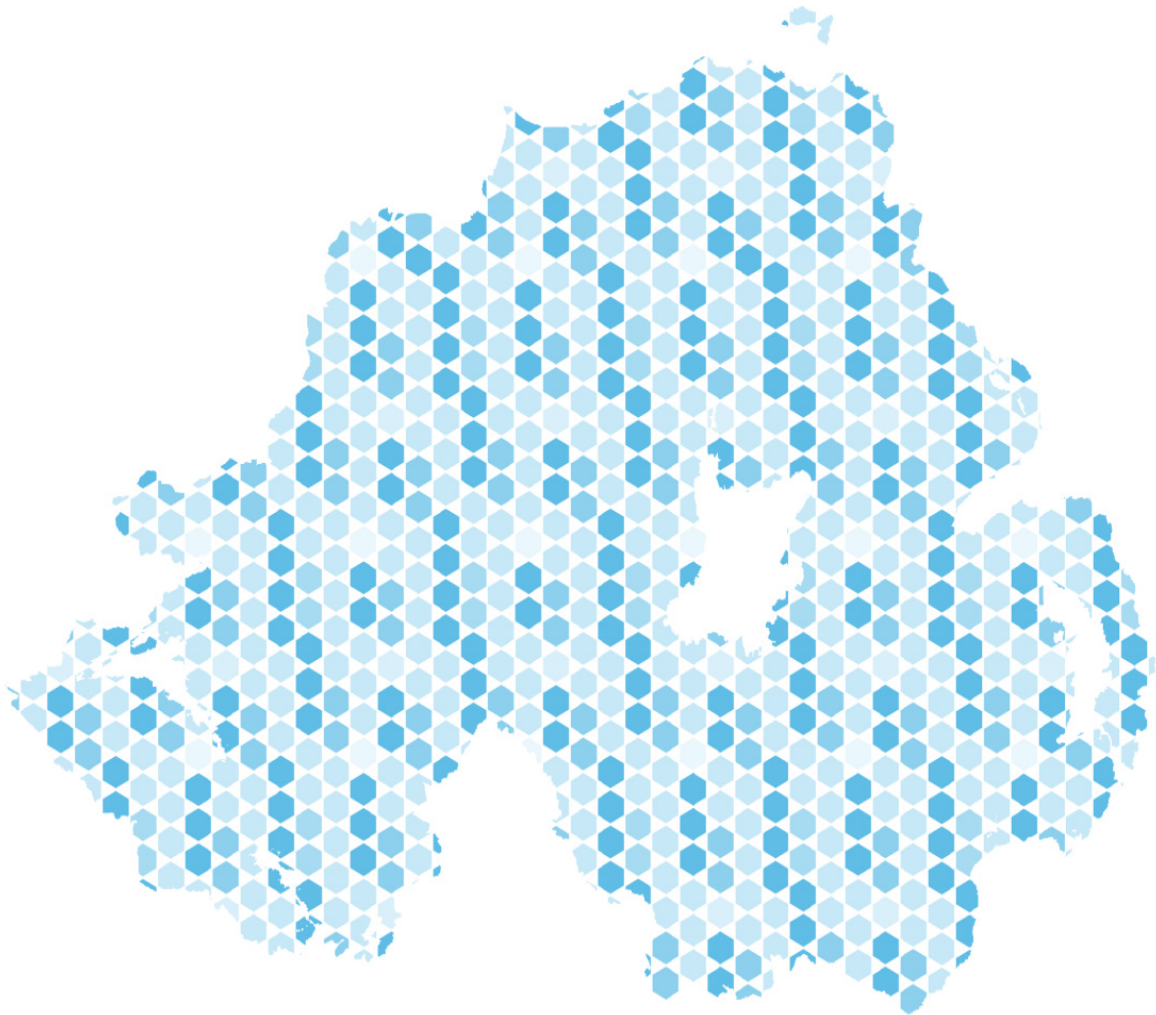


# PRIMARY INSPECTION



Education and Training  
Inspectorate

Abercorn Primary School,  
Banbridge

Report of an inspection  
in April 2012

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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%

In assessing the various features of the provision, Inspectors relate their evaluations to six descriptors as set out below:

DESCRIPTOR
Outstanding
Very Good
Good
Satisfactory
Inadequate
Unsatisfactory

## BASIC INFORMATION SHEET (BIS) - PRIMARY SCHOOLS

- A. i. **School: Abercorn Primary** iii. **Date of Inspection: W/B 16/04/12**  
 ii. **School Reference Number: 501-1594** iv. **Nature of Inspection: Focused**

B.

School Year	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
Year 1 Intake	45	42	39	56	61
<b>Enrolments</b>					
Primary	359	348	323	323	328
Reception	0	0	0	0	0
Nursery Unit	0	0	0	0	0
Special Unit	0	0	0	0	0
Irish Medium Unit	0	0	0	0	0

The enrolment for the current year is the figure on the day of notification of inspection. For previous years it is the figure in the annual return to the Department of Education.

The calculations at C and D should be based on the total of the primary and reception enrolments only.

- C. Average Attendance for the Previous School Year (expressed as a percentage): 94.8% **NI Avg Att: 94.7%**

Average Attendance for those children on the Special Educational Needs Register: 92.4%

<b>Primary &amp; Reception</b>	<b>Nursery Unit</b>	<b>Special Unit</b>	<b>Irish Medium Unit</b>
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- D. i. Number of Teachers (including the principal and part-time teachers): 15.18 0 0 0  
 (Full-time equivalent = 25 teaching hours)
- ii. PTR (Pupil/Teacher Ratio): 21.6 NI PTR: 20.2
- iii. Average Class Size: 25
- iv. Class Size (Range): 21 to 31
- v. Ancillary Support:  
 Number of Hours **Per Week**:
- |   |  |    |  |
|---|--|----|--|
| i. Clerical support:  |  | 36 |  |
| ii. Foundation Stage Classroom Assistant Support:           |  | 82 |  |
| iii. Additional hours of other classroom assistant support: |  | 85 |  |
- vi. Percentage of children with statements of special educational needs: 5.1%
- vii. Total percentage of children on the Special Needs Register: 17.9%
- viii. Number of children who are **not** of statutory school age: 0
- ix. Percentage of children entitled to free school meals: 24%
- x. Percentage of children at the end of Key Stage 2 for 2010/11 who attained level 4 and above in English and mathematics, and Irish (in Irish-medium schools):
- |  |                |                    |              |
|--|----------------|--------------------|--------------|
|  | <b>English</b> | <b>Mathematics</b> | <b>Irish</b> |
|  | 86.54%         | 84.62%             | N/A          |

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 SCHOOL CONTEXT

Abercorn Primary School is situated on the Newry Road, in the town of Banbridge, County Down. The enrolment in the school has decreased over the past four years, from 348 in 2008 to the current enrolment of 328. Almost all of the children in the school come from the immediate area. At the time of the inspection 24% of the children were entitled to free school meals and 18% of the children were identified as requiring help with aspects of their learning. There is also a very small number of newcomer children in the school.

### 1.2 FOCUS

The inspection focused on:

- the children's achievements and standards in literacy and numeracy;
- the quality of provision for learning; and
- the quality of leadership and management.

In addition, the use of information and communication technology (ICT) to support learning, and the school's arrangements for pastoral care, including child protection, were evaluated.

### 1.3 THE VIEWS OF THE PARENTS, TEACHERS, GOVERNORS, SUPPORT STAFF AND CHILDREN

The arrangements for the inspection included the opportunity for the parents, the teachers and support staff to complete a confidential questionnaire prior to the inspection, as well as meetings with representatives from the Board of Governors (governors) and a group of children from year 6.

Of the 118 questionnaires issued to the parents, 46 (39%) were returned to Inspection Services Branch (ISB), including 20 which contained an additional written comment. Almost all of the responses from the questionnaires indicated a good level of satisfaction with the provision in the school. In particular, the parents valued the hard-working staff, the informative parent-teacher meetings and the wide range of after-school activities available to the children.

The small number of concerns raised in the written comments has been discussed with the governors and the Principal.

Twelve of the teachers and 15 support staff completed the questionnaire prior to the inspection. All of the staff indicated that they enjoy working in the school. In the meeting with the governors, they expressed strong appreciation of the work of the Principal in leading and managing the school and of the opportunity for them to meet formally with the subject co-ordinators to receive regular reports about developments within their respective areas of responsibility. They also paid tribute to the whole staff for their hard work and loyalty to the school.

In discussions held with the year 6 children, they spoke positively about the many aspects of school life which they enjoy, including the range of after-school activities. They also indicated that they feel safe and happy in school and know what to do if they have any worries about their care and well-being.

## 1.4 PASTORAL CARE

The quality of the arrangements for pastoral care in the school is good. This is evidenced through, for example, the good working relationships between the teachers and the children; the good quality support provided by the classroom assistants and their sensitive interactions with the children; the priority given to promoting positive behaviour; and the opportunities for the older children to take on positions of responsibility.

The children are consulted about a range of school issues that directly affect them and have appropriate opportunities to contribute meaningfully to decisions about aspects of school life through, for example, the eco-committee and the recently established class councils.

## 1.5 CHILD PROTECTION

The school has very good, comprehensive arrangements in place for safeguarding children; these arrangements reflect the guidance issued by the Department of Education (DE).

## 1.6 HEALTHY EATING and PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

The school gives good attention to promoting healthy eating and physical activity. There is a range of strategies and initiatives to encourage the children to adopt healthy lifestyles including the promotion of healthy breaks and snacks, the healthy lifestyles week, the range of physical activities and the active playground games.

## 1.7 LINKS WITH PARENTS AND THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

The school has established effective links with the parents and the wider school community, including a range of educational and medical professionals, in order to support and enrich the children's learning. The children benefit from participating in a cross-community programme with two neighbouring schools which focuses on the development of the children's drama and music skills and on extending their understanding of people from differing backgrounds. The parents are provided with useful information on how they can support their children's learning through, for example the year 1 curriculum meeting and the use of the 'Talk to Me' mathematics resources for children in years 1 to 6. They are kept well-informed about their children's progress and about how they can support their children's learning through a progress meeting in term 1 and term 2 and through an informative annual written report at the end of term 3.

## 2. ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS

### 2.1 LEARNING

Throughout the school, the children are courteous, co-operative and well-behaved. Most of the children are keen to learn; they listen well in class and can complete accurately the tasks which have been set for them. When provided with stimulating and appropriately differentiated learning activities, they become more actively engaged in their learning and can achieve outcomes which are reflective of their abilities. Similarly, when the teachers provide the opportunity, the children demonstrate independence and the ability to work co-operatively in pairs.

In the foundation stage (FS), the children learn through rhymes and songs and a combination of formal and play-based activities. Within the key stage there is inconsistency in the quality of the children's learning experiences and in the priority given to developing their skills in key areas of the curriculum, particularly in mathematics.

During the inspection, the children with special educational needs who are receiving withdrawal support for their learning, demonstrated confidence, enthusiasm and a pride in their achievements. The school's records indicate that these children are making good progress in their learning, in line with their ability, and that a small number of them make sufficient progress to be removed from the SEN register.

Most of the children are competent and confident in their use of word processing and graphics programmes in ICT. In a small number of classes the children also demonstrated competence in the use of data bases and movie-maker to support their learning in the World Around Us.

An analysis of the key stage (KS) 2 assessment data over the past four years shows that the school's performance in English and mathematics has been in line with or above the Northern Ireland (NI) average for three of the four years. When compared with schools in the same free school meals category, the school's performance in English and mathematics has also been in line with or above the average for three of the four years.

During the inspection, the evidence gained from discussions with the children, scrutiny of the children's completed written work and examination of the school's internal data, indicates that, by year 7, a majority of the children attain good standards in both literacy and numeracy. There was also evidence to indicate that a number of the children, across the ability range, are not achieving in line with their ability and that, throughout the school, the children would benefit from a more challenging and diverse range of learning experiences.

## 2.2 ENGLISH AND LITERACY

The overall quality of the provision for English and literacy is satisfactory.

Literacy is promoted well throughout the school through, for example the book club, the regular well-supported book fairs and the use of the recently refurbished library by all classes. The literacy team has sought the views of the children on their preferred reading materials and as a result has begun to provide more non-fiction books.

The teachers have adopted the 'Framework for Literacy' produced by the Southern Education and Library Board (SELB) and have customised it appropriately to their particular context. They have also begun to make good use of the school's internal data to identify those children who are under-achieving in literacy and to prioritise areas for whole-school improvement. The action plans which have been created to guide the developments in literacy need to focus more specifically on the actions which will bring about continued improvement in the children's learning.

A majority of the children demonstrate good oral communication skills, when given the opportunity to do so. In the most effective practice the teachers encourage the children to talk about their personal experiences and to provide extended oral responses to a range of stimuli; they support the children skilfully in structuring their ideas and in extending their range of vocabulary. In the less effective practice, there are limited opportunities for the children to express their opinions and to engage in meaningful discussion with their peers. In almost all of the classes there is a need for the teachers to promote more effectively, the development of the children's talking and listening skills.

A majority of the children achieve good or better standards in reading. They acquire basic reading skills through a structured phonics programme and exposure to modelled, shared and guided reading across a range of texts. The school has, appropriately, identified the development of the children's understanding of non-fiction text as an area for whole-school improvement. Throughout the school, there is an over-reliance on the use of textbook and photo-copiable resources to teach comprehension skills.

During the inspection, groups of children from years 4 and 7 read with fluency, expression and understanding. The children were enthusiastic about reading and were able to discuss their preferences in relation to genres, authors and characters.

By the end of year 7, most of the children attain good standards in writing. In the early FS, the children experiment with writing, develop letter formation and can write a range of basic words. A small number of children can express their ideas in simple sentences. The teachers need to review the teaching of writing in order to ensure that all of the children make appropriate progress in the development of their early writing skills and that they have more adequate opportunities to develop as independent writers. In KS1 and KS2 the children have the opportunity to write in a range of genres across the curriculum and for a variety of audiences. Throughout the school, the teachers need to provide the children with more opportunities to develop their creative writing skills.

Most of the children present their written work well.

### 2.3 MATHEMATICS AND NUMERACY

The overall quality of provision in mathematics is satisfactory.

The mathematics action plan outlines a range of appropriate areas for development, including the review of the mathematics policy, the introduction of a revised planning format and a whole-school focus on the development of the children's mental strategies. It will also be necessary for the mathematics team to refine the whole-school programme for mathematics in order to ensure more consistent progression in the development of the children's mathematical knowledge, skills and language.

The quality of the children's learning experiences in mathematics is inconsistent as they progress through the school. In the most effective practice observed during the inspection, the teachers incorporated stimulating mental mathematics activities into their lessons; they used open ended questioning well to extend the children's thinking and built skilfully on the children's responses to further their learning. In most of the lessons, however, there was over-direction by the teacher, the learning activities did not focus clearly on the expected learning outcomes and they did not match adequately the needs of all of the children. In addition, there were insufficient opportunities for the children to share their learning using accurate mathematical language.

Throughout the school, the teachers need to broaden their teaching approaches in mathematics to link the children's learning experiences more effectively to real life situations and, where appropriate, to connect their learning across other areas of the curriculum.

During the inspection, most of the children were positive about mathematics. In discussions with a group of children from year 4, they were able to draw confidently on a range of mental strategies to answer questions. In similar discussions with a group of year 7 children, they were flexible and skilled in their working with number and with concepts such as estimation, measures and shape and space.



By the end of key stage 2, most of the children achieve a good or better understanding of the mathematics curriculum.

The use of ICT to support learning and teaching is under- developed. During the inspection there were a few examples of the interactive white board, software programmes and programmable devices being used appropriately to focus the children's interest and to enhance their learning in mathematics and the World Around Us. The children also have access to an individualised, computer adaptive programme for home and school use which has stimulated their interest in mathematics.

### **3. THE QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING**

#### **3.1 PLANNING**

Within the past two years the teachers have developed an agreed format for their medium- and short- term planning. In the best practice, this planning is of a good quality, is clearly focused on learning and is used effectively to guide the teachers in their day to day work with the children. In a number of classes, however, the good quality of the planning is not reflected in the practice within the lessons. In the less effective practice, there is duplication in the medium and short term planning and an emphasis on the completion of isolated activities. During the inspection, there was a number of occasions when the teachers had not planned sufficiently for the development of these activities which led to confusion in the children's learning. Throughout the school, there is a need for more adequate differentiation to meet the range of the children's abilities and needs.

In the best practice, the teachers complete informative and useful evaluations of the quality of the children's learning. There is a need for this practice to be shared and developed further to inform future planning to meet the needs of all of the children.

#### **3.2 TEACHING**

The teachers are hard working and committed to supporting the children in their learning.

During the inspection, the quality of the teaching in almost one third of the lessons observed was good or very good. In the remaining two-thirds of the lessons observed, there was a need for improvement in the quality of the teaching.

In the most effective practice, the lessons were well-structured and appropriately paced. In these lessons, the teachers shared the planned learning appropriately with the children; they provided the children with clear instructions and interacted purposefully with them, using effective questioning to stimulate the children's thinking and their sense of enquiry. In the less effective practice, the teachers held low expectations for the children's learning; there was a focus on the completion of routine tasks and worksheets; there was insufficient differentiation to meet the needs of all of the children, particularly the more able, and the support for the children with additional learning needs was disconnected from the main class activity. In these classes, over-direction by the teacher restricted the opportunities for the children to develop their language and self management skills, to work collaboratively together in pairs and small groups and to take responsibility for their learning. In a significant number of the classes the time for learning was not managed efficiently and the classroom management and organisation were ineffective in supporting the children's learning.

### 3.3 ASSESSMENT

Throughout the school, individual teachers have trialled a range of marking and assessment for learning strategies. It will now be important for them to agree and implement a more strategic, whole-school approach which will ensure consistency in the quality of their assessments and which will impact more effectively on improving the quality of the children's learning.

In the FS, the use of observations to assess the children's progress and to inform planning is at an early stage of development. The FS staff needs to work together more collaboratively to develop a shared understanding of the integrated process of observation, assessment and planning for progression in the children's learning; to establish agreed procedures and to implement them consistently across the key stage.

Within the past three years, the school has developed robust procedures for administering, marking and analysing a range of standardised tests. The outcomes from these tests have been used effectively to assess the children's levels of achievement in English and mathematics, to identify discrepancies between individual children's expected and actual performance and to highlight a number of relevant areas for whole-school development. The senior leadership team (SLT) has identified, appropriately, the need to develop further their analysis and use of data to inform better their planning and target setting at individual, class and whole-school level.

### 3.4 SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

The quality of the provision for special educational needs (SEN) is good.

Special Educational Needs is given a high priority by the school.

The children requiring additional support with aspects of their learning are identified early through classroom observations and through the analysis of a range of assessment data; they are currently provided for through a combination of in-class support and withdrawal sessions for literacy. In addition a small number of children receive peripatetic support from the SELB.

The class teachers take responsibility for writing and implementing the individual education plans (IEPs). The format of the IEPs has been reviewed recently; most of them are of a good quality, with clear and measurable targets and helpful strategies to support the children's learning. The teachers need to ensure that the planned learning activities are linked more effectively to these targets and strategies in order to meet the children's specific needs. The class teachers have, appropriately, begun to gather evidence of the children's achievements to demonstrate the progress they make against their targets. This good practice needs to be developed further to ensure the more rigorous evaluation of the children's progress.

In the well-planned and structured withdrawal sessions, the SENCO and Learning Support Teacher (LST) provide good, intensive support for literacy that is matched well to the children's identified needs; these sessions are effective in raising the children's confidence and attainment.

The SENCO manages the provision well and maintains good links with the parents and a range of support agencies. Through effective self-evaluation the SENCO and LST have identified appropriate priorities to develop further the provision for SEN, including the need for additional numeracy support.

## **4. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

### **4.1 LEADERSHIP**

The overall quality of leadership and management is satisfactory.

The Principal has been in post for almost four years; she is hard-working and is committed to the continued development of the school to meet the needs of all of the children. Since taking up post, she has begun to develop an open and inclusive culture within the school and has provided effective leadership for the staff and governors in initiating important changes in the school's provision. In that time, she has also reviewed the roles and responsibilities of the main post-holders, has created a team approach to the development of provision in literacy and numeracy and has made a good start to developing the roles of the co-ordinators in order to meet more effectively the school's curricular and pastoral responsibilities. It will be important to develop further the capacity of the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) and to ensure the more effective and cohesive leadership of developments within the FS.

The SENCO and the literacy and numeracy co-ordinators have made a good start to managing the development of their respective areas of the curriculum and to monitoring aspects of the provision through, for example, scrutiny of the teachers' planning and the analysis and use of the school's internal data to identify areas for improvement in learning and teaching. It will now be important for each team to evaluate the impact of the recent developments on the outcomes for the children.

### **4.2 PLANNING FOR IMPROVEMENT**

Within the past four years the school has begun to develop the process of self-evaluation to promote improvement. The Principal has carried out a range of meaningful consultations with the children, the parents and the teaching and support staff and has made effective use of the outcomes from these consultations to inform planning for the school's development. During the inspection there was evidence to indicate that this self evaluation has led to improvement in the child protection procedures, in the quality of the provision for children with additional learning needs and in the analysis and effective use of the schools internal data. It will be important for the school to develop further the self-evaluation procedures in order to focus more specifically on the quality of learning and teaching.

The School Development Plan (SDP) outlines a range of appropriate priorities for development in the school's curricular and pastoral provision. It will be important for the Principal, staff and governors to review the current SDP in light of the inspection findings in order to identify more specifically the developments and staff training which will bring about improvement in the overall quality of the learning and teaching in the school.

### **4.3 ACCOMMODATION**

The school building is approximately 80 years old; whilst it presents challenges in terms of accommodation, all of the space available is used effectively for learning and teaching and for celebrating the children's achievements. There is a need for the staff to review the arrangements for the children's movement around the building at peak times and to re-consider the allocation of the younger children to classrooms upstairs.

The standards of caretaking and cleaning are very good.

#### 4.4 RESOURCES, FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE

The school is adequately resourced to support learning and teaching.

The governors are well-informed about all aspects of the school's provision; they engage purposefully in the management of the school and are keenly aware of the enrolment trends and the related financial implications. They are wholly supportive of the Principal, the staff and of the work of the school.

### 5. CONCLUSION

5.1 The strengths of the school include:

- the courteous, co-operative and well-behaved children;
- the good quality of the arrangements for pastoral care;
- the good quality of the withdrawal provision for children with additional learning needs and the progress they make;
- the good standards achieved by most of the children in literacy and numeracy by the end of year 7; and
- the hard-working staff and the good leadership of the Principal in initiating and developing the processes for self evaluation to promote improvement.

5.2 The areas for development include the need to:

- improve the overall quality of the teaching;
- enhance the quality of the learning experiences for the children and connect their learning more effectively across the curriculum; and
- build the capacity of the Senior Leadership Team.

5.3 In most of the areas inspected the quality of education provided in this school is satisfactory; the strengths outweigh areas for improvement in the provision. The inspection has identified areas for improvement in leadership and management and in learning and teaching which need to be addressed if the needs of all the children are to be met more effectively. The Education and Training Inspectorate will monitor and report on the school's progress in addressing the areas for improvement over a 12-24 month period.

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