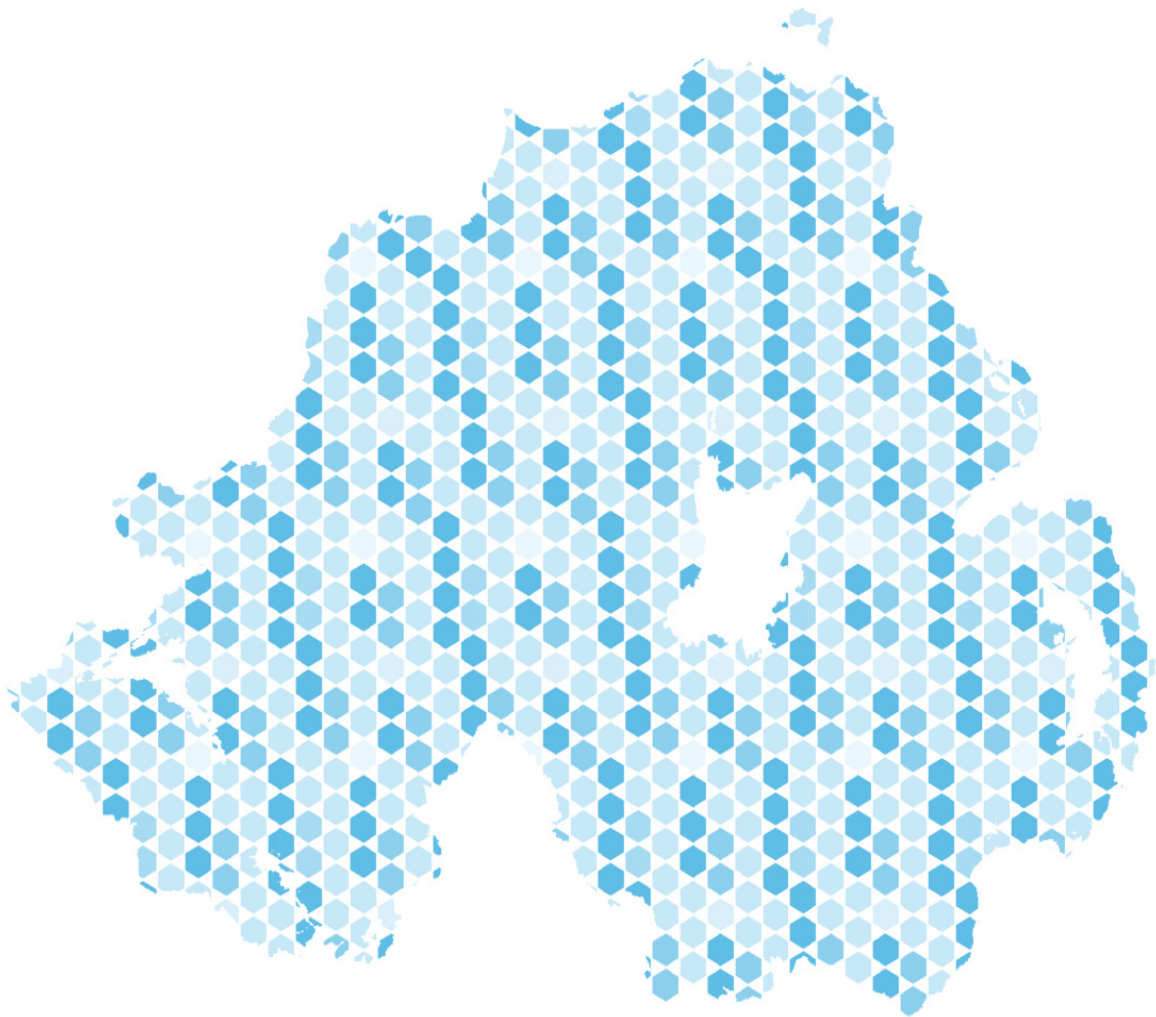


PRIMARY INSPECTION



Education and Training
Inspectorate

Carrick Primary School,
Warrenpoint

Report of an Inspection
in March 2011

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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

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 SCHOOL CONTEXT

Carrick Primary School is situated on Ballydesland Road in the townland of Carrick which is approximately three miles outside Warrenpoint, County Down. The enrolment has increased steadily over the past five years and currently stands at 403. Almost all of the children come from within a two-mile radius of the school. At the time of the inspection 10% of the children were entitled to free school meals and 15% of the children were identified as requiring help with aspects of their learning.

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), groups of children from years 6 and 7 and members of the School Council.

Of the 133 questionnaires issued to parents 82 (62%) were returned to Inspection Services Branch, including 35 which contained an additional written comment. Almost all of the responses from the questionnaires indicated a high level of satisfaction with the provision in the school. In particular, the parents valued the caring family ethos, the support provided for children with additional learning needs and the attention given to building the children's confidence and self-esteem. In addition, they expressed strong appreciation of the dedicated and hard-working Principal, teachers and non-teaching staff and of the school's contribution to the life of the local community. The very small number of concerns raised has been discussed with the governors and the Principal. An appendix to the report addresses a health and safety issue raised by a small number of parents in relation to parking outside the school.

Eleven of the teachers and eighteen support staff completed the questionnaire. All of the staff indicated that they are happy in their work in the school and are highly supportive of the Principal. However, a significant number of the support staff indicated that they would like their contribution to the life and work of the school to be recognised more consistently by the broader staff team.

The governors praised the teaching and support staff for their hard work, for the high standards of care and support which they show to the children and for their commitment to ongoing curriculum and professional development. They paid particular tribute to the Principal for her leadership and vision for the development of the school within the community.

In discussions held with the year 6 children and with members of the School Council, they spoke positively and enthusiastically about their experiences in school, about the range of extra-curricular activities and about their opportunities to contribute to decision making within the school. They also indicated that they feel safe in school and know who to speak to if they have any concerns.

1.4 PASTORAL CARE

The quality of the arrangements for pastoral care in the school is outstanding.

Among the strengths are the inclusive, caring ethos, the importance placed on the holistic development of each child as an individual, the focus on life-long learning for all members of the school community and the range of workshops and activities for parents to enable them to support their children's learning.

The school council complements well the work of the school in liaising with all stakeholders about improving their school.

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.

1.6 HEALTHY EATING and PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

The school gives outstanding attention to promoting healthy eating and physical activity, for example through an annual Healthy Eating Week and the nutritional quality of the school meals, which encourage the children to adopt healthy lifestyles.

1.7 LINKS WITH PARENTS AND THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

The school is heavily rooted in its community and involved in the daily life of the village through sporting, parish, musical and social activities. They have developed very good links with the parents. For example, the Friends of Carrick provide considerable financial assistance to the school, providing additional reading resources and sporting equipment, as well as organising social events. The school has very good links both locally and internationally, for example, they have raised significant funds to support the work of two primary schools in Ghana and Kenya.

A key characteristic of the school's provision is the importance which is placed on assisting parents to support their children's learning.

The parents are kept well informed of their children's progress through parental interviews, half-termly assessment information and an annual written report. The annual written reports provide the parents with a comprehensive evaluation of their children's progress and attainment and, importantly, indicate what the children need to do to make improvements in their learning.

2. ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS

2.1 LEARNING

The children are highly motivated to learn; they settle quickly to their work, demonstrating very good organisational skills, levels of independence and engagement in their learning. They work together collaboratively in pairs and small groups, expressing their own ideas confidently and showing respect for the opinions of others. From an early stage, they manage their own learning well; they respond enthusiastically to the challenging activities set by most of the teachers, make decisions about the most appropriate resources to use and persevere through to the completion of their learning tasks. They make mature and realistic assessments of their learning and can discuss possible ways to improve the quality of their work. Their behaviour is exemplary.

In the foundation stage, the children learn through a very effective balance of formal and play-based activities; they contribute to the planning for their learning and engage in a wide range of activities which promote their sense of enquiry and support the development of their language and early mathematical skills.

The children with special educational needs (SEN) achieve well. The close monitoring of progress and very good early intervention enables the children to become more independent and confident as they progress through key stage (KS) 1. By the end of KS2 they demonstrate good levels of progress in literacy and numeracy, show increasing self-confidence and are secure and happy in their classes. The special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO), in liaison with the school's Data Team, ensures that the overall progress of the children who have SEN is carefully monitored alongside their peers, but always with a sound reference to their specific challenges and needs.

Throughout the school, the children's learning is very effectively supported by the dedicated team of classroom assistants who have a clear understanding of the planned learning intentions, methodologies and language to be developed.

An analysis of the KS2 assessment data over the past four years shows that the school's performance in English and mathematics is consistently in line with or above the Northern Ireland average. Compared with schools in the same free school meals category, the levels of attainment in English and mathematics are consistently below the average. An analysis of the school's internal data for the same period indicates that all of the children, in each cohort, achieved standards in English and mathematics which were in keeping with their ability.

Whilst the standards achieved by the children at the end of KS2 are very good, the school has, appropriately, identified the need to support the small numbers of children who are underachieving.

2.2 ENGLISH AND LITERACY

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

The planning for literacy across the year groups provides a good framework for progression in talking and listening, reading and writing. The literacy co-ordinators work well together and liaise effectively with the SENCO. They monitor and evaluate the provision for English through sampling the children's books across the year groups and moderation of their work

in key stage meetings. While they have identified important areas for development which are integral to the school development plan (SDP), for example addressing the gender imbalance in the children's standards in reading, they need to focus on a smaller number of priorities which are aimed specifically at raising further the standards the children attain in English.

The staff place a high priority on the development of the children's oral skills and the children attain outstanding standards in talking and listening. All of the teachers provide well-planned oral activities which enable the children to offer extended contributions to whole-class discussion, make presentations to their peers and talk about their own learning. The children participate very enthusiastically in drama activities such as hot-seating and role-play.

The school has a well-structured and systematic programme for the teaching of reading. The children observed reading during the inspection displayed fluency, expression and a very good level of understanding. They spoke enthusiastically about their favourite books and authors. The love of reading is promoted through timetabled visits to the attractive, well-stocked library, the provision of age-appropriate books, "Easy Read" texts and a very good selection of class novels, complemented by challenging and engaging tasks in class. Those children who have additional needs in literacy receive very good support through the Reading Partnership initiative; almost all of these children make significant progress over the course of the programme.

The standard of the children's writing is very good. A notable strength of the school's provision is the breadth of opportunities for the children to write independently across the curriculum and to make meaningful links between the areas of learning. They write confidently in a wide range of genres and for different audiences; for example, reports, letters, diary entries, recipes, play scripts, poems and narrative recounts. Their writing is celebrated in eye-catching displays in the classrooms and corridors. Information and communication technology is used effectively to facilitate the drafting and editing process and improve the presentation of the children's written work.

2.3 MATHEMATICS AND NUMERACY

The overall quality of provision in mathematics is very good.

The responsibility for leading and developing mathematics in the school is shared effectively by two co-ordinators who are also members of the school leadership team (SLT). They are enthusiastic, effective in promoting mathematics throughout the school and are very good role models in their classroom practice. They monitor the provision for mathematics in the school through scrutiny of the teachers' planning, sampling and moderation of the children's work and through performance review and staff development classroom observations. They have provided workshops for parents to enable them to support their children's learning and have heightened awareness of the need to set learning within real-life contexts for the children.

The current action plan for Numeracy outlines a number of appropriate priorities for development including the review of the whole-school programme; the further analysis and use of assessment data and the introduction of the Numeracy Catch-up programme.

The school gives a high priority to developing the children's mental agility, their flexibility with number and their reasoning skills. In the mental mathematics sessions observed during the inspection, the children engaged enthusiastically in a range of challenging activities which consolidated their understanding of key concepts, fostered their use of accurate mathematical language and connected their learning across the mathematics curriculum.

Throughout the school, the teachers, the support staff and the children demonstrate enthusiasm for and enjoyment in mathematics. In the most effective practice, the teachers build on the children's prior learning; they focus appropriately on the development of processes, engage in purposeful discussion with the children about their chosen strategies and, very skilfully, turn the children's mistakes into opportunities for further learning. In these lessons the teachers provide the children with opportunities to apply their knowledge and skills within meaningful contexts; they also challenge and extend their mathematical thinking through the use of graded extension activities which the children self-monitor. In a small number of the classes there is insufficient differentiation of the learning activities to meet the needs of the more able children.

In discussion with groups of children from years 4 and 7, they demonstrated high levels of confidence, understanding and competence in all areas of the mathematics curriculum.

Information and communication technology is used very effectively to support teaching and learning across the curriculum. The teachers and classroom assistants have accessed appropriate training, for example, in the use of the interactive whiteboard. The children are very confident and competent in their use of ICT to support their learning. They use programmable devices and a range of age-appropriate software to consolidate and extend their understanding of key mathematical concepts.

3. THE QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING

3.1 PLANNING

The quality of planning to support the teaching and learning is good. The medium-term planning by the respective year groups provides a broad framework for progression and ensures coherence in the children's learning, particularly by connecting the areas of the curriculum through thematic topics. The teachers evaluate their planning regularly. In the best practice, these evaluations are focused on the needs of groups and individuals within the class and are used effectively to inform future planning to meet the needs of all of the children.

The planning for SEN is integrated well across the school and teachers take care to use the detailed information provided by the SENCO to guide their classroom practice.

3.2 TEACHING

The teachers are dedicated and committed to ensuring the holistic development of each child; they work very successfully to promote in the children a sense of enjoyment in learning.

During the inspection the quality of almost all of the teaching observed was good or better. In just over one-third of the lessons it was very good and in a further one third it was outstanding.

In the most effective practice, the teachers had appropriately high expectations of what the children could achieve, there was a sustained focus on the planned learning and the lessons were well paced and purposeful. Through the use of effective questioning, the teachers challenged the children's thinking and fostered their active engagement in the learning.

In a small number of lessons observed, there was insufficient challenge and differentiation to meet fully the needs of all the children.

3.3 ASSESSMENT

The teachers employ a range of appropriate strategies to assess the quality of the children's learning and to inform their future practice.

Over the last three years, the teachers have undertaken a well-planned, strategic programme of training in a range of assessment for learning initiatives, the benefits of which are evidenced in the consistent, effective use of questioning by the teachers throughout the school to assess the extent of the children's learning. Learning intentions are shared with the children in a purposeful way and appropriate success criteria are negotiated with them. The children's work is marked diligently and regularly and, in the best practice, the teachers annotate the work, often indicating how it could be further improved.

The school uses classroom observation and a suitable range of standardised and non-standardised testing to assess the children's levels of achievement in English and mathematics. The teachers use well the outcomes from observation and testing to identify those children who require additional support with aspects of their learning in literacy and numeracy. The assessment coordinator and the Data Team have, appropriately, identified the need to engage in more rigorous analysis of the assessment outcomes in order to track the children's progress at individual, class and whole-school level, to identify low or under-achievement and to help prioritise key areas for whole-school development.

3.4 SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

The overall quality of the provision for special educational needs is outstanding.

The Principal, SENCO, SLT and staff are committed to providing for the additional needs of children across the range of ability. The school has a clear and comprehensive policy in place for those children with SEN and the SEN action plan identifies appropriate priorities for development. The SENCO has a good strategic overview of SEN and has developed a strong rapport with the teachers in order to guide and co-ordinate the work in SEN. There is good co-operation and communication between the team of teachers providing withdrawal learning support and peripatetic support for the children and this is linked closely to the overall work of the classroom teachers.

The class teachers display a strong commitment to including every child in the lessons at a level appropriate to their individual need. They target aspects for development appropriate to those children with more complex and challenging needs and are vigilant in monitoring progress and praising success. Those children receiving withdrawal support were notably involved in evaluations of their sessions and these were used effectively by the teacher to monitor and review her provision. The SENCO ensures that close contact is kept with the Southern Education and Library Board services, including for example educational psychology and Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) support, to extend and develop provision in the school and to use their advice to inform practice.

4. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The overall quality of leadership and management is very good.

4.1 LEADERSHIP

The Principal provides very good leadership for the school. She is in her third year in the post and has an appropriate vision for the school, with a clear understanding of how to realise this. She has overseen many initiatives that enhance and support the learning

experiences of the children and is thoroughly committed to providing high standards of education for all the children in her care. She is supportive of her staff, both teaching and non-teaching, demonstrating commitment to their welfare and continued professional development. This is evidenced through, for example, the training of the classroom assistants to work in supporting the Better Reading Partnership programme, the Numeracy Catch-up programme and in working with children with ASD.

The Vice-principal supports very effectively the Principal and contributes to setting the appropriate tone for the life and work of the school.

The roles and responsibilities of the SLT and subject co-ordinators have been clearly defined and very effective structures have been established to ensure the purposeful engagement of all staff in implementing agreed practice.

The governors are involved in the overall strategic planning and policy development for the school. They also play an important role in monitoring and evaluating the life and work of the school.

4.2 PLANNING FOR IMPROVEMENT

Reflection and self-evaluation to promote improvement are embedded in the school's practice at all levels. During the inspection, there was evidence that the focus on the development of the 'Easy Read' programme has led to an increase in the children's interest and fluency in reading and to improvements in the quality of their oral language.

The SDP meets fully the requirements of the Department of Education School Development Planning Regulations/Schedule 2005/19. It will be appropriate for the Principal, staff and governors to review the current SDP in light of the inspection findings in order to identify more clearly defined objectives which focus on teaching and learning and raise further the standards achieved by the children.

4.3 ACCOMMODATION

A capital build programme for a new school is due to begin in the immediate future. The current building is over 70 years old and was originally built to accommodate 80 children. More than half of the classes are now accommodated within mobile classrooms; conditions in the main building, mobile classrooms and outdoor areas are extremely cramped. However, the teaching and support staff have worked hard to create and maintain a bright, stimulating learning environment and have made optimum use of all available accommodation.

The standards of caretaking and cleaning are excellent.

4.4 RESOURCES, FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE

The school is very well resourced to support learning and teaching. The resources are well maintained and fit for purpose.

The governors are extremely well-informed about all aspects of the school's provision; they make an effective contribution to the development of the school and are highly supportive of the work of the Principal.

5. CONCLUSION

5.1 The strengths of the school include:

- the courteous, articulate children and their enthusiasm for learning;
- the outstanding quality of the arrangements for Pastoral Care including the effective links with the local and wider community to promote learning;
- the quality of teaching observed, almost all of which was good or better, with one third being outstanding;
- the outstanding support for children who have special educational needs and the progress they make;
- the very good standards achieved by the children in literacy and numeracy; and
- the dedicated, hard-working staff team and the very effective leadership of the Principal, Vice-principal and SLT.

In the areas inspected, the quality of education provided by the school is very good. The school is meeting very effectively the educational and pastoral needs of all of the learners; and has demonstrated its capacity for sustained self-improvement.

HEALTH AND SAFETY

- The roadside adjacent to the school becomes dangerously congested at the beginning and the end of the day. The school is aware of this, and has made every effort to remedy the situation. Vigilance and planning from the school with the continued support of the parents is needed.

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