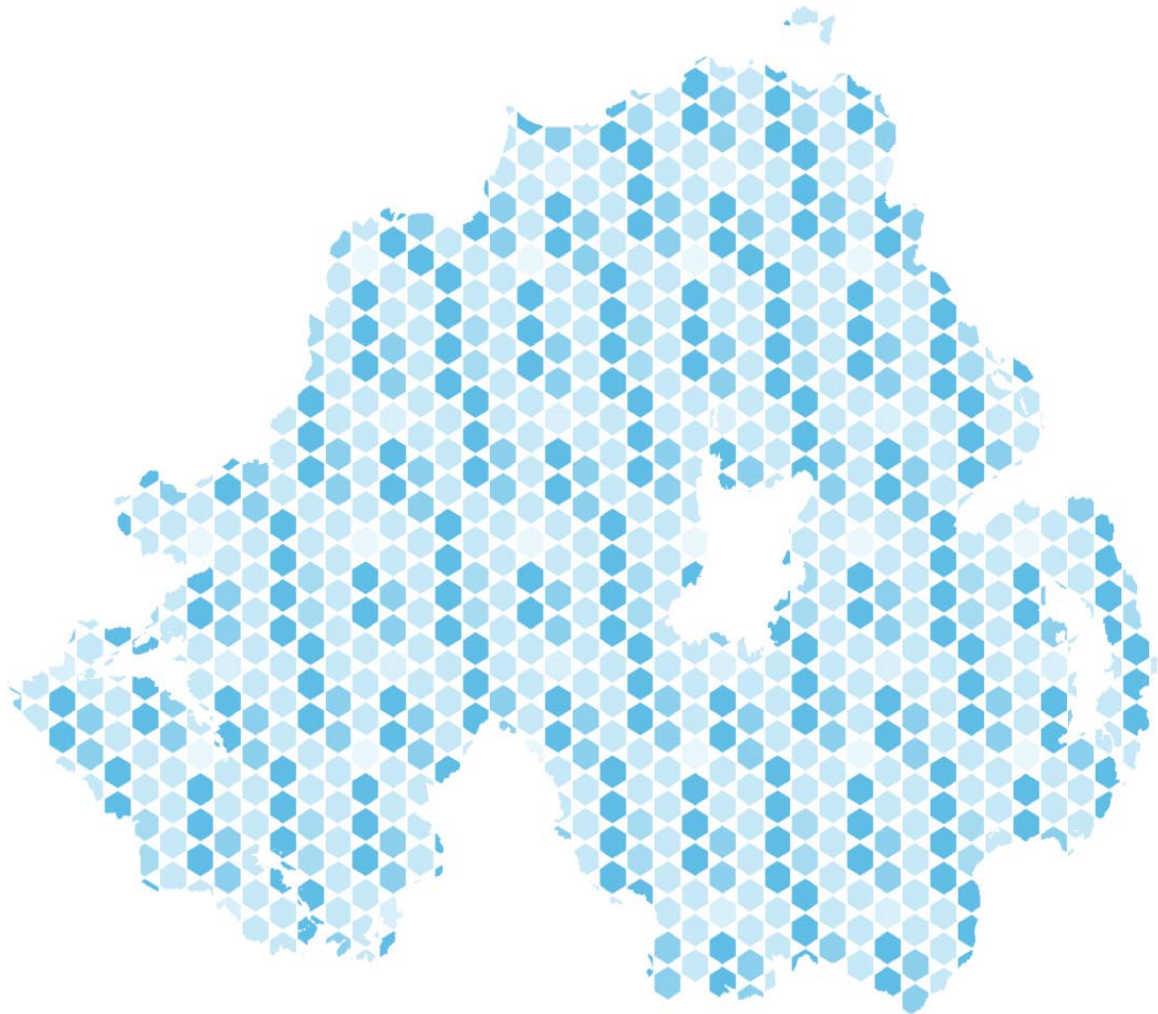


# PRIMARY INSPECTION



Education and Training  
Inspectorate

St Mark's Primary School and  
Nursery Unit, Twinbrook

Report of an Inspection  
in April 2010

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In this report, proportions may be described as percentages, common fractions and in more general quantitative terms. Where more general terms are used, they should be interpreted as follows:

Almost/nearly all	-	more than 90%
Most	-	75%-90%
A majority	-	50%-74%
A significant minority	-	30%-49%
A minority	-	10%-29%
Very few/a small number	-	less than 10%

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

DESCRIPTOR
Outstanding
Very Good
Good
Satisfactory
Inadequate
Unsatisfactory



## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 SCHOOL CONTEXT

St Mark's Primary School is located between West Belfast and Lisburn in the Twinbrook area. The enrolment in the primary school has decreased gradually over the past four years and stands currently at 420 children, including 22 children in the reception class and 52 children in the nursery unit. At the time of the inspection, approximately 45% of the children were entitled to receive free school meals and approximately 21% of the children were identified by the school as having special educational needs.

### 1.2 FOCUS

The inspection focused on:

- the quality of the children's achievements and standards in literacy and numeracy;
- the quality of provision for learning; 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 confidential questionnaires prior to the inspection, as well as meetings with representatives from the Board of Governors (governors), a group of children from year 6 and representatives from the school council. One hundred and twenty-six questionnaires were issued to the parents of the primary school; approximately 25% were returned to the Inspection Services Branch and 15 contained additional written comments. The responses from the parental questionnaires support strongly the work of the school, in particular the dedicated and caring staff, the wide range of extra-curricular activities available for the children and the high regard in which the school is held by the local community. Fifty-two questionnaires were issued to the parents of the nursery unit. Approximately 23% of the parents responded to the nursery unit questionnaire and seven made additional written comments. The responses from the parental questionnaire were all positive and indicated that the parents have a high regard for the nursery unit.

Eleven of the teaching staff and five members of the support staff responded to the online questionnaires. Almost all of the responses commented positively on the very good working relationships across the school and the dedicated team work to develop the school in the best interests of the children.

The governors expressed their confidence in the leadership of the acting Principal and the staff's commitment to school improvement.

The year 6 children spoke confidently about their experiences in school and their participation in a wide range of extra-curricular activities. In particular, they valued the caring and approachable acting Principal, teachers and support staff, and the 'Golden Time' and other rewards for good progress and behaviour. They are fully aware of what to do if they have any concerns about their safety and well-being.

The representatives from the school council talked enthusiastically about working in consultation with their teachers and representatives of the Northern Ireland Council for Children and Young People on a range of issues including, anti-bullying, school rules, playground and sporting activities, school meals and charity collections.

The Education and Training Inspectorate has reported to the acting Principal and representatives of the governors the main messages emerging from the questionnaires and the discussions.

#### 1.4 PASTORAL CARE

The quality of the arrangements for pastoral care in the school and the nursery unit is very good. The children are friendly, courteous, mannerly and welcoming to visitors. Among the strengths are: the shared effort by all staff to ensure that guidance, care and support are in place to help all children achieve their best; the well-embedded assertive behaviour programme across all year groups to assist the children in their learning; the wide-ranging after school provision funded through the Extended Schools' initiative; the valuable contribution of the external counselling service to assist those children who are experiencing personal or emotional difficulties; the effective involvement of the children in the decision-making process through the system of class and school councils; and the strong community ethos within the school. In the nursery unit the children are settled, happy and confident.

#### 1.5 CHILD PROTECTION

The school, including the nursery unit, has very good and 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, including the nursery unit, gives very good attention to promoting healthy eating and physical activity. All the school initiatives combine well to encourage the children to adopt healthy lifestyles.

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

The acting Principal and teachers are committed to developing effective links with parents to ensure they work together for the benefit of the children. Parental views are sought at intervals by questionnaire; the results are used appropriately to inform whole-school planning. The parents are welcomed into the school to discuss their children's progress and to attend curriculum information meetings to enable them to support the children in their learning. Communication with parents is well established and maintained through a series of regular newsletters, homework books and reading records, Open Days, and by attendance at plays and concerts. In addition, there is an active Parent Teacher Association which has made a significant contribution to the life and work of the school.

The children's learning experiences are enhanced through active links with the wider community including, the Colin Neighbourhood Partnership of local primary and post-primary schools, the Sustrans' programme which encourages the children to become safe and competent cyclists, and through the successful Business in the Community initiative with year 6 children.

## **2. ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS**

### **2.1 LEARNING**

The children are motivated and responsive learners; they persevere well with their learning activities. They are confident and willing to offer information, opinions and solutions to challenges in all areas of learning. In the foundation stage (FS), the quality of the play-based learning is good. In the more effective practice throughout the three key stages, the children contribute to the development of topic work and reflect on their learning through purposeful plenary sessions.

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

### **2.2 ENGLISH AND LITERACY**

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

From the FS, the children are introduced to a wide range of language and writing experiences to encourage and support their development in literacy. The teachers use a variety of strategies to develop within the children independence in learning which grows as they progress through the school, and which results in a high level of reading, research and writing skills in a variety of meaningful contexts for many of the children.

The children have a good range of opportunities to talk and to listen to others, which allows them to have different perspectives or to address different audiences. The majority of the teachers use effective questioning to encourage the children to develop their answers and their thinking skills.

The majority of the children achieve good standards in reading. They read fluently and with good understanding and expression, using a range of strategies to comprehend unfamiliar words or text. Throughout the school, the teachers use a variety of appropriate approaches, including shared, guided and independent reading, to develop the children's skills. The children enjoy reading for pleasure and they make effective use of books, as well as information and communication technology, to research topics.

The standard of written work is good across the areas of learning. The teachers have been working successfully on developing good letter formation and written presentation throughout the school. The children take pride in their written work. From the FS, they have the opportunity to write in different styles including lists, poems, letters, reports and on many occasions, creative writing of a high standard. They are encouraged to plan, draft and edit their work to improve their writing.

The teachers make effective use of planned topics to encourage independent writing across the curriculum and to help the children make meaningful links between the areas of learning. They use stimulating materials to provoke discussion and to support the development of the children's ideas. The teachers need to provide more support that is consistent across the school, for the children to develop their independent writing. The encouragement for the children to try the spelling of new words, the recent introduction of learning journals in a few classes and the increasing opportunities for the children to reflect on the teaching and learning at the end of a lesson, provide the opportunity to link these initiatives more closely to setting personal targets.

## 2.3 MATHEMATICS AND NUMERACY

The quality of provision for mathematics and numeracy is good.

The programme for mathematics provides the children with a wide range of experiences in number, shape and space, measures and data handling. In the FS, the children have many good opportunities to develop mathematical language and ideas through play-based learning. In KS1 and 2, the teachers continue to make use of a range of standard and non-standard practical equipment to establish a secure understanding of important concepts such as place value, decimals and fractions. In the effective practice, in a minority of classes, the children's mathematical reasoning develops through the appropriate integration of problem-solving and investigative activities. This form of teaching needs to be applied consistently across all year groups.

A coherent programme for mental mathematics enables the teachers to plan for, and develop, effective progression of the children's mental mathematics strategies. Most of the mental mathematics practices were appropriately challenging and well paced. The children's mathematical learning would benefit from increased opportunities to explain their mathematical thinking.

The use of mathematics across the curriculum is very good throughout the school. The children's mathematical learning is supported by the effective use of a range of ICT, including interactive games, websites and programmable devices. Regular whole-school competitions enhance the children's enjoyment and understanding of mathematics.

The majority of the children achieve good standards in mathematics. During the inspection, the more able children in year 7 demonstrated a very good understanding of mathematical concepts and their ability to work flexibly with numbers.

## 2.4 RECEPTION PROVISION

Twenty-two children, who have not reached the statutory school age, are enrolled in the reception class. The overall quality of the provision in the reception class is good. Almost all of the children participate well in sustained and purposeful play. The children's thinking skills and capacity for creativity develop appropriately through the good opportunities for learning in all areas of the pre-school curriculum. The children make good progress in developing their ability to articulate their understanding, explore and extend their imaginative ideas and express their viewpoints through the play activities. The planning and assessment methods are effective. The teacher uses aptly the information gathered through the observation of the children's play and interaction to plan activities to meet their individual interests and additional learning needs. The teacher in charge of the nursery unit liaises successfully with the reception class teacher to develop the learning and teaching strategies and to promote evaluation of the provision.



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

#### **3.1 PLANNING**

The half-termly planning provides helpful guidance for the work in each class and it focuses appropriately on the intended learning outcomes for each year group. The teachers evaluate the effectiveness of their teaching and, in the best practice, use the information to guide future planning to meet the needs of all the children. The teachers' plans reflect clearly the opportunities for the effective integration and use of ICT to enhance the children's learning. There is effective planning for progression in literacy across the school. The literacy co-ordinator, in conjunction with the teachers, has identified appropriately the priorities for further development, including the compilation of a whole-school scheme of work in literacy. The long-term planning for numeracy provides helpful guidance on progression in the children's mathematical learning.

#### **3.2 TEACHING**

During the inspection, the quality of most of the teaching was good or better, with just over two-fifths of the lessons evaluated as very good and outstanding. In the most effective practice observed, the intended learning was made clear to the children, the activities were matched closely to the range of ability within each class, the lessons had clear focus and purpose, and the work had appropriate pace and challenge. In addition, the teachers used skilful questioning to develop the children's thinking and to consolidate their learning at appropriate intervals throughout the lesson. The teachers make good use of ICT to support the children in their learning in both literacy and numeracy. All classes use regularly the ICT suite and access to it enhances the children's learning experiences. In a minority of lessons, where the teaching was less effective, there was undue emphasis on routine tasks and insufficient challenge for the wide range of abilities in the classes. To enhance the teaching across the school, more attention needs to be given to differentiating further the tasks set to ensure greater challenge for all children.

#### **3.3 ASSESSMENT**

In the primary classes, the children's work is marked regularly and supportively. In the best practice, the teachers mark and annotate the children's work, indicating the standards achieved and how, if necessary, the work could be improved. The Acting-principal is leading the staff in reviewing the use of performance data. The school is making good progress in implementing an appropriate and manageable assessment system to monitor and evaluate the children's progress. The teachers in the nursery unit and the reception class share appropriate information on the children's achievements with the year 1 teachers; most of the children transfer directly from the nursery and reception provision to the primary school. This transition process facilitates effective progression in the children's learning from the pre-school provision to year 1. The parents of children in the primary school receive information on their children's progress through annual written reports and at parent-teacher meetings.

#### **3.4 SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS**

The quality of the provision for special educational needs is good. There is a welcoming and inclusive ethos for children with additional needs in the school and the provision for special educational needs (SEN) is given a high priority.

Currently, the school deploys one full-time teacher to support literacy through withdrawal sessions. These sessions are provided in a supportive atmosphere and are of a high quality. They include effective group work where the approaches and tasks are varied and well matched to the children's learning needs and interests; the children are making good progress.

The teachers' knowledge of the children and a range of standardised tests help to identify early those children requiring additional help with their learning. Appropriate intervention is planned to support the children in literacy. In addition, the FS and KS1 teachers provide a minority of year 7 children with additional learning support in numeracy; the evidence suggests that they are making good progress. Parents are kept well informed at all stages.

The class teachers take responsibility for the in-class implementation of individual education plans (IEPs). Overall, these plans outline appropriate targets and support strategies to promote improvement. In a minority of cases, the targets in the IEPs are not focused enough to ensure progression or to facilitate effective evaluation. The school recognises the need to review the targets in the children's IEPs and to draw up a relevant action plan to guide the further development in SEN provision across the school.

The school receives beneficial multi-disciplinary support for those children requiring specialised help through, for example, the services of the South-Eastern Education and Library Board Curriculum Advisory and Support Service, and other agencies to support learning and teaching.

#### **4. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

##### **4.1 LEADERSHIP**

The Acting-principal has been in post for six months and provides very good leadership; he is building successfully on the developmental work which he was responsible for as Vice-principal. He has a clear strategic vision for the school which he communicates well to the children, staff, parents, governors and the local community. He is fully committed to the life and work of the school and his concern and care for the staff and the children is evident. The acting Vice-principal, as literacy co-ordinator, and the numeracy co-ordinator provide very good leadership and have identified appropriate developmental needs regarding their respective curricular areas. This entails the need for the staff to focus more specifically on monitoring and evaluating the consistency and quality of the learning experiences and the attainments of the children by continuing to develop their understanding of how the use of the available data can inform target-setting for individuals or groups of children. The school is well placed to address the areas for further improvement that are identified in this report.

##### **4.2 PLANNING FOR IMPROVEMENT**

The School Development Plan (SDP) meets the requirements of The Education (School Development Plans) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2005. It sets out clearly the school's priorities and is based on clear evidence about raising attainment for the children.

##### **4.3 RESOURCES, FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE**

The governors are fully involved in the overall strategic planning and policy development for the school. With advice from the acting Principal and the school's management team, the governors have managed effectively the financial needs of the school. The governors give very good support to the acting Principal and the staff in the implementation of the SDP. In

line with DE guidelines, the governors should continue to review the policy of admitting children who are below the statutory school age into the nursery unit and enrolment in the reception class.

## 5. CONCLUSION

5.1 The strengths of the school include:

- the very good quality of the pastoral care provision which fosters successfully the caring and inclusive ethos;
- the positive approach to learning created by the consistent application of the assertive discipline policy within each class;
- the good standards achieved by the children in English and mathematics;
- the quality of the teaching observed, most of which ranged from good to , in a minority of lessons, outstanding;
- the effective use of ICT to enhance and to enrich the children's learning experiences; and
- the very good strategic leadership of the acting Principal in the management of change in the school with the effective support of the acting Vice-principal and co-ordinators.

5.2 The area for improvement is the need to:

- continue to develop the use of the performance data in order to identify more sharply focused targets in whole school and individual planning for further improvement in the children's learning and in the standards they achieve in literacy and numeracy.

5.3 In the areas inspected, the quality of education provided by the school is good. The school has important strengths in most of its educational and pastoral provision. The inspection has identified areas for improvement which the school has demonstrated the capacity to address.

The Education and Training Inspectorate will monitor the school's progress on the areas for improvement.

## 6. THE NURSERY UNIT

6.1 The nursery unit is situated in purpose-built accommodation within the grounds of St Mark's Primary School. The nursery unit offers 52 full-time places; currently, 26 of the children attending the unit are in their penultimate pre-school year. At the time of the inspection, 22 children in their pre-school year were enrolled in a reception class.

6.2 The main strengths within the nursery unit's educational and pastoral provision are as follows:

- the children, including those in their penultimate pre-school year, are happy, well settled and show a good interest in the activities provided. They are confident, familiar with the routines and are becoming increasingly more independent. They are able to play co-operatively for extended periods and most can handle small tools and equipment very efficiently. Their drawings and paintings are beginning to show representational detail. They show a very good interest in books, stories and early mark making;
- the children's language skills are developing well and most children are able to express their thoughts and ideas confidently and fluently. The staff have identified a minority of children who require additional support with the development of their speech, and the children and staff have benefited from regular in-class support from the local SureStart Speech and Language therapist. There is evidence that the children are making good progress;
- the staff have created an attractive learning environment both indoors and in the outdoor play area. Their interactions with the children are supportive and help to develop the children's interest and to extend their play. The daily routines are well managed and provide lengthy periods of uninterrupted play;
- the programme is well planned and there are very good opportunities for learning in all areas of the pre-school curriculum. In particular, the staff are skilful in promoting the children's understanding of early mathematics. The children's responses are recorded regularly and the staff have developed individual profiles which show the children's progress and development;
- the staff have identified a small number of children with special educational needs. They have put appropriate education plans in place, with well-focused targets which are reviewed regularly. The children's progress is shared with the parents; and
- the teacher in charge of the nursery manages the unit very effectively. The staff work very well as a team and have established a strong culture of self-evaluation. The nursery unit has a very comprehensive development plan which identifies appropriate priorities for improvement. The action plans are evaluated regularly and there is evidence of on-going improvement in provision and practice.

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

**STATISTICAL INFORMATION ON ST MARK'S NURSERY UNIT, DUNMURRY, BELFAST  
(403-6134)**

**1. Details of Children**

<b>Number of children:</b>	<b>Class 1</b>	<b>Class 2</b>
Attending full-time	26	26
Attending part-time	0	0
Under 3 years of age*	13	13
With statement of special educational needs ( SEN) **	0	0
At CoP stages 3 or 4***	0	0
At CoP stages 1 or 2***	2	2
With English as an additional language	0	0

\* On 1 July

\*\* Special Educational Needs

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

Percentage qualifying under DE admission criteria 1 or 2.	0%
Average attendance for the previous year.	91.6%

**2. Duration of Sessions**

<b>Full-time</b>	<b>Part-time: am</b>	<b>Part-time: pm</b>
4½ hours	-	-

**3. Details of Staff**

<b>Number of:</b>	<b>Full-Time</b>	<b>Part-Time</b>
Teachers	2	0
Nursery Assistants	0	0
Qualified Nursery Assistants	2	0

<b>Number of: ***</b>	
Students	5
Trainees	1

\*\*\* Total placements since September of current year

**4. Parental Questionnaires**

<b>Number issued</b>	52
Percentage returned	23.07%
Number of written comments	7

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