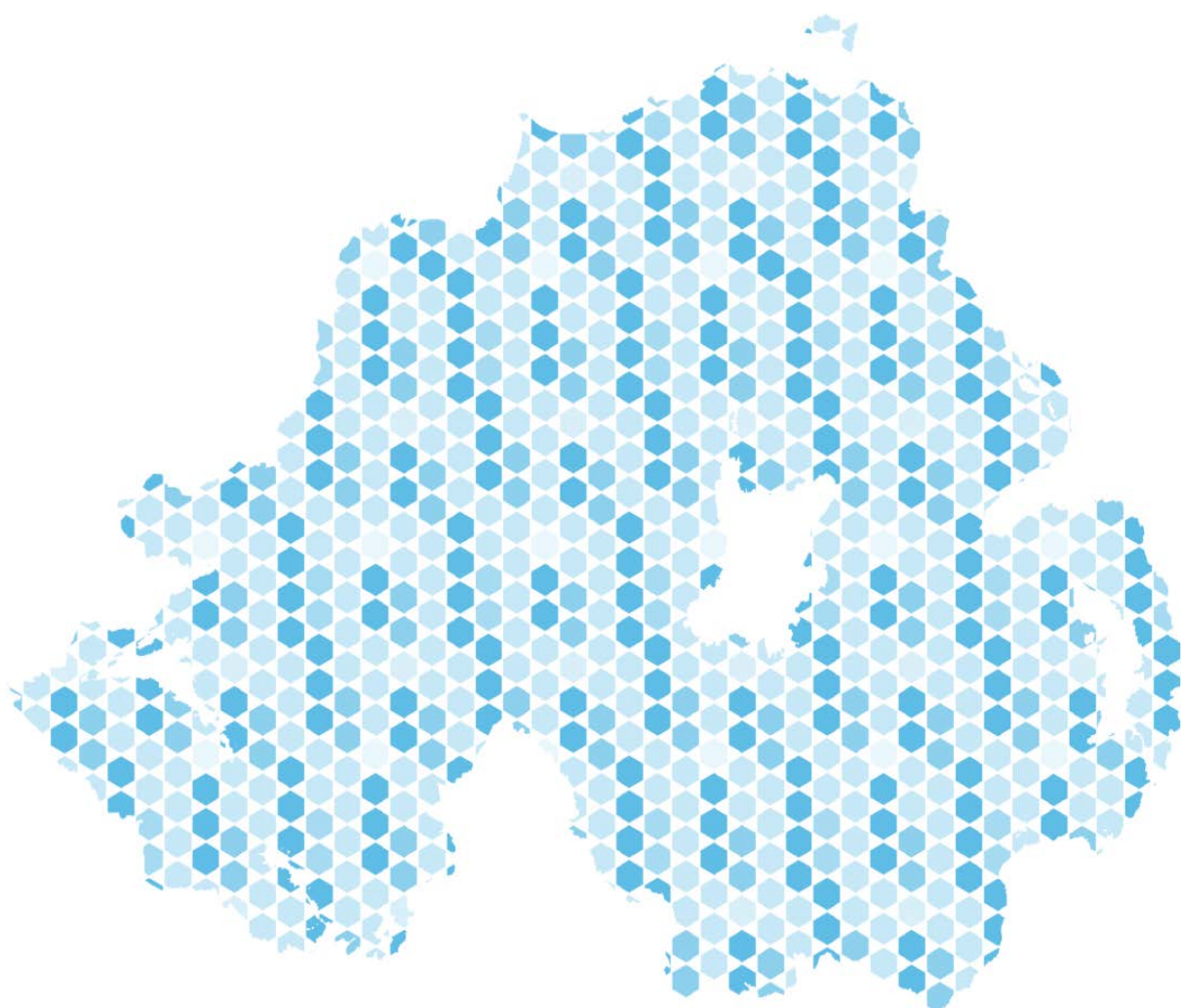


PRIMARY INSPECTION 2014-15



Education and Training
Inspectorate

Ballymena Primary School,
Co Antrim

Report of an Inspection in
November 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
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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 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.

Twelve percent of parents and 90% of staff, teaching and non-teaching, in the primary school responded to the questionnaires. Overall, the responses to the parental questionnaires indicated high levels of satisfaction with the life and work of the school. In particular, the parents expressed their appreciation of the approachable, caring and hardworking staff, the diversity of opportunities for the children to extend their learning within an inclusive learning environment and the effective leadership at all levels. Almost all of the staff completed questionnaires and all of the responses were very positive. They emphasised the high quality of the working relationships, their meaningful involvement in decision-making processes, the collegial approach and the extensive range of opportunities for staff development. ETI reported to the principal and a representative of the board of governors the main issues emerging from the questionnaires and the discussions.

2. Focus of inspection

The inspection focused on:

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

3. Context

Ballymena Primary School is situated on the northern side of Ballymena, County Antrim. The children who attend come from a wide catchment area that includes the town and surrounding rural district. The enrolment has remained steady over the past three years and currently stands at 292 children. The school prides itself on its rights respecting school and thinking school status and its international and inclusive ethos. At the time of inspection, 29% of the children were entitled to free school meals and 18% of the children had been identified as requiring additional support with aspects of their learning.

Ballymena Primary School	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
Enrolment	301	280	284	292
% Attendance (NI Average)	92.7	95.0	94.6	96.4
FSME Percentage ¹	26.6	27.8	27.1	28.8
% (No) of children on SEN register	21.9	27.8	22.1	18.4
No. of children with statements of educational needs	7	6	5	7
No. of newcomers	36	45	45	50

Source: data as held by the school.

* fewer than 5

4. Overall findings of the inspection

Overall Performance Level	Very Good
Achievements and Standards	Very Good
Provision	Very Good
Leadership and Management	Very Good

5. Achievements and standards

- The children are friendly and mannerly and their behaviour is exemplary. They are well-motivated, enthusiastic learners who settle quickly to work. The children have very good personal and social skills and work well independently and in pairs. Across the key stages, they respond very well to the learning activities which develop effectively their well-established thinking skills and self-management.
- The school's performance data shows that almost all children, including those who require additional support with aspects of their learning and those whose first language is other than English, make good progress in English and mathematics in line with their ability or above expectation.
- The children's communication skills are very good. Through carefully planned talking and listening opportunities, the children develop well their active listening skills, to give their opinions and support their own views with evidence and in turn, to respond appropriately to others' points of view. By year 7, the most able children are purposeful readers who communicate a confident understanding of what they have read and make connections between texts, their own experiences and the world around them. They evaluate and make inferences, justify their opinions and ideas and draw appropriate conclusions.
- In mathematics, the children apply their thinking skills maturely to enable them to make choices and decisions in their mathematical learning and to explain the calculation strategies they are using. By year 7, the most able children are secure in their knowledge of number facts and place value and demonstrate a very good working knowledge of key concepts across the areas of mathematics. They can handle simple and more complex computation competently and are skilled, confident and flexible in their mathematical thinking.

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

- The children are very skilled in using a wide range of information and communication technology (ICT) devices and software to extend and express their learning across the curriculum; this high level work includes animation, interactive design, and various forms of broadcasting, including television, radio and podcasts.

6. Provision

- The quality of the planning, teaching and assessment for learning is very good. In the most effective practice, in approximately three-fifths of the lessons observed, the teachers used skilful questioning to challenge and extend the children's creative and critical thinking and to develop further their independence. The teachers made the learning explicit for the children; they provided an appropriate range of practical learning and used effective plenary sessions to consolidate the learning.
- The teachers' planning is comprehensive and the teachers exploit well opportunities to make effective connections across the curriculum using a wide range of information and communication technology (ICT) resources to develop and extend the children's knowledge and skills. The effectiveness of the planning, however, for and evaluation of differentiated learning strategies is inconsistent. The teachers need to ensure that the evaluations inform clearly the planned learning activities in order that they match more closely the individual needs of all the children including the most able.
- The children's work is marked regularly and there are good examples of teacher feedback which give the children precise guidance on how to improve their work further and which support the children in identifying their own targets for improvement. This existing good practice needs to be embedded more consistently across all classes.
- The teachers provide a supportive and stimulating learning environment for literacy and numeracy, including engaging learning displays which demonstrate the children's developing mathematical skills and concept knowledge and celebrate the children's achievements in writing.
- In literacy, the integration of reading with opportunities for talking and listening and independent writing provides progression and continuity for all children across the key stages. The teachers' use of a blend of initiatives and strategies has supported the children's progression in the compositional aspects of writing including planning, drafting and editing. The children communicate information, meaning, feelings, imaginings and ideas in a clear and organised way through a wide range of interesting tasks for a variety of purposes and audiences. In improving this effective work further, the school has identified appropriately the need to monitor and evaluate the planning for progression in the writing forms and the standards achieved by the children.
- The whole school programme for mathematics is comprehensive and provides for balanced coverage across the areas of mathematics and clear progression through the school. A key feature of the numeracy provision is the whole-school focus on the effective development of calculation strategies to extend the children's thinking, including the rigorous development of their use of the associated mathematical language. Across the key stages, the teachers use

well-focused mental mathematics activities as an enjoyable and challenging lesson introduction to consolidate the children's previous learning and to enable the children to make connections between their mathematical learning and everyday life. The teachers provide the children with motivating opportunities to apply their mathematics in other areas of the curriculum, including the World Around Us, and through well-planned mini-enterprise activities to develop their financial capabilities.

- The children who require additional support with their learning benefit from the in-class support of their teachers and classroom assistants and from targeted withdrawal sessions. Their needs are identified early and appropriately through ongoing assessment by the staff, who have put in place a range of strategies to address the various barriers to their learning. It is appropriate that the school has identified the need to review the effectiveness of the education plans to ensure that the children's targets are precise and measurable.
- The outstanding pastoral care within the school is characterised by a very caring, welcoming and inclusive ethos. The staff and children embrace diversity and there are positive working relationships at all levels. The children demonstrate high levels of mutual understanding, respect and sensitivity to the needs of others. The school links periodically with schools from other sectors to encourage shared education. The children's achievements are valued and celebrated throughout the school, developing well their confidence and self-esteem. They have a wide range of opportunities, through the taught pastoral programme and other well-planned activities to develop their personal, social and learning skills. The children's ideas and opinions are sought and valued; they contribute to decisions about aspects of school life that affect them directly through the purposeful school and eco-councils.
- The school gives very good attention to promoting healthy eating and physical activity, through the promotion of healthy breaks and lunches, the range of extra-curricular activities on offer and the opportunities for the children to grow their own vegetables.

7. Leadership and management

- The leadership and management are visionary, strategic and have made an outstanding contribution to raising the standards attained by the children and to targeting priorities for improvement in the provision. An important strength is the recent development of a strategic leadership team which uses effectively the wide range of individual teacher skills. This development enables a collaborative approach to whole school development and builds further the capacity of the staff.
- A comprehensive school development plan (SDP) and associated action planning process are linked with the efficient use of the school's internal performance data and draw on effective consultation with the parents, staff and governors. The co-ordinators are very skilled and knowledgeable within their respective areas of responsibility, contributing with enthusiasm and collaborating meaningfully with all staff in the school development planning process. They monitor and evaluate effectively the teachers' planning and the children's work to develop continuity and progression in the learning experiences across the year groups.

- Ongoing staff development is a key priority within the school. There are outstanding opportunities for all staff to engage in a wide range of professional development activities including school-based workshops, educational conferences and study visits to extend their skills. It will be important for the school to monitor and evaluate systematically the influence of the staff training and the effectiveness of the learning and teaching strategies on the quality of the provision and on the standards which the children attain.
- The school has developed and sustained effective links with the local and wider community, including businesses, external agencies, and schools to benefit the children, the staff and the community. Significantly, a partnership arrangement with other local primary schools broadens the range of extra-curricular activities for the children and provides valuable professional development opportunities for the staff. The active Parent Teacher Association has contributed funds which have helped to enhance the learning and play facilities. The school's successful involvement in a broad range of programmes and awards enhances the children's awareness of their rights and responsibilities, develops well their enterprise skills and enables them to take action as local and global citizens to support others and their environment.
- 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 reflect the guidance issued by the Department of Education. In discussions with the inspectors, the children reported that they felt very secure in school and knew what to do if they had any concerns about their well-being.
- Based on the evidence presented at the time of inspection, the ETI's evaluation is that there can be confidence in the aspects of governance evaluated. There is an aspect of governance to review, namely, to ensure that the school improvement process is informed by rigorous evaluation of the children's learning.

8. Conclusion

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

Accommodation

1. There is evidence of dampness in the walls in several areas of the school due to the building's age

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