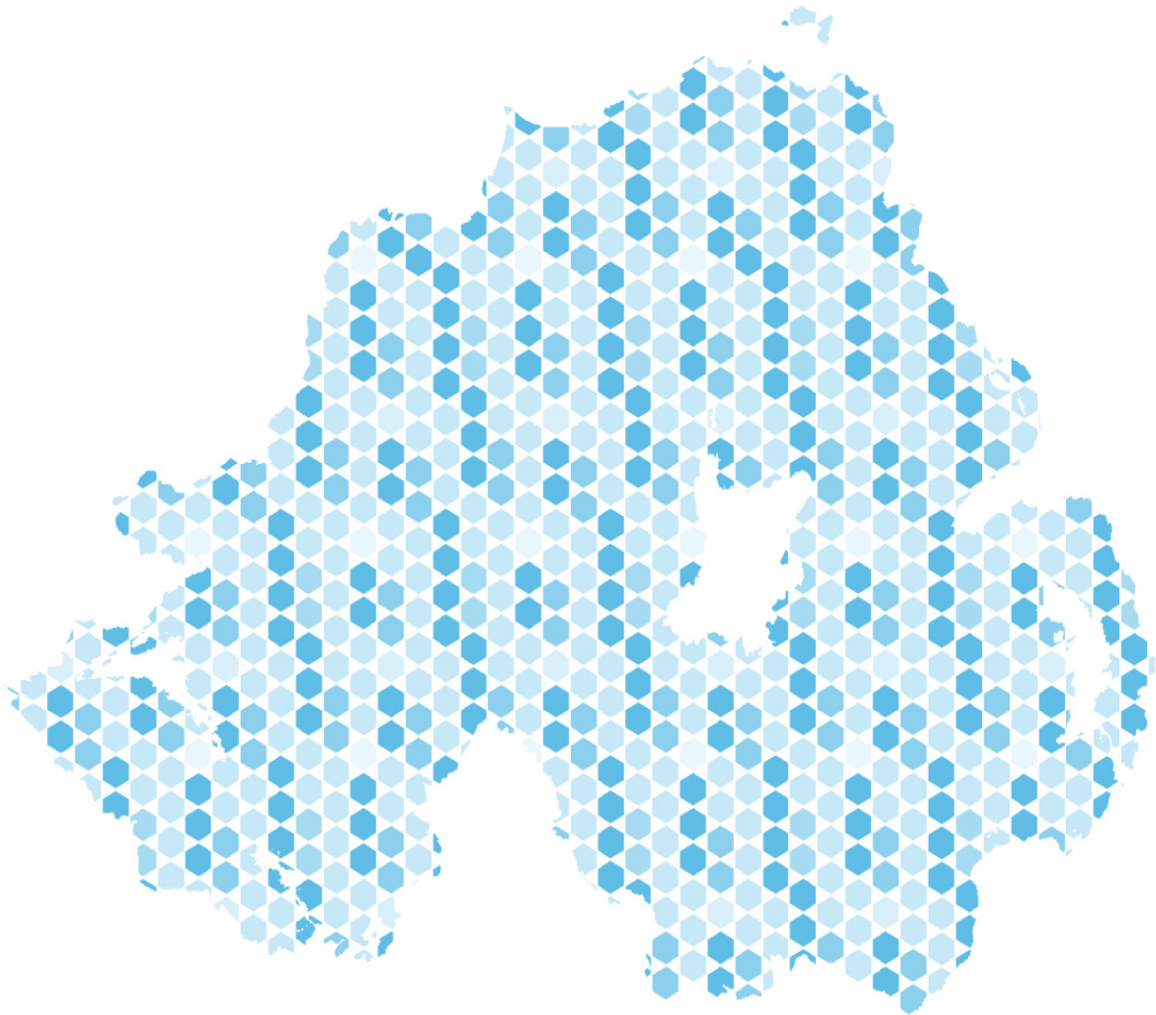


PRIMARY INSPECTION



Education and Training
Inspectorate

St Macartan's Primary School,
Loughinisland

Report of an Inspection
in June 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 Macartan's Primary School is situated on Loughinisland Road in the village of Loughinisland, four miles from Downpatrick, County Down. The enrolment has remained steady over the past four years and currently stands at 178. Most of the children come from the surrounding rural area. At the time of the inspection eight percent of the children were entitled to free school meals and 30% 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, the teachers and the support staff to complete a confidential questionnaire prior to the inspection, as well as meetings with representatives from the Board of Governors (governors) and groups of children from years 6 and 7.

Of the 130 questionnaires issued to parents, 73 (56%) were returned to Inspection Services Branch, including 42 which contained additional written comments. Almost all 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 atmosphere; the very good working relationships at all levels; and the practical application of the school's motto, "Praise the young and they shall succeed". In addition, they expressed strong appreciation of the dedicated and approachable Principal, the caring teachers and non-teaching staff, and the school's place at the heart of the local community. The very small number of concerns raised has been discussed with the governors and the Principal.

Ten of the teachers and eleven support staff completed the questionnaire. They all indicated that they are happy in their work, appreciate the team ethos in the school and are highly supportive of the Principal.

The governors commended the teaching and support staff for their dedication and are committed to supporting them in their ongoing curriculum and professional development. They paid particular tribute to the Principal for her leadership and vision for the school's development, her care for the whole-school community and her fostering of extensive links with other schools and a wide range of external agencies.

The children in year 6 and year 7 spoke highly of the support and care provided by all of the staff, the wide range of extra-curricular activities provided for them and the very friendly atmosphere in the school. In discussions, they reported that they feel very safe and are aware of what to do if they have any worries or concerns about their safety or well-being.

1.4 PASTORAL CARE

The quality of the arrangements for pastoral care in the school is very good.

The school has a warm, welcoming atmosphere in which every child is valued highly; all of the staff in the school put into practice the school's motto, "Praise the young and they shall succeed". Among the strengths are the excellent working relationships at all levels characterised by mutual respect; the inclusive ethos and effective integration of new children in the school community; the positive reward systems which place a high value on the children's academic and personal achievements; and the processes for consultation with all stakeholders, in which the children's views are sought and valued.

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 (DE).

1.6 HEALTHY EATING and PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

The school gives very good attention to promoting healthy eating and physical activity. This is encouraged through, for example, the healthy break rewards initiatives and the children's opportunities to grow their own salad vegetables and strawberries. Across the school the children have regular opportunities for energetic outdoor play and sports, which encourage them to adopt healthy lifestyles. The school has recently gained the silver Health Promoting Schools Award. The school has appropriately extended the opportunities for girls to benefit from coaching in a range of sports.

1.7 LINKS WITH PARENTS AND THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

The school is deeply rooted in its community and involved in the daily life of the village through sporting, musical, drama and social activities. The school's facilities have been made available to a range of local organisations and members of the community are regularly invited to speak to the children about their work. The school has also sustained strong links with other local schools, notably through the joint planning of an annual residential trip.

They have developed very good links with the parents; a parents' support group organises events such as a joint school/parish fun day and, throughout the year, actively raises money to fund improvements in the school's facilities and resources. A key characteristic of the school's provision is the importance which is placed on assisting parents to support their children's learning; for example, the school sends home the six-weekly topic planners for every class and the parents are invited to curricular meetings after which their evaluations enable the school, at future meetings, to provide the parents with the support they have identified as being most helpful.

2. ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS

2.1 LEARNING

The children are enthusiastic and highly motivated to learn; they engage fully in their activities and experiences in class. They settle quickly to work and display very good levels of independence. A particular strength is the children's readiness to work collaboratively in pairs and small groups; they express their own ideas clearly, listen attentively and respond sensitively to the views of others. They enjoy the realistically challenging work provided across the curriculum; they make mature assessments of their own work. Their behaviour is exemplary.

Appropriate targets are outlined in the individual education plans (IEPs) provided for the children who require additional support in their learning. The IEPs are of a good quality and outline appropriate strategies for the teachers and parents to support the children's progress. The school's internal performance data shows that most of these children achieve standards commensurate with their ability.

An analysis of the internal performance data for the whole school shows that the achievements of most of the children are in line with their ability. Scrutiny of the children's books and observations of their work in class provide further evidence that most of the children are achieving very good standards in their learning.

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 average. When compared with schools in the same free school meals category, the level of attainment in English and mathematics is also below the average.

2.2 ENGLISH AND LITERACY

The quality of provision for English and literacy is very good.

Most of the children have very good oral communication skills. In the foundation stage (FS) and KS1, play-based learning activities are used regularly to encourage the children to extend their vocabulary and communicate confidently. In the best practice, in most of the classes, the teachers extend the children's ability to formulate and express their ideas through effective questioning, engaging group tasks and well-focused plenary sessions. By the end of year 7, most of the children are able to present their views confidently and articulately in class discussions and debates.

The children learn to read well using a varied range of appropriate texts. The children apply sound phonological and context strategies, which they develop systematically through a structured phonics and reading programme, to decode and make meaning of unfamiliar text. Within the FS and KS1, the children complete a broad range of well-connected literacy activities which consolidates their early skills. In all classes, good use is made of topics which develop reading in relevant and recognisable contexts. By the end of KS2, most of the children make good or very good progress in reading and attain in line with their ability. The most able children read with very good levels of fluency and expression, which convey clearly their levels of understanding and enjoyment.

In all key stages the children are able to write well in a range of meaningful contexts across the curriculum; their achievements are celebrated in attractive class writing collections and displays. The good quality and progression within their written work is also evident in their books and the year-on-year writing records which are compiled for every child. In the FS, the children develop as independent writers from early independent sentence building

activities, role-play writing and shared writing sessions. The adults value and encourage the children's efforts and, as a consequence, the children become confident writers from an early stage. As they progress through KS1 and KS2, the children write increasingly competently in different forms for various purposes and audiences. The teachers respond very well to the children's writing; they praise their attempts and give them clear guidance about how to improve it further. By the end of year 7, most children have developed an attractive linked handwriting style and take pride in the presentation of their work. Information and communication technology is integrated well to support all aspects of literacy learning and teaching; in particular, ICT is used effectively for research, drafting and editing in a range of tasks.

The school's literacy co-ordinator leads and manages the development of literacy well across the curriculum and has included appropriate improvement priorities in the current school development plan. She is currently guiding the teachers in reviewing and improving their range of approaches to support the children's developing comprehension skills. The inspection findings endorse this current improvement focus. It will be important for the school to monitor closely and evaluate the impact of this action on the quality and extent of the children's learning and the standards they attain.

2.3 MATHEMATICS AND NUMERACY

The overall quality of provision in mathematics is very good.

The programme for mathematics provides the children with a wide range of experiences in number, shape and space, measures and data-handling. Throughout the school, the teachers make very effective use of a range of practical equipment to develop the children's understanding of important concepts such as place value and three-dimensional shape. In most classes the teachers have realistically high expectations for the children and the teaching consistently develops progression in their understanding of mathematical ideas and concepts. In these classes the children have very good opportunities to engage in a variety of problem-solving and investigative mathematics. Mental mathematics was observed in all classes. In all of the lessons observed, the pace was good and the activities engaged, challenged and motivated the children. In most classes the teachers provide very good opportunities for the children to develop mathematical language and to articulate, clarify and extend their mathematical thinking.

The teachers make very good use of interactive whiteboards, websites, programmable devices, and computer programmes to motivate the children and support learning and teaching in mathematics. The children are able to apply their mathematics in a range of contexts across the curriculum and in everyday life. In year 4, for example, the children used tally charts to investigate the range of mini-beasts living in the school grounds; they then drew graphs to communicate their findings. Visitors from the local and wider community, for example farmers, retail managers and sports development officers, are invited to talk to the children about how mathematics is used in their jobs.

The co-ordinator is a role-model for good practice and supports well her colleagues in implementing the agreed strategies. She monitors regularly the quality of the mathematics provision through classroom observations, the sampling of the children's work, the review of teaching plans and the analysis of performance data. She now needs to use the outcomes of these evaluations to plan more systematically for whole-school development. Attractive displays and whole school events, such as mathematics weeks, capture the children's interest and enhance their enjoyment and understanding of numeracy. The co-ordinator organises regular workshops for the parents which encourage them to become more productively involved in their children's learning.

The standards achieved by the children in mathematics are very good. During the inspection the highest attaining children demonstrated their ability to think mathematically across all areas of the numeracy programme and to talk with confidence about their experiences.

3. THE QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING

3.1 PLANNING

The long-term planning across the year groups provides a broad framework for progression in the children's learning and ensures coherence by making strong connections between all areas of the curriculum. The school needs to develop further the medium-term planning in order to match the learning more clearly to the needs of all of the children and to ensure that it is sufficiently detailed to guide learning and teaching. The teachers evaluate their planning regularly. In the best practice, the majority of teachers make evaluations which are focused on the progress made by the whole class, by groups and by individual children.

The planning for special educational needs (SEN) is well integrated across the year groups and the teachers make good use of the information provided by the special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO) to inform their teaching.

The school needs to review the planning for play-based learning in the FS in order to ensure that all of the interactions between the children and adults are sharply focused on the development of the children's language and mathematical understanding.

3.2 TEACHING

The quality of the teaching observed ranged from satisfactory to outstanding. Almost all of the lessons were good or better, with two thirds being very good or outstanding.

The teachers are very well prepared for lessons and make the intended learning clear for all of the children. In the most effective practice, the teachers have high expectations of the children and of themselves; they engage the children's interests, value highly their contributions and celebrate their achievements. Effective questioning promotes the children's thinking skills and enables them to make extended oral responses. The teachers encourage the children to behave well through a range of positive behaviour strategies.

The children who require additional support with their learning are identified appropriately at an early stage through the teachers' observations, diagnostic tests and the analysis of standardised assessment data. In-class and withdrawal support is provided, in both literacy and numeracy. The teachers display a strong commitment to including every child in the lessons at a level appropriate to their need. The classroom assistants work effectively with individuals and groups, providing appropriate support for those children who have additional needs. The quality of the learning and teaching observed in the withdrawal sessions ranged from satisfactory to very good. The sessions are well paced and are conducted in a supportive environment which helps develop their confidence; there are very positive working relationships and the children are consistently encouraged to have a go and to explain their answers.

3.3 ASSESSMENT

The school has designed and implements effective processes for the continual assessment of all of the children. Through a detailed and comprehensive analysis of standardised tests and DE benchmarking information, the teachers identify a minority of the children who are either under-achieving or are having difficulty with aspects of their learning. In developing further this work, the teachers need to design more specific learning programmes for all of these children in order to raise further the standards they attain.

The teachers mark the children's work diligently and supportively, and provide the children with helpful comments on how their learning can be improved. Children are encouraged, through peer assessment and self-assessment, to reflect upon and improve the quality of their own work and that of others.

The parents are kept well informed of their children's progress through parental interviews and an annual written report. The annual written reports provide the parents with a comprehensive evaluation of their children's progress and attainment and, importantly, indicate what the children need to do to make improvements in their learning. The parents are welcome to discuss any concerns about their children's progress throughout the year.

4. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

4.1 LEADERSHIP

The overall quality of leadership and management is very good.

The Principal provides very effective leadership. She is in her fourth year in the post and has a clear vision for the school. Her approach is reflective and she has established very good processes for self-evaluation across the school, with a strong emphasis on raising further the standards in English and mathematics achieved by the children. She has established excellent working relationships with the parents, the governors and all members of the staff team; she ensures that the staff have appropriate opportunities for professional development.

The Vice-principal supports the Principal very effectively and, particularly in her role as designated teacher for child protection, contributes to setting the appropriate tone for the life and work of the school. The curriculum co-ordinators provide helpful and appropriate guidance for the development of their subject throughout the school. The SENCO has a good strategic overview of the provision and liaises effectively with the class teachers in order to guide the work in SEN. The arrangements for consulting parents in drafting and reviewing the children's IEPs are very good.

4.2 PLANNING FOR IMPROVEMENT

Reflection and self-evaluation to promote improvement are embedded in the school's practice at all levels. A particular strength is that the views of the teachers, children, parents and governors are consistently sought and used to identify appropriate priorities for school improvement. In order to promote improvement most effectively, the associated action plans to support, for example, the development of literacy and the analysis of data in literacy and numeracy, need to be more rigorous; the school needs to define more clearly the targets and success criteria in the action plans so that resources can be focused sharply on the priorities, and progress towards the targets can be measured accurately.

The school development Plan (SDP) meets fully the requirements of the Department of Education School Development Planning Regulations/Schedule 2005/19.

4.3 ACCOMMODATION

The main school building houses the central ICT suite, a well-resourced room for literacy support, a shared play area and the FS and KS1 classes; the adjacent building, opened in 2005, houses the KS2 classes. In the extensive grounds, there is also a numeracy support room, a games court and a 3G pitch used regularly by the children and by community groups. The standards of caretaking and cleaning are excellent.

4.4 RESOURCES, FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE

The school is very well resourced to support learning and teaching, particularly in ICT. There are interactive whiteboards in every classroom as well as digital cameras and microphones, with two digital video cameras for whole-school use. The resources are well maintained and fit for purpose.

The governors are very well-informed about all aspects of the school's provision; they make very positive contributions to the life and work of the school and support effectively the Principal and the staff in the implementation of the SDP. They ensure that all aspects of the life and work of the school are kept under regular review.

5. CONCLUSION

5.1 The strengths of the school include:

- the very good provision for pastoral care, characterised by mutual respect and positive working relationships at all levels;
- the excellent, extensive links and partnerships established with other schools, agencies and community groups;
- the courteous children who are highly motivated and display enjoyment in their learning;
- the quality of the teaching observed, two-thirds of which was very good or outstanding;
- the good standards attained by the children in literacy and numeracy; and
- the very effective leadership of the Principal, strongly supported by the Vice-principal and by the hard-working teaching and non-teaching staff team.

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

HEALTH AND SAFETY

- The gateway to the adjacent car park is too narrow and would present a health and safety hazard in the event of an emergency evacuation.

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