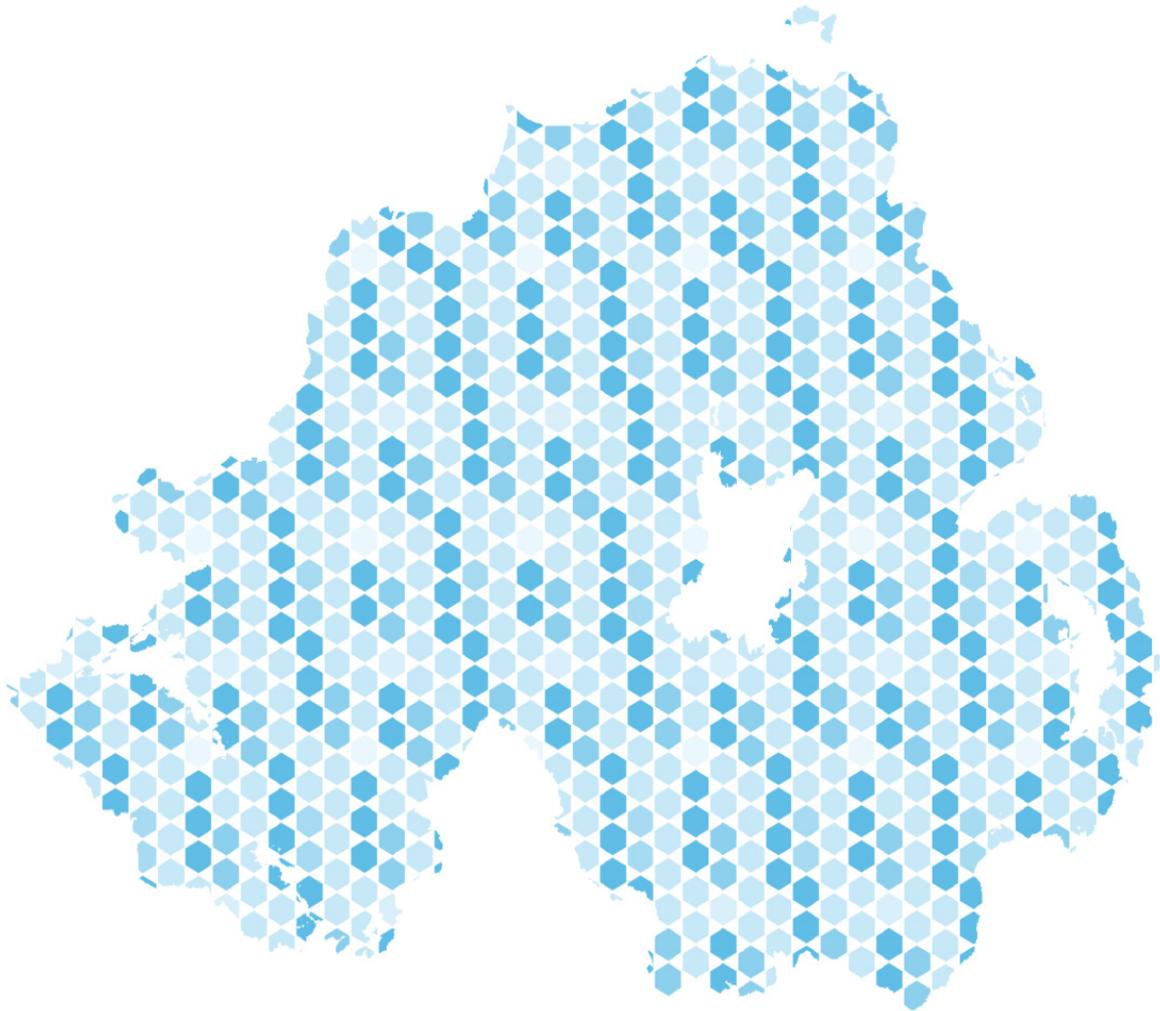


PRIMARY INSPECTION



Education and Training
Inspectorate

Lowwood Primary School and
Nursery Unit, Belfast

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

BASIC INFORMATION SHEET (BIS) - PRIMARY SCHOOLS

- A. i. **School: Lowwood Primary** iii. **Date of Inspection: W/B 14/11/11**
 ii. **School Reference Number: 101-6537** iv. **Nature of Inspection: Focused**

B.

School Year	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
Year 1 Intake	33	26	18	23	28
Enrolments					
Primary	175	171	175	165	182
Reception	0	0	0	0	0
Nursery Unit	52	52	52	52	52
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): 94.4% **NI Avg Att: 94.7%**
- Average Attendance for those children on the
 Special Educational Needs Register: 96%
- | | Primary &
Reception | Nursery
Unit | Special
Unit | Irish Medium
Unit |
|--|------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|----------------------|
|--|------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|----------------------|
- D. i. Number of Teachers
 (including the principal and part-time teachers): 9 2 0 0
 (Full-time equivalent = 25 teaching hours)
- ii. PTR (Pupil/Teacher Ratio): 19.9 NI PTR: 20.2
- iii. Average Class Size: 25.57
- iv. Class Size (Range): 19 to 30
- v. Ancillary Support:
 Number of Hours **Per Week**:
- | | |
|---|-------------|
| i. Clerical support: | 30 |
| ii. Foundation Stage Classroom Assistant Support: | |
| iii. Additional hours of other classroom assistant support: | 25
45.25 |
- vi. Percentage of children with statements of special educational needs: 3.2%
- vii. Total percentage of children on the Special Needs Register: 38%
- viii. Number of children who are **not** of statutory school age: 0
- ix. Percentage of children entitled to free school meals: 54.4%
- 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):
- | | | |
|----------------|--------------------|--------------|
| English | Mathematics | Irish |
| 60% | 67% | N/A |

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 SCHOOL CONTEXT

Lowwood Primary School and Nursery Unit is situated off the Shore Road in north Belfast. The enrolment of the school has increased slightly over the last five years and currently stands at 182 children in the primary school and 52 in the nursery unit. The majority of the children come from the immediate area surrounding the school. At the time of the inspection approximately 54% of the children within the school were entitled to free school meals (FSM). The school has identified 38% of the children as requiring additional support 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 and the teaching and support staff to complete confidential questionnaires prior to the inspection, as well as meetings with the chair of the Board of Governors (governors) and a group of the children from year 6.

One hundred and nine questionnaires were issued to the parents in the primary school; approximately 23% of the parental questionnaires were returned to the Inspection Services Branch and seven contained additional written comments. Fifty-two questionnaires were issued to the parents in the nursery unit; approximately 25% of the parental questionnaires were returned and three contained written comments. The responses from the parental questionnaires, from the primary school and the nursery unit, indicated that almost all of the parents are very supportive of the life and work of the school. In particular, the parents acknowledge the caring, dedicated and attentive staff.

The questionnaire responses and a summary of the written comments made by the parents and the staff were shared with the Principal and the governor.

Three teachers and six support staff completed the confidential online questionnaire. Almost all of the teachers and support staff were very positive about all aspects of the life and work of the school; in particular they acknowledged the strong team ethos among the staff of the school.

The chair of the board of governors expressed very strong support for the school; in particular he recorded his appreciation of the work of the Principal and the commitment of all the staff to the community and to every child in the school. He reported that the governors were kept well informed by the Principal and had a good understanding of the priorities outlined in the school development plan (SDP).

The children in year 6 talked very openly and enthusiastically about their experiences in school. They appreciate the care, support and work of all the adults, and value the meaningful role played by the school council in representing their views. The children understand and value the school rules and the high expectations for their behaviour. They enjoy the range of after school extra-curricular activities. The children indicated that they are happy and secure in school and that they know what to do if they have any concerns about their safety and well-being.

1.4 PASTORAL CARE

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

Some of the strengths are the inclusive and supportive ethos throughout the school, the very good working relationships, the high expectations of all of the staff for the children's behaviour and that they will all reach their full potential. The children feel valued, encouraged and motivated to learn and successes in all aspects of school life are celebrated. The School Council provides the children with real and meaningful opportunities to express their views and contribute to the decision making process. The children's behaviour is exemplary.

1.5 CHILD PROTECTION

The school and the nursery unit have 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 and nursery unit give outstanding attention to promoting healthy eating and physical activity through, for example, the healthy-break initiative, the provision of playground games and a wide range of extra-curricular physical activities which encourage the children to adopt healthy lifestyles.

1.7 LINKS WITH PARENTS AND THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

The school and the nursery unit have worked hard to develop very effective links with the parents and others in the community. Parents have benefited from the range of workshops which place an important focus on developing their children's numeracy and literacy skills.

More recent links include the regular provision of information about school events through the monthly newsletter, the school website, a weekly lending library, and regular opportunities for the parents to meet both formally and informally with teachers to discuss their children's progress.

The Principal meets regularly with local community groups to share relevant information on the life and work of the school. The school premises are used appropriately by a number of community groups for meetings and for evening activities.

2. ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS

2.1 LEARNING

Almost all the children are highly motivated and demonstrate very good levels of engagement and enjoyment in their learning. They settle quickly into very effective routines which support progress in their learning. By the end of key stage (KS) 2 the level of their oral communication is very good. All of the teachers have very high expectations of what the children can achieve which is evident in the very good progress they make in their learning.

The teachers use skilfully engaging, practical activities to promote the children's sense of enjoyment of their learning. In response, the children demonstrate a willingness to try their best and to learn from their mistakes. They transfer their developing skills to other meaningful contexts.

Throughout the school the children make effective use of ICT, use a range of applications and their ICT skills are very good. Their work in KS2 is accredited through the Curriculum Council and Examination ICT Accreditation Scheme.

The majority of the children with special educational needs (SEN) make very good to outstanding progress in their learning. Effective assessments of the children's needs, and early intervention enables them to become more independent and confident as they progress through the school. The children's own understanding of how they are improving is a particular feature of the SEN provision in this school.

An analysis of the KS2 assessment data over the past four years shows that in English and mathematics the standards are below the Northern Ireland (NI) average¹. Over the same period there is a developing consistency and improvement in the standards achieved by the children in literacy and particularly in numeracy. For example in all but one of the last four years the schools' performance in English has shown steady improvement. Over the corresponding period, in mathematics, the school's performance was in line with that of similar schools. The school's internal performance data indicates that most of the children are attaining in line with or above their ability.

2.2 ENGLISH AND LITERACY

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

All of the children listen respectfully, co-operate well with each other and talk about their play and their work. Excellent working relationships and highly effective questioning by the teachers and support staff encourages all of the children to extend their vocabulary, take active roles, speak out and respond with confidence and enthusiasm. The children also make and review digital videos of their work to assess themselves and their peers and to improve their work further.

Reading is taught through a wide range of word recognition strategies and a well-established phonics programme. Effective approaches to teaching reading, adopted from reading recovery methods, are implemented consistently across the school. The children enjoy listening to stories and the majority are confident when attempting unfamiliar texts. A good range of fiction, poems, plays and non-fiction books are enjoyed by the children and internet sources, such as news stories, are used for research. The standards of reading are

¹ The Key Stage outcomes should be interpreted with caution for small cohorts of children as a large percentage change from year to year can often be attributed to a very small number of children.

very good. The school monitors and tracks the children's standards in reading through the regular analysis of standardised test results, which indicate that most of the children, by the end of KS2 are reading at a level at least equivalent to their age. There is clear evidence of year on year improvements.

From the early years, the children are introduced to different forms of print and experiment with letter and word formation in many interesting ways and they are encouraged to 'have a go'. There are very good opportunities for emergent and for increasingly independent writing to develop and for the children to master a growing variety of written styles for different purposes and audiences. There are many good examples of high quality, extensive, creative and imaginative prose and poetry; the standards of writing are high.

The literacy co-ordinator provides clear purpose to and highly effective management and planning for the class teaching of English and literacy across the school. The teachers work effectively as a team and have supported an open and honest whole-school approach to the development of the provision. Through moderation of examples of the children's work, the teachers draw out the implications of this process for their teaching, develop individual folders of progress for each child, review its effectiveness in raising standards and identify where children would benefit from additional support.

2.3 MATHEMATICS AND NUMERACY

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

Effective use is made of a wide range of practical equipment to support the children in their learning and develop their numeracy skills. Information and communication technology programmes support well the children's learning in mathematics. The teachers and the children use the interactive whiteboard to explore, extend and consolidate key mathematical concepts. In almost all of the lessons observed, the teachers use effective questioning to engage and challenge the children, encouraging them to reflect on and explain their thinking using the appropriate mathematical language.

Across the key stages (KS) the children develop their numeracy skills and thinking through the increasing number of opportunities to apply their learning in problem-solving activities and in real life meaningful contexts. The children work with enthusiasm and enjoyment. When presented with more challenging activities they demonstrate their ability to solve problems and complete investigations.

During the inspection, the highest attaining children in years 4 and 7 demonstrated very good knowledge of important ideas and flexibility in their mathematical thinking. By the end of KS2, most of the children achieve very good standards in mathematics.

The numeracy co-ordinator, supported well by the numeracy team, monitors and evaluates effectively the quality of the provision through the scrutiny of the teachers' planning, analysis of data, and sampling of the children's work. The ongoing development of the provision for mathematics and numeracy continues to be prioritised within the School Development Plan.

3. THE QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING

3.1 PLANNING

The planning is very thorough and guides well the day to day work of the school; it provides effective guidance to support the staff and connects successfully all areas of learning and contextualises them imaginatively within the children's experiences. The planning for both English and mathematics facilitates a consistent approach to preparation and a very good

structure for lessons enabling coherence, differentiation and progression. The written plans are evaluated regularly and systematically by the teachers and co-ordinators to inform future planning and take full account of the wide range of ability within each class.

The teachers work closely with the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO) to produce high quality Individual Education Plans (IEPs) for those children identified as requiring additional support with aspects of their learning. The IEPs are focused and include well-informed, realistic individual targets for all of the children. The teachers review and update the planning through effective monitoring and evaluation of the children's learning and progress.

3.2 TEACHING

The quality of the teaching observed in the school ranged from outstanding to good. Most of the teaching was very good or better.

In the most effective practice, the teachers built effectively upon prior learning with very good opportunities to develop the children's thinking skills and personal capabilities. The lessons were well-paced and had an appropriate emphasis on meaningful real-life experiences with very good learning support for the wide range of abilities and needs.

The school provides in-class and withdrawal support in both literacy and numeracy, for those children identified as having additional learning needs. A particular feature of the provision is the extent to which the teachers providing the withdrawal support plan co-operatively with the class teachers; ensuring that the work covered in the withdrawal sessions complements well and supports effectively the work the children are doing in class.

3.3 ASSESSMENT

The arrangements for assessment and target setting are excellent. There is a well-embedded and highly effective culture of self-evaluation in the school. The teachers make extensive and systematic use of a wide range of qualitative and quantitative data. Standardised test results and DE benchmarked information are used to monitor the progress and attainments of the children, track every child's progress and to identify promptly those children who are underachieving or are having difficulty with aspects of their learning. The assessment arrangements enable the school to monitor and evaluate effectively the provision for the wide range of learning needs of all the children, including the most able.

Marking is of a very high standard. The teachers annotate the work with positive and sensitive comments on how the children can improve on their efforts. Increasingly the children develop the skills to assess their own efforts using a range of strategies to improve the standards of the work. They are involved fully in setting individual targets to develop their knowledge and skills; when given the opportunity they articulate their thoughts and understanding of their learning experiences and how they can improve.

4. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

4.1 LEADERSHIP

The quality of leadership and management within the school is outstanding.

The quality of the leadership provided by the Principal is outstanding. Since his appointment he has worked very effectively to develop important links with the parents and the local community. He has worked with great commitment to develop a clear and shared strategic vision for the school which has an appropriate focus on supporting parents and on meeting

the needs of all the children. This work has been supported well by the vice-Principal and all the staff and it has a clear focus on raising the standards and achievements of all of the children. As a result, and with the hard work and dedication of his team, he has overseen significant improvements in the standards the children attain.

All of the co-ordinators are very hard working, highly effective and lead their teams very well. They work collaboratively to develop clear links across the curriculum. The very high quality of the planning is evidence that they are well-informed of their area of learning through the comprehensive staff audits, the very good analysis of data and effective monitoring and evaluation.

The SENCO provides effective leadership in SEN; she provides very good support for the staff and focuses appropriately on early identification and intervention strategies. The children's literacy, numeracy and social needs are identified early and well planned and structured individual support is provided and matched effectively to the work in the classrooms.

The school uses an appropriate range of diagnostic testing, together with the teachers' observations, to identify early those children requiring additional support with their learning. The current provision is mainly through children receiving withdrawal support for numeracy and literacy within the school; a small number of these children receive well-matched support from external support teachers.

The learning support assistants provide sensitive, valuable and well-directed support and contribute significantly to the children's overall progress. The SENCO also meets well the needs of those children who need additional support in relation to the development of their social skills and has put in place a 'Friendship Club' to complement the work of the class teachers.

4.2 PLANNING FOR IMPROVEMENT

The school improvement process is clearly linked to a well-constructed school development plan (SDP) underpinned by rigorous self-evaluation. There are effective processes for consultation about the school development plan within the school community. These consultations along with the efficient use of data, effective target-setting and benchmarking are used effectively to inform well-constructed action plans which are appropriately focused on raising further the standards of learning and teaching.

The school gives very good attention to and meets fully the requirements of the School Development Plans Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2010.

4.3 RESOURCES, FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE

The governors are fully involved in the life and work of the school and support effectively the Principal, the Vice-principal and the staff in raising the profile of the school and maintaining links with the parents and the local community.

4.4 ACCOMMODATION

The school building and grounds are very well maintained. The standard of caretaking is excellent.

5. CONCLUSION

5.1 The strengths of the school include:

- the very good standards achieved by the children in literacy and numeracy;
- the quality of the teaching observed during the inspection, with most of the lessons being very good or outstanding;
- the outstanding pastoral care provision which underpins the quality of the children's learning and the development of their skills;
- the outstanding quality of the provision in the nursery unit;
- the highly effective links made with the parents and the community which are having a positive impact on the children's progress and achievements; and
- the outstanding leadership provided by the Principal.

5.2 In the areas inspected, the quality of education provided by this school is outstanding; the quality of pastoral care is also outstanding. The school has demonstrated its capacity for sustained self-improvement.

6. THE NURSERY UNIT

6.1 The double nursery unit is attached to Lowwood Primary School and offers 52 full time places.

6.2 The main strengths within the nursery unit's educational provision include:

- the richly resourced, stimulating and attractive learning environment which promotes very effectively the children's independence and engagement in a wide range of activities;
- the supportive and caring staff who display high levels of skill as they engage with the children to promote concentrated and purposeful play, build effectively on their ideas and extend their language and thinking;
- the very good progress made by the children, in their developing confidence, motivation, positive attitudes and dispositions for learning;
- the well-planned, broad and balanced programme which promotes excellent opportunities for learning in all areas of the pre-school curriculum;
- the very good quality of the children's art work, their interest and curiosity about the natural world and their engagement in a wide range of opportunities for mark making are particular strengths; and
- the dedicated Head of the Nursery Unit who has worked very effectively with her staff to bring about continuing improvement within the nursery unit.

6.3 The quality of education provided by this nursery unit is outstanding. The nursery unit has demonstrated its capacity for sustained self-improvement.

STATISTICAL INFORMATION ON LOWWOOD PRIMARY SCHOOL NURSERY UNIT, BELFAST

1. Details of Children

Number of children:	Class 1	Class 2
Attending full-time	26	26
Attending part-time	0	0
Under 3 years of age*	0	0
With statement of special educational needs	0	0
Without a statement but receiving therapy or support from other professionals for special educational needs	0	0
At CoP stages 3 or 4**	0	0
At CoP stages 1 or 2**	3	3
With English as an additional language	0	0

* On 1 July.

** The stages refer to those set out in the Code of Practice for the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs.

Percentage qualifying under DE admission criteria 1 or 2.	30.8%
Average attendance for the previous year.	90.4%

2. Duration of Sessions

Full-time	Part-time: am	Part-time: pm
4 ² / ₃ hours	-	-

3. Details of Staff

Number of:	Full-Time	Part-Time
Teachers	2	0
Nursery Assistants (qualified)	0	5
Nursery Assistants (non-qualified)	0	0

Number of: ***	
Students	2
Trainees	0

*** Total placements since September of current year

4. Parental Questionnaires

Number issued	
Percentage returned	%
Number of written comments	

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