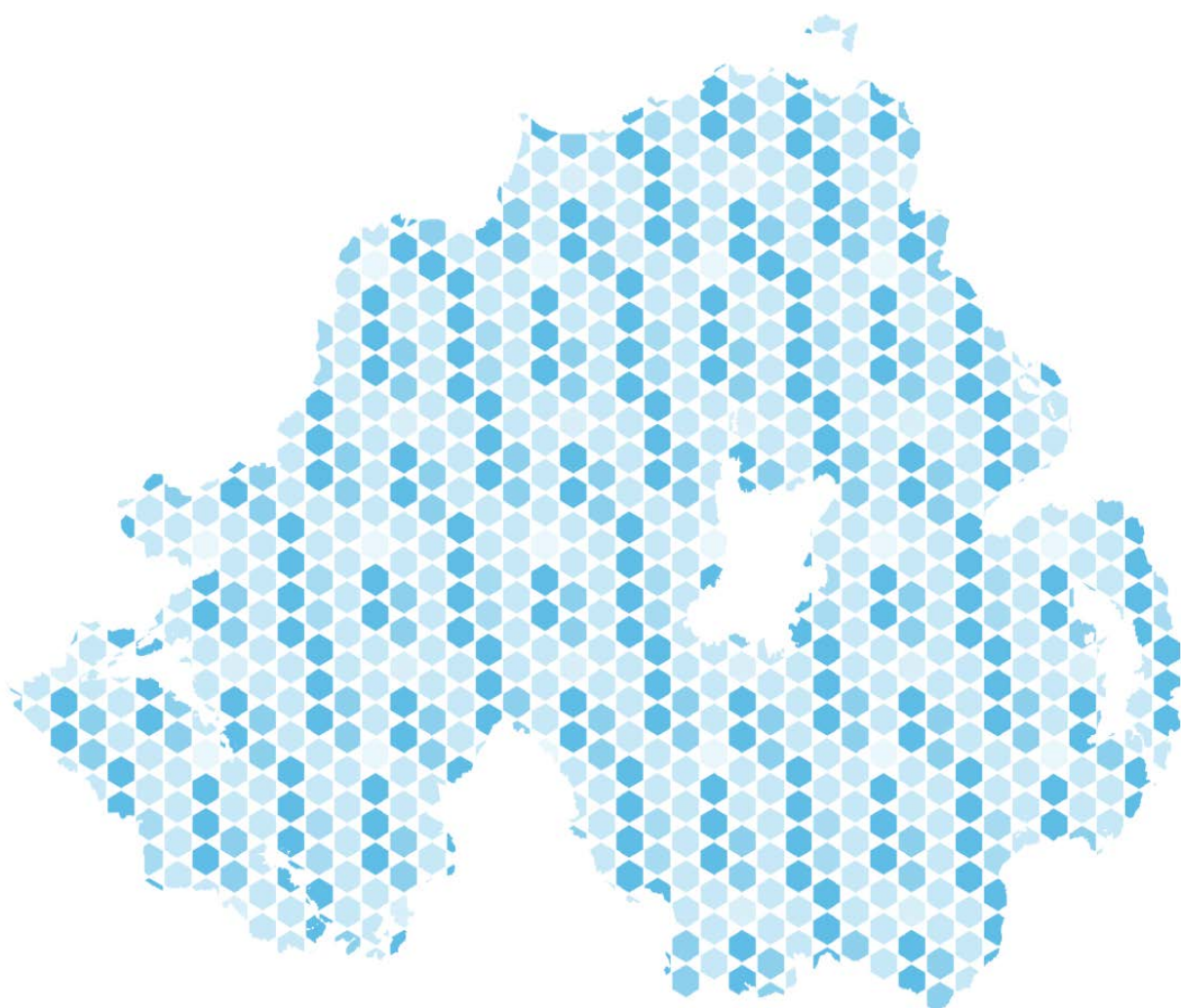


PRIMARY INSPECTION 2014-15



Education and Training
Inspectorate

Mount St Michael's Primary
School and Nursery Unit,
Randalstown, Co Antrim

Report of an Inspection in
February 2015

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

Sixteen percent of parents responded to the questionnaires. Most of the responses to the parental questionnaires indicated high levels of satisfaction with the life and work of the school. In particular, the parents highlighted the dedicated and committed teaching staff and classroom assistants, the high level of pastoral care shown towards the children, the wide range of after-school activities and their children's enjoyment of school life.

All of the teaching staff, and most of the teaching and support staff, completed questionnaires and their responses were wholly positive; they emphasised the collegiate atmosphere and the whole-school focus on the well-being and education of all of the children. The ETI has reported to the principal and three representatives of the board of governors the main issues emerging from the questionnaires.

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, including the nursery unit; and
3. the quality of leadership and management.

3. Context

Mount St Michael's Primary School is located in the town of Randalstown. Over the past four years, the enrolment has steadily increased and currently stands at 409 children in the primary school and 52 children in the nursery unit. Both the primary school and the nursery unit were oversubscribed this academic year. At the time of the inspection, approximately 23% of the children were entitled to free school meals and around 23% of the children had been identified by the school as requiring additional support with aspects of their learning. Eleven per cent of the school population comprises of newcomer children whose first language is not English. The school has well-established shared education links with the local primary and post-primary school and has developed recently a community relation, equality and diversity (CRED) link with a special school.

Mount St Michael's Primary School and Nursery Unit	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
Enrolment	361	395	403	409
Nursery Unit	53	51	54	52
% Attendance (NI Average)	95.2	95.4	95.7	96.6
FSME Percentage ¹	18.5	17.4	20.8	22.8
% (No) of children on SEN register	20.7	20	22	23.4
No. of children with statements of educational needs	6	8	5	9
No. of newcomers	35	38	34	46

Source: data as held by the school.

* fewer than 5

4. Overall findings of the inspection

Overall Performance Level	Very good
Achievements and Standards	Good
Provision	Very good
Leadership and Management	Very good
Nursery Unit	Very good

5. Achievements and standards

- The children are very welcoming and demonstrate respect to the staff, visitors and their peers; their behaviour and manners are excellent. Throughout the school, the children work well in pairs and small groups, for example, they are able to share and value the ideas of their peers.
- The school's performance data indicates that most of the children make good progress in English and mathematics in line with their ability or above expectation. The school has identified appropriately the need to raise further the children's standards in literacy and numeracy and has put in place a range of appropriate strategies to support the children who have been identified as underachieving.
- The newcomer children and those children who require additional support with their learning make very good progress in English, including oral communication skills, and in mathematics. By the end of key stage (KS) 2, almost one-half of the children achieve standards at which they no longer require additional support in numeracy, and one-quarter no longer require support with literacy.
- By year 7, the highest achieving children read with good levels of accuracy, fluency and comprehension. They talk knowledgeably about their favourite novels and authors and explain clearly how the accelerated reading programme has contributed to their interest in reading and developed their comprehension skills and vocabulary. Throughout the school, the children have well-developed

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

talking and listening skills and they display good standards in writing across a broad range of genres. Their handwriting and presentation is of a high quality. They convey their feelings very well through poetry as part of a personal development programme. In a minority of instances, there is insufficient challenge for the most able children, especially to develop further their independent and creative writing skills.

- In the foundation stage (FS), the children demonstrate a clear understanding of the mathematical concepts appropriate to their age and ability and are using well mathematical language to discuss their learning. By year 7, the highest achieving children demonstrate a good understanding of number facts, numerical operations and key concepts across the areas of mathematics. They use mathematical language precisely and apply their mathematical understanding suitably in real and relevant contexts. The school has identified appropriately the further development of mathematical processes to extend the children's independent mathematical thinking skills through more open-ended opportunities.
- The children in the nursery unit are well-settled and display positive attitudes to their learning across both part-time sessions. They are making very good progress in developing their language and social skills and are confident in making choices in their play, especially through their selection from a wide range of creative materials available to make representational paintings and models. They develop very good early reading dispositions through the highly effective story-telling time, exploration of books and the development of their understanding of rhythm through the musical sessions.
- The children achieve very good standards in their use of information and communication technology (ICT). Across the key stages, children demonstrate confidence in using technology for a range of purposes to support their learning.

6. Provision

- There is a coherent whole-school approach to planning. The staff in the nursery unit plan an interesting programme that provides appropriate challenge and progression for the children. In the primary school, there is an agreed coherent planning format for all aspects of literacy, numeracy and ICT across the school which guides well the learning and the teaching. In the most effective lessons, in well over half of the lessons observed, there were excellent working relationships, effective questions, and purposeful plenary sessions to reflect on the learning. The teachers mark the children's work regularly and supportively and, in the best practice, challenge the children on how to improve further their work. In the less effective practice, in very few of the lessons observed, the lessons were over-directed by the teacher and the content did not challenge sufficiently the more able children.
- The school's literacy programme ensures good progression in talking and listening, reading and writing as the children move through the school. In the foundation stage, the children's oral and independent writing skills are developed well through purposeful play and group activities. The children cooperate in well-planned paired and group activities to explore texts and develop their reading comprehension skills. The whole-school focus on writing ensures that the children develop their writing skills systematically across an appropriate range of genres. The children are motivated to read beyond the classroom and

literacy is promoted very effectively within the school through well-conceived opportunities to involve parents, and to allow the children to attend professional performances and take part in events and competitions. Notably, over one-third of the children take part in the local speech and drama festival; including a number for whom English is not their first language.

- In the foundation stage, the teachers promote mathematics through a wide range of activities and play-based learning. Across the key stages, the children engage well collaboratively, developing their ability to work confidently. The mental agility starters to the numeracy lessons are well-paced, matched to the children's ability and linked to the activity of the main lesson. An important feature of the numeracy provision is the focus on 'word questions' in each year group and the inclusion of investigations.
- The children requiring additional support with their learning are identified through teacher observation and extensive assessment results at an early stage. The special educational needs co-ordinator and teachers are skilled at planning and implementing a broad range of strategies to support differentiation and learning in the classroom. The children's progress is monitored and evaluated thoroughly and those requiring further support receive highly effective withdrawal sessions for literacy and numeracy. The support teachers and class teachers liaise and plan well together to ensure that the support sessions complement class teaching and focus sharply on the needs of the children. During the inspection, the children were enthusiastic about their support sessions, and engaged very well with the well-paced and helpful activities. Parental workshops and advice sheets to support learning have been recently put in place.
- The quality of the provision in the nursery unit is very good. The particular strengths of the play provision include the development of the children's oral language, their personal, social and emotional development and the children's creative skills. The quality of the interaction between the staff and the children is consistently of a very good standard and, on occasions, outstanding. The staff assess systematically the children's progress and their evaluations are used effectively to inform the planning. The needs of the children who require specific learning support are well met through the sensitive intervention strategies applied by the staff.
- The pastoral care provision in the school and nursery unit is of a very high quality and a key strength. The caring and inclusive ethos is underpinned by the mutual respect and pride in the school and reflects the school's values that permeate all aspects of school life. The children respond positively to the broad range of extra-curricular opportunities and the reward systems that motivate and encourage them. The children have an active input into the decision-making processes in the school through the school council.
- The school gives outstanding attention to the promotion of healthy eating and physical activity. Healthy lunch box and fruit break schemes operate successfully. An effective physical education curriculum is supplemented by organised games and physical play at lunch time and a wide-range of sporting activities. Through the school's well-established relationships with the Gaelic Athletic Association, the children avail of quality facilities, coaching and educational visits, and have achieved success in inter-school Gaelic games competitions at county level and beyond. Significantly, the school's core values are visible on the team jersey underpinning its approach to sport.

7. Leadership and management

- The leadership and management of the school are focused clearly on meeting the individual needs of the children based on an agreed set of school values which underpin all actions for improvement. The senior leadership team inspires confidence and provides clear direction for the work of the school, based on systematic self-evaluation processes. These include consulting with the staff, children, parents and governors and the effective use of assessment outcomes to inform directly the school development planning process.
- The learning co-ordinators are highly motivated and carry out their leadership roles effectively. They are adept at collating and using performance data at whole-school level to identify low attainment and underachievement and work collaboratively to put in place programmes of support. Alongside this improvement, and central to it, has been the professional development of the staff in a wide range of training programmes linked to the key priorities within the school development plan.
- The school continues to foster strong links with parents and the wider community, through engagement with Community Relations in Schools and CRED Enhancement work with the local controlled primary school. Importantly, the school has established the Antrim and Randalstown Schools Moving Forward Together initiative with membership of fifteen schools. The school's commitment to promoting effective working partnerships with parents is demonstrated in the wide range of parent education programmes and workshops, including an information evening on e-safety for parents from other schools in the community.
- Based on the evidence presented at the time of inspection, the ETI's evaluation is that there can be a high degree of confidence in the aspects of governance evaluated. The governors are committed to supporting the school team in providing a high quality learning environment for all of the children. They are actively involved in the school development planning process and provide high levels of challenge and support to the work of the senior leadership team.
- 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 but the following areas need to be addressed. There is a need to ensure that: effective risk assessments are in place for every primary and nursery school visit off the school premises and the draft Intimate Care policy is refined and ratified by the board of governors.
- During the inspection, the inspectors met with a group of children in year 6. The children talked about the many aspects of school life that they enjoy and reported that they feel safe and secure 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 the school and the nursery unit is very good. The school is meeting very effectively the educational and pastoral needs of the children; and has demonstrated its capacity for sustained self-improvement.

Health and safety

1. The school dining hall and the playground can be accessed from the side of the dining hall that is not supervised. There is a need to review the security of this possible entry point to the school playground.
2. The rear entrance to the school is not monitored by the school's security cameras and is used by visitors to the school. There is a need to review the security of this entry point to the school building.
3. The fence to the front of the nursery area is too low and there is a gap at one side. A higher fence installed without gaps would provide a more secure area for the children.
4. There is a need to review the height of the fencing outside the year 7 classrooms to ensure the safety and security of all the children.
5. It will be important for the school to review the external signage in place to direct visitors to the school reception where entry can be monitored.
6. There is a lack of playground space which constitutes a risk to the health and well-being of the children.

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