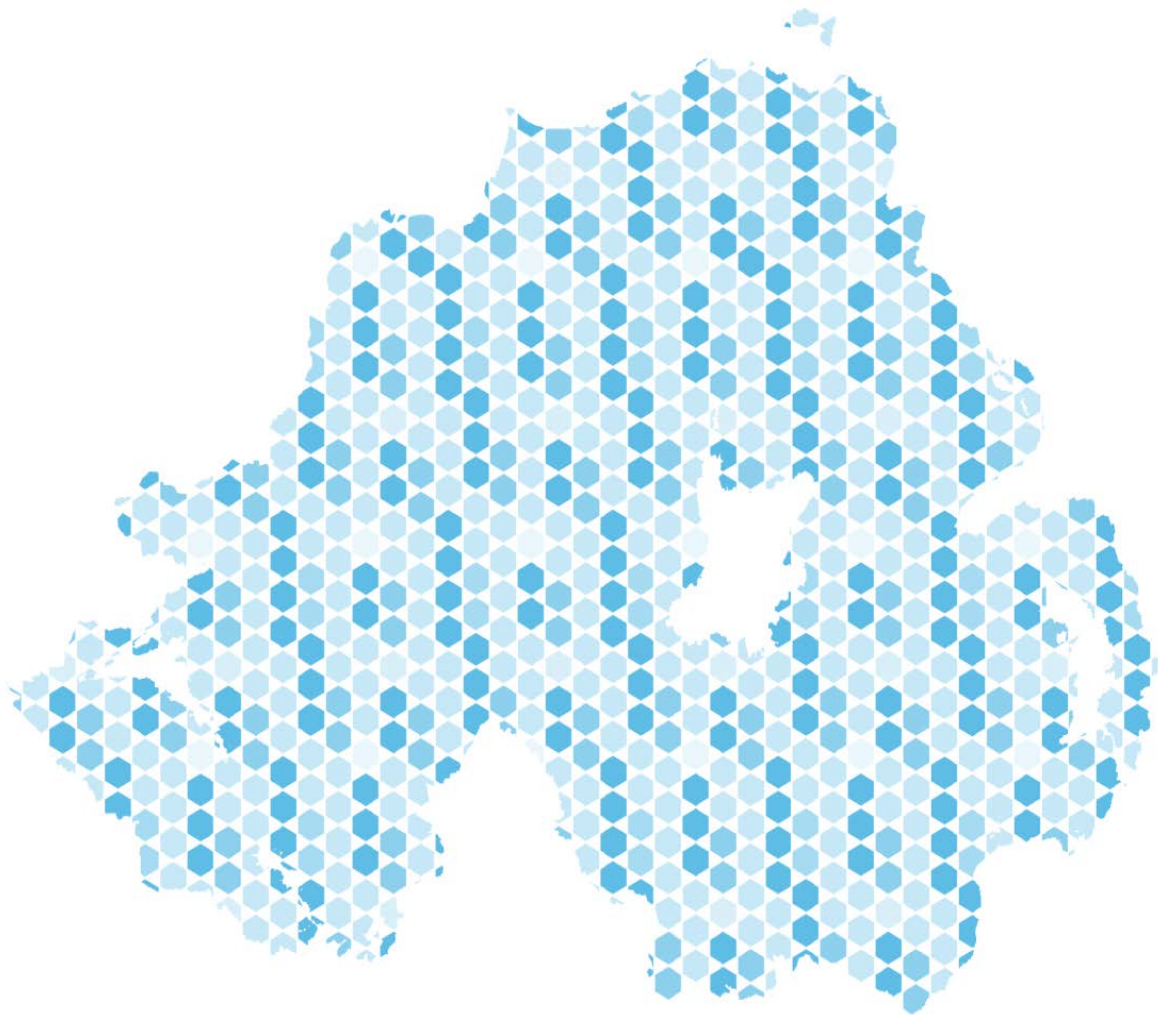


PRIMARY INSPECTION



Education and Training
Inspectorate

Fourtowns Primary School,
Ahoghill, Co Antrim

Report of an Inspection in
January 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 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 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 (total number in the school per category) | Number returned | Percentage returned | Number with comments |
|----------------|--|-----------------|---------------------|----------------------|
| Parents | 212 | 21 | 10% | 12 |
| Teaching staff | 13 | 10 | 77% | 7 |
| Support staff | 6 | 6 | 100% | * |

* fewer than 5

The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) is trialling a range of methods for collecting the views of parents about the life and work of the school. As a result, the response rate to the parental questionnaire may be low.

The responses to the parental questionnaires indicated high levels of satisfaction with the life and work of the school. In particular, the parents' written responses emphasised their appreciation of the positive working relationships, a sense of pride in their school, the effective communication at all levels and the strong leadership.

The responses from the teachers and the support staff were very positive; they emphasised the very good working relationships, the team approach, the leadership of the principal and the caring, safe environment for the children. The governors expressed very strong support for the school. A small number of concerns raised in the questionnaires was discussed with the principal and the board of governors.

2. Context

Fourtowns Primary School is situated in the village of Ahoghill, approximately four miles west of Ballymena and five miles east of Portglenone. The enrolment has increased steadily over the last four years and currently stands at 282 children. This trend is set to continue in the future. Almost all of the children come from the village; a small number travel to school from the surrounding rural area. At the time of the inspection, approximately 23% of the children in the school were entitled to free school meals and around 17% of the children were identified by the school as requiring additional support with aspects of their learning.

| Fourtowns Primary School | 2010/11 | 2011/12 | 2012/13 | 2013/14 |
|--|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Enrolment | 219 | 231 | 250 | 282 |
| % Attendance (NI Average) | 96.8% | 96.4% | 96.1% | 96.7% |
| % Attendance for those children on the SEN register | 94.93% | 95.47% | 93.8% | 96.13% |
| FSME Percentage ¹ | 14.1% | 20.3% | 21.2% | 22.7% |
| % of children on SEN register | 14.1% | 18.2% | 15.2% | 17.02% |
| No. of children with statements of educational needs | * | * | * | * |
| No. of newcomers | * | * | * | * |

Source: data as held by the school.

*fewer than 5

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 | Outstanding |
| Achievements and Standards | Outstanding |
| Provision | Outstanding |
| Leadership and Management | Outstanding |

Key findings of the inspection

5. Achievements and standards

- In all year groups, the children are highly motivated and engaged in their learning. They are happy to participate in practical learning experiences, demonstrate good self management skills and take responsibility for aspects of their learning, working effectively in pairs and groups. In the lessons observed, there were frequent examples of children giving confident, thoughtful and articulate responses and they experience a wide range of opportunities to reflect on their own learning.

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

- An analysis of the end of key stage (KS) 2 performance data in three of the past four years shows that in English and mathematics the school's performance is consistently in line with, or above the Northern Ireland (NI) average. Compared with schools in the same free school meals (FSM) category, the performance in English and mathematics is at the median and above in the last two years.*² The school's internal performance data shows that most children, including those who require additional support with aspects of their learning, make outstanding progress in English and mathematics in line with their ability or above expectation.
- By year 7, the children attain outstanding standards in English: they work competently across an appropriate range of formats and produce extended pieces of creative writing of a very high standard, in meaningful contexts and across the curriculum. From an early age, most of the children approach writing activities with enjoyment and confidence. By year 7, the children read with fluency and understanding and talk enthusiastically about their reading texts. They show an excellent knowledge and understanding of key concepts across the mathematics curriculum. They can apply a range of strategies, explain their thinking using the appropriate mathematical language and can self-correct when appropriate. They explain confidently their methods and demonstrate flexible thinking in problem solving tasks.
- The children's achievements and standards in information and communication technology (ICT) are outstanding.

6. Provision

- The teachers' planning is thorough and well informed by accurate evaluation of the children's previous learning and knowledge of their individual needs. It guides and reflects the day to day work including giving effective guidance to support staff. The planning for both English and mathematics facilitates a consistent approach to lesson preparation, a clear structure for teaching, and meets effectively each child's individual learning needs. It enables coherence, differentiation and progression in the children's experiences in each class.
- The quality of the teaching observed ranged from very good to outstanding; a third of which was outstanding. The teaching is built on the children's previous learning, the staff have high expectations for what the children can achieve, and they make skilful use of questioning to extend, probe and challenge the children's thinking and oral responses. Information and communication and technology is an integral part of the learning. Classroom assistants skilfully support the children's learning and individual needs.
- The teachers employ a wide range of assessment approaches to monitor and evaluate the children's learning; in particular, the children are encouraged to assess their work and that of their peers against their individual targets in order to improve their work. By the end of KS2, most of the children are confident to reflect on and manage their own learning. The marking is consistently of a high standard, focused on progression, quality and the standard of the children's work. The teachers annotate the children's work with positive and sensitive

² 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.

comments on how the children can improve on their work. The teachers' evaluation of the children's learning is a key feature of the high quality of learning and teaching throughout the school. The record keeping of assessments is meticulous and enables thorough scrutiny of the internal performance data gathered throughout each child's school career.

- The quality of the provision for the children who require additional support with their learning is outstanding. Early intervention is a whole school priority: strategies and targets are well conceived and reflect a detailed knowledge of each individual child. The children benefit from a well-planned, collaborative programme in literacy and numeracy which is provided through in-class and withdrawal support. The children receiving booster sessions in literacy and numeracy benefit from the interesting, relevant and well focused teaching which is targeted skilfully at improving standards. An important and effective resource is the recent acquisition of an electronic 'Active Table' which greatly facilitates innovative group work during these booster sessions.
- The quality of the arrangements for pastoral care in the school is outstanding. There is an inclusive ethos in which each child is valued and supported by all of the adults to become increasingly capable of making independent, responsible choices. The school's mission statement, 'Achieving success for all', is clearly evident in every classroom and children are encouraged to take creative risks and 'have a go'. The well resourced environment allows the children to work and explore happily together, developing skills for living in, and making a positive contribution to the school and wider community. The children's achievements are celebrated across the school, in the classroom, in the corridors and in assemblies.
- The positive approach to promoting good behaviour is well embedded throughout the school; it supports effectively the children's sense of personal responsibility and self-management, resulting in confident and polite children whose behaviour during the inspection was exemplary. There are effective arrangements in place for transition between each class, key stage and post primary schools. The personal development programme encourages the children to explore values and talk about their feelings. There are good opportunities for the children to develop their interests further through a wide range of extra-curricular activities, competitions and visits. The formation of the school council has allowed the children a more formalised means of putting forward their views on the life and development of the school. An informative school website has been developed which provides the parents with important information, enables the school to share success stories with the community and provides a platform for the children to showcase their work.
- The school gives outstanding attention to promoting healthy eating and physical activity thereby encouraging the children to adopt healthy lifestyles. The children are encouraged to have a healthy breakfast and eat nutritious foods at break and lunch time. There is a very good variety of physical development opportunities.

7. Leadership and management

- The leadership and management of the school is visionary, highly strategic and has resulted in a distributed leadership structure with a collective responsibility by all the staff to do the best for every child. The staff give high priority to the pastoral care, welfare and holistic development of the children and they embrace the importance of life-long learning experiences and professional development. Highly effective channels of communication are evident which have ensured trusting professional working relationships, and open and honest professional discussions. The senior management team use their wide range of individual skills effectively to enable a strong collaborative approach to whole school development. The team has a thorough knowledge of the statutory primary curriculum, and employ rigorous levels of monitoring and evaluating in everything that they do.
- A comprehensive school development plan (SDP) and action planning process is effectively linked with efficient use of the school's internal performance data and the teachers' observations and evaluations of the children's learning. The coordinators are very knowledgeable about their respective areas of responsibility and contribute with enthusiasm and collaboratively with all staff to the whole-school development planning process.
- Based on the evidence presented at the time of inspection, the parents, staff and school community can have a high degree of confidence in the aspects of governance evaluated. The governors are very involved in the work of the school; the coordinators present to the governors the developments achieved in their respective areas of responsibility. Through mutual agreement a number of governors have visited the classes to become more informed about the life and work of the school.
- 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 year 6 children talked with enthusiasm about their school, their friends and the staff. They reported that they feel safe in school and know what to do if they have any concerns about their well-being.

8. Conclusion

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.

Health and safety/Accommodation

- The enrolment of the school has been steadily increasing over recent years and it is now almost at maximum capacity. This trend is set to continue in the future and will have an impact on existing accommodation.

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