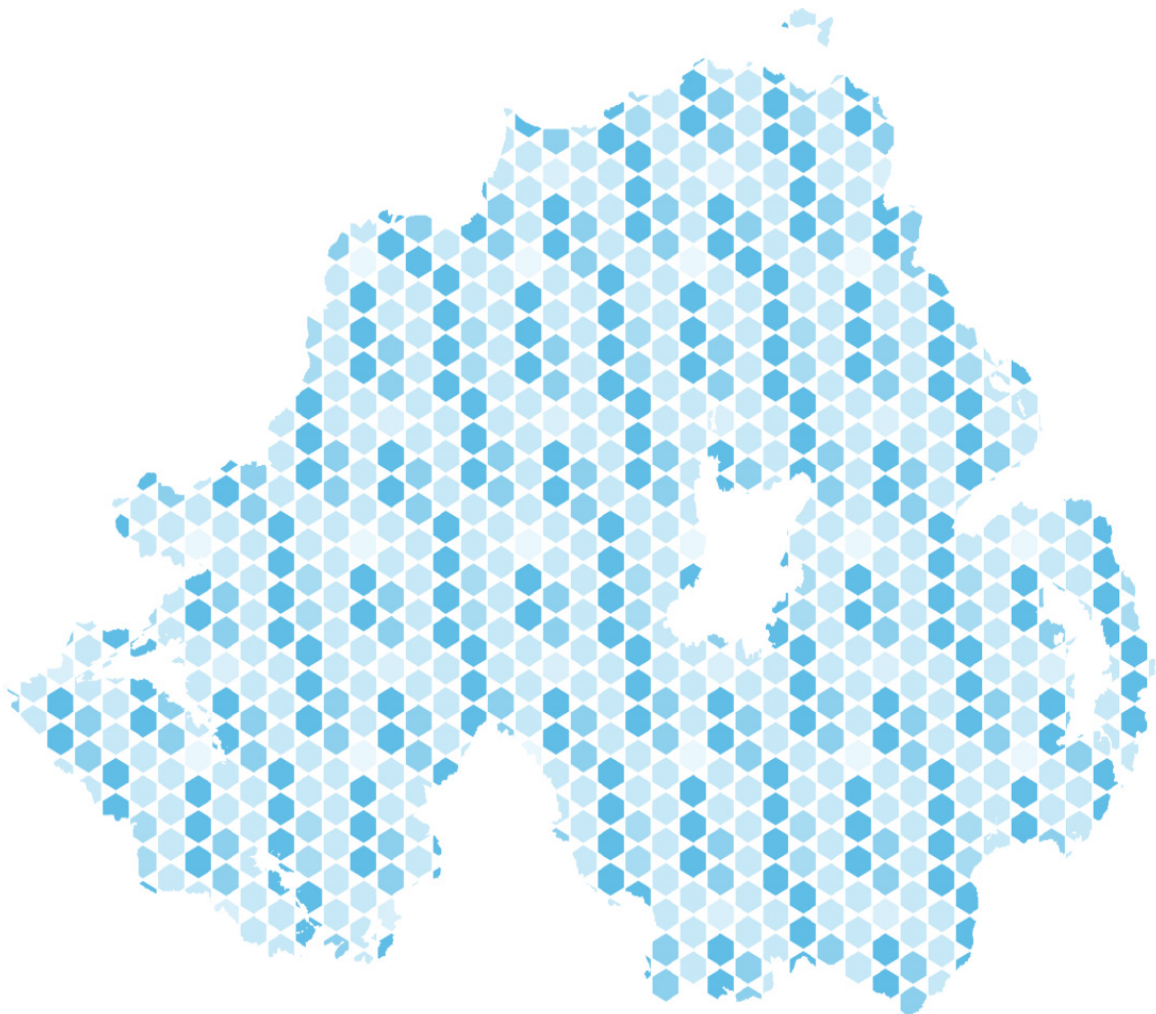


PRIMARY INSPECTION



Education and Training
Inspectorate

St Colman's Primary School,
Newry

Report of an Inspection
in October 2011

CONTENTS

Section		Page
	STATISTICAL INFORMATION	
1.	INTRODUCTION	1
1		
2.	ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS	2
3.	THE QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING	5
4.	LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT	6
5.	CONCLUSION	7
	APPENDIX	

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

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 SCHOOL CONTEXT

St Colman's Primary School is situated on the Sheeptown Road in the Parish of Saval, approximately three miles outside Newry, County Down. The enrolment has increased quite steadily over the past five years, from 144 in 2007 to the current enrolment of 166. Almost all of the children come from within a three-mile radius of the school. At the time of the inspection 19% of the children were entitled to free school meals and 16% of the children were identified as requiring help with aspects of their learning.

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, teachers 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.

Of the 110 questionnaires issued to the parents 52 (47%) were returned to Inspection Services Branch, including 22 which contained an additional written comment. Most of the responses from the questionnaires indicated a high level of satisfaction with the provision in the school. In particular, the parents valued the warm, welcoming ethos, the caring, approachable staff and the teachers' high level of involvement in the life of the community. In addition, they expressed strong appreciation of the work of the Principal and of his good level of communication with them. The small number of concerns raised in the written comments has been discussed with the governors and the Principal. An appendix to the report addresses an accommodation issue raised by the governors and by a small number of the parents.

Seven of the teachers and almost all of the support staff completed the questionnaire. All of the staff indicated that they are very happy in their work in the school. The governors expressed their pride in the school and in the teachers' efforts to ensure a balance between developing the children as individuals and achieving the highest possible standards in learning. They were also very appreciative of the Principal's commitment to keeping them informed about all aspects of school provision.

In discussions held with the year 6 children they spoke confidently about the care they receive from the teachers and lunch-time supervisors and about the range of extra-curricular activities available to them. They also indicated that they feel safe in school and know who to speak to if they have any concerns.

1.4 PASTORAL CARE

The quality of the arrangements for pastoral care in the school is very good. This is characterised by the excellent working relationships at all levels, the care and attention focused on the children and the good and open lines of communication established between the school and the parents. Within classes, the children have an opportunity to agree their own rules and are, increasingly, being given a greater voice in the life and work of the school. The children's positive attitudes and values are being developed through the school's programme for personal development and mutual understanding. Through approaches such as "circle time", the children are encouraged to recognise and value diversity, value their own and others' opinions and understand prejudice.

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 HEALTHY EATING and PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

The school gives good attention to promoting healthy eating and physical activity, for example through the taught World Around Us programme, through the attention to the children's personal development and through the range of after-school sporting activities which encourage the children to adopt healthy lifestyles.

1.7 LINKS WITH PARENTS AND THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

The school has very good links with the parish, the local gaelic athletic association and with the wider rural community. They have established effective pastoral links with the neighbouring pre-school playgroup and with the post-primary schools to which the children transfer. Within the past year they have formed a 'Friends of St Colman's' parent group which has provided the parents with additional opportunities to contribute to the life and work of the school.

The school is beginning to extend its links beyond the local area through, for example, a 'penpal' link with a primary school in North Antrim.

2. **ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS**

2.1 LEARNING

The children respond positively to the high expectations set by the majority of the teaching staff; they are enthusiastic and keen to talk about their learning, engage actively in and persevere to the conclusion of their learning tasks and, when given the opportunity, demonstrate good levels of self management and independence. They co-operate well with each other when working in pairs or small groups; they are courteous and mannerly to their friends, teachers and other adults within the school and their behaviour is exemplary.

In the foundation stage (FS), the children learn through songs, rhymes and a combination of formal and play-based activities. In the most effective practice the play-based activities are used to reasonable effect to support and enrich the development of the children's literacy, numeracy and personal skills.

The children are confident and competent in their use of ICT to support their learning. The current year 5 children have all been successful in attaining level 2 in the Council for the Curriculum Examination and Assessment (CCEA) ICT accreditation programme.

An analysis of the key stage (KS) 2 assessment data over the past four years shows that the school's performance in English has been in line with or above the Northern Ireland (NI) average in three of the four years and has remained within the average band when compared with schools in the same free school meals category. During the same four year period, the school's performance in mathematics fluctuated considerably. In two of the four years it was below the NI average and below the average when compared to schools in the same free school meals category.

During the inspection, the evidence gained from lesson observations and discussions with the children, together with a scrutiny of the children's completed written work, indicates that, by year 7, the children attain good standards in both literacy and numeracy. The evidence also suggests that, with more consistent year-on-year progress, these good standards could be improved yet further.

2.2 ENGLISH AND LITERACY

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

The English programme makes good provision for developing the children's talking and listening skills. Throughout the school, the children are encouraged to ask questions, to discuss aspects of their work with one another and to contribute orally in class groupings and whole-class presentations. The children are articulate and confident and are able to give increasingly extended responses as they progress through the school. They listen well to their teachers and are able to carry out tasks competently. They listen well to their peers when engaging in group work and are able to offer opinions and views in a mature and measured manner.

The children learn to read with the aid of a commercial scheme supplemented, as appropriate, with a wider range of reading material. More recently, the reading programme has been complemented by the implementation of a phonics element. There is some evidence of the successful uptake and use of this phonics approach by the children in helping their reading in the FS and KS1. As they progress through KS2, the children have limited access to a broader range of suitable reading material but within that range most are able to read fluently and accurately. By the end of KS2, the standards in reading are satisfactory and could be improved further by extending the focus on reading for understanding and on widening the range and quality of the children's reading experiences.

The school has focused on developing the children's writing through recent staff development. Consequently, the children are experiencing a broader range of writing opportunities including writing in different forms and genre. They are able, for example, to write book reviews, narrative where they write from the perspective of another person, letters, reports of educational visits and autobiographical accounts. During these opportunities the children write competently, confidently and in their own words not only in English related activities but also in other areas of the curriculum. By the end of KS2, most of the children are able to write to a good standard. In improving further the quality of the provision, the school needs to review the use of worksheets which are often constraining the children's writing, particularly in the early years. The teachers should also consider the implementation of an agreed and more effective approach to spelling and the writing of new vocabulary.

Under the leadership of the English co-ordinator, the school has completed a very thorough evaluation of the school's provision for English and literacy. The audit has identified appropriate areas for further development with which this inspection concurs.

2.3 MATHEMATICS AND NUMERACY

The overall quality of provision in mathematics is satisfactory.

The co-ordinator has been in post for approximately six years. She has carried out an audit of the school's resources and has begun to monitor aspects of the provision through, for example, reviewing samples of the children's work.

The whole-school programme for mathematics ensures that, by the end of KS2, there is adequate progression in most areas of the mathematics curriculum. However, this progression is inconsistent across the key stages, particularly in aspects such as area, three-dimensional shape and capacity. The current action plan outlines broadly the school's intention to develop the progression for shape. It will be important for the plan to be reviewed in light of the inspection findings and to focus more specifically on the actions which will bring about improvement in the quality of learning and teaching.

The quality of the children's learning experiences and the progress in their understanding of key concepts and language vary significantly within and across the key stages. In the most effective practice, the teachers have high expectations of what the children can achieve; they focus, appropriately, on developing the children's mental agility and flexibility with number, take time to teach key strategies, such as estimation and connect learning across the mathematics curriculum. In these classes the children engage in purposeful and stimulating practical work and appropriate, often skilful, recording of their findings; they are encouraged to identify trends, draw conclusions and to develop well-reasoned questions using accurate mathematical language. In the less effective practice observed during the inspection, the lessons lacked structure, the pace of the lesson was too slow, the instructions to the children about the planned learning tasks were unclear and there was insufficient focus on learning. In these classes, the teachers did not take adequate account of the children's prior knowledge and experience and there was very limited progress in the quality and extent of the children's learning.

In discussion with groups of the children from years 4 and 7, they expressed enthusiasm for mathematics; most of the year 7 children are able to complete mental calculations quickly and accurately; they are able to draw on a range of mental strategies and to articulate confidently their chosen methods. They have good understanding of most aspects of the mathematics curriculum. Most of the children in year 4 have a good understanding of the relationship between addition and subtraction and are able to complete basic calculations accurately. They are insecure in their understanding of areas such as time, length and 3D shape.

By the end of year 7 most of the children attain good standards in mathematics. These standards could be enhanced further through more consistent provision and high quality teaching in all year groups.

The ICT co-ordinator provides well-focused training and support for the staff and has developed a useful action plan to guide the continued development of ICT within the school. During the inspection, ICT was used effectively in a few of the classes to support teaching and learning across the curriculum, for example, during a WAU lesson, the children were accessing information from the Woodland Trust website and, in a mathematics lesson, the interactive whiteboard was used very effectively to support the children's understanding of co-ordinates.

3. THE QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING

3.1 PLANNING

The teachers plan their work conscientiously. In the best practice, the planning developed by individual teachers is well-focused and supports very effectively the teaching and learning in literacy and numeracy. This practice is not consistent throughout the school. There is a need for the teachers to work together to review the current planning, to refine it and to implement a more coherent, consistent approach throughout the school.

The teachers complete regular and, in a few instances, very detailed evaluations of their planning. In the most effective practice these evaluations provide comprehensive information about the quality and extent of the children's learning and clear guidance for future planning for individuals and small groups. This good practice needs to be shared and developed more consistently throughout the school.

3.2 TEACHING

The teachers are hard-working and committed to the education of the children.

During the inspection the majority of the teaching observed was good or better and in almost ten percent of the lessons it was outstanding. The need for improvement in the quality of teaching was identified in the remainder of the lessons observed.

In the most effective practice, the teachers created purposeful, motivating learning environments; they built effectively on the children's previous learning, had appropriately high expectations of what the children could achieve and used effective questioning to challenge and extend the children's thinking. In these lessons the teachers shared the planned learning intentions appropriately with the children and revisited them effectively throughout the lesson to sustain focus on the desired outcomes. In the less effective practice, there was over-direction by the teacher, the pace of the lessons was too slow and the narrow range of routine learning activities resulted in insufficient learning taking place.

3.3 ASSESSMENT

The teachers mark the children's written work regularly.

In the year prior to the inspection, the staff development included a focus on marking for improvement, particularly in relation to writing. In a few of the classes the agreed strategies have been implemented very effectively with teachers providing very well-focused advice for the children on how they can improve the quality of their work. This good practice needs to be shared and implemented more consistently throughout the school.

In the early FS, observations and base-line assessments are used to identify the children's stages of development and to inform subsequent planning. The observation procedures need to be developed further to ensure that they are implemented consistently across the key stage in order to meet the needs of all of the children and to track their individual progress.

The school carries out a range of standardised testing to assess the children's levels of achievement in English and mathematics. The senior management team (SMT) analyses and uses the outcomes from these tests to track individual children's progress, to identify children who could achieve higher standards and those who are experiencing difficulty with aspects of their learning. The SMT has, appropriately, identified the need to develop the use of the outcomes further in order to identify more specific areas for whole school development.

The parents are kept well informed of their children's progress both formally and informally. There is a planned progress meeting for each child in the first term and an annual written report at the end of the school year. The school has, appropriately, identified the need to develop further the programme for parents to enable them to support their children's learning, through, for example, the use of parent workshops.

3.4 SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

The quality of the provision for special educational needs is satisfactory.

The school places a high priority on meeting the needs of those children with special educational needs. The children are identified at an early stage and additional support is provided either in class or through withdrawal sessions for both literacy and numeracy. The support through withdrawal sessions is provided sensitively and aimed at developing the children's competence and their self esteem. The support is having a beneficial impact on the children's learning; this is evidenced through the removal of children from the special needs register once targeted improvements have been made. A reading partnership programme has been instigated to provide a boost for those children experiencing reading difficulties. This programme is provided by the learning support staff; it is well-organised and the school records indicate that it is helping to raise the reading attainment of the children. In developing the special needs provision further and to realise greater benefit from it for the children, the school needs to widen the approaches used beyond a focus on phonics and to tailor the provision more closely to the children's diagnosed needs.

4. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The overall quality of leadership and management is good.

4.1 LEADERSHIP

The Principal has been in post for 18 months. In that time, he has got to know the children, their families and the needs of the community very well and is committed to providing the highest quality provision for them. He is pro-active in identifying the development needs of the school and provides good leadership and direction for the staff and governors. He has, appropriately, identified the need to review the management structure within the school to ensure the more equitable distribution of responsibilities, to promote the teachers' professional development and to meet more effectively the school's curricular needs.

The Vice-principal supports the Principal very effectively. With the Principal, she provides good leadership for the development and improvement of key areas of the curriculum.

4.2 PLANNING FOR IMPROVEMENT

Reflection and self-evaluation are becoming well-integrated in the day-to-day organisation and strategic planning for the school's development. The Principal has carried out a number of purposeful audits with the staff, parents and the children and has used the outcomes effectively to plan for improvement, particularly in relation to communication with the parents and to involving them further in the life and work of the school.

There is an interim School Development Plan (SDP) in place which outlines broadly the areas for development over a three year period. It will be important for the Principal, staff and governors to review the current SDP in light of the inspection findings in order to identify more specifically the developments which will bring about continued improvement in teaching and learning and in the standards achieved by the children.

4.3 ACCOMMODATION

The facilities, accommodation and external environment of the school are of a very high standard. With the steady increase in enrolment in recent years, it has been necessary for one of the classes to be taught within a shared resource area. Whilst the staff are making the best possible use of the space available, the resource area was not designed as a class base and does not provide a suitable environment for teaching and learning.

The standards of caretaking and cleaning are excellent.

4.4 RESOURCES, FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE

The governors take a keen interest in all aspects of the school's provision. They support effectively the Principal and the staff in the implementation of the SDP and make a very positive contribution to the life and work of the school.

5. CONCLUSION

5.1 The strengths of the school include:

- the excellent working relationships at all levels, the exemplary behaviour of the children and their enthusiasm for learning;
- the very good quality of the arrangements for pastoral care;
- the dedicated, hard-working staff team and the good or better quality of teaching observed in the majority of the lessons;
- the good standards achieved by the children in literacy and numeracy; and
- the good leadership provided by the Principal and Vice-principal.

5.2 The areas for improvement include the need to:

- review and refine the current planning in order to ensure a more consistent and coherent approach to teaching and learning throughout the school; and
- have consistently high quality teaching in all the classes to ensure a more progressive development of the children's learning through the seven years.

5.3 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 learning and teaching which need to be addressed if the needs of all the children 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 over a 12-24 month period.

ACCOMMODATION

- The shared resource area which is being used as a permanent class base within the school is not a suitable environment for learning and teaching.

© CROWN COPYRIGHT 2011

This report may be reproduced in whole or in part, except for commercial purposes or in connection with a prospectus or advertisement, provided that the source and date thereof are stated.

Copies of this report are available on the ETI website: www.etini.gov.uk

