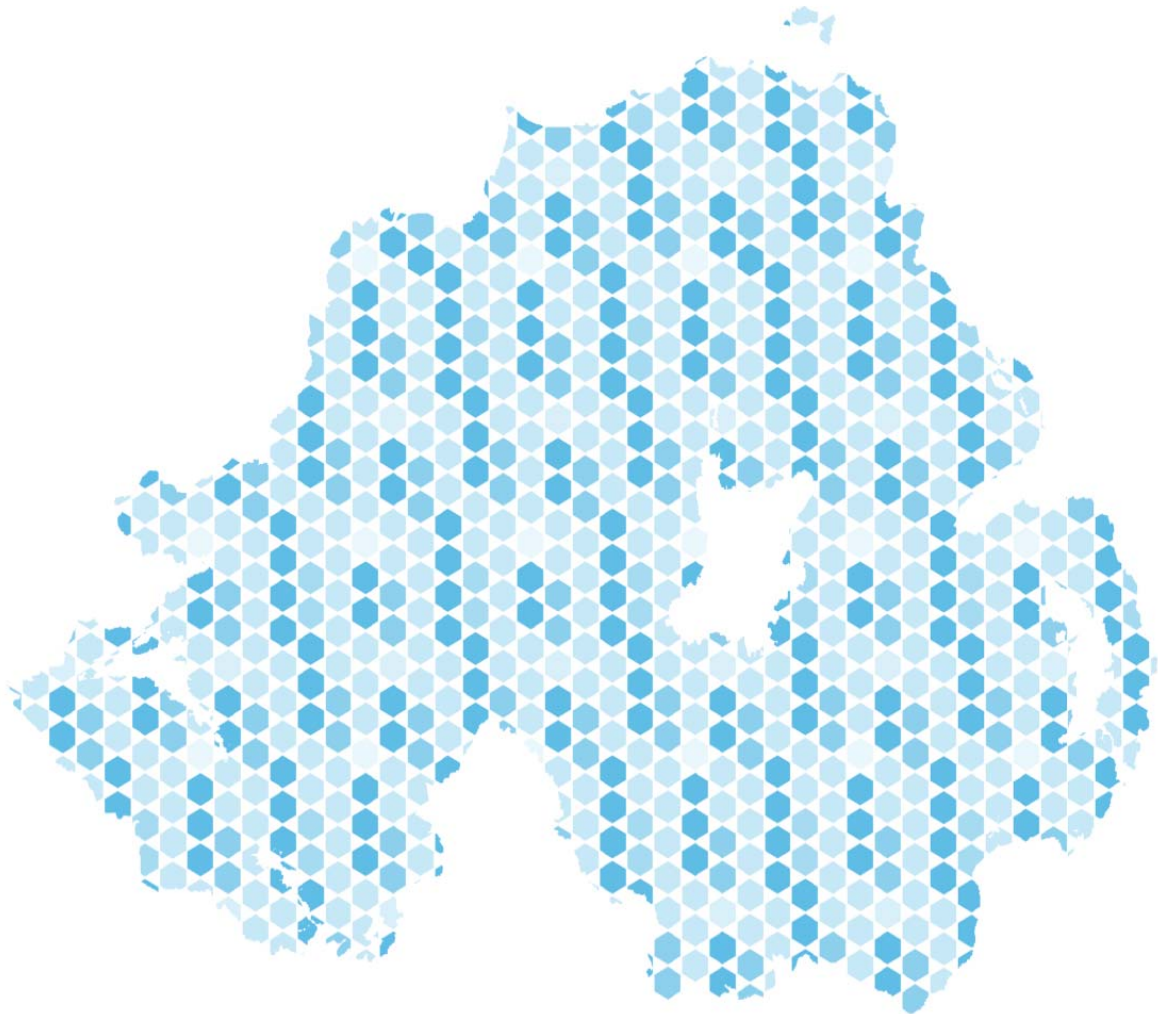


PRIMARY INSPECTION



Education and Training
Inspectorate

Harmony Primary School,
Belfast

Report of an Inspection
in January 2010

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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%

In assessing the various features of the provision, the Inspectorate relate their evaluations to six descriptors as set out below:

DESCRIPTOR
Outstanding
Very Good
Good
Satisfactory
Inadequate
Unsatisfactory

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 SCHOOL CONTEXT

Harmony Primary School is situated in the Glencairn area of west Belfast. The school's enrolment has remained steady over the past few years and stands currently at 158. The children come from the local housing estate. Fifty-two children attend the nursery unit which operates two full-time sessions. At the time of the inspection there were three substitute teachers on the staff, one of whom had just taken up post for numeracy support.

The school is part of the ten-year 'Achieving Belfast' programme aimed at raising standards in literacy and numeracy. At the time of the inspection, almost 60% of the children were entitled to receive free school meals and approximately 40% were identified as having special educational needs.

Twenty of the children who attend the nursery unit are in their penultimate pre-school year. The nursery unit serves the whole community. Less than half of the children attending the nursery unit transfer to Harmony Primary School, while the remainder transfer to a range of local primary schools.

1.2 FOCUS

The inspection focused on the quality of the children's achievements and standards in literacy and numeracy, the quality of provision for learning, the quality of leadership and management and the school's arrangements for pastoral care and child protection. The inspection also evaluated the contribution of information and communication technology (ICT) in promoting and supporting learning.

1.3 THE VIEWS OF THE PARENTS, TEACHERS, GOVERNORS, SUPPORT STAFF AND CHILDREN

The arrangements for the inspection included the opportunity for the parents and the teaching staff to complete confidential questionnaires prior to the inspection, as well as meetings with representatives from the Board of Governors (governors) and groups of children from year 6 and year 7. One hundred and twenty questionnaires were issued to the parents; 14% were returned to Inspection Services Branch (ISB) and four contained additional written comments. The responses from the questionnaires indicated that almost all of the parents appreciate the very positive ethos of the school and the welcoming Principal and staff. In the nursery unit, approximately 17% of the questionnaires issued to parents were returned. Those who responded indicated a very high level of satisfaction with the overall provision; they recorded their appreciation of the staff and that the nursery is well thought of in the community.

The governors spoke positively about the school. They praised the commitment of the Principal and the staff's hard work and dedication in the interests of the children and the wider community.

Most of the teaching staff responded to the online teacher questionnaire. The responses were almost all positive about all aspects of the school; the matters arising were shared with the Principal and the governors. The questionnaires from the staff of the nursery reflected a high level of satisfaction with all aspects of the provision.

The year 6 children talked enthusiastically about the many aspects of school life they enjoy. They know what to do if they have any concerns or worries. The year 7 children contributed to the discussion on healthy eating and physical activity.

1.4 PASTORAL CARE

The quality of the arrangements for pastoral care in the school is good. Among the strengths are the welcoming, supportive ethos in the school and the extra-curricular provision for the children. The school has a range of policies to guide and inform the pastoral provision; the implementation of which the staff need to monitor and evaluate more rigorously.

The quality of the pastoral care in the nursery unit is outstanding. Working relationships at all levels are very good. The staff are warm, caring and supportive and develop effectively the children's confidence and self-esteem. The children respond well to the staff and their behaviour is excellent.

1.5 CHILD PROTECTION

The school and nursery unit have very good comprehensive arrangements in place for safeguarding children. These arrangements reflect the guidance issued by the relevant Department of Education (DE).

1.6 HEALTHY EATING AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

The school gives good attention to promoting healthy eating and physical activity through, for example, the 'Save Our Smiles' healthy break scheme and the sporting opportunities available to the children. The area for improvement identified includes the need to extend the range of healthy eating programmes within the school.

The nursery unit gives good attention to promoting healthy eating as demonstrated through a healthy break and their involvement in a dental programme with the children. The nursery programme provides regular opportunities for energetic physical and outdoor play.

1.7 LINKS WITH PARENTS AND THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

The school keeps parents well informed of the progress their children make, through regular reports and consultations. The Principal has worked hard to improve formal and informal links between the parents and the school. The school has organised curriculum meetings and a number of workshops to enable the parents to support their children's learning, but the uptake has been limited.

The school has created a mathematics trail in the area which has involved a wide group of parents and community members. In addition, the children's learning experiences are enhanced through the school's links within the local community, including churches and other local schools. The children participate in competitions and sporting events and visit places of educational interest. There are also strong and developing cross-community links with St Paul's Primary School which the parents value.

2. ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS

2.1 LEARNING

The children have a positive attitude to school and are keen to talk about their learning. They are co-operative and work well in pairs and small groups when the activities are appropriately challenging. Where the teaching lacked pace, or there was a mismatch between the challenge in the task and the levels of ability, the children were less settled and less motivated.

An analysis of the key stage (KS) 2 assessment data over the past four years shows that in English and mathematics, the school's performance is below the Northern Ireland (NI) average. When compared with schools in a similar free schools meals category, the levels of attainment are below the average for each year in mathematics and, in three out of the four years, in English.

2.2 ENGLISH AND LITERACY

The quality of the provision for English and literacy is satisfactory. In talking and listening, the quality and range of the work is satisfactory. In reading, the majority of the children achieve a good standard, but a significant minority make inadequate progress. The standards achieved in writing are satisfactory. It is appropriate that the action plan prioritises the need to raise standards in writing and develop the children's confidence as readers.

The scheme of work provides a broad framework for the development of talking and listening, reading and writing, but the teachers need to ensure that their planning identifies consistently the learning outcomes, a range of suitable teaching strategies and opportunities for assessment for learning.

In the Foundation Stage, there is an appropriate focus on developing the children's oral skills through a range of language programmes. The teachers are beginning to use the data generated from these programmes to identify the children's needs earlier and to provide suitable support. As they progress through KS 1 and KS 2, the children's talking and listening is supported through well-planned group and paired work. In a minority of the lessons observed, the teachers posed challenging questions and gave the children time to think. However, such higher level questioning is under-developed across the school and in a majority of the lessons observed, questions required short, factual responses.

The implementation of a whole-school phonics programme is developing the children's confidence in reading unfamiliar words. The children enjoy the timetabled silent reading sessions and library visits. The teachers need to maximise opportunities to promote reading for pleasure and increase the level of challenge in the children's reading in order to raise standards across the school.

The examples of writing observed demonstrates satisfactory progression through the school year and the writing in a significant minority of work books displays a good level of secretarial accuracy. The teachers need to ensure that the children have more opportunities for extended, independent writing in different genres across the year groups. In a minority of lessons observed, ICT was used very well by the teachers to model writing.

The Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) has invited the school to participate in a pilot programme for KS 2 accreditation in music and moving image. The literacy co-ordinator has prioritised the integration of ICT to promote literacy, especially through this music and moving image work being piloted in the school.

2.3 MATHEMATICS AND NUMERACY

The overall quality of the provision for mathematics and numeracy is satisfactory. The programme for numeracy outlines clearly the learning intentions for each area of the mathematics curriculum, lines of progression and the mathematical language to be developed.

The teachers use a wide range of resources, including ICT, to support the children in their learning and, through practical investigative activities, provide opportunities for the children to apply their learning in everyday contexts and across the curriculum. There are regular sessions of mental mathematics in all of the classes.

In a minority of the lessons observed, the teachers used good questioning to motivate and challenge the children and encouraged them to reflect on and explain their learning using the appropriate mathematical language. In the less effective practice, the activities lacked sufficient challenge and the teachers missed opportunities to engage the children fully in quality mathematical thinking.

The children demonstrate satisfactory knowledge of key mathematical concepts and flexibility in their thinking. Most of the children engage well in practical activities, working along side others, and use practical resources, including ICT, to support and consolidate their learning. However, a lack of secure understanding of number hinders significantly the children's progress in other areas of the mathematics curriculum, in particular, problem-solving, and restricts their ability to apply their mathematical learning across the curriculum.

The action plan for numeracy is clearly focused on raising standards and highlights appropriately the development of number and mathematical language as priorities for improvement. The teachers need to take a more consistent and agreed approach in all the classes to addressing these areas in both their planning and in their classroom practice.

3. THE QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING

3.1 PLANNING

The teachers plan conscientiously for the children's learning across the curriculum and produce half-termly notes. In the best practice, the planning identifies the intended learning, the teaching strategies to be used and the differentiation for all ability levels in the class. During the inspection there were some examples of evaluations used effectively by teachers to inform future planning. This good practice needs to be disseminated more widely with a clear emphasis on learning. There is a need to ensure that the planning for learning in all classes includes differentiation for the less able children.

3.2 TEACHING

During the inspection, the quality of the teaching in approximately two-thirds of the lessons observed was good or better. The teaching ranged from outstanding, in a small number of lessons, to inadequate, in a small number of lessons. In the best practice, the lessons were paced appropriately, with good use of practical resources and the effective integration of ICT to enhance the children's learning. In these lessons, the teachers used effective questioning, had realistically high expectations of all the children and the needs of the whole ability range were well met. In addition, the intended learning was shared with the children at the start of the lessons and they were drawn to an effective conclusion with good feedback sessions and discussion to assess how well the objectives had been met.

3.3 ASSESSMENT

There are appropriate procedures and records for keeping the parents informed about their children's progress. These include written reports, formal parent-teacher consultations and an open-door policy for informal consultations.

There is a whole-school approach to assessment for learning. The teachers mark the children's written work regularly, however, there are inconsistencies in the marking across the classes. In the best practice, there is effective marking to promote improvement and the children are encouraged to engage in self-evaluation of their learning.

The school uses a suitable range of standardised and non-standardised testing to assess the children's level of achievement in English and mathematics. Recently, the school adopted a suitable IT program to manage assessment information, track the children's progress and identify underachievement.

3.4 SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

The quality of the provision for special educational (SEN) needs is satisfactory. There is a very inclusive and welcoming ethos for children with additional needs in the school and the provision for SEN is well resourced. Currently, the school deploys one full-time teacher for literacy support and one part-time teacher for numeracy support through a mix of both withdrawal and class-based sessions. As part of the 'Achieving Belfast' programme, the school has access to a teacher for just over two days each week, as well as a full-time classroom assistant.

The school uses the class teachers' knowledge and experience, as well as a wide range of standardised tests, to identify early those children requiring additional help. The parents are kept well informed at all stages.

The withdrawal sessions for literacy and numeracy are provided in a supportive atmosphere. The SEN teachers provide effective group work where the approaches and tasks are varied and well matched to the children's learning needs and interests. There is a suitable emphasis on practical activities using appropriate resources.

The extent to which the teachers take account of the children's different needs within class varies, and at its best, is excellent. The special educational needs co-ordinator writes individual education plans (IEPs) for the children in all classes. These plans identify, for the most part, broad targets and support strategies to promote improvement but are not focused enough to ensure progression or to facilitate effective evaluation. As a result, there is insufficient rigour in the monitoring of the progress made by individual children.

The development of the SEN provision is not given priority in the school's development plan (SDP). The school, however, recognises the need to draw up a relevant action plan to guide further development in the provision. The school also recognises the need to review and evaluate the impact that the SEN support is having on the children's learning.

The school maintains valuable links with the Curriculum Advisory Support Service in the Belfast Education and Library Board and with other agencies to support learning and teaching.

4. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

4.1 LEADERSHIP

The Principal has been in post for four years and provides good quality leadership. She is committed to the life and work of the school and to the well-being of the children. She has been instrumental in bringing about many important and positive changes. She builds well on the good relationships established with the parents, the staff and the children to ensure a positive ethos. She enjoys the support of the local community.

4.2 PLANNING FOR IMPROVEMENT

The SDP meets fully the requirements of the Department of Education School Development Planning Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2005. It is appropriate for the Principal and the staff to review the SDP in the light of this report in order to prioritise more effectively the areas identified by this inspection for further improvement.

4.3 RESOURCES, FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE

The governors are involved fully in the strategic planning and policy development for the school and effectively support the Principal and the staff in the implementation of the SDP.

4.4 ACCOMMODATION

The school building is modern, spacious and well organised. The standard of caretaking is very good and the children take pride in helping the teachers and the support staff to maintain their school. The bright and inviting classrooms and corridors are used to display and celebrate the children's work. The ICT suite and central library enhance the learning environment.

5. THE NURSERY UNIT

5.1 The main strengths within the nursery unit's educational and pastoral provision include:

- the very high levels of motivation, engagement and concentration by the children in their activities;
- the good to excellent opportunities to learn in all areas of the pre-school curriculum, particularly the children's very good social skills and the good progress in their language development and understanding of early mathematical concepts;
- the excellent work being developed in conjunction with speech and language therapists to support the children's language and communication skills;
- the good quality of the staff interactions with the children to promote purposeful play, language and learning;
- the very good work being developed with the parents and the community; and
- the effective leadership provided by the co-ordinator who promotes a very strong sense of teamwork among the very hard working and committed staff.

5.2 In the areas inspected, the quality of education provided by this nursery unit is very good. The nursery is meeting very effectively the educational and pastoral needs of the learners, and has demonstrated its capacity for sustained self-improvement.

6. CONCLUSION

6.1 The strengths of the school include:

- the good quality of the leadership of the Principal;
- the positive attitudes of the children to their learning;
- the good quality of the majority of the teaching;
- the effective use of ICT to enhance the children's learning;
- the very good quality of the nursery provision; and
- the support of the governors and the good quality links with other schools and with the local and wider community.

6.2 The areas for improvement include the need to:

- improve the standards in literacy and numeracy; and
- review the targets in the IEPs to ensure appropriate progression in and effective evaluation of the children's learning.

6.3 In most of the areas inspected the quality of education provided in this school is satisfactory; the strengths outweigh areas for improvement in the provision. The inspection has identified areas for improvement in standards and learning and teaching which need to be addressed if the needs of all the learners are to be met more effectively. The Education and Training Inspectorate will monitor and report on the school's progress in addressing the areas for improvement.

STATISTICAL INFORMATION ON THE NURSERY UNIT IN HARMONY PRIMARY SCHOOL

1. Details of Children

Number of children:	Class 1	Class 2
Attending full-time	26	26
Attending part-time	0	0
Under 3 years of age*	11	9
With statement of SEN**	0	0
At CoP stages 3 or 4***	2	0
At CoP stages 1 or 2***	0	0
With English as an additional language	0	2

* On 1 July.

** Special Educational Needs.

*** The stages refer to those set out in the Code of Practice for the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs.

Percentage qualifying under DE admission criteria 1 or 2.	26%
Average attendance for the previous year.	82%

2. Duration of Sessions

Full-time	Part-time: am	Part-time: pm
4	-	-

3. Details of Staff

Number of:	Full-Time	Part-Time
Teachers	2	0
Nursery Assistants	0	0
Qualified Nursery Assistants	2	0

Number of: ****	
Students	2
Trainees	0

**** Total placements since September of current year

4. Parental Questionnaires

Number issued	52
Percentage returned	%
Number of written comments	3

HEALTH AND SAFETY

There is a need to ensure that the perimeter of the primary school is fully secured and that access to the school grounds and all the school entry points are secured at all times.

The perimeter fence to the front of the nursery unit needs to be higher to ensure the security and safe supervision of the children.

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