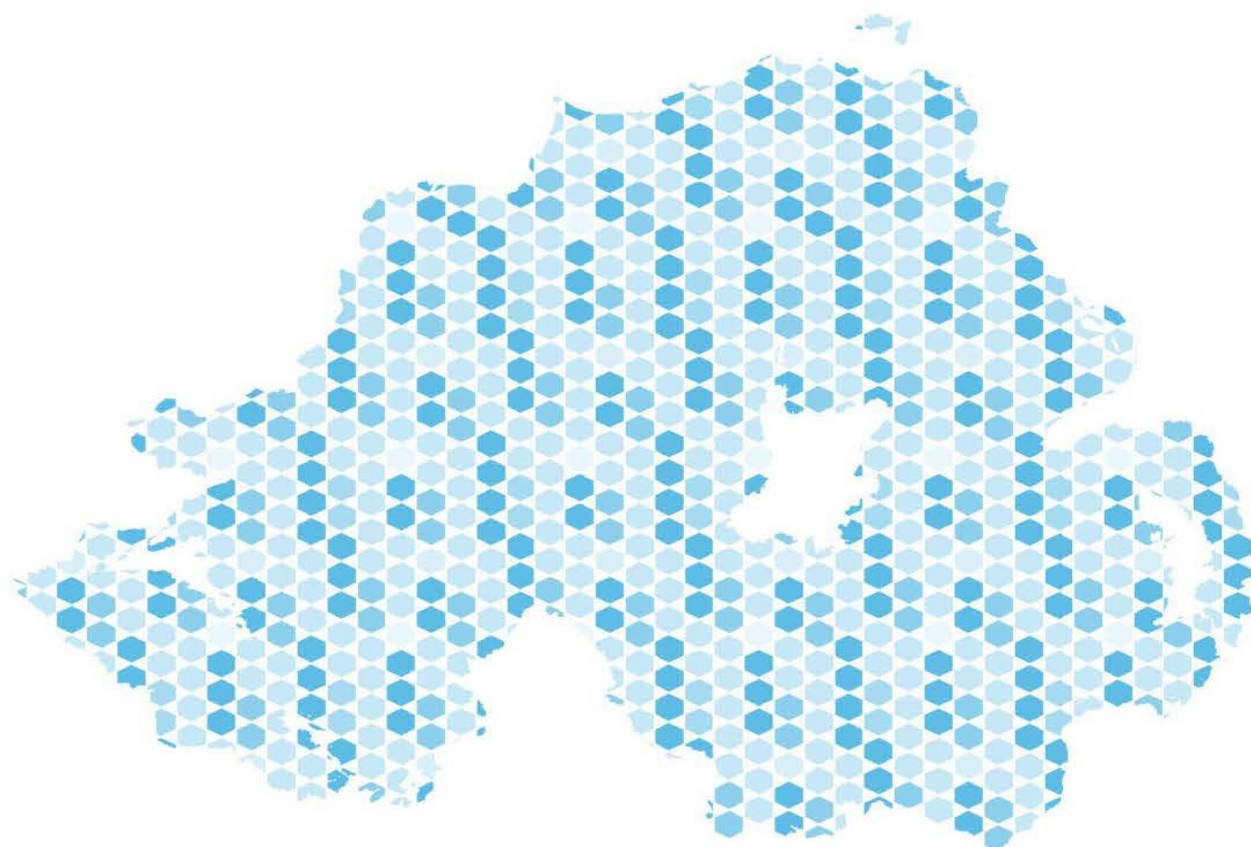


Education and Training Inspectorate

PRIMARY INSPECTION



Rathcoole Primary School, Newtownabbey, County Antrim

Controlled, co-educational DE Ref No (301-0895)

Report of a Sustaining Improvement Inspection (Involving Action Short of Strike) in June 2019



The Education and Training Inspectorate
Promoting Improvement

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Department of Education
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Sustaining Improvement Inspection of Rathcoole Primary School, Newtownabbey, County Antrim (301-0895)

Introduction

The previous inspection in March 2016 evaluated the overall effectiveness of Rathcoole Primary School as having the capacity to bring about improvement. In the interim, permanent teachers have been appointed, there has been acting leadership in place and the number of children enrolled has risen from 64 children in the main school in 2016 to 102 in 2019. In 2016, the school achieved the Boxall Quality Mark Award for Nurture, attained the 'SUSTRANS' Bronze Award regarding active travel to school and has gained the Taking Outdoor Play Seriously ("TOPS") Award. A sustaining improvement inspection (SII) was conducted on 3 June 2019. The inspection team met with representatives of the board of governors and, at their request, with a number of the staff regarding their views on aspects of the work of the school including working relationships.

Four of the teaching unions which make up the Northern Ireland Teachers' Council (NITC) have declared industrial action primarily in relation to a pay dispute. This includes non-co-operation with the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI). Prior to the inspection, the school informed the ETI that almost all of the teachers would not be co-operating with the inspectors. The principal co-operated with the inspection team in relation to safeguarding responsibilities; and, the principal and a co-ordinator co-operated in relation to their leadership roles. The ETI has a statutory duty to monitor, inspect and report on the quality of education under Article 102 of the Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 1986. Therefore, the inspection proceeded and the following evaluations are based on the evidence as made available at the time of the inspection.

Focus of the inspection

Owing to the school's participation in industrial action:

- the inspection was unable to focus on evaluating the extent to which the school is capable of demonstrating its capacity to effect improvement through self-evaluation and effective school planning; and
- a line of inquiry was not selected by the school from the development plan priorities.

Key findings

- The quality of the working relationships among the staff within the school is an important area for improvement (the Department of Education will seek assurance from the Education Authority that they are working with the school in relation to the inspection findings). The lack of effective communication and collegial working relationships among the whole staff team and governors is impacting negatively on school morale, the monitoring and evaluation processes and the pace and effectiveness of whole-school improvement.

- The group of children from year 6 talked about their enjoyment of school activities, such as, numeracy, writing stories, topic work and their participation in the wider learning experiences of outdoor play, forest schools and beach schools. They take pride in their leadership roles as 'digital leaders' and 'anti-bullying ambassadors.' The children talked enthusiastically about the reward systems in school.
- The participation in a key stage 2/3 transition project is focusing appropriately on the development of the role of middle management. There are clear processes for using the analysis of the school's data to identify relevant priorities, set clear actions and measure the impact within the transition project's action plans.
- There are opportunities for parents, staff, governors and children to contribute their ideas through a range of consultation processes.
- It will be important that the employing authority, school governors and the staff plan for, and manage, issues related to the sustainability of the school provision and school budget in order to address the current and future needs of the children and the staff.

The ETI was unable to evaluate:

- the lines of inquiry; and
- the quality of learning and teaching within the classrooms.

Safeguarding

During the inspection, the school provided evidence that the arrangements for safeguarding children reflect broadly the guidance from the Department of Education. The group of year 6 children report that they know who to talk to if they have a concern. However, owing to the action short of strike, the ETI was unable to evaluate the outworking of the arrangements for safeguarding in the school.

The school needs to:

- set out a clear timetable of review for updating the safeguarding and pastoral policies; and
- ensure that the anti-bullying policy is aligned more fully to the practice in the school.

Conclusion

Owing to the impact of the action short of strike being taken by the teachers, the ETI is unable to assure parents/carers, the wider school community and stakeholders of the quality of education being provided for the children. The school is a high priority for future inspection with no further notice.

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