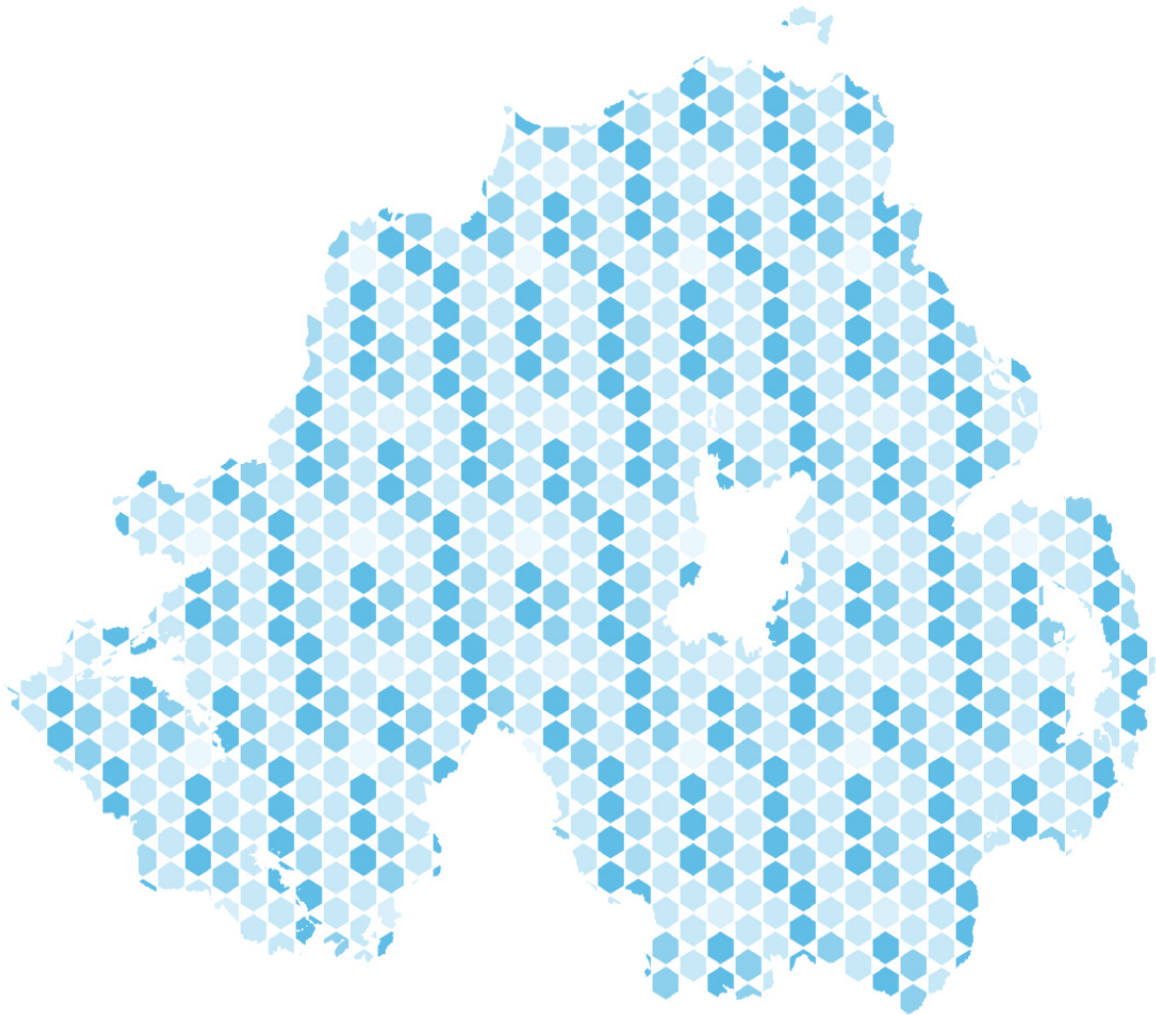


PRIMARY INSPECTION



Education and Training
Inspectorate

Irvinestown Primary School,
Co Fermanagh

Report of an Inspection
in November 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

Irvinestown Primary School is situated in Burfits Hill, Irvinestown, County Fermanagh. The children come from the town and the wider surrounding rural area. The enrolment has increased slightly over the last four years and currently stands at 137. Approximately 11% of the children are entitled to free school meals (FSM) and about 28% have been identified as needing support with aspects of their learning. At the time of the inspection, nine teachers, including the teaching principal, were employed in the school. This arrangement incorporated the principal's part-time release teacher, the part-time teacher for special educational needs, and two temporary teachers.

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 and the teaching 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 the children from year 6.

Of the 100 questionnaires issued to the parents, 59 (59%) were returned to Inspection Services Branch, including 22 which contained additional written comments. All of the questionnaires expressed very high levels of satisfaction with the life and work of the school. In their written comments, the parents highlighted the dedication, approachability and professionalism shown by all the staff, the very good quality of provision for children who require additional support with aspects of their learning, and the wide range of enrichment and extra-curricular activities provided for all the children.

All of the teachers and the support staff responded to the questionnaires. Almost all of the teachers and a small number of the support staff supplied additional comments. The responses indicated very high levels of satisfaction in relation to all aspects of school life. An analysis of the questionnaires and the comments made by the parents and the staff were shared with the Principal and the governors.

The governors spoke positively about the commitment of the Principal and staff to meeting the individual needs of the children, the school's many meaningful links with the local and wider community, and the opportunities provided for the all the children to participate in, and contribute to, a wide range of school and community events and activities.

The children in year 6 talked very positively about the many aspects of school life they enjoyed. They valued the support and guidance given by their teachers and the other adults in the school and how their thoughts and ideas on issues which affected them were respected and acted upon. They signified strongly that they feel 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 outstanding.

The staff works very hard to meet the pastoral and learning needs of all the children and where appropriate, they make effective use of external support services to address specific issues and support individual children.

Among the many strengths of the school's provision are the school's inclusive and nurturing ethos and the very good working relationships at all levels. In addition, the staff extends the range of learning experiences, through the provision of events and visits for all the children, which support and promote well their personal and social development.

1.5 CHILD PROTECTION/SAFEGUARDING

The school has very good comprehensive arrangements for safeguarding children. These arrangements reflect the guidance issued by the Department of Education.

1.6 HEALTHY EATING AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

The school gives very good attention to promoting healthy eating and physical activity. Throughout the school, the promotion of healthy breaks, the range of health-related topics planned for and provided within the curriculum, and the good range of physical activities develop well the children's understanding of healthy lifestyles.

1.7 LINKS WITH PARENTS AND THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

The school has worked hard to develop and sustain an excellent range of links and partnerships to extend further the quality and extent of the children's personal development and mutual understanding (PDMU). Among the many strengths are; the very good development of pupil participation through the enthusiastic Eco Council, the active links made with local businesses and services, the positive and effective communications with the parents and purposeful shared learning experiences with a number of local schools. The children are involved regularly in many community-based, cultural and sporting events and the school places a high emphasis on supporting well a diverse range of charities.

The children have benefitted from the additional learning resources which have been purchased from the funds raised by the active Parent Teacher Association.

2. ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS

2.1 LEARNING

The children demonstrate positive attitudes towards learning and are motivated and confident. They communicate effectively with each other, their teachers and visitors. The children learn through a well-balanced blend of activity-based and more formal learning

tasks. Throughout the school, the children work well in pairs and groups and show respect for the views of others. The children can take appropriate responsibility for their own work, engage well in creative activities and achieve suitably high standards in line with their expected levels of ability.

An analysis of the key stage (KS) 2 assessment data over the past four years shows that while the school's performance in English and mathematics has fluctuated above and below the Northern Ireland average, overall the school's performance trend is continuing to improve. Compared with schools in the same FSM category, the children's levels of attainment in English and mathematics are below the average but also indicate continued improvement.

The school's internal records and the performance data demonstrate that by the end of KS2, the children with special or additional learning needs make steady progress through the school year groups and achieve standards in line with or above expectations.

2.2 ENGLISH AND LITERACY

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

The children talk and listen attentively and express their opinions clearly in almost all of the classes. A feature of the talking and listening observed during the inspection was the emphasis placed on the children asking questions to seek information and the views of others. The children enjoy and are confident in role-play situations across the school and are able to perform in a range of public events.

The children learn to read through immersion in a literacy rich environment which includes well-stocked class libraries. The school makes very good use of print in the school environment and classroom displays to reinforce word recognition skills. The children enjoy books in all classes and are able to justify their reading preferences. By the end of KS2, the majority of the children are reading at a level commensurate with or above their chronological age.

The staff is developing a range of appropriate strategies to support the children's writing skills. It is timely that the school is reviewing the need to develop further the compositional aspects of independent writing. In foundation stage (FS) the teachers support the children effectively to develop letter formation, to write words and simple sentences. The children are able to experiment with writing during play-based learning. During the inspection in KS1 and KS2, the children composed poems and plays and in the best practice expressed their feelings and ideas with imagination. In all key stages, the children work regularly on a range of ICT activities which complement and support their work in literacy. The children are currently participating in the revised Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment ICT accreditation scheme. The majority of children in KS2 write with accuracy and fluency and across a wide range of writing genres. Overall, the children achieve good standards in writing in line with or above expectations.

The literacy co-ordinator is also the Vice-principal and special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO). She has developed a comprehensive policy and a relevant action plan to guide the development of the literacy provision and improvements in the children's standards. The staff is developing effective strategies to address the needs of the children identified with dyslexia and other reading challenges. Reading recovery training is disseminated to all staff to enable them to support the children's literacy skills. In addition, effective reading partnership programmes are provided for the children identified with reading delay and the gains made by these children are often sustained as they progress through the school.

2.3 MATHEMATICS AND NUMERACY

The overall quality of provision in mathematics and numeracy is very good.

The school has encouraged and supported well the involvement of the parents in their children's mathematical learning through, for example, the provision of a series of successful numeracy information meetings covering a range of topics and the evaluation of the parents' views of the school's provision through relevant questionnaires.

In the mathematics lessons observed, a good blend of active learning approaches and discussions and a very good range of resources, including the use of ICT, were used skilfully to support the learning and teaching. The children in the FS practise aspects of their learning at home through engaging numeracy packs. In KS1 and KS2 the teachers use short sessions of mental mathematics effectively to activate the children's thinking. In all classes the children work ably in groups on interesting and challenging investigative and problem-solving tasks, sharing their ideas and reasoning to develop further their mathematical skills.

Throughout the school, the teachers set the learning in meaningful contexts and make skilful use of routines and incidental opportunities to promote and extend the children's interest and understanding; for example, in the FS, the children record their snack break choices in Venn diagrams, and the children in all key stages take part in a well-planned Money Week programme which develops their financial capability.

By the end of KS1, the children have a good understanding and application of number, shape and space and measurement. By the end of KS2, the most able children are very competent in their mathematical thinking; they are able to work flexibly with larger numbers and apply their knowledge to solve more complex problems confidently. Overall, the children achieve good standards in mathematics in line with their ability.

The numeracy co-ordinator, who is also the Principal, is highly committed to the ongoing development of the provision for numeracy and mathematics. She has led the staff in a recent review of the school's numeracy policy and planned programme to ensure increased continuity, progression and challenge for all of the children and as a result, the school's programme is suitably broad and balanced over the seven years. The current action plan places an appropriate emphasis on the further development of the numeracy provision and improvements in the children's standards.

3. THE QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING

3.1 PLANNING

The school has reviewed and developed various aspects of the whole-school planning, including in numeracy and literacy, to ensure greater continuity and progression in the children's learning. As a result, the planning focuses more specifically on well-defined learning intentions which guide well the classroom practice. The school has identified, appropriately, the need for the teachers to evaluate more systematically the extent to which the learning outcomes are met by groups and individual children to inform more precisely their future planning.

3.2 TEACHING

Most of the teaching observed was good or better, with a significant minority being very good or outstanding. All of the teachers work hard to plan and resource their lessons well. In the most effective practice the lessons are well structured and well-paced and focus clearly on what the children are going to learn; the teachers build well on the children's understanding and interests; the learning activities are set in real and relevant contexts for the children; and the teachers use effective questioning strategies to extend the children's thinking.

Current provision for the children with special educational needs (SEN) is organised through an effective combination of in-class support and withdrawal sessions for some children in literacy and numeracy. The staff, the part-time special needs teacher and the SENCO maintain close links to ensure continuity in meeting the children's needs. The classroom assistants provide very good support and work effectively as part of the whole-school team.

3.3 ASSESSMENT

The school is continuing to develop further its approach to the effective use of assessment information. At a whole-school level, there is effective use of performance data to identify and address the children's needs and to set appropriately challenging targets for the improvement of literacy and numeracy.

In the best practice, some teachers evaluate systematically the impact of the planned programme on the children's day-to-day progress. The school has plans to develop this work further and the inspection endorses this.

The teachers mark the children's written work regularly and provide positive encouragement for the children's achievements. The teachers need to indicate more specifically in their written responses how the children may improve further the quality of their work, especially in their compositional writing and to extend further their self-management skills.

The parents are kept well-informed about their children's work through two progress meetings, a comprehensive written report at the end of the school year and an open-door policy should the parents wish to discuss any aspect of their child's progress.

3.4 SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

The quality of the provision for children with SEN is very good.

Special educational needs is given a high priority by the school and an additional teacher is employed on a part-time basis to support the children identified with literacy and numeracy difficulties. The SENCO provides very good leadership, is committed to the development of the provision and action plans for improvement. She maintains effectively the SEN register, has very good links with the parents, attends relevant courses and disseminates best practice to build the capacity of the staff.

The teachers, with the support of the SENCO, identify early those children who require additional support with their learning in both literacy and numeracy. In addition, the school identifies the children whose barriers to learning are of a personal, social and emotional nature and makes referrals in collaboration with the parents, for support, to the school counsellor or outside support agencies.

The class teachers in consultation with the SENCO write individual and group education plans (EP) for the children with special educational needs. Most of the EPs are being developed further to record information about the children's strengths as well as targets for improvement. There is a need to ensure that the areas of concerns identified are clear in the EPs. Overall, the children identified with any special or additional need are carefully monitored and where their improvements are sustained in literacy and numeracy, they are able to leave the register. The school has established good liaison with the special schools and a speech and language unit in Enniskillen.

4. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The overall quality of leadership and management is outstanding.

4.1 LEADERSHIP

The teaching-Principal has been in the school for 33 years. She previously served as a class teacher and Vice-principal in the school and is now in her twelfth year as Principal. She demonstrates ongoing loyalty and commitment to the children, their families and the local community. She has secured a caring, collaborative ethos amongst the staff team and a shared commitment to continuous improvement and to meeting effectively all of the children's needs. She has led the improvement of many aspects of the school's provision, including, for example, the high quality pastoral care and the recent development of the very good outdoor learning environment.

The Principal is supported very effectively in this work by the highly skilled Vice-principal who provides very good curricular and pastoral leadership throughout the school and a dedicated and hard-working staff team.

4.2 PLANNING FOR IMPROVEMENT

The school improvement process links well to a clearly devised school development plan (SDP) and effective procedures for consultation about the SDP within the school community. The school has developed a good range of appropriate methods for self-evaluation. The current action plans are informed by the careful evaluation of previous improvement actions and contain appropriately challenging targets to bring about further improvement in the quality and extent of the children's learning and the standards they achieve.

4.3 ACCOMMODATION

The staff works hard to provide an attractive and child-friendly learning environment, valuing all aspects of the children's work and achievements through appealing and informative displays. They make effective use of all the space available for learning including the school's external environment. The recent development of a very well-planned outdoor classroom, and the addition of a very good range of playground equipment, extend well the children's learning experiences about the natural environment and sustainability and increase their opportunities for regular energetic play. The school is maintained to a very high standard.

4.4 RESOURCES, FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE

The governors make a very positive contribution to the life and work of the school. They are well-informed about all aspects of school developments and manage the budget effectively to provide for the children's needs. They support the Principal and the staff well in the implementation of the SDP.

5. CONCLUSION

5.1 The strengths of the school include:

- the very well-motivated and friendly children, who engage enthusiastically in all aspects of school life;
- the outstanding quality of the school's pastoral care provision; including the very good provision for the children who require additional support with aspects of their learning;
- the quality of the teaching observed, most of which was good or better;
- the good standards achieved by the children in literacy and numeracy;
- the broad and balanced curriculum including the wide range of extra-curricular and enrichment activities provided for the children; and,
- the excellent leadership provided by the Principal and the effective Vice-principal, staff team and governors in ensuring the continuous improvement of all aspects of the school's provision.

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

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