

Education and Training Inspectorate

PRIMARY INSPECTION



St Catherine's Primary School, Strabane, County Tyrone

Maintained, co-educational DE Ref No (203-6703)

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



The Education and Training Inspectorate
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Sustaining Improvement Inspection of St Catherine's Primary School, Strabane, County Tyrone (203-6703)

Introduction

The previous inspection in May 2016 evaluated the overall effectiveness of St Catherine's Primary School as having a high level of capacity for sustained improvement. A sustaining improvement inspection (SII) was conducted on 9 and 10 May 2019.

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 most of the teachers would not be co-operating with the inspectors. The senior leadership team co-operated with the inspection in relation to leadership and safeguarding responsibilities. 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

The inspection focused on evaluating the extent to which the school is capable of demonstrating its capacity to effect improvement through self-evaluation and effective school development planning. The school also provided evidence of provision for safeguarding as part of the inspection.

The lines of inquiry during the SII were:

- to improve the approach to practical activities relating to the learning and teaching of mathematics in real-life and meaningful contexts; and
- to streamline the processes around withdrawal intervention for children in need of additional support with their learning.

Key findings

- The school has developed a practical mathematics programme to improve further the children's skills in problem solving, financial literacy and mental mathematics. The planning for this activity-based learning programme identifies teaching strategies that develop a more interdisciplinary and interactive learning experience; and, as a result, the school has begun to blend this programme across the curriculum to enhance the children's enjoyment and understanding of mathematics. The school is currently involved in a cross-phase shared education programme focusing appropriately on the development of practical mathematics.

- A group of year 7 children, who participated in a mathematics activity during the inspection, had a very positive attitude towards the learning of mathematics; they were flexible in their thinking and confident in their knowledge and understanding of a wide range of aspects across the mathematics curriculum. The children reported an enjoyment of investigative and problem-solving mathematics and were able to associate and apply their learning to real-life contexts.
- The school has streamlined and developed further its systems for assessing and identifying children who require additional support with their learning, in the form of one-to-one and small group learning programmes. Detailed evaluations of this provision inform the planning for future intervention programmes which include a focus on practical numeracy and literacy learning activities as well as the use of assistive digital technology.
- A group of year 6 children spoke very enthusiastically about their learning experiences in school. During the discussions, they highlighted: the friendly and supportive school environment which enables them to enjoy their learning and to play safely; the positive contributions and suggestions that they are able to make through the Eco- and School- councils; and their wide participation and enjoyment of the range of extra-curricular activities provided for them.

The ETI was unable to evaluate fully:

- 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 six children reported that they feel safe in school and are aware of what to do if they have any concerns about their safety or welfare. However, owing to the action short of strike, the ETI was unable to evaluate fully the outworking of the arrangements for safeguarding 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. This will be reflected in future inspection activity.

Health and safety/accommodation

1. The school is working with the Education Authority to address the security arrangements within the school grounds in order to restrict public access to the play areas. This needs to be concluded urgently.

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