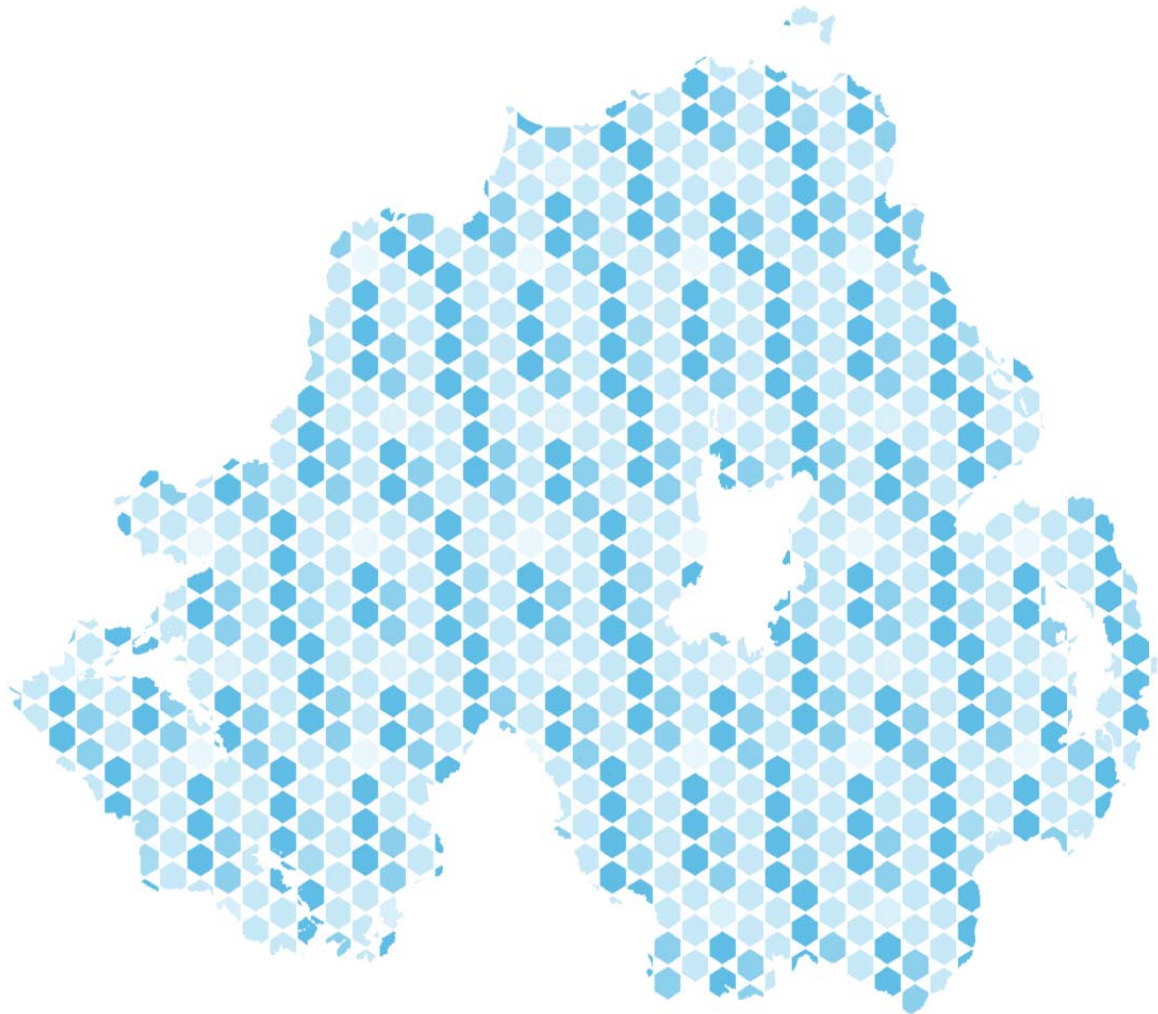


# PRIMARY INSPECTION



Education and Training  
Inspectorate

St Mary's Primary School,  
Kircubbin

Report of an Inspection  
in January 2010

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*The Education and Training Inspectorate -  
Promoting Improvement*

Providing Inspection Services for

Department of Education  
Department for Employment and Learning  
Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure



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CUSTOMER SERVICE EXCELLENCE

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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 Mary's Primary school is situated in the village of Kircubbin, County Down. All of the children come from the village and the surrounding rural area. The enrolment has fluctuated over recent years and currently stands at 130 children. The school reports that approximately 14% of the children are entitled to free school meals and 30.7% of the children require additional support with aspects of their learning. At the time of the inspection, there was a substitute teacher employed in year 1.

### 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. The inspection also evaluates the contribution of information and communication technology (ICT) to promoting and supporting learning. In addition, the school's arrangements for pastoral care, including child protection are also evaluated.

### 1.3 THE VIEWS OF THE PARENTS, TEACHERS, GOVERNORS, AND CHILDREN

The arrangements for the inspection included the opportunity for the parents and the teaching 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. Ninety-six questionnaires were issued to the parents; 22% were returned to the Department of Education (DE) and 14 contained additional written comments. The responses from the questionnaires indicated that almost all of the parents are satisfied with all aspects of the life and work of the school. In particular, the parents appreciate the approachable professional Principal, the friendly, dedicated teachers, the good levels of communication between school and home, and the strong commitment to the pastoral care of the children.

The governors spoke very positively about the Catholic ethos which permeates the life and work of the school, the commitment of the Principal, and the staff's hard work and dedication in the interests of the children and the wider community.

Seven of the teaching staff responded to the online teacher questionnaire; all included written comments about their involvement in the life and work of the school. The responses were unanimously positive about all aspects of the school; the teachers praised the Principal's caring approach and highlighted the team spirit among the staff.

The year 6 children indicated that they are happy and feel secure in school. They spoke positively about aspects of school life such as their topic work, homework and the playground rules. They know whom to speak to if they have a concern. The year 7 children contributed positively to the discussion on healthy eating and physical activity. An analysis of the questionnaires and the written comments made by the parents and the staff were shared with the Principal and the governors.

## 1.4 PASTORAL CARE

The quality of the arrangements for pastoral care is very good. The school has a welcoming, happy atmosphere and the ethos is supportive and inclusive. Working relationships between the children and the adults are very positive. The children are friendly and courteous; their behaviour is very good. The teachers make good use of praise and encouragement to motivate the children; the appropriate balance between rewards and sanctions contributes well to the very positive ethos which is evident throughout the school.

Among the strengths are the developments of whole-school approaches to behaviour management, the involvement of the children in establishing school rules and the wide range of extra-curricular activities available for the children. The older children spoke positively and enthusiastically about their role in developing a school council and planning further improvements for their playground.

The staff have created an attractive learning environment for the children. Good use is made of corridors and classrooms to display and celebrate the children's work and achievements. The classroom assistants, office staff, cleaning staff and other ancillary personnel contribute significantly to promoting and maintaining a pleasant working environment for the children.

## 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 very good attention to promoting healthy eating and physical activity, for example, through the well-established healthy breaks scheme and the variety of sporting opportunities available to the children, which encourage them to adopt healthy lifestyles.

## 1.7 LINKS WITH PARENTS AND THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

Good links and communication have been developed with the parents and wider community. The school makes effective use of a variety of visitors, educational visits and links with local post-primary schools and shops in the village to support and enhance the children's learning. The Parent Support Group raises significant funds which are used to enhance all aspects of the work of the school. Parents are kept very well informed about key events in school through a text-messaging service and through a link in the parish website. Curricular meetings for all year groups, parent-teacher meetings and annual reports are used to inform the parents of their children's progress.

# 2. ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS

## 2.1 LEARNING

Almost all the children demonstrate high levels of motivation and positive attitudes to their learning. They complete tasks co-operatively and in the best practice, they have enjoyable opportunities to interact with each other in paired and group work. It is important that the teachers ensure that the children are able to apply their skills and concepts across all areas of learning in line with the underlying principles of the Northern Ireland Curriculum (NIC).

An analysis of the key stage (KS) 1 and KS2 assessment data over the past four years shows that, in English, the school's performance has fluctuated. The most recent data indicates that the percentage of children achieving Level 4 or above is below the Northern Ireland (NI) average and below those schools in a similar free school meals category.

In Mathematics, although the standards attained by the children have also fluctuated over the last four years, the most recent data shows that the percentage of children achieving Level 4 or above is above the NI average and above those schools in a similar free school meals category.

## 2.2 ENGLISH AND LITERACY

The standards of literacy in the school are satisfactory. The school needs to revise and update the literacy policy to ensure it reflects more fully the strategies of the NIC to enable the children to have more opportunities to develop literacy skills that the topic-based, thematic approach offers.

In foundation stage (FS) and KS1, the children are keen to talk about their work and can express their thoughts and ideas with confidence. Teachers need to ensure that they interact effectively with the children during the play-based learning sessions to exploit more fully the opportunities for learning inherent in the activities and to develop talking, listening and thinking skills further. As they progress through KS2, the children's talking and listening continue to develop; in the best practice, effective questioning encourages the children's thinking skills and extended responses and they have opportunities to discuss their work in group activities.

Throughout the FS and KS1, the children are introduced to an appropriate range of reading strategies which enable them to decipher unfamiliar text and they learn to read with increasing fluency and expression. They have regular opportunities to explore books and to listen to stories; the children give good levels of oral response to the text. Effective use is made of big books as a tool to teach reading and as a stimulus for writing, talking and listening. By the end of KS1, most of the children read with a good level of fluency, understanding and enjoyment. In KS2, the children have regular opportunities to develop their reading skills through guided reading, group novels and daily independent reading sessions in class. They make ready and effective use of dictionaries and thesauri and ICT is used appropriately to support research activities. By the end of KS2 the majority of the children read with a satisfactory level of accuracy, fluency, and understanding of the text.

The school has identified the need to focus on the further development of writing skills. In the FS, the children become familiar with different forms of print and experiment with informal mark making. The children's letter formation, word building skills and knowledge of the basic conventions, such as simple sentence structure, are developed through shared writing activities. As their skills develop, the children's independent writing is promoted effectively; by the end of KS1, the majority of children can express their ideas with a length and quality of content appropriate to their ability. In KS2, the children's writing experiences would benefit from regular and consistent opportunities to write across the curriculum and to engage more in revising and editing their own writing, using ICT where it is appropriate. The teachers need to provide a wider range of more open ended contexts for writing in order to foster the children's creativity and to provide greater challenge. By the end of KS2, the standard and range of written work achieved by the children, including presentation, are satisfactory.

## 2.3 MATHEMATICS AND NUMERACY

The overall provision for mathematics is good. The numeracy co-ordinator has been in post for one year and the staff are currently developing whole-school schemes of work for numeracy; the teachers' medium-term planning outlines potential progression in the children's mathematical understanding. The programme is suitably broad; the children engage in a variety of investigative mathematics and are given opportunities to work effectively in pairs and groups. In most of the lessons observed, the children engaged in a range of mental mathematics activities. Information and communication technology is used throughout the school to support the learning and teaching of mathematics. In the best practice, good use is made of interactive whiteboards to support the development of mathematics lessons.

In the FS, the children experience a range of appropriate play-based activities through which they are developing early mathematical language, concepts and understanding appropriate to their age and ability. The children are able to sort, order numbers, explore and name two-dimensional (2D) and 3D shapes and handle data through a combination of suitable oral and practical work.

At KS1, the children engage in a range of practical activities which help develop their understanding of number, measures, shape and space, and handling data. At year 4, the more able children have a good understanding of place value, use a variety of strategies to add and subtract two-digit numbers, and can apply their understanding to solve simple problems.

At KS2, the children are able to talk confidently about mathematics, demonstrating their knowledge of important mathematical ideas and concepts, for example, number facts and processes. They have opportunities for problem solving and investigations, for example, as they work on the topics of co-ordinates in year 5 and percentages in year 7. There is a need to provide greater challenge and extension to the mathematical experiences of the more able children and to ensure that tasks are appropriately differentiated to meet the needs of all the children. By the end of KS2, the standards in mathematics achieved by most of the children are good.

## 3. THE QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING

### 3.1 PLANNING

The teachers have agreed and use a common format for medium-term planning in literacy and numeracy, the World Around Us and play-based learning. The planning outlines potential progression in most of the areas of the curriculum. The teachers now need to develop short-term planning to guide them more effectively in their day-to-day teaching. This planning should identify clearly defined learning intentions which need to be shared more consistently with the children.

### 3.2 TEACHING

During the inspection, the quality of the teaching observed ranged from inadequate to very good; the majority of the teaching was good or better. In the best practice there is skilful questioning, appropriate pace and challenge, and the class work is differentiated well for the range of ability. The classroom assistants observed during the inspection engaged very effectively with the children and provided very valuable support for the teachers and the children.



### 3.3 ASSESSMENT

The teachers use a range of standardised and non-standardised testing to identify the children's needs and achievements in English and mathematics. The parents are kept informed regarding their children's progress through regular parent/teacher meetings, annual reports and an open-door policy for informal consultations. The school has identified the need to develop further its use of data to inform planning, to set appropriate targets for individuals and to evaluate the quality of teaching and learning across the curriculum.

The school has a marking policy and the children's work is marked regularly. In the best practice the marking includes extended and evaluative feedback for the children; however there is an inconsistency in the quality of the evaluative feedback given to the children which needs to be addressed at whole-school level.

### 3.4 SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

The quality of the provision for special educational needs (SEN) is good. The recently-appointed special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO) supports effectively the classroom teachers in the identification of targets and strategies for individual education plans (IEPs). She has made a good start to using standardised and diagnostic tests to identify needs and track the children's progress. She is aware of the need for closer monitoring and evaluation of SEN provision to ensure the education plans are matched to the learning needs of the children. The SEN provision includes a number of withdrawal classes, such as Reading Recovery. In the best practice, the withdrawal support is closely linked to the targets set in the IEPs and is of sufficient challenge. Overall, the children receiving additional support are making satisfactory progress in the areas identified within their IEPs.

## 4. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

### 4.1 LEADERSHIP

The teaching Principal has been in post for six years; he is dedicated to the life and work of the school and to the well-being of the children; he is highly supportive of the staff. He has worked hard to raise the profile of the school in the wider community and has developed effective communication with the parents. The Principal and the governors need to review the roles and responsibilities of all staff and co-ordinators to promote more effective, self-evaluative processes leading to improvement in the standards achieved and in teaching and learning.

### 4.2 PLANNING FOR IMPROVEMENT

The School Development Plan (SDP) identifies important areas for further development and meets fully the requirements of the Department of Education School Development Planning Regulations/Schedule 2005/19. The Principal's vision for the school is exemplified through a number of priorities for improvement, including the development of data analysis and target setting. The inspection findings would endorse this as an important priority. It is appropriate for the Principal together with staff to review the current SDP in the light of the findings of this report.

### 4.3 ACCOMMODATION

Since taking up his post, the Principal has worked hard to improve the infrastructure and fabric of the buildings and the quality of the environment of the school both indoors and outdoors. The school building is spacious, well-organised and maintained to a high standard.

## 5. CONCLUSION

5.1 The strengths of the school include the:

- motivated children, who were always well-behaved, settle quickly to work and display positive attitudes to their learning;
- very good quality of the pastoral care provided for the children;
- quality of the majority of the teaching observed, which was good or better;
- good quality of the provision for SEN;
- effective role of the Principal in promoting the school and developing the links and communication with parents and the wider community; and
- emphasis placed on developing the children's health and well-being including the wide range of extra-curricular activities provided.

5.2 The areas for improvement include the need:

- to improve the standards achieved in English and to increase the challenge within the learning experiences of all the children; and
- to develop further the role of the Principal and of staff with responsibilities for key areas of the curriculum in monitoring the children's progress in literacy and numeracy and in promoting greater consistency in the quality of the teaching.

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 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.

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