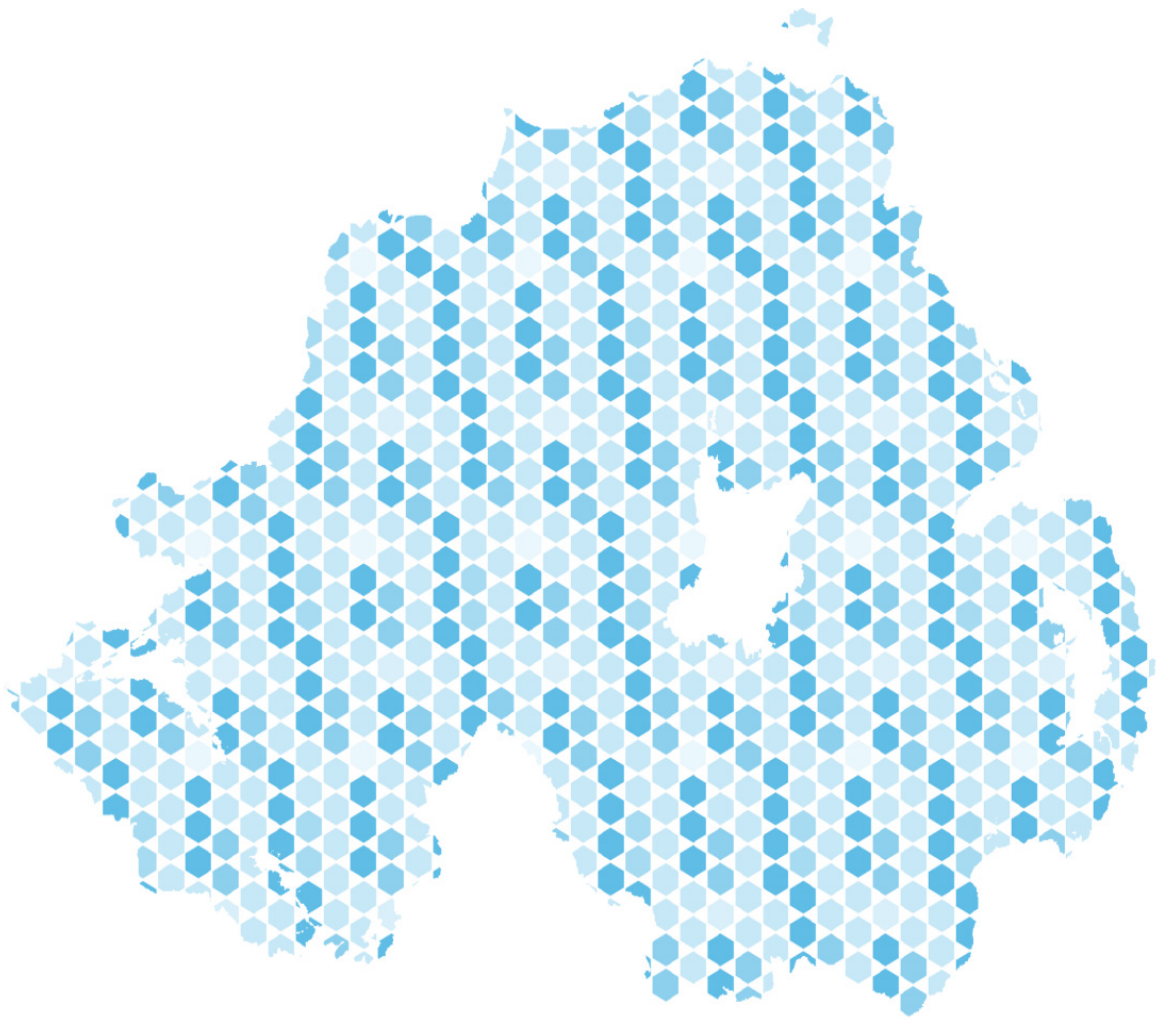


PRIMARY INSPECTION



Education and Training
Inspectorate

St Mary's Primary School,
Portaferry

Report of an Inspection
in February 2012



Providing Inspection Services for
Department of Education
Department for Employment and Learning
Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure

CUSTOMER
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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

St Mary's Primary School is located in Portaferry on the Ards Peninsula, County Down. The enrolment of the school has remained steady over the last five years and currently stands at 200 children in the primary school and 26 children attending on a part-time basis in the nursery unit. The majority of the children come from the village and wider rural area. At the time of the inspection approximately 24% of the children within the school were entitled to free school meals (FSM). The school has identified approximately 23% 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 representatives of the Board of Governors (governors) and a group of the children from year 6.

One hundred and forty-seven questionnaires were issued to the parents in the primary school; 66% of the parental questionnaires were returned to the Inspection Services Branch (ISB) and 18 contained additional written comments. In addition, 26 questionnaires were issued to the parents in the nursery unit 38.5% were returned to ISB and a small number contained additional written comments.

Almost 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 strong commitment of the Principal, together with the teaching, support and ancillary staff in providing high quality care and guidance for the children; the very effective communications between home and school; and the high regard that the local community has for the school.

Seven of the teachers and a small number of the support staff responded to the online questionnaires. Nearly all of the responses indicated very high levels of support for the work of the school. The staff reported that they feel valued, enjoy working in the school and work collectively as a team in developing the school in the best interests of all the children.

The governors expressed their strong support for the work of the school. They spoke very positively about the leadership of the Principal, the commitment and dedication of the staff, and the close links that the school has developed with the local community.

In discussions held with a group of children in year 6, they talked very openly and positively about their experiences in school. They value the help and support of their teachers and the very good opportunities they have to participate in extra-curricular activities. They indicated strongly that they feel happy and secure in school and they know what to do if they have any worries about their safety and well-being.

An analysis of the questionnaire responses and a summary of the written comments made by the parents and the staff were shared with the Principal and the governors.

1.4 PASTORAL CARE

The quality of the arrangements for pastoral care in the school and nursery unit is very good. There is an inclusive, welcoming ethos in which each child is valued and supported by all of the adults. There are very good working relationships at all levels and good pastoral links between the school and the nursery unit. The children are pleasant, courteous and generally well-behaved; their work and achievements are celebrated across the school, in the classrooms, the corridors and in assemblies. The Personal Development and Mutual Understanding Programme (PDMU) is well conceived and enhances the development of the children's confidence, self-esteem, personal and social skills. The children develop their personal interests through an extensive range of extra-curricular activities, sports competitions and educational visits.

1.5 CHILD PROTECTION

The school and 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 gives very good attention to promoting healthy eating and physical activity, for example, the emphasis on healthy breaks, and the very good programme of physical education available to all of the children which encourage them to adopt healthy lifestyles.

1.7 LINKS WITH PARENTS AND THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

The links with the parents and the local community are given a high priority within the school and the nursery unit. The active Parent Support Group (PSG) provides very good support and resources to enhance the work of the school. Effective links with the parents are maintained through regular school newsletters and information leaflets. Parental consultation and involvement in the children's learning are important features in the life of the school. The children are encouraged to contribute to selected charities and appropriate emphasis is placed on caring for others in both the local and the wider communities. In addition, the children's learning experiences are further enhanced through active links with the parish, other local schools and visits to places of educational interest.

2. ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS

2.1 LEARNING

The majority of the children respond very well to the high expectations set by their teachers and are highly motivated to learn. Most of the children settle quickly to their work, have good self-management skills and engage purposefully 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.

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 fluctuated from below to above the NI average; in the last two years the schools performance has improved and has been above the Northern Ireland (NI) average in both English and mathematics.

Compared with schools in the same free school meals category, the levels of attainment in English and mathematics are generally in line with or above the average for similar schools. In addition an analysis of the school's internal data over the last two years indicates that all of the children attain standards in English and mathematics in line with their ability and there is evidence to show that intervention strategies in place are improving the children's standards.

2.2 ENGLISH AND LITERACY

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

The literacy co-ordinator provides very good leadership. She monitors and evaluates the provision for literacy across the school and is committed to promoting high standards in literacy throughout the school. Effective use is made of the school's internal and external performance data to set appropriate targets for all the children. Information from training courses is shared and support provided, as appropriate, to ensure that the staff have a shared understanding of best practice in literacy and collaborate well together on auditing the provision and action-planning for improvement. The co-ordinator monitors and evaluates the provision for learning and teaching in literacy across the school through 'book looks', scrutiny of the literacy planners, the sampling and moderation of children's work and classroom visits.

Across the key stages appropriate emphasis is placed on developing the children's talking and listening skills and almost all of the children have very good oral communication skills. In the best practice, the teachers use effective questioning to scaffold the children's oral responses and seek their views and opinions on a wide range of topics; the children are given appropriate thinking time, extended responses are encouraged and their contributions are valued.

The staff have created a literacy rich environment throughout the school, they stimulate an enjoyment in reading amongst the children and very good use is made of the attractive class libraries which provide books that match the interests and abilities of the children. The children are taught to read systematically through the use of commercial reading schemes in KS1 which are enhanced by a wide range of appropriate support materials such as novels, 'big books' and reference materials. They enjoy reading and are developing a good range of appropriate strategies to help them interpret unfamiliar text. Reading is promoted positively in the school through book fairs and reading support programmes, for example, 'Reading Partners' and 'Paired Reading'. Almost all of the children achieve very good standards in reading and by the end of KS2 they are reading at a level commensurate with or above their ability.

The standards attained by the children in writing are very good.

In the foundation stage (FS) the children have well-planned opportunities to experiment with writing during play-based learning activities and are well supported to develop letter formation, to write words and to express their ideas in simple sentences. As they progress through the school the children display increased accuracy, fluency and clarity in their writing. They are more independent and have opportunities to plan, edit and extend their writing through a wide range of genres and across the curriculum. They write for a variety of audiences and produce very good pieces of writing in which they express their opinions and ideas clearly. The children are encouraged to take pride in their written work and often present it creatively and to a high standard.

It will be important that the monitoring and evaluation of learning and teaching across all aspects of the literacy programme continues to be built upon in order to continue to improve the overall standards in literacy.

Information and communication technology is used effectively throughout the school to support the promotion of literacy, through for example, the development of research skills using the internet and the creative use of word processing to enhance the presentation of written work.

2.3 MATHEMATICS AND NUMERACY

The overall quality of provision in mathematics is very good.

The co-ordinator who has been in post for approximately two years provides excellent leadership in developing mathematics within the school. Major strengths include the strategic and comprehensive approach to identifying key priorities, providing training and support to the staff and effectively monitoring and evaluating both the implementation of strategies within the classes and the outcomes for the children. Parents are kept well informed and are actively encouraged through a range of information and teaching packs to support mathematics through learning at home.

The whole-school programme for mathematics provides appropriate guidance for the teachers to plan effectively for balanced coverage of the mathematics curriculum. The quality of the children's learning experiences and the progress in their understanding of key concepts and use of mathematical language is very good. The teachers have high expectations of what the children can achieve; they have a clear emphasis on developing the children's mental agility and flexibility with number. The teachers take time to teach key strategies, such as estimation and to connect learning across the mathematics curriculum. The children are provided with opportunities to engage in purposeful and stimulating practical work and to record their findings; they are encouraged to identify trends, draw conclusions and to develop questions using accurate mathematical language.

In discussions with a group of the children most expressed enthusiasm for mathematics; they demonstrated very good flexibility in their mathematical thinking. They were able to complete mental calculations quickly and accurately; draw on a range of mental strategies and to articulate confidently their chosen methods.

Throughout the school the children who do not reach the expected levels of attainment have been clearly identified and they are given appropriate support; there is evidence to demonstrate that the targeted support improves the level of attainment achieved by most of the children. By the end of year 7 most of the children attain very good standards in

mathematics. It will be important to ensure that the teaching strategies employed and the planning for target groups of children are consistently implemented and embedded throughout the school to ensure that the improving standards are maintained and continue to improve for all of the children.

Information and communication technology is used effectively to support teaching and learning in mathematics throughout the school.

3. THE QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING

3.1 PLANNING

The teachers prepare well for lessons; their short-and medium-term planning, to support the learning and teaching, is very good. They have developed themes and topics which support very effectively connected learning across the curriculum. The teachers complete useful written evaluations of their planned work and the children's learning to inform future practice, appropriate cognisance is taken of the varying needs and abilities of the children. The teachers work closely with the special educational needs (SEN) support teacher to ensure planning for children who require support with aspects of their learning which leads to early and effective intervention and ensures consistency and coherence in the children's learning.

3.2 TEACHING

During the inspection, the quality of the teaching observed ranged from satisfactory to outstanding; most of the teaching observed was good or better; a majority of the teaching was very good or outstanding. The teachers are conscientious and hard-working; they know the children very well, have high expectations and understand the learning needs of the children.

In the most effective practice, the lessons had a clear focus and purpose; a suitable range of teaching approaches were used, including the application of ICT and opportunities were provided for the children to discuss their learning. Cross-curricular topics enriched the experiences of the children and contextualized their learning and the teachers used skilful questioning to extend the children's understanding.

On the few occasions when the teaching was less effective, there was insufficient pace and challenge in the tasks, the children's learning difficulties were not addressed appropriately and there was inconsistent use of effective behaviour management strategies.

The classroom assistants make a significant contribution to the teaching and learning in all classes and contribute to the high standards in the school.

3.3 ASSESSMENT

The teachers mark the children's written work regularly and provide supportive feedback to the children. However, the written comments provided by the teachers do not always provide sufficient evaluative detail on what the children need to do in order to improve their work further. The teachers need to improve the quality of the written feedback with a focus on learning and to further embed assessment for learning strategies across the school. In the most effective practice, observed during the inspection, the teachers negotiated success criteria skilfully with the children and used the plenary sessions to consolidate effectively the learning.

The children's achievements and standards are reported to the parents regularly through the annual written report, formal parent-teacher meetings and informal contact between the teachers and the parents as the need arises. The annual written report provides the parents with a broad and holistic evaluation of their children's progress and attainment.

3.4 SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

Special educational needs is given a high priority by the school and the quality of the provision is very good.

The Principal, in his role as acting Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO)', has a clear overview of provision for those children identified with SEN and supports the staff well in their commitment to providing for the additional needs of children across the range of ability. The work is well co-ordinated and there is a cohesive programme in place for each pupil.

The majority of the teachers use the detailed information and professional development opportunities provided by the SENCO and SEN teacher to guide their classroom practice. They display a strong commitment to including every child in the lessons at a level appropriate to their individual need. Those children in withdrawal support receive effective individual or small group teaching based on sound knowledge of their needs and good use of information provided by other professionals and by their families. The withdrawal teacher, in collaboration with class teachers and the SENCO, prepares a detailed diagnosis of difficulty and there is meticulous ongoing recording of progress, particularly in reading.

The majority of children with SEN make good progress. Early intervention enables them to become more independent and confident as they progress through KS1. By the end of KS2 they demonstrate good levels of progress in their learning, show increasing self-confidence and are secure and happy in their classes.

4. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

4.1 LEADERSHIP

The overall quality of the leadership and management is very good.

The Principal has been in post for 16 years and has provided dedicated service to the school and the community; he sets the tone for the caring and positive ethos in the school. He promotes a collaborative leadership style and strong team spirit at all levels. He gives a high priority to meeting the care and well-being of all the children and to raising further the standards they attain. He has successfully developed links and partnerships with a range of stakeholders to promote the school within the community and to enhance the learning opportunities for all the children.

The co-ordinators are hard working, very effective and are well informed of their areas of learning. They have a clear understanding of their roles and work collaboratively to develop clear links across the curriculum.

4.2 PLANNING FOR IMPROVEMENT

The school improvement process is clearly linked to the school development plan (SDP) with relevant associated action plans. There are effective processes for consultation about the SDP within the school community. Appropriate policies and action plans are in place for the key curricular areas that are focused on raising further the children's standards and achievements. The plan complies fully with the requirements of the School Development Plans Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2010.

4.3 ACCOMMODATION

The teachers have created stimulating environments in the classrooms and shared areas which support and celebrate the children's learning. Good use is made of the available outdoor space to enhance learning opportunities and the school is very well maintained.

4.4 RESOURCES, FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE

The governors are supportive to the Principal and the work of the school; they have a good understanding of the challenges and opportunities faced by the school.

5. CONCLUSION

5.1 The strengths of the school include:

- the inclusive ethos which is underpinned by the very good quality of pastoral care provision and the excellent working relationships at all levels;
- the courteous and well-motivated children who have a very good disposition towards their learning and work very well both independently and in groups;
- the commitment and strong sense of collegiality of the teaching and non-teaching staff who work very hard to meet the needs of all of the children;
- the quality of the teaching observed which was very good or outstanding in the majority of the lessons;
- the very good standards attained by the children in literacy and numeracy and the very good quality of the special educational needs provision; and
- the effective leadership provided by the Principal and his dedicated service to the school and the community.

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.

6. THE NURSERY UNIT

6.1 The single nursery unit is situated in grounds of St Mary's Primary School and provides 26 part-time places. Most of children come from the local area and all are in their immediate pre-school year. At the time of the inspection a substitute teacher was employed in the nursery unit.

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

- broad range of appropriate activities provided for the children;
- children's good level of independence, the development of their social skills through good collaborative play; and their interest in early writing and mark-making;
- appropriate use of the play activities to promote the children's development of mathematical language and concepts;
- very good care and support provided for the children by the staff;
- good quality of most of the interaction between the staff and the children; and
- effective use of educational visits and visitors to the nursery to enhance the quality of the children's learning experiences.

6.3 The areas for improvement include the need to:

- develop the short-term planning, for both indoor and outdoor play, to ensure that the areas of play are sufficiently resourced and that the learning potential inherent in all of the activities is more consistently exploited by the staff;
- develop comprehensive records of the children's progress and use the information to guide the planning process to meet more effectively the children's differing needs.

In most of the areas inspected the quality of education provided in this nursery unit is satisfactory; the strengths outweigh areas for improvement in the provision. The inspection has identified areas for improvement in learning and teaching and leadership and management 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 nursery unit's progress in addressing the areas for improvement over a 12-18 month period.

**STATISTICAL INFORMATION ON ST MARY'S PRIMARY SCHOOL NURSERY UNIT,
PORTAFERRY**

1. Details of Children

Number of children:	Class 1	Class 2
Attending full-time	0	0
Attending part-time	26	0
Under 3 years of age*	0	0
With statement of SEN**	1	0
At CoP stages 3 or 4***	0	0
At CoP stages 1 or 2***	7	0
With English as an additional language	0	0

* On 1 July.

** Special Educational Needs.

*** 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.	0%
Average attendance for the previous year.	93%

2. Duration of Sessions

Full-time	Part-time: am	Part-time: pm
-	2 hours 50 mins	-

3. Details of Staff

Number of:	Full-Time	Part-Time
Teachers	0	1
Nursery Assistants	0	1
Qualified Nursery Assistants	0	0

Number of: ****	
Students	0
Trainees	2

**** Total placements since September of current year

4. Parental Questionnaires (to be completed by Inspection Services Branch)

Number issued	25
Percentage returned	38.5%
Number of written comments	

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