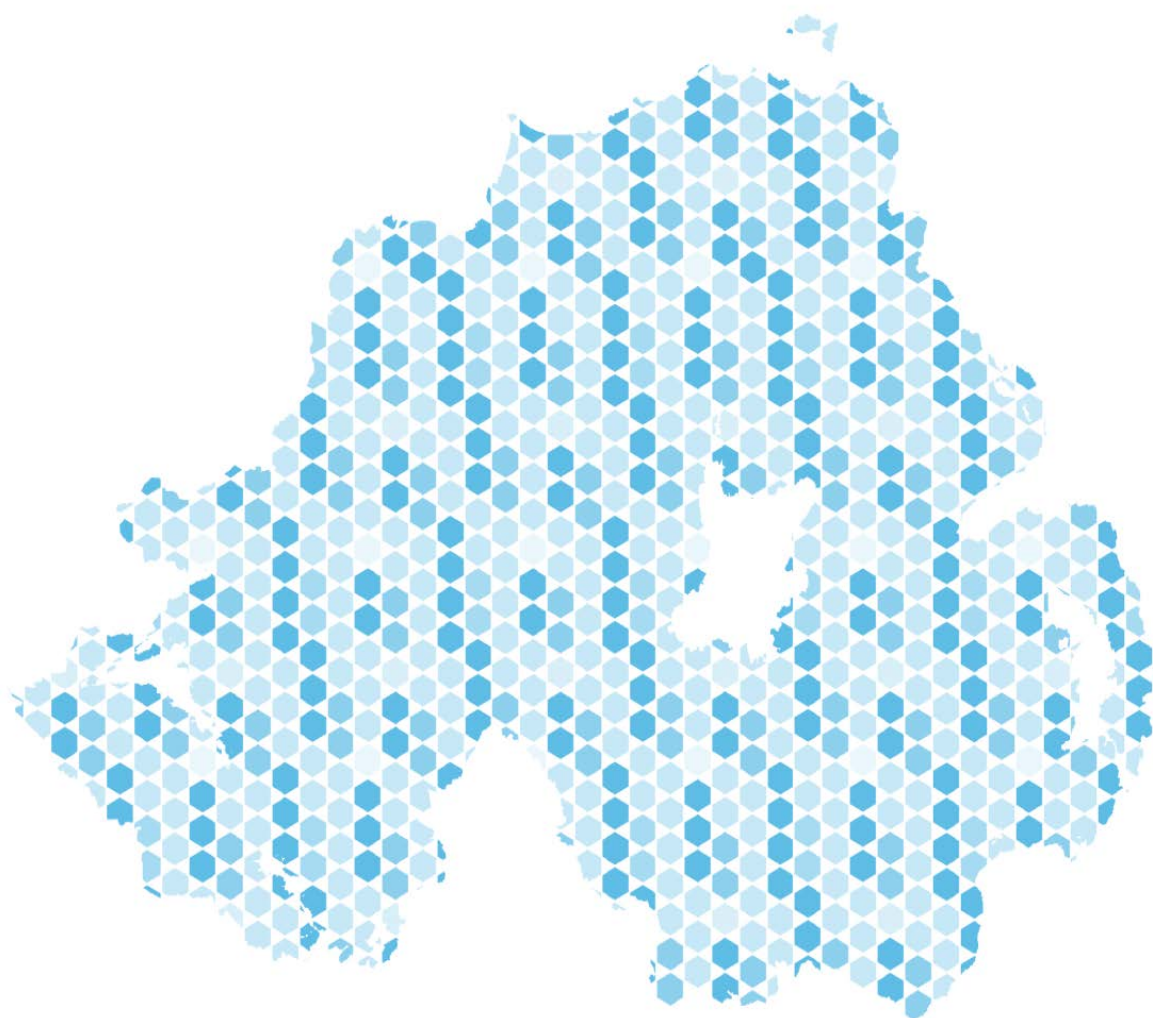


PRIMARY INSPECTION



Education and Training
Inspectorate

Abbots Cross Primary School,
Newtownabbey, Co Antrim

Report of an Inspection in
February 2014

eti

*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

CUSTOMER
SERVICE
EXCELLENCE



Quantitative terms

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% |

Performance levels

The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) use the following performance levels in reports:

| |
|----------------|
| DESCRIPTOR |
| Outstanding |
| Very Good |
| Good |
| Satisfactory |
| Inadequate |
| Unsatisfactory |

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1. 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 Inspectorate's 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 representatives from the governors;
- meetings with groups of children; and
- the opportunity for the parents, teaching and support staff to complete a confidential questionnaire.

| Questionnaire | Number issued | Number returned | Percentage returned | Number with comments |
|---------------|---------------|-----------------|---------------------|----------------------|
| Parental | 220 | 9 | <1% | 5 |
| Teachers | 14 | 10 | 71% | 7 |
| Support staff | 29 | 14 | 48% | * |

* fewer than 5

The ETI is trialling a range of methods to collect the views of parents/carers and as a result the percentage of questionnaires returned may be low.

A majority of the responses to the parental questionnaires were positive as were the returns from the teaching and support staff. The additional written comments raised a small number of concerns in relation to communication and aspects of leadership; these have been discussed with the principal and with a representative of the governors.

2. Context

Abbots Cross Primary School is situated in Newtownabbey in County Antrim. All of the children attending the school come from within a radius of two miles.

| Abbots Cross Primary School | 2010/11 | 2011/12 | 2012/13 | 2013/14 |
|--|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Enrolment | 292 | 283 | 275 | 292 |
| % Attendance | 93.4 | 93.37 | 93.97 | 94.45 |
| FSME Percentage ^[1] | 36 | 47.7 | 55.2 | 62 |
| % of children on SEN register | 27.7 | 24.4 | 24.4 | 21.6 |
| No. of children with statements of educational needs | * | 5 | * | 6 |
| No. of newcomers | * | * | * | * |

* fewer than 5

^[1] The term 'FSME Percentage' refers to the percentage of pupils entitled to free school meals.

3. Focus of inspection

The inspection focused on:

- the children's achievements and standards in literacy and numeracy, in particular, how the school is addressing low attainment and underachievement where applicable;
- the quality of provision in the school; and
- the quality of leadership and management.

4. Overall finding

| | |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------|
| Overall Performance Level | Satisfactory |
| Achievements and Standards | Good |
| Provision | Good |
| Leadership and Management | Satisfactory |

Key findings of the inspection

5. Achievements and standards

- The children in the school are motivated to learn; they respond positively and enthusiastically, to the learning opportunities provided by their teachers. The children work well independently and co-operate well when working in pairs and groups; their behaviour during the inspection was exemplary. The children are proud of their school and their work and are keen to talk about their learning and achievements.
- An analysis of the end of key stage (KS) 2 performance data over three years¹ shows that in English and mathematics the school's performance was consistently below the Northern Ireland (NI) average and that of schools in the same free school meals (FSM) category². The school's internal performance data shows that most of the children, including those who require additional support with aspects of their learning, make good progress in English and mathematics and achieve in line with their ability, or above expectation.
- Throughout the school, the children have good talking and listening skills; they are confident in expressing themselves and in their engagement with adults. The children write to a good standard and take a pride in neatly produced work. In discussion with the children, they expressed an enjoyment in reading and could discuss a range of authors and their preferred genre of books. The most able children read fluently, expressively and with good comprehension.

¹ Due to the current transition period in the arrangements for statutory assessment, this analysis of the end of KS2 performance data is based on the outcomes up to but not including the 2012/13 school year.

² The key stage outcomes should be interpreted with caution for small primary schools as a large percentage change from year to year can often be attributed to a very small number of children.

- The standards achieved by the children in mathematics are good. By year 7, the children are secure in their knowledge of important mathematical ideas and concepts; they can apply a range of effective mental mathematics strategies and demonstrate good flexibility in their mathematical thinking.
- The children use their information and communication technology (ICT) skills across a range of contexts and attain good standards. Their achievements in the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) information and communication technology (ICT) Accreditation Scheme are above the Northern Ireland (NI) average.

6. Provision

- There is a coherent, whole-school approach to the arrangements for the planning and teaching of literacy and numeracy which incorporates a clear focus on differentiation. The teachers make good use of appropriate practical activities and resources to motivate the children, develop their language and understanding and in the very best practice, to challenge and extend their thinking skills.
- Nearly all of the learning and teaching observed was good or better, with well over two-thirds of the lessons being very good or outstanding. The most effective practice was characterised by very high expectations, well-paced and challenging learning activities which engaged the children and developed their literacy, numeracy and thinking skills.
- The children's work is marked regularly and positively and there are appropriate procedures for keeping the parents informed about their children's progress. In the effective practice, the children are encouraged to reflect on their learning, assess the quality of their own work and that of their peers and the feedback given by the teachers enables the children to improve the quality of their work. It will be important that this good practice is disseminated throughout the school. The staff need to review and update the assessment and marking policies.
- The children who require support with aspects of their learning are identified effectively. The teaching and support staff use well the individual education plans and employ a range of appropriate strategies to support the children. It will be important that the different programmes and initiatives currently being used throughout the school are co-ordinated and evaluated, in order to demonstrate the impact they have on raising the attainments for all of the children.
- The children are provided with a good range of reading resources and, in the best practice, they engage in interesting and creative writing and ICT based activities to develop further their reading comprehension skills. Throughout the school, the teachers need to ensure that the children are given a wider range of opportunities to develop further their writing skills with more extended writing in key stage (KS) 1 and 2 and more opportunities for independent writing in the foundation stage. The teachers now need to plan for activities which enable the children to develop further their thinking skills and personal capabilities alongside their talking and listening skills.

- The whole-school programme and planning for mathematics is coherent and provides effectively for progression in the children's knowledge, skills and understanding. Across the key stages, the children experience a balanced coverage of number, shape and space, measures and handling data. They have good opportunities to develop their skills with mental mathematics and, in the most effective practice, the teachers focus well on developing the children's mathematical language to enable them to articulate, clarify and extend their mathematical thinking.
- The quality of the provision for pastoral care is good. The teachers and classroom assistants know the children and their families very well and the support for each child and family is central to the work of the school; a nurturing environment has been created by the staff. The children benefit from a good range of enrichment and extra-curricular activities which meet their needs, interests and abilities. In discussions with the inspectors, the year 6 children talked with enthusiasm about their school; in particular, they emphasised the range of extra-curricular activities and the good whole school rewards system. To improve the pastoral care provision, there is a need for the governors and staff to review the policies and procedures related to pastoral care. It will be important that in the review process, the children, their parents and the staff are consulted and agree on the rewards and sanctions to be applied where necessary, and that these are applied consistently. The recently established school council needs to involve the children more fully in making decisions about issues which affect them.
- The school gives good attention to promoting healthy eating and physical activity, through for example, encouraging the children to have healthy snacks at break-time and through the range of activities provided by the Extended Schools Programme.

7. Leadership and management

- The principal has overseen the establishment of a senior leadership team and the creation of the school development plan (SDP), which places an appropriate focus on raising the standards the children attain. However, the current procedures for monitoring and evaluating the progress and impact of the actions taken are not sufficiently formalised, rigorous or robust. As this is the first year of the implementation of the current SDP, it will be important that the principal links better all of the associated action plans, and develops further the current mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating the impact of this work on the children's learning and achievements. The principal needs to be more pro-active in providing effective strategic leadership for school improvement.
- The school's processes for self-evaluation leading to improvement are at an early stage of development. The staff gather information about aspects of the school's provision and are using well the internal performance data to identify underachievement. The senior management team now need to develop this work to include more qualitative data in order to measure and track individual and group progress, determine trends and effect further improvements in the quality of learning and teaching across the key stages and in the specific areas of learning.

- The acting vice-principal, who carries a significant number of co-ordinator roles, is highly effective in leading key aspects of the school's work. The co-ordinators lead well their various areas of responsibility and are instrumental in bringing about improvement.
- The staff place an appropriate focus on involving parents in their child's learning. A sense of community and an effective partnership with parents is developing through the important work undertaken by the staff, supported effectively by the expertise of the 'Newtownabbey Family Connections' facilitators.
- The governors play an active role in the life and work of the school. They have managed the budget effectively and have overseen changes in staffing which have brought about improvements in the provision for the children. Based on the evidence presented at the time of inspection, the parents, staff and school community can have confidence in most of the aspects of governance evaluated. In supporting the school's improvement work further, it will be important for the governors to exercise a more robust challenge function in relation to achieving improvements in the quality of learning and teaching, leadership and management.
- On the basis of the evidence available at the time of the inspection, the school has satisfactory arrangements in place for safeguarding children. These arrangements broadly reflect the guidance issued by the Department of Education. The children reported that they feel secure in school and know what to do if they have any concerns about their well-being.

8. Conclusion

In most of the areas inspected the quality of education provided in this school is satisfactory; the strengths outweigh areas for improvement in the provision. The inspection has identified areas for improvement in leadership and management which need to be addressed if the needs of all the children are to be met more effectively. The main areas for improvement include the need:

- to build upon the effective leadership demonstrated by key co-ordinators through more rigorous evaluation of the outcomes of their work, to ensure that all of the children attain the highest possible standards; and
- for the principal to provide effective strategic leadership.

The Education and Training Inspectorate will monitor and report on the school's progress in addressing the areas for improvement over a 12-24 month period.

Health and safety

- There is a need to carry out a review of the visibility panels on some of the internal doors.
- It will be important for the school to carry out risk assessments in relation to security, the access to and around the school building and the opening and closing arrangements for pedestrian and vehicular access at the front of the school.

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