

PRIMARY INSPECTION



Education and Training
Inspectorate

Holy Cross Boys' Primary
School, Belfast

Report of an Inspection in
November 2013

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 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	Number returned	Percentage returned	Number with comments
Parent	284	20	7	13
Teaching staff	24	22	92	22
Support staff	36	11	31	6

* fewer than 5

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

The responses to the parent questionnaires indicated a high level of satisfaction with the life and work of the school. In particular, the parents recognised the progress made by their children and highlighted their appreciation of the diligent and caring staff. A small number of matters raised were discussed with the governors and the principal. All of the teachers and most of the support staff completed questionnaires and their responses were very positive.

2. Context

Holy Cross Boys' Primary School is situated in Ardoyne in the North Belfast area. The enrolment has increased substantially over the last four years and is currently 437 children; Most of the children come from the surrounding area. At the time of the inspection, just under 80 % of the children were entitled to free school meals, and around 33% of the children were identified by the school as requiring additional support with aspects of their learning. The average attendance rate of the children was above the Northern Ireland (NI) average over the past four years.

Holy Cross Boys' Primary School	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14
Enrolment	372	391	415	437
% Attendance	95.6%	95.8%	95.5%	96.7%
FSME Percentage ¹	60.41%	77.21%	77.81%	78.21%
% (No) of children on SEN register	30.51%	32.1%	35.1%	33.02%
No. of children with statements of educational needs	13	13	15	16
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

- The children are clearly proud of their school and their behaviour is exemplary. They are highly motivated, settle quickly in their lessons, and show respect for themselves their teachers, and other adults. They have regular opportunities to participate in collaborative group activities and, as a result, have highly developed thinking skills and good levels of independence and self-management.

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

- An analysis of the key stage (KS) 2 assessment data, in three* of the past four years, shows that in English and mathematics, the school's performance is below the Northern Ireland (NI) average in the three years. Compared with schools in the same free school meals category (FSM), the levels of attainment in English are consistently above the average in the three years, and, in mathematics they are on or above the average in the three years. The school's internal performance data shows that almost all of the children, including those who require additional support with aspects of their learning, make outstanding progress in English and mathematics and achieve standards in English and mathematics in line with their ability or above expectation.
- Across the key stages, the children listen very attentively in class and contribute confidently to group and class discussions. During the inspection, groups of children from year 4 and year 7 read fluently and with expression; and they talked with a high degree of understanding about their favourite authors and characters. Throughout the school, the children write competently for a range of purposes and audiences, showing outstanding progress across the three key stages. The children enjoy and are enthusiastic in mathematics lessons; they use appropriate mathematical language with increasing fluency and have an in-depth understanding of the mathematics curriculum. By the end of key stage (KS) 2, the most able children have an outstanding knowledge of a wide range of mathematical concepts and are highly flexible in their mathematical thinking and computation. These high standards reflect the appropriately high expectations which the teachers set for the children across all key stages.
- The children's achievements and standards in information and communication technology (ICT) are well above the NI average as evidenced by their performance in the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) ICT Accreditation Scheme.

6. Provision

- The quality of almost all of the learning and teaching observed was good or better, with a majority being very good or outstanding. The teaching is characterised by the high and realistic degree of challenge set within lessons by all of the teachers. The best practice is characterised by lessons and plenary sessions where the children are allowed sufficient time to reflect on and consolidate their learning. The teachers' planning is comprehensive and, in particular, takes due account of the reflective evaluations of previous learning, which are used well to inform future practice. On occasion, the children need more opportunities to develop their creative and decision-making skills through play-based learning; this priority is identified in the school development plan (SDP).
- The children's work is marked regularly and the teachers' written feedback acknowledges appropriately the children's successes and provides clear guidance for improvement. There is evidence from a scrutiny of the children's written work that the children use the guidance to improve their work through correcting and learning from their mistakes.

* 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.

- The quality of provision for ICT is outstanding. This is evident in the way in which ICT is seamlessly integrated across the school to enhance teaching and support the children's learning, through a wide range of programmes and devices. The investment in ICT is significant: the classrooms are well resourced and the school currently has two computer suites, one of which contains software for the assessment of individual children's progress in literacy and numeracy, which teachers and children use very effectively. The children make outstanding use of the most up- to- date hardware, including ICT tablets, and software; the experience and knowledge they gain impact positively on the quality of their learning. The school is the recipient of the National Association of Advisors for Computers in Education (NAACE) ICT Award and the Third Millennium Teaching Award for ICT.
- The children identified as having additional needs in the foundation stage (FS) and KS1 have regular, weekly withdrawal sessions to support literacy and numeracy. These sessions are of a high quality, are motivating for the children, and are proving successful in raising standards. The children's education plans outline appropriate targets, and a key feature is the thorough and rigorous assessment of those targets and the tracking of the children's progress. The classroom assistants work well with the teachers in supporting the children's learning in all classes.
- Across the school, there is a clear priority given to the development of the children's talking and listening skills, and most of the children display high levels of confidence when sharing their ideas and opinions. The teaching of reading is thorough and structured appropriately to include both fiction and non-fiction texts: higher level comprehension skills are developing well through a whole school focus on effective questioning. The programme for writing provides very good opportunities for the children to write in a variety of styles and, in the best practice, to write purposefully in creative, meaningful contexts across the curriculum.
 - The children access a wide range of experiences in numeracy with an appropriate emphasis placed on developing connected learning through problem-solving and investigative activities set in real life contexts. Very good use is made of games, ICT and practical activities to develop the children's mathematical thinking and language and to consolidate and extend their knowledge.
- The outstanding quality of the arrangements for pastoral care in the school is characterised by the inclusive, supportive and child-centred ethos, the outstanding working relationships and the high degree of mutual respect amongst all members of the school community. The children are encouraged to take on roles and responsibilities through, for example, the 'playground buddy' systems, and the ICT planning group. In addition, the school council provides the children with opportunities to contribute effectively to the decision-making processes within the school. The children access a wide range of extra-curricular activities and frequent opportunities to engage in music, sporting and other activities. There is an effective system of rewards and sanctions that are well understood and responded to by all of the children.

- The school gives very good attention to promoting a healthy lifestyle through, for example, the whole-school physical education programme, the well-attended 'Breakfast Club' and the provision of healthy breaks.

7. Leadership and management

- The principal and the school leadership team (SLT) provide outstanding leadership whereby they have a clear, shared vision for school improvement focused sharply on achieving the highest possible standards for all of the children. The findings of this inspection confirm that this vision is being achieved. They work very well with governors and the staff, at all levels, to ensure their full involvement and contribution to the school's thoughtfully conceived and very effective self-evaluation processes. The drive for improvement in this school at all levels is continuous and unrelenting.
- The co-ordinators are knowledgeable and are fully committed to the continuous improvement of the quality of provision for their areas of responsibility. They monitor and evaluate robustly and regularly the teachers' planning, the children's class work and homework, and have purposeful opportunities to observe classroom practice. The school's internal performance data is used systematically and rigorously to track children's progress. The teachers are highly accountable for ensuring that, where necessary, remediation programmes are in place for children whose performance has dropped: the effectiveness of these programmes is evaluated fully by the co-ordinators and the school leadership team (SLT).
- The teachers' professional development is supported well through an induction programme for new staff. In addition, all staff benefit from a school-based development programme which draws on the latest educational research to inform teaching styles and improve further the quality of learning and teaching.
- The school development plan (SDP) is informed well by regular consultation with the children, parents, local community and by a wide range of first-hand information to identify accurately the school's future development priorities.
- The school has a range of effective arrangements to keep parents informed about the life and work of the school, including a pioneering and informative school website. The school works in partnership with the local nursery, post-primary schools and a variety of external support agencies to ensure that the children are well supported in all aspects of their development and reach the highest possible standards in their learning. Links with the local community are very well developed.
- 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 well-informed governors support the principal and staff very well in the implementation of the school development plan (SDP) and make a very positive contribution to the life and work of the school. Notable key features include the governors reviewing and challenging, where necessary, evidence presented to them from a range of post holders on the effectiveness of the action being taken, and currently implementing a well-conceived action plan for the further development of their work as governors.

- 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. During the inspection, the inspectors met with a group of year six children. The children spoke with enthusiasm and confidence about their experiences in school. They reported that they feel happy and safe in school and know what to do if they have any concerns.

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.

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