



*The Education and Training Inspectorate -  
Promoting Improvement*

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



## **Education and Training Inspectorate**

**Oakfield Primary School and Nursery Unit  
Carrickfergus**

**Inspection Letter**

**June 2015**

**INSPECTION OF OAKFIELD PRIMARY SCHOOL AND NURSERY UNIT,  
CARRICKFERGUS (301-6257)  
1 JUNE 2015**

**INSPECTION LETTER**

The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) notified Oakfield Primary School and Nursery Unit of its forthcoming inspection scheduled for week commencing 1 June 2015 in line with its standard inspection notification protocols. Prior to the inspection, the school informed ETI that 25% of the senior leadership team and 18% of teachers would not be co-operating with the inspectors on advice from their trade union. The action is not connected with the inspection process itself. Where the inspection is not carried out in full, parents and stakeholders have no complete external evaluation of the quality of education being provided by the school.

Within the primary school, the inspectors were able to:

- observe learning and teaching in all classes;
- observe directly the children at work and talk to them about their work;
- evaluate the children's achievements and standards in literacy and numeracy, in particular, how the school is addressing low attainment and underachievement where applicable;
- evaluate the quality of provision, children's achievements and standards in information and communication technology (ICT);
- evaluate the quality of the provision made for the children with special educational needs;
- scrutinise the school's internal assessment data on the attainment and progress of the children;
- discuss pastoral care and safeguarding, literacy and numeracy with sample groups of children from key stage (KS) 2;
- discuss the development of the key curricular areas under focus with the co-ordinators;
- discuss the leadership and management of the school including pastoral care and safeguarding with the principal, vice-principal and designated teacher;
- discuss the governance of the school with a representative of the board of governors; and
- elicit the views of the parents through the parental questionnaire normally distributed by the school.

Owing to the non co-operation of a teacher, in the primary school, the inspectors were not able to:

- observe aspects of the support provided for children identified as having additional educational needs.

Owing to the non co-operation of the two teachers in the nursery unit, the inspectors were not able to evaluate the quality of the provision, the standards achieved by the children or the quality of the leadership and management in the nursery unit.

### **Inspection method and evidence base**

The key questions and quality indicators which guide inspection and self-evaluation of primary schools, which were applied to this inspection, are available in the Education and Training Inspectorate's (ETI) publication *Together Towards Improvement: a process for self-evaluation* at: <http://www.etini.gov.uk/index/together-towards-improvement/together-towards-improvement-primary.htm>.

Inspectors observed teaching and learning, scrutinised documentation and the children's written work and held formal and informal discussions with children, teachers and staff with specific responsibilities.

The arrangements for this inspection included:

- a meeting with a representative from the governors;
- meetings with groups of children; and
- the opportunity for the parents, teaching and support staff to complete a confidential questionnaire.

Eleven percent of parents and 59% of the teaching and non-teaching staff responded to the questionnaires. The responses to the parental questionnaires indicated high levels of satisfaction with the life and work of the school. In particular, the parents highlighted their appreciation of the opportunities the children had to benefit from extra curricular activities and after-school clubs; how the children enjoy learning and the teachers' and support staff's good work in developing the children's personal, social and emotional skills; and, for the leadership and management of the school. The small number of queries raised was discussed with the principal and the chair of governors.

A majority of the staff completed questionnaires and their responses were also positive; they emphasised the high quality of the working relationships across the school and its inclusive, welcoming and pastoral ethos. In a discussion with the chair of governors, he emphasised the governors' support for the school, and the strong focus on providing quality provision for the children.

### **Context**

Oakfield Primary School and Nursery Unit is situated on Oakfield Drive, off the North Road in Carrickfergus. Almost all of the children attending both the school and the nursery unit come from the surrounding area. The nursery unit is located in the grounds of the primary school; it operates two full-time sessions with 52 children in total.

The enrolment within the primary school has declined in recent years; however, in the last two years it has levelled off and currently stands at 288 with an additional 52 children attending the nursery unit.

At the time of the inspection, approximately 30.9% of the children were entitled to free school meals (FSM) and the school had identified 21.9% of the children as requiring additional support with aspects of their learning.

The school achieved its first green flag through the Eco-School programme in February 2015.

Oakfield Primary School	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
Enrolment	317	303	291	288
% Attendance	94.8	94.7	94.6	94.6
% Attendance for those children on the SEN Register	92.4	91.8	92.2	93.5
Percentage of pupils entitled to Free School Meals	30.0	30.0	30.2	30.9
% of children on SEN register	16.7	20.1	21.0	21.9
No. of children with statements of educational needs	6	*	*	*
No. of newcomers	0	*	0	0

**Source:** data as held by the school.

\* fewer than 5

### Achievements and standards

- The children are developing well their social and interpersonal skills; they are confident within the school environment, interact respectfully with adults and demonstrate great pride in their school. They can self-manage, are well-organised and settle quickly to work, generally responding positively and with enthusiasm to the learning opportunities provided by their teachers and, in particular, when the teachers have appropriately high expectations of their ability. They work well independently, in pairs and in groups. When given the opportunity, the children engage purposefully in discussions with their peers and take part in challenging activities, in which they demonstrate well their ability to problem solve and complete investigations.
- The school's internal performance data indicates that most of the children including nearly all of those children who require additional support with aspects of their learning, make progress in literacy in line with their ability or above expectations. In numeracy, a majority of children, including those who require additional support with aspects of their learning, make progress in line with their ability or above expectation.
- Overall, the standards achieved by the children in literacy are good. The children in the foundation stage (FS) listen attentively to stories and, when provided with appropriate opportunities, give extended responses which show a very good understanding of the text. By the end of key stage (KS) 2, the most able children read fluently and can talk articulately about a range of authors and different styles of writing. In the most effective practice, the children make confident oral presentations and write imaginatively for a range of audiences and purpose.

- The standards achieved by the children in mathematics are good; the children enjoy their mathematical learning and talk enthusiastically about their work. By year 7, the most able children have a very good knowledge and understanding of most areas of the mathematics curriculum and can carry out mental mathematics calculations with accuracy and speed. They apply their learning to a variety of real life contexts, and solve and set mathematical problems with competence and confidence.
- By the end of key stage (KS) 2, the children develop a very good range of information and communication technology (ICT) skills. They use ICT competently to create texts, research topics, make presentations and consolidate aspects of their learning.

## **Provision**

- In the majority of teaching observed during the inspection teaching was effective. In the most effective teaching, in a third of the lessons observed, the key characteristics included: teachers' high expectations for all of the children; clear learning intentions, linked to meaningful contexts; and, appropriate pace and challenge. The differentiation in the learning and teaching was well planned to support the learning needs of all children; there was effective questioning to consolidate and extend learning, with time given to allow children to think before responding and an effective plenary in which the quality of the learning which had taken place was assessed.
- In the less effective practice, in just over a fifth of the lessons observed during the inspection, the children's learning was over directed by the teacher. In addition, there was insufficient clarity about the learning and a lack of appropriate challenge or support, as planning did not take account of the wide range of learning needs within the class. There is a need for the staff to identify and disseminate further the best practice in teaching and learning in order to improve further the quality of the children's learning experiences.
- In the foundation stage, the play-based provision is under developed. It will be necessary for the staff to review and improve the policy, planning and provision, to ensure that the children benefit from an age-appropriate, creative and challenging programme to enrich their learning and meet, more effectively, their needs.
- Long-term planning is in place for the areas of learning which provides an effective overview for the development of the children's knowledge, understanding and skills, including their communication and mathematical skills. There is a need for staff to review medium and short term planning as the effectiveness of planning for, and evaluation of, differentiated learning strategies to meet the needs of the children is inconsistent. In the most effective planning, the intended learning is identified clearly, tasks are appropriately differentiated to meet the needs of all of the children and the evaluations of the children's learning inform effectively the next steps in the teaching and learning.

- The children experiencing difficulties with aspects of their learning are identified early and they are well supported in class; in the best practice, the classroom teachers use effectively the detailed information provided by the special needs co-ordinator (SENCO) to guide classroom teaching. The detailed individual education plans need to be refined by reducing the number of targets and ensuring they are more specific to better inform the daily teaching and learning. Those children receiving additional support in developing their reading skills make very good progress. A numeracy support programme has been introduced and the school hosts a 'Ready to Learn' programme facilitated by Barnardos; it will be important for the SENCO to evaluate the effectiveness of these interventions, as well as further developing monitoring of the effectiveness of strategies in place to support the children in class.
- The children are provided with a breadth of experiences both in the classroom and through their involvement in wider extra-curricular activities to develop their reading, writing, talking and listening. In the best practice, the teaching and learning are embedded in meaningful contexts and age-appropriate tasks to develop well the children's skills, knowledge and understanding. The literacy scheme has been identified as a priority area to be updated, to inform a more progressive and coherent approach to the whole school teaching of literacy. In order to raise standards further, the children need to have more consistent opportunities to develop their reading, writing and talking and listening in a creative, holistic and integrated manner.
- The whole school programme for mathematics, which has been reviewed by the teachers this year, is comprehensive and provides for balanced coverage across the areas of mathematics and clear progression throughout the school. A key feature of the numeracy provision is the portfolio of applied tasks which extend the children's thinking, and create opportunities for children to make connections between their mathematical learning and everyday life. In the most effective practice, well-focused mental mathematical activities are used as an introduction to lessons to consolidate the children's previous learning and to promote their use of the associated mathematical language. The teachers use a range of practical resources to engage the children's mathematical curiosity and to deepen their mathematical understanding. However, this practice is inconsistent across the school and now needs to be shared and disseminated.
- The children's work is marked regularly and, in the best practice, the teachers provide meaningful guidance to the children on how to improve their work further. A more consistent application of the recently updated marking policy is required in order to promote further improvement. All children are supported and guided in setting appropriate individual targets and are beginning to use these to measure their progress and consider how to improve further their work.
- The quality of the arrangements for pastoral care within the school is very good. There is an evident caring and inclusive ethos throughout the school and the older children support the younger children well through the 'buddy system'; the effective voice of the child within the school has led to the introduction of curricular initiatives, such as, 'Friendship Week' and improvements in provision at break times. The children's achievements are celebrated, with the range of positive reward systems in class and in the whole school context, making the children feel valued and their efforts appreciated. The children show a keen sense of social justice through their support for a range of charities and the school council is very active in organising fundraising activities.

- The school gives good attention to promoting healthy eating and physical activity through for example, the promotion of healthy breaks, initiated by the children, and the range of after-school sports activities which encourage them to adopt healthy lifestyles.

### **Leadership and management**

- The leadership and management have a clear vision for providing high quality education for all children and are committed to the holistic development of the children. The school's aspiration is for the children to develop, "A rainbow of skills, to grow our little acorns into great oak trees".
- The school development planning process has been underpinned by effective consultation with the children, their parents, staff and governors. It is supported by an action-planning process focused on relevant aspects of literacy, numeracy, ICT and the broader development of the curriculum. There is evidence of ongoing improvements in the areas identified in the most recent school development plan. The associated action plans need to be developed further, with more precise and measurable targets and the identification of more rigorous systems for monitoring and evaluating the children's learning.
- The co-ordinators, in the best practice, provide effective leadership through a well-conceived team approach with representation by teachers from all key stages in the school. The staff need to develop further distributed leadership and the role of the co-ordinators.
- The school has effective links with the parents and wider community; the active parents' association contributes significantly to the life and work of the school and provides considerable financial assistance to the school, for example, the purchase of resources, such as, interactive white boards. The well-established Community Relations, Equality and Diversity Programme (CRED) promotes effective links with a local integrated primary school who engage in joint projects and residential trips that develop well the children's social and emotional skills and enable them to respect and appreciate other children and share their experiences. The school places an appropriate emphasis on supporting children transferring to and from the school.
- The governors bring a wide range of skill and expertise to their role and keep themselves fully informed of all aspects of the work of the school. They are fully committed to ensuring the school continues to improve the quality of the educational provision. Based on the evidence presented at the time of inspection, ETI's evaluation is that there can be a high degree of confidence in the aspects of governance evaluated.
- On the basis of the evidence available at the time of the inspection, the school has comprehensive arrangements in place for safeguarding children. These arrangements broadly reflect the guidance issued by the Department of Education.
- In discussions with the inspectors, the year 6 children reported that they feel very secure in school and know what to do if they have any concerns about their well-being. They spoke of the activities they enjoy after school and opportunities they have to develop their musical, creative and sporting talents.

The overall effectiveness of the school will be finalised on completion of the inspection. Currently, in the areas inspected, the quality of education provided by the school is good. The school has important strengths in most of its educational and pastoral provision. The inspection has identified areas for improvement which the school has demonstrated the capacity to address.

The areas for improvement include the need to:

- ensure a greater consistency in the quality of the planning, teaching and learning in order to raise standards further; and
- continue to develop the role of the co-ordinators in leading, monitoring and evaluating rigorously the impact of actions taken on the children's learning experiences and the standards they attain.

The school's inspection is incomplete. The ETI will return as soon as possible, and with little or no additional notice, to complete the inspection and to issue a published report. This will include undertaking all the aspects of the inspection which were not possible during this inspection.

ETI has reported the findings in this letter to the board of governors, the principal and representatives of the Education Authority: North-Eastern Region.



**Health and safety**

1. One of the close circuit cameras, used to monitor the safety and security of the entrances and exits, requires repair or replacement.
2. The school is located on a large site and there are a number of outside playgrounds around the front side and rear of the building. Two of the external security lights are defective and require urgent repair to ensure the safety of children.
3. The mobile classroom, used to accommodate the year four children, is isolated from the main building. This mobile classroom does not have an electronically controlled access system to ensure the safety of the children.

**Accommodation**

1. The fascia board at the front of the school, at its main entrance, is in a very poor state of repair and requires urgent remedial action to ensure the building remains watertight.
2. There are sections of the exterior of the building that are in poor decorative order and require repainting.

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