

EDUCATION AND TRAINING INSPECTORATE

PRIMARY INSPECTION

Woodlawn Primary School, Carrickfergus,
County Antrim

Controlled co-educational, DE Ref No: 301-6225

Report of a Follow-up Inspection in October 2022



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Follow-up to the inspection of Woodlawn Primary School, Carrickfergus, County Antrim, BT38 8EZ

The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) carried out a follow-up inspection of Woodlawn Primary School in March 2017¹. Owing to the action short of strike, ETI was unable to evaluate fully the impact of the actions taken and the extent to which the important areas for improvement had been addressed, namely to:

- continue to develop the capacity and effectiveness of the leadership and management; in particular, the role of the principal in leading whole-school improvement;
- develop the role of the special educational needs co-ordinator;
- develop a more collegial and collaborative improvement among the whole staff team in order to embed and build on the improvements and continue to raise standards in literacy and numeracy;
- continue to build on the improvements made through the follow-up inspection process in order to raise further the outcomes for all children; and
- use the available broad range of data to set clearer baseline positions and measurable targets of improvement in the action plans.

Consequently, there remained a need for Woodlawn Primary School to address the important areas for improvement.

The school's development plan and associated action plans were adjusted in light of the inspection findings and the feedback given by ETI.

ETI carried out a monitoring visit in June 2021 and a third follow-up inspection in October 2022.

In the interval since the initial inspection, the school has received external support from the Education Authority (EA) in relation to:

- the former vice-principal taking on the role of acting principal;
- training for first-time senior leaders following the recent appointments of a permanent principal and vice-principal;
- building the capacity of the co-ordinators to monitor and evaluate aspects of the school's provision and plan for improvement;
- behaviour support for a small number of children;

¹ [Woodlawn Primary School Report](#)

- the establishment of the two autism specific classes, notably through the Specialist Setting Support Team; and
- staff development focused on numeracy.

Over the same period, the key actions or changes which affect the work of the school include:

- the appointment of the former acting principal as permanent principal and the appointment of a new vice-principal;
- the appointment of a new chair and vice-chair to the board of governors;
- changes to key roles and responsibilities, including numeracy co-ordinator, special educational needs co-ordinator and teacher in charge of the autism specific classes;
- the re-design of the front of the school and addition of excellent resources to enhance the children's outdoor learning;
- improvements in the infrastructure for information and communication technology (ICT), including better access to devices, new interactive whiteboards in all classrooms, the continued use of a digital application for communication with parents and the appointment of children as digital ambassadors;
- the introduction of the Engage Programme to provide additional support in literacy and numeracy for small groups of children; and
- a further decline in enrolment, from 266 children in 2017 to 142 currently.

As a consequence of the external support and the key changes and actions taken within the school, there have been significant improvements in the quality of education as reported in the key findings below.

Views of parents/carers and staff

Thirty-two percent of parents and almost 90% of the staff responded to the confidential, online questionnaire. The responses to the parental questionnaire were highly positive and almost all of the written comments indicated high levels of satisfaction with the life and work of the school, notably the welcoming ethos, the approachable, supportive staff and the improvements in the learning environment. The responses to the staff questionnaire were also highly positive and highlighted, among other features: the emphasis placed on the wellbeing of all members of the school community; the culture of teamwork and collaboration fostered by the senior leadership team; and, the improvement in staff morale. The ETI inspectors have communicated to the principal and to representatives of the board of governors the main findings, and any individual issues arising, from the questionnaires.

Key findings

The outcomes for learners have improved and are now good.

By the end of key stage (KS) 2, almost all of the children achieve good standards in numeracy and most achieve good standards in literacy. Overall, the school's data indicates that there has been a notable reduction in underachievement and an increase in the number of children attaining at the expected level or higher than expected. In discussions with a group of year 7 children, they spoke positively about their enjoyment of learning both independently and in a group. The children read fluently and used a variety of approaches to decipher unfamiliar words. Most of the children used confidently a range of mental mathematics strategies to solve problems and they explained their calculations clearly.

Across the year groups, the children write with increasing confidence and improve the quality of their work through the editing and re-drafting process. The work in the children's books and folders show consistent progression in their learning, particularly in numeracy and ICT. The children who require additional support with aspects of their learning are making good progress. Their individual needs are identified early through well-informed staff observations which are shared with parents to ensure that the targets in the individual education plans are well understood, relevant and measurable. Children within the autism specific classes transition smoothly between activities, listen and engage well with staff and peers, follow instructions with accuracy and show respect for others when taking turns or expressing their points of view.

The quality of provision has improved and is now very good.

The quality of almost all of the learning and teaching observed was very good. This highly effective practice is characterised by: high levels of engagement and enjoyment in the children's learning; appropriate differentiation which enables the children to make progress, deepen their understanding of key concepts and develop skills; the learning support assistants' skilful help for individuals and small groups; and, the teachers' flexible integration of different areas of the curriculum in practical and enquiry-based activities. The teachers' marking and comments in the children's books give clear guidance on how to improve the quality of their work. The impact of this approach is demonstrated in the drafting process which helps the children produce more accurate, detailed written assignments: the children take pride in the presentation of their final drafts. The development of the outdoor learning area is a significant benefit for the children in the foundation stage as it helps them develop fine and gross motor skills, work closely with their peers and find practical solutions to various problems.

Within the autism specific classes, the teachers and learning support assistants have created a positive, nurturing ethos. They use effectively a range of practical and sensory strategies to engage the children, help them regulate their own behaviour and become more independent learners. As the special educational needs co-ordinator and the teacher in charge of the autism specific classes continue to work closely together, it will be important to share the good practice already established in these classes with teachers in the mainstream.

The quality and effectiveness of leadership, management and action to promote improvement have improved and are now very good.

The recent appointment of a permanent principal, as well as the appointment of a new vice-principal, follows a period of discontinuity in leadership and brings stability to the school. The principal has fostered a collaborative culture in which senior and middle leaders work together, evaluate rigorously and plan jointly for school improvement. The schedule for monitoring, evaluating and review is shared at the start of the school year and involves all staff in the school development planning process. The whole-school and curricular action plans begin from clear baselines and focus closely on appropriate priorities: the outworking of the improvement process is evident in the quality of the provision and in the rising standards attained by the children.

The governors receive regular first-hand accounts from the co-ordinators. Consequently, they are well informed and able to provide support and challenge, when appropriate, to the senior leaders. Based on the evidence presented at the time of the follow-up inspection, there can be a high degree of confidence in the aspects of governance evaluated.

Overall effectiveness

Woodlawn Primary School now demonstrates the capacity to identify and bring about improvement in the interests of all the children. ETI will monitor how the school sustains improvement in:

- raising further the standards attained by the children.

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