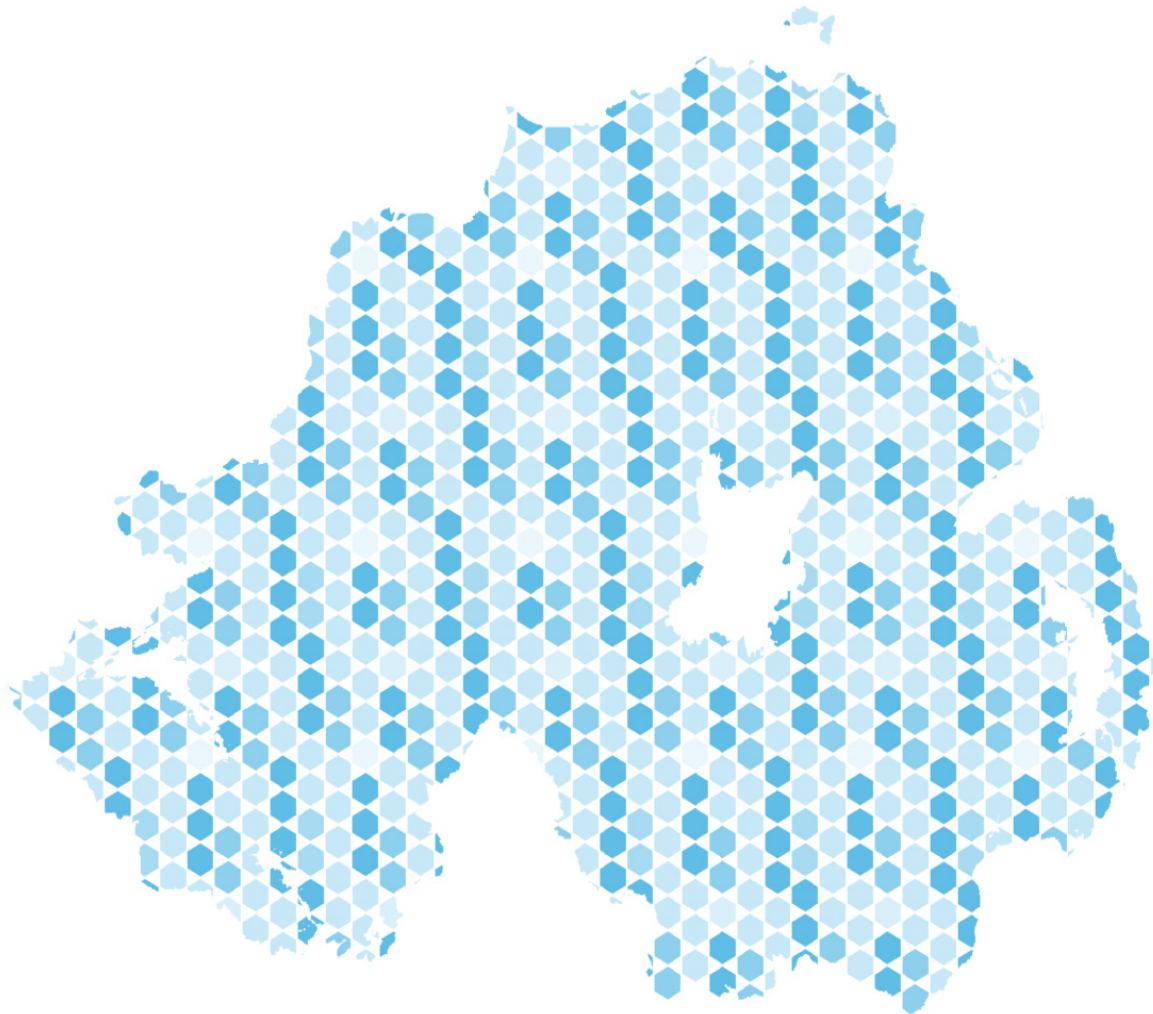


PRIMARY INSPECTION



Education and Training
Inspectorate

St Joseph's Primary School,
Killough

Report of an Inspection
in January 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

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 SCHOOL CONTEXT

St Joseph's Primary School is situated on the main road in the village of Killough, County Down. The vast majority of the children come from the village and the remainder are from a wider catchment area. The enrolment has declined over the past five years and the current figure is 78 children, including two children who are educated off site. At the time of the inspection 36% of the children were entitled to free school meals and 40% of the children were identified as requiring help with aspects of their learning.

The school has experienced a number of staffing changes over the past three years. The Principal has been in post for 24 years and the overall staffing quota stands at five.

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, the teaching and support staff to complete confidential questionnaires prior to the inspection. In addition, meetings were held with representatives from the Board of Governors (governors), and a representative group of children from year 6.

Thirty-seven questionnaires were issued to the parents; 14 (38%) were returned to Inspection Services Branch of which five contained additional written comments. Most of the responses indicated a high level of satisfaction with the provision in the school. In particular, the parents appreciated the caring, helpful Principal and staff; the warm, child-centred ethos in which the children's confidence and self-esteem are nurtured; and the support for children who have additional learning needs.

Two teachers and no support staff completed the online questionnaire; no written comments were made. The responses were highly positive and supportive of the work of the school.

The governors expressed their commitment to the work of the school. They appreciated the school's role in the community, the commitment of the staff to the children and reported that they are kept well informed by the Principal.

In discussions held with the year 6 children they spoke positively about their experience and talked enthusiastically about all aspects of school life; in particular they valued the opportunities available for extra-curricular activities. They indicated that they feel happy and safe in school and know to whom they should turn if they have a concern.

An analysis of the questionnaires and the written comments made by the parents and the staff was shared with the Principal and the governors.

1.4 PASTORAL CARE

The quality of the arrangements for pastoral care in the school is very good. There is a happy atmosphere and very good relationships between the staff and the children. The friendly and courteous children respond well to the staff's high expectations; their behaviour is exemplary. The school regularly rewards the children for good effort and conduct; this promotes the children's self-esteem, self-confidence and positive behaviour. Through the School Council, the children can make a valuable contribution to the life and work of the school; their views and opinions are valued. The children have the opportunity to participate in a wide range of extra-curricular sporting activities. In addition, their learning and social development are enhanced through visits to places of educational interest and visitors to the school.

1.5 CHILD PROTECTION

The school has satisfactory arrangements in place for safeguarding children. These arrangements broadly reflect the guidance issued by the Department of Education. However, the inspection has identified the following areas for development: the school needs to ensure that all information relating to pastoral care and child protection is up to date; and the information relating to child protection needs to be displayed prominently and clearly in key locations around the school.

1.6 HEALTHY EATING AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

The school gives good attention to the development and implementation of physical activity programmes, through for example, weekly PE sessions for all year groups, swimming lessons for years 5, 6 and 7, and the 'Heart Start' and 'Grass Roots' programmes. The school has recently implemented additional health and well-being practices to complement the existing physical activity programmes and to encourage a healthier lifestyle among the children.

1.7 LINKS WITH THE PARENTS AND THE WIDER COMMUNITY

The school has been proactive in fostering good links with the local community and schools.

The parents are encouraged to become involved in the life of the school; they regularly attend the school assembly and events such as the annual Open Day. They are kept well informed through the monthly newsletter. The Parent-Teacher Association organises the annual sports day and is active in raising funds to support the purchase of additional resources for the school; this has recently included two interactive whiteboards.

In the light of recent curricular developments, the school needs to put more emphasis on enabling the parents to enhance their children's learning through providing curricular meetings on, for example, paired reading, phonics or paired maths.

2. ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS

2.1 LEARNING

Most of the children settle quickly to their work; they demonstrate good levels of interest and engagement and are keen to talk about what they are learning.

In the foundation stage (FS), the children learn through a combination of play-based and formal learning activities. Almost all of the children display a positive attitude to their learning, listen attentively and are actively involved in the lessons. It will be important for the school to review aspects of the programme for play-based learning, in particular the monitoring and evaluation of the provision, in order to ensure that the planned activities adequately support the children in their learning.

While most of the children in key stage (KS) 1 are motivated and display a good attitude to their learning, a minority were not engaging with aspects of the work as it was not pitched at an appropriate level for them. The teachers need to ensure that the activities are well matched to the differing needs of all of the learners. Almost all of the children in KS2 were highly motivated, remained focused and on task for the duration of the lessons observed.

An analysis of the KS2 assessment data over the past four years shows that the school's performance in English and mathematics has fluctuated*. The levels attained in English have been above both the Northern Ireland (NI) average and the average for similar schools in three of the last four years. In two of the last four years the levels attained in mathematics have been above both averages; in the other two years the attainment has been significantly below both the NI average and the average for schools in the same free school meals category.

2.2 ENGLISH AND LITERACY

The quality of provision for English and literacy is good.

The whole-school planning for literacy provides a broad framework for progression in talking and listening, reading and writing. The literacy co-ordinator has identified important areas for development which are integral to the school's development plan, such as the establishment of a phonics programme. This work is at an early stage of development.

The standards the children achieve in talking and listening are good. Effective questioning in all of the classes enables the children to make extended contributions to whole-class discussion and to develop their thinking skills. Most of the children engage enthusiastically in talking and listening activities; when they work in pairs and in groups, they interact very well with one another, listen to one another's views and respond appropriately.

Across the year groups the children benefit from a well-structured reading programme and enjoy an appropriate range of reading experiences, including shared, guided and independent reading. In the FS good use is made of the 'Big Book' in shared reading activities. The children listen attentively and join in at appropriate times. In all the classrooms there are well-stocked libraries which are used effectively to support topic work and in the daily timetabled individual reading sessions. Annual book fairs and visits to the local library also stimulate the enjoyment of reading. Most of the children from the end of KS1 and KS2 who were observed reading displayed confidence when they encountered unfamiliar words and spoke enthusiastically about their favourite authors and books. However, a minority of the children need additional support in developing their literal and inferential comprehension skills.

* The key stage outcomes should be interpreted with caution for small primary schools as a large percentage change from year to year can often be attributed to a very small number of children.

The standard of the children's written work is good. Their achievements in writing are celebrated in attractive, stimulating displays of their work in the classrooms and corridors. The examples of extended writing in the children's workbooks are of a good quality, but the majority of their literacy work comprises short responses which limit their opportunities to develop as writers. In order to raise the standards of writing further, the teachers need to ensure that the children are given a wider range of opportunities to develop their independent writing across the curriculum.

The children in KS2 use ICT for the purposes of research, to enhance the presentation of their writing and facilitate the drafting and editing process, notably in the work they are undertaking for ICT accreditation.

2.3 MATHEMATICS AND NUMERACY

The overall quality of provision in mathematics is satisfactory.

The numeracy co-ordinator has reviewed the policy and provision for mathematics, but, at the time of the inspection no current action plan was available and numeracy was not prioritised within the school development plan. She has made satisfactory progress in addressing this priority for the school.

Throughout the school the teachers make good use of a variety of resources to support the children in their learning and provide opportunities in which the children are able to apply their mathematical learning in everyday contexts and in other areas of the curriculum. The school needs to review the use of work sheets in the planned activities and consider more opportunities for investigative and practical work to consolidate learning in mathematics.

The teachers use effective questioning techniques and provide valuable opportunities for discussion to help focus the children and develop further their understanding of key concepts in mathematics and numeracy. In the best practice effective links were made with prior learning and the learning intentions were shared with the children and revisited during the lesson. The school is well-equipped with interactive whiteboards and these are used well to engage the children and to stimulate their thinking.

During the inspection, the children in the FS used mathematical language well and demonstrated a sound understanding of mathematical concepts such as number, sorting and shape. In KS1 practical work was used well to help the children understand the value of money and in KS2 the children displayed a secure understanding of position, movement and direction in their work with angles and special lines.

Across the key stages the children's flexibility with number operations and mental calculations is variable; this aspect of the provision requires further development in order to ensure appropriate pace and challenge for all the children.

Good use is made of ICT across the school to support the children's learning in mathematics.

3. THE QUALITY OF THE PROVISION FOR LEARNING

3.1 PLANNING

The quality of the planning across the school is satisfactory. While the planning guides the daily teaching and learning, the teachers need to take greater cognisance of the children's current level of attainment so that the work is more closely matched to their needs and abilities. It will be important that the co-ordinators monitor and evaluate the planning regularly in order to ensure differentiation, consistency and progression across the school.

3.2 TEACHING

During the inspection, the quality of the teaching observed ranged from satisfactory to outstanding. Most of the teaching was good or better, with one quarter of the lessons observed being very good or outstanding. In the best practice there was a clear focus on learning throughout the lesson; the pace and level of challenge were appropriate; the teachers built on previous lessons and used skilful questioning to stimulate the children's thinking. In these lessons the teachers also used praise and encouragement to promote positive behaviour and to raise the children's confidence and self-esteem.

In the less effective practice, the lessons displayed a lack of appropriate differentiation and challenge and there were limited opportunities for the children to engage in collaborative learning.

3.3 ASSESSMENT

The teachers mark the children's written work regularly. In the best practice, they use the planned learning intentions as the basis for their marking and advise the children, orally or in writing, on how to improve the quality of their work. While there is evidence of good marking for improvement strategies in a minority of the teachers' assessments, this good practice needs to be disseminated within the school.

The school carries out a range of standardised testing to identify individual children's potential for learning and to confirm their levels of attainment in English and mathematics. The senior management team have, appropriately, identified the need to develop further the analysis of the information gained and to use it more strategically to identify priorities for whole-school development, to address the issue of underachievement and to raise the overall standards in literacy and numeracy.

The parents are kept well informed of their children's progress through an annual interview, informal meetings and an annual written report.

3.4 SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

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

The Principal has been acting special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO) since September and has provided additional support in withdrawal sessions for individuals and small groups. While the school provides support for those children who require additional help in their reading, it will be important to make similar provision for those children who have additional needs in numeracy. It will also be important to ensure that the children benefiting from this provision are appropriately assessed so that their progress can be measured.

The acting SENCO, in consultation with the class teachers and the parents, draws up individual education plans (IEPs) which are reviewed regularly. In a minority of IEPs all of the areas for concern are not addressed; the SENCO and the class teachers will need to review the children's targets more rigorously to ensure that all the children's identified needs are being met.

4. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

4.1 LEADERSHIP

The overall quality of leadership and management is satisfactory.

The Principal has been in post for 24 years and has developed a pastoral approach to his work in school. He is committed to the life of the school, its role within the community and to the well-being of the children.

The Principal, in conjunction with the senior management team, needs to review the roles and responsibilities of the co-ordinators in order to help them plan, monitor and evaluate the quality of learning and teaching more effectively and to develop further the use of data to inform planning, to set targets for individuals and to track individual, class and whole school progress.

4.2 PLANNING FOR IMPROVEMENT

The school's self-evaluation and development planning processes are satisfactory.

The school development plan (SDP) outlines a number of appropriate priorities for development and meets the requirements of the School Development Plans Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2005. However, it needs to have a stronger focus on the three main priorities for school improvement and include a more detailed evaluation of the effectiveness of previous plans and priorities. The SDP is supported by a range of action plans. In the best practice, the action plans have challenging targets and clearly-defined success criteria; for example, the effective plan to promote and sustain good behaviour. The Principal and co-ordinators now need to review the development planning process to ensure that the quality of action planning within the school is consistently good.

4.3 ACCOMMODATION

The school building is approximately 40 years old. In the last academic year a major refurbishment programme was carried out to improve its appearance and comfort. The school has plans to develop the outdoor environment further in order to extend the children's learning experiences. The standards of caretaking and cleaning are very good.

4.4 RESOURCES, FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE

The school is adequately resourced to support learning and teaching and has good resources for ICT, notably interactive whiteboards in every room.

The governors take a keen interest in developments within the school. They are fully aware of the school's financial position.

4.5 STAFF DEVELOPMENT

The policy for staff development is appropriate and the teachers, as well as other school staff, have benefited from opportunities for further professional development.

A number of appropriate staff development priorities have been identified in the SDP. It will be important for these priorities to be reviewed in light of the inspection findings in order to ensure that the staff develop and implement agreed teaching strategies more consistently throughout the school.

5. CONCLUSION

5.1 The strengths of the school include:

- the very good quality of the pastoral care and the children's positive attitude to learning;
- the quality of the teaching, most of which was good or better;
- the good quality of the provision in literacy and the good standards achieved by most of the children in this area of the curriculum;
- the support shown by the parents and governors for the life and work of the school and the strong links with the local community; and
- the commitment of the principal and the staff to improving the provision for the children.

5.2 The areas for improvement include the need to:

- audit and evaluate the quality of provision across all aspects of the mathematics programme in order to guide the teachers in their work and ensure more consistency, continuity and progression in learning;
- review aspects of the SEN provision and set in place more effective strategies and targets to meet the differing needs of all of the children and to monitor their progress; and
- develop further the School Development Plan and associated processes in line with The Education (School Development Plans) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2005 in order to assist the management of the school and the staff to focus clearly on key strategies and targets, and to help them to plan, monitor and evaluate improvement more effectively.

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 standards, learning and teaching and leadership and management 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.

5.4 It will be important that the employing authority, 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.

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