work in their books, the children plan their writing in a method suited best to their preferred learning style; this good practice should be employed more widely. A range of strategies are used by the teachers to foster the children's enjoyment of reading through well-planned events, such as, visits by authors and journalists and educational trips to enhance the children's learning experiences. The guided reading activities are varied and interesting for the children and the small group reading opportunities develop well their understanding and comprehension of the text. There is a need

for the teachers to make better use of novels in the teaching of guided reading in order to provide more challenge within the children's reading, to develop further their understanding of the authors' styles of writing and to give the children opportunities to apply these approaches to their own work.

- The whole-school planning for numeracy is broad and balanced across the areas of mathematics and outlines clearly a progression in knowledge and skills across each year group. There is insufficient detail in the teachers' medium-term planning of the specific learning and teaching strategies to guide effectively the provision and ensure it meets fully the needs of all of the children. A key feature of the current provision for numeracy is the development of problem-solving tasks and investigative activities which extend the children's thinking and enable them to use their mathematics across other areas of the curriculum. In the most effective numeracy provision, in just under two-fifths of lessons observed, the work was structured suitably and well-planned introductions to lessons engaged the children, reviewed well the children's prior learning and consolidated their mental mathematical skills. The teachers need to reinforce more regularly the mathematical language and processes, and integrate into all lessons regular and effective opportunities for the children to explain their mental mathematical strategies and thinking to improve further the standards they attain.
- There are well-established processes for the early identification of the learning needs of the children. The provision of effective specialised, small group withdrawal sessions, individual intervention programmes and in-class support, complemented by the liaison with relevant external agencies, supports well the social, emotional and educational development of the children who require additional help with aspects of their learning. The individual education plans are reviewed with parents on three occasions throughout the school year. The classroom assistants contribute effectively to the review of the individual education plans and are empowered, through appropriate training, to support well the learning needs of the children. In the main, these individual education plans guide quite well the work of the teachers. The leadership team and staff recognise, however, the need to engage the child more meaningfully in the planning and review processes and to ensure the targets identified in a minority of the individual education plans are more specific and achievable within the review timeframe to enable the child to experience success.
- The quality of the arrangements for pastoral care is very good. There is an inclusive ethos which promotes well the children's understanding, and their celebration, of other cultures and communities. The children's achievements are celebrated, with a suitable range of positive reward systems in class and in school assemblies to promote the children's self-esteem and recognise their efforts. The children take on responsibilities with enthusiasm in, for example, the school council, 'Eco-club' and in their roles as 'class helpers' and 'playground buddies'. The wide range of enrichment and extra-curricular activities focusing on sports, music, art, charity work and the visitors to the school enhance further the children's personal development and their awareness of social justice and good citizenship.
- The school gives very good attention to promoting healthy eating and physical activity through, for example, the 'mile walk' and related awareness-raising events thereby encouraging the children to adopt healthy lifestyles.

7. Leadership and management

- The senior leaders set high standards and expectations which are underpinned by a thorough knowledge and understanding of the curriculum. The school development plan² (SDP) is currently in its final year of the three-year cycle; during this time, significant development work has been undertaken in a timely manner. This development work has resulted in improvements in: the quality of the teachers' medium-term planning in some curricular areas; the use of data to inform teaching; the learning environment; and, the standards the children attain in literacy, numeracy and in the presentation of their work. The SDP has been informed by the effective use of internal performance data. There are good opportunities for all staff to undertake continuing professional development informed by the priorities identified in the SDP. A culture by which teachers reflect on their practice is being fostered through programmes involving team-teaching and peer-coaching both within school and in collaboration with other schools. The action plans associated with the SDP are mainly of a good quality but, at times, the targets set do not reflect the key development needs of the school. As a consequence, there is a need to develop more robust self-evaluation and action-planning to guide better the improvement work of the school with a clear focus on improving further the quality of the learning experiences for the children. A minority of the parents who responded to the confidential questionnaire raised a concern about the lack of consultation with them; the inspection findings support the need for the school to develop further mechanisms to engage with the parents as a means of improving the robustness of the school's self-evaluative processes.
- Useful curriculum meetings are provided for parents to help them in supporting their child's learning. The school is supported by an active parent-teacher association that contributes well to the improvement work of the school. The school has extensive links with the local and wider community. The children have engaged in recent years with their peers from two local controlled schools in community relations projects focusing on developing the children's experiences in the expressive arts and business enterprise. The school also has numerous links with industry and a joint schools' programme on 'music making', all of which enrich the children's educational experiences.
- Based on the evidence available at the time of inspection, 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 and bring a useful blend of experience and expertise to the governance of the school. They contribute meaningfully to the identification of priorities for the SDP and meet regularly with senior and middle leaders to discuss aspects of their work. There is an aspect of governance to review, namely, to commit fully to the development of an ethos of mutual respect within the governing body to complement effectively the work of the senior leadership team.
- 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 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 meets the requirements of the School Development Planning Regulations (NI) 2010

8. Overall effectiveness

St Michael's Primary 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, in particular, the need to:

- develop more robust self-evaluation and action-planning to guide better the improvement work of the school with a clear focus on improving further the quality of the learning experiences for the children.

Health and Safety

1. There is a need for the board of governors and principal to amend the risk assessment for the use of a small section of the school site as a consequence of the current building work.

© 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