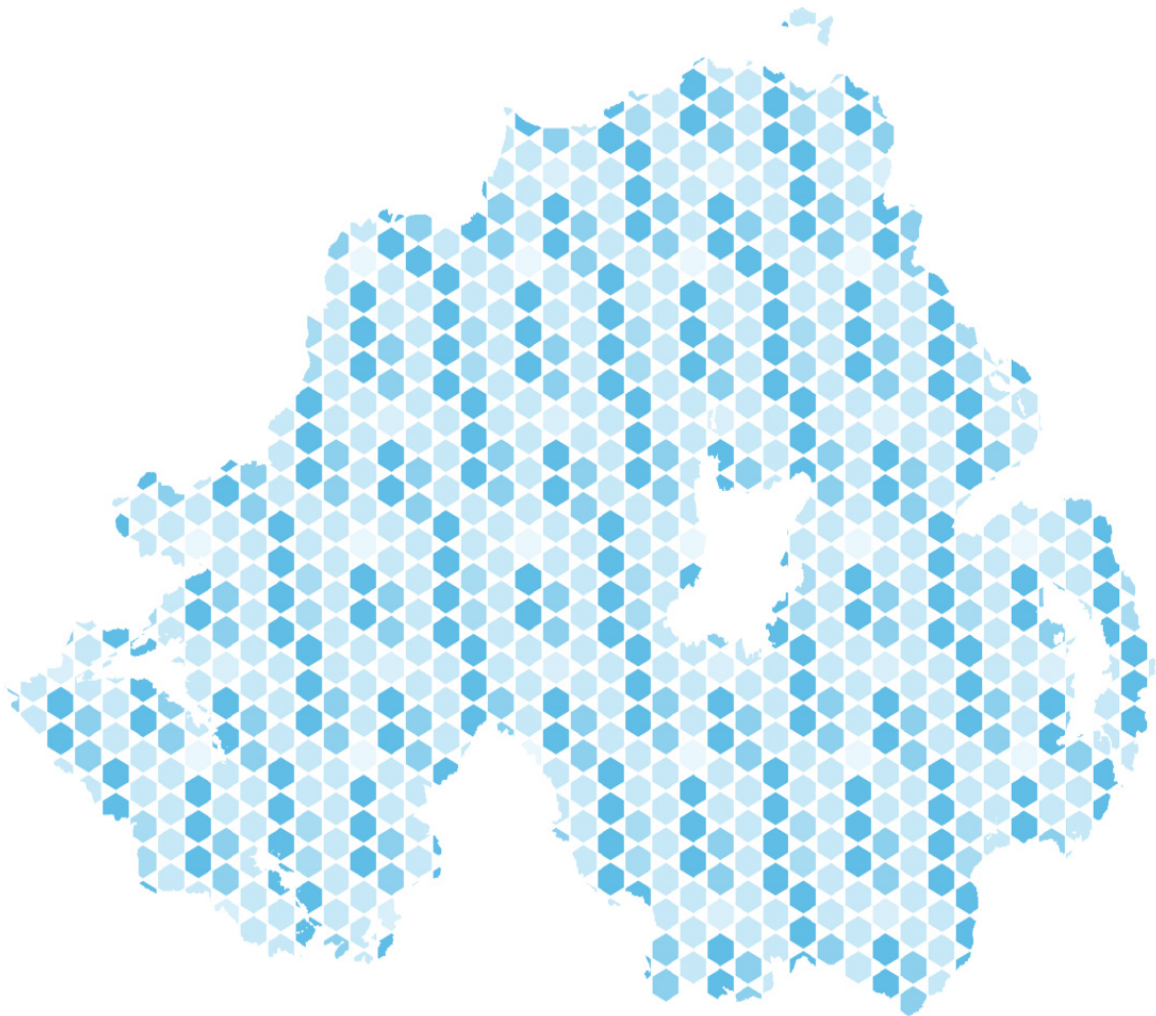


# PRIMARY INSPECTION



Education and Training  
Inspectorate

Springhill Primary School,  
Belfast

Report of an Inspection  
in March 2011



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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, Inspectors relate their evaluations to six descriptors as set out below:

DESCRIPTOR
Outstanding
Very Good
Good
Satisfactory
Inadequate
Unsatisfactory

**BASIC INFORMATION SHEET (BIS) - PRIMARY SCHOOLS**

- A. i. **School: Springhill Primary** iii. **Date of Inspection: W/B 07/03/11**  
ii. **School Reference Number: 101-0307** iv. **Nature of Inspection: Focused**

B.

<b>School Year</b>	<b>2006/07</b>	<b>2007/08</b>	<b>2008/09</b>	<b>2009/10</b>	<b>2010/11</b>
Year 1 Intake	20	44	30	32	32
<b>Enrolments</b>					
Primary	283	268	247	237	224
Reception	0	0	0	0	0
Nursery Unit	0	0	0	0	0
Special Unit	0	0	0	0	0
Irish Medium Unit	0	0	0	0	0

The enrolment for the current year is the figure on the day of notification of inspection. For previous years it is the figure in the annual return to the Department of Education.

The calculations at C and D should be based on the total of the primary and reception enrolments only.

- C. Average Attendance for the Previous School Year (expressed as a percentage): 93.5% **NI Avg Att: 94.9%**
- |  | <b>Primary &amp; Reception</b> | <b>Nursery Unit</b> | <b>Special Unit</b> | <b>Irish Medium Unit</b> |
|--|--------------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|--------------------------|
|--|--------------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|--------------------------|
- D. i. Number of Teachers (including the principal and part-time teachers): 11 0 0 0  
(Full-time equivalent = 25 teaching hours)
- ii. PTR (Pupil/Teacher Ratio): 20.36 NI PTR: 20.7
- iii. Average Class Size: 24.9
- iv. Class Size (Range): 20 to 32
- v. Ancillary Support:  
Number of Hours **Per Week:**
- |   |    |
|---|----|
| i. Clerical support:  | 40 |
| ii. Foundation Stage Classroom Assistant Support:           | 35 |
| iii. Additional hours of other classroom assistant support: | 70 |
- vi. Percentage of children with statements of special educational needs: 1.4%
- vii. Total percentage of children on the Special Needs Register: 44.2%
- viii. Number of children who are **not** of statutory school age: 0
- ix. Percentage of children entitled to free school meals: 28.57%
- x. Percentage of children at the end of Key Stage 2 for 2009/10 who attained level 4 and above in English and mathematics: **English 63.83%** **Mathematics 76.6%**

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 SCHOOL CONTEXT

Springhill Primary School is situated near the top of the Ballygomartin Road in Belfast. The enrolment has declined in recent years and stands currently at 224. The children come mostly from the surrounding areas although a minority travel from beyond the immediate vicinity. Approximately 29% of the children are entitled to free schools meals (FSM). The school has identified just over 44% of the children as requiring additional support with aspects of their learning, including a few with a statement of special educational needs.

### 1.2 FOCUS

The inspection focused on:

- the children's achievements and standards in literacy and numeracy;
- the quality of provision for learning; and
- the quality of leadership and management.

In addition, the use of information and communication technology (ICT) to support learning, and the school's arrangements for pastoral care, including child protection, were evaluated.

### 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 and support staff to complete a confidential questionnaire prior to the inspection, as well as meetings with representatives from the Board of Governors (governors) and a group of children from year 6.

One hundred and 19 questionnaires were issued to parents. Approximately 30% of the parental questionnaires were returned to the Inspection Services Branch; 23 contained additional written comments.

The responses from the parental questionnaires were highly affirmative, indicating strong support for the life and work of the school. In particular, the parents acknowledged the welcoming atmosphere of the school, the caring and supportive ethos and the approachable staff. The parents commented on the dilapidated state of the school building and expressed a wish for the provision of more after-school clubs and activities.

Twelve teachers and 20 support staff completed the confidential online questionnaire with seven and 15 respectively, including additional written comments. Almost all of the responses were positive about most aspects of the work of the school.

The governors expressed their strong support for the Principal and staff. In particular, they praised the presentations given to them by the various subject co-ordinators to inform them about curricular developments within the school. The governors expressed their disappointment about the lack of progress in obtaining a new school building, and they highlighted the challenging circumstances in which the school operates.

The year 6 children talked openly about their experiences in the school. They value the help and support of their teachers and they are aware of the school rules. The children indicated that they felt safe and happy in school. They know where to seek help and to whom to turn in the event of any concern.

The Education and Training Inspectorate reported to the Principal and the Chairperson of the governors the very few issues emerging from the questionnaires.

#### 1.4 PASTORAL CARE

The quality of the arrangements for pastoral care in the school is satisfactory. The teachers promote positive behaviour through their application of a range of rewards that develop the children's self-esteem. The children respond well to these approaches and the group of year 6 children interviewed during the inspection spoke favourably about the 'pupil of the month' rewards celebrated at key stage assemblies. There has been an appropriate focus on personal development and mutual understanding in the early years as part of the school's introduction of the revised curriculum. The children's learning and social development are enhanced through trips to places of educational interest, and visits to the school by individuals and organisations. The older children are given positions of responsibility, for example, they act as 'play pals' in the school playground or carry out duties in the canteen at lunch time. In order to build further on the quality of pastoral care, the school needs to review the balance between the sanctions and rewards. In addition, the children need to have more opportunities to influence decisions in order to play a fuller role within the life of the school.

#### 1.5 CHILD PROTECTION

The school has very good comprehensive arrangements in place for safeguarding children. These arrangements reflect the guidance issued by the Department of Education.

#### 1.6 LINKS WITH PARENTS AND THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

The school maintains close links with the parents through regular newsletters. Parents are invited to parent/teacher meetings and the school reports a high attendance; they also receive an annual written report on their child's progress. There is good communication with parents regarding the children with special educational needs and the parents are kept fully informed about their child's programme and progress. A recently formed Parents Support Group organises a variety of events, including book fairs, fun and craft days. There is scope, however, for the establishment of firmer home-school links around the curriculum and the children's learning. The school links with several primary schools and the local post-primary schools.

### 2. ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS

#### 2.1 LEARNING

An analysis of the key stage (KS) 2 assessment data indicates that in English and mathematics, over the past four years, the school's performance was significantly below the Northern Ireland (NI) average and the average for other primary schools within the Belfast Education and Library Board (BELB).

In the same period, the standards achieved at the end of KS2 in English and mathematics by both boys and girls were consistently lower than other schools in the same FSM band.

Appropriate targets are outlined in the individual and group education plans drawn up for the children who require support in their learning in literacy. A suitable range of early intervention and literacy activities is used to provide extra help. A significant minority of children make satisfactory progress and have demonstrated improvements in reading and spelling work which need to be sustained.

Throughout the school the children demonstrate high levels of motivation and engagement with their learning, and they respond particularly well when the learning activities are matched closely to their varying abilities.

## 2.2 ENGLISH AND LITERACY

The overall quality of the provision for English and literacy is inadequate.

The majority of the children demonstrate satisfactory oral communication skills but there is a need for the children's learning experiences in talking and listening to develop in a more progressive and structured manner across the key stages. In the foundation stage (FS) and KS1, play-based learning areas and activities are used well to encourage the children to extend their vocabulary and communicate with their peers. However, there is too much inconsistency in the quality of the adult interaction, expectations and teaching strategies. In the best examples observed, the teachers used extended questions to promote the children's thinking skills; they provided collaborative group activities which promoted meaningful discussion and the sharing of ideas, and they made productive use of the children's oral contributions. In a majority of the lessons observed, the work was overly-directed by the teacher, questioning often produced limited responses from the children and important opportunities were missed, to build upon the children's ideas and extend their language and communication skills across all areas of learning.

In the FS and KS1 the children acquire the basic skills of reading through a structured phonics programme and modelled, shared and guided reading activities. In KS1 and KS2, a variety of novels, new fiction and non fiction resources develop the children's comprehension skills and are used as a stimulus for writing and encouraging the reading of further works by the same author. In addition, a few children in KS2 benefit from participation in a supplementary 'booster reading' programme. The recent introduction of initiatives to support the children's reading is a strength of the school's provision for literacy. The children in years 4 and 7 read fluently and with some expression, and they displayed interest and enjoyment in reading. By the end of KS2, while a majority of the children are reading at a satisfactory level, a significant minority are not reading at a level commensurate with their age and stage of development. In order to raise further the children's standards and attainments in reading, the teachers need to focus the planned reading activities more specifically on extending and deepening the children's understanding of what they read and of how language is used for a range of purposes and audiences.

In the FS, the children experiment with letter and word formation and have opportunities for early writing through a variety of activities, including writing in the context of their play based learning. The teachers need to provide the children with more extended and creative opportunities to develop these initial writing skills, in order for the children to become independent writers. In KS1 and KS 2, the children have opportunities to write in a variety of styles, which in the best practice, are linked to current curriculum topics and the children's own experiences and interests. While the children produce some good samples of writing, there is a lack of development in the composing style and the creative use of language of a majority of the children. By the end of year 7 the standards achieved by a significant minority of the children in writing are inadequate. In order to raise the overall standard of the children's achievements in writing, the teachers need to develop further a shared

understanding of how to help the children to become motivated, independent writers, implement an agreed progression in the children's learning experiences and monitor the impact of this work. It is also important that in their planning for writing, the teachers take better account of matching the challenge of tasks to the specific needs of groups and individual children. It is appropriate that the school has identified this as an area for further development in the near future.

The hard-working literacy co-ordinator has implemented a number of important actions leading to improvement. The current literacy action plan outlines a number of tasks to be completed including the need to use more effectively the school's internal assessment data to inform more closely the planning for learning. The senior leadership team and teachers need to review this plan in order to focus the priorities more specifically on raising the children's levels of attainment and extending the range of learning and teaching strategies.

### 2.3 MATHEMATICS AND NUMERACY

The overall quality of the provision for numeracy is inadequate.

In the FS and KS1, the children often experience play based, practical activities across important areas in numeracy which develop their basic mathematical concepts. There is a broad programme for mathematics which comprises important elements of number, measures, shape and space and handling data. The children show a positive attitude to their numeracy sessions. They acquire basic computation skills in a flexible way. In the best practice observed, in a minority of the lessons, the teachers made skilful use of learning opportunities by developing key mathematical language and they challenged the children in their mathematical learning. In the least effective practice, opportunities to connect numeracy to real life situations were too often missed and the learning tasks did not focus clearly enough on the expected learning outcomes and associated success criteria.

In KS2, the children exhibited good progress in mental approaches and used appropriate strategies to solve problems. They were keen to engage in numeracy lessons and they experience a varied programme. There is, however, an over-emphasis on the development of number skills taught in isolation. Although the school has identified number as an area for development the teachers need to reflect on the balance of the programme and combine number more clearly with other areas of mathematics. While good practice exists that can be built upon further, overall, there is undue variation in the provision and a lack of opportunities for investigative and problem solving activities. The school needs to develop its approach to numeracy in order to include an emphasis on real life situations and the application of mathematics in other areas of learning.

The numeracy coordinator provides thoughtful guidance to the school and gives careful consideration to resources and schemes of work. She initiated a useful whole school audit of provision which resulted in a suitable planning for numeracy at the FS. There is a need to produce similar updated planning for numeracy at key stages 1 and 2 since the absence of an agreed scheme is inhibiting the co-ordinator's work in evaluating the children's progression in mathematics, in particular at KS1. As part of the self-evaluation process leading to improvement, the co-ordinator has also made good use of the quantitative data to identify low attainment and a disparity in performance between the children's achievement in numeracy and English. She has provided guidance on curricular areas in need of improvement. In mathematics, while a majority of the children reach satisfactory and sometimes good standards in line with their ability, for a significant minority of the children the standards of attainment are inadequate.



2.4 Information and communication technology is at an early stage of development. An useful audit was carried out by the co-ordinator within the last year and a line of development drawn up across each year group to ensure progression in the children's learning experiences. Some good examples of the use of ICT to support literacy and numeracy were observed. For example, the children made use of ICT to compose and edit their writing and for researching useful websites. Overall, however, the use and potential of ICT to support learning and teaching in literacy and numeracy are under-developed across the key stages.

### **3. THE QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING**

#### **3.1 PLANNING**

The teachers work hard and produce detailed plans for the important components of key subject areas across four annual planning cycles; these are complemented by weekly overviews which contain helpful references to learning intentions. Much of the planning is under review currently as the school is developing an agreed format to best suit its circumstances. There needs to be a more co-ordinated and whole school approach to planning, set within a defined time-frame, if better learning outcomes are to be attained by the children.

#### **3.2 TEACHING**

The quality of teaching observed ranged from satisfactory to very good. Most of the teaching was either satisfactory or good. In the best practice observed in a minority of the lessons, there was an appropriate focus on meeting the learning outcomes and the children achieved standards in line with their abilities. The activities were well matched to the children's varying levels of attainment and were pitched at a level to challenge all of the children in their learning. The teachers made good use of incidental opportunities to promote the children's learning and linked it to real life situations which captured well their attention and interest. A key finding of this report is the need to disseminate more widely the elements of good practice already existing within the school.

In contrast, in the less effective practice, the pace of the lessons was too slow and the teaching lacked sufficient focus to stretch the children to achieve to the maximum of their capabilities. The tasks were often overly directed by the teacher and this resulted in the children having fewer opportunities to participate fully or to contribute to lessons; consequently, they often became restless and progressed less well than expected. The children need more opportunities to engage in independent work involving them more in their own learning.

#### **3.3 ASSESSMENT**

The children's work is marked regularly and, in the best practice, a minority of the teachers set out clearly for the children how they can improve their first drafts. The teachers have incorporated some aspects of assessment for learning associated with the revised curriculum into their lessons; this has been used to good effect in a minority of classes but needs to be implemented more consistently across the whole school.

The school uses a variety of standardised tests and has collated useful, quantitative information on the progress and attainment of the children. Internal data and standardised scores reveal a pattern of under-achievement for a significant minority of the children; a majority of the older children have not progressed sufficiently in literacy and numeracy. The Principal and senior leadership team (SLT) need to make more strategic use of the performance data available to them and to focus more sharply on improving standards of achievement in literacy and numeracy across the school.

### **3.5 SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS**

The school's provision for the children with special education needs is satisfactory.

The school has identified just over 44% of the children with additional learning or behavioural needs, including a few children with statements of educational need. The children requiring help are withdrawn for language and literacy support sessions taken by the special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO). In addition, a small number of children are taught individually or in groups for extra support for reading and behavioural difficulties by teachers from the various peripatetic services of the BELB Outreach Services.

In order to tackle the incidence of low literacy levels across all key stages, the school has adopted a policy of early intervention and introduced a series of measures with a focus on improving the children's basic language and communication skills. With the support of a trained classroom assistant, extra reading groups using ICT as a tool for improving their learning, were established for children in years 4-7; this programme will be evaluated later in the school year.

The children who receive additional support learn in a caring environment and they are involved in a suitable range of literacy activities. A significant minority of children make satisfactory progress and have demonstrated improvements in reading and spelling work which need to be sustained. It will be important that a programme of additional support for numeracy is provided for the minority of children who require it.

## **4. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

### **4.1 LEADERSHIP**

The quality of curricular leadership and management is inadequate.

The Principal has been in post since 1998. He knows the children, their families and the community they come from very well. He has led the school through periods of social unrest and community strife. He is strongly supportive of the teachers and he has the confidence of the governors. He has worked hard to maintain the school enrolment in difficult circumstances. He devotes much of his time and energy to managing the school's accommodation issues and attending to the huge budgetary deficit.

There are, however, important curricular leadership and management issues that need immediate and urgent attention. The key challenge for the school is to raise substantially the inadequate standards reached by a significant minority of the children in literacy and numeracy. It will be important for the Principal, supported by the governors, to provide more effective strategic direction and to influence improvements in the learning and teaching across the key stages. To this end, the governors need to develop further their challenge function and adopt a more proactive role in order to support the Principal and teachers to concentrate collectively on raising the educational performance of all of the children.

The SENCO oversees the wide range of provision; she works closely with the KS1 co-ordinator and supports the teachers in the production of effective individual and group education plans. The SENCO, along with the literacy and numeracy co-ordinators need to provide a more coherent approach to address the levels of underachievement that exist across the key stages.

#### 4.2 PLANNING FOR IMPROVEMENT

The school development plan (SDP) does not meet fully the requirements of the Department of Education School Development Planning Regulations/Schedule 2005/1.

Although the three-year SDP covers a wide range of areas, it fails to prioritise adequately the key issues on which the school needs to focus. It does not set out clearly enough the direction for taking the school forward and for making the necessary improvements in the children's standards of learning. It is not supported by a comprehensive programme of continuous professional development.

The school has collated important performance data on the children through a series of tests. The data indicates that for a significant minority of the children there is insufficient improvement in their standards in literacy and numeracy over time. The interpretation of the data to underpin the school's work in self-evaluation leading to improvement lacks rigour; for example, few substantive or specific actions have been implemented to raise the children's standards of attainment and to tackle underachievement.

#### 4.3 RESOURCES, FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT and GOVERNANCE

The school has a large budget deficit and a decreasing enrolment. The Principal and governors are working closely with the BELB in order to manage more efficiently its overspend of available delegated resources.

#### 4.4 ACCOMMODATION

All those associated with the school had anticipated the erection of a new school building; the school was informed last June by the Department of Education that it was not compliant. At the time of the inspection the school reported that the BELB was investing one-quarter of a million pounds in refurbishing and re-painting the school, providing new toilets, a new entrance foyer and disabled access.

### 5. CONCLUSION

#### 5.1 The strengths of the school include:

- the friendly and welcoming children who are motivated and respond well when the learning activities match their abilities;
- the hard working teachers who demonstrate loyalty to the school;
- the good provision for pastoral care;

- the work of the subject co-ordinators for English and mathematics in beginning the process of self-evaluation; and
- the recent introduction of initiatives to support the children's language development.

5.2 The areas for improvement include the need:

- to raise the inadequate standards reached by a significant minority of the children in literacy and numeracy;
- for stronger curricular leadership by the Principal, supported by the Board of Governors, to provide better strategic direction and an improvement in the teaching and learning across the key stages; and
- to disseminate more widely the elements of good practice already existing within the school.

5.3 In almost all of the areas inspected, the quality of education provided by this school is inadequate; the areas for improvement outweigh the strengths in the provision. The inspection has identified significant areas for improvement in standards, in learning and teaching, and in leadership and management, which need to be addressed urgently if the school is to meet effectively the needs of all of the children. The school will require well-focused, external support to help them take forward the areas identified for improvement.

**HEALTH AND SAFETY**

- The security fence surrounding the school is in need of repair.
- Several of the entrances and exits to the school premises require urgently tighter security.

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