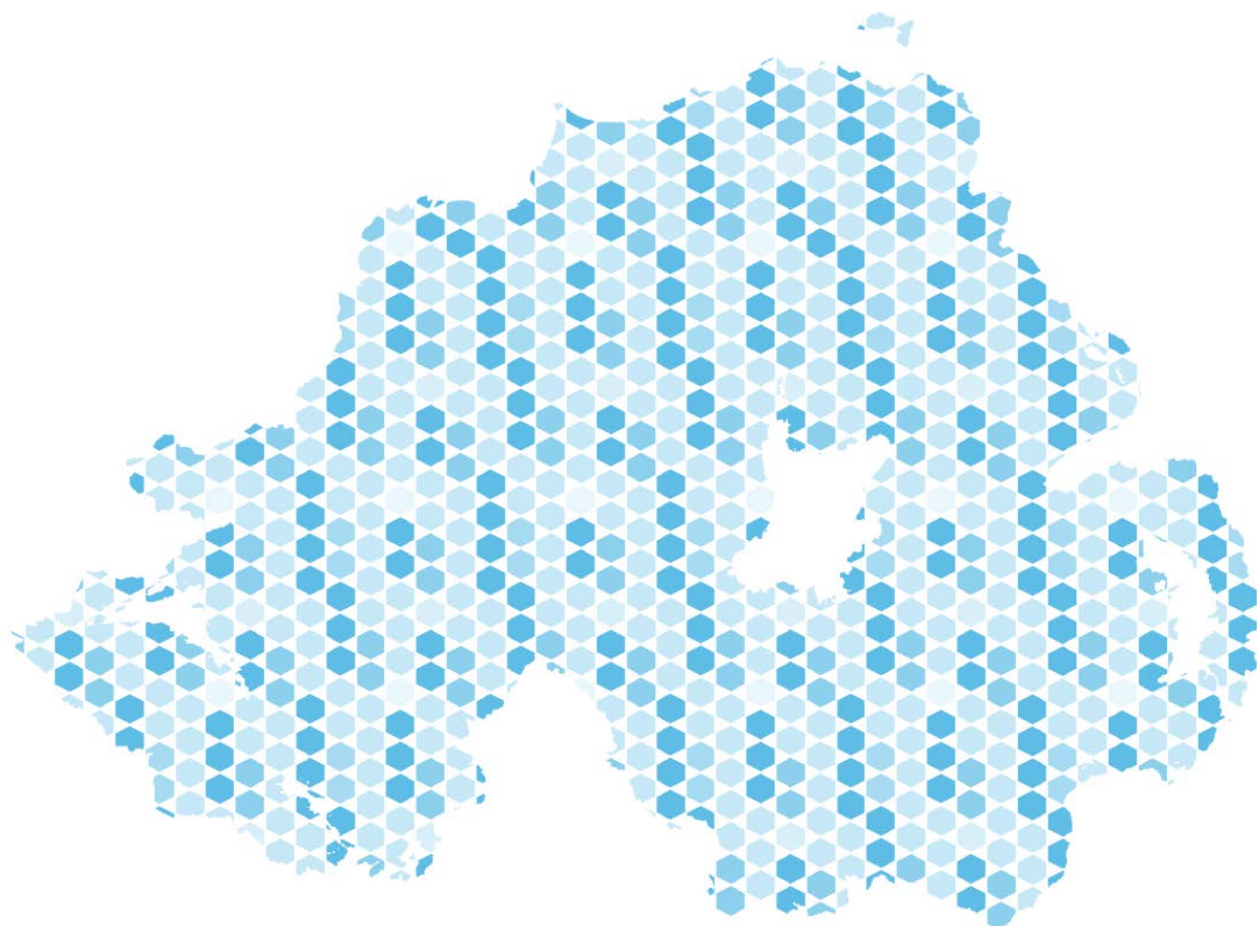


PRIMARY INSPECTION



Education and Training
Inspectorate

Comber Primary School and
Nursery Unit, County Down

Report of an Inspection in
June 2016



The Education and Training Inspectorate
Promoting Improvement

Providing Inspection Services for:

Department of Education
Department for the Economy
Department for Communities

CUSTOMER
SERVICE
EXCELLENCE



Quantitative terms used by the Education and Training Inspectorate

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%

Performance levels

The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) use the following performance levels when reporting on Achievement and standards, on Provision for learning and on Leadership and management:

Outstanding
Very good
Good
Important area(s) for improvement
Requires significant improvement
Requires urgent improvement

Overall effectiveness

The ETI use one of the following inspection outcomes when evaluating the overall effectiveness of the school:

The school has a high level of capacity for sustained improvement in the interest of all the learners. The ETI will monitor how the school sustains improvement.
The school demonstrates the capacity to identify and bring about improvement in the interest of all the learners. The ETI will monitor how the school sustains improvement.
The school needs to address (an) important area(s) for improvement in the interest of all the learners. The ETI will monitor and report on the school's progress in addressing the area(s) for improvement. There will be a formal follow-up inspection.
The school needs to address urgently the significant areas for improvement identified in the interest of all the learners. It requires external support to do so. The ETI will monitor and report on the school's progress in addressing the areas for improvement. There will be a formal follow-up inspection.

Contents

Section	Page
1. Inspection method and evidence base	1
2. Focus of inspection	1
3. Context	1
4. Overall findings of the inspection	2
5. Achievements and standards	2
6. Provision for learning	3
7. Leadership and management	4
8. Overall effectiveness	5
Appendix	

1. Inspection method and evidence base

The key questions and quality indicators which guide inspection and self-evaluation of primary schools, which were applied to this inspection, are available in the ETI publication *Together Towards Improvement: a process for self-evaluation* at: <http://www.etini.gov.uk/index/together-towards-improvement/together-towards-improvement-primary.htm>.

Inspectors observed learning and teaching, scrutinised documentation and the children's written work and held formal and informal discussions with children, teachers and staff with specific responsibilities.

The arrangements for this inspection included:

- a meeting with a representative from the governors;
- meetings with groups of children; and
- the opportunity for the parents, teaching and support staff to complete confidential questionnaires.

Four percent of the parents responded to the confidential questionnaires; they indicated high levels of satisfaction with a majority of the areas of the life and work of the school. In written comments, the parents highlighted the approachable and friendly staff and the high quality working relationships between the staff and their children. Fifty-two percent of the teaching and non-teaching staff completed confidential questionnaires. Their responses highlighted the good working relationships of the staff and welcoming, inclusive and pastoral ethos within the school. The ETI has reported to the principal and chairperson of the board of governors the views of the parents and staff emerging from the questionnaires.

2. Focus of inspection

In order to promote improvement in the interest of all children, the purpose of inspection is, through effective linking of internal and external approaches, to evaluate the:

- children's achievements and standards in literacy and numeracy; including how the school is addressing low attainment and underachievement where applicable;
- quality of provision for learning in the school including the nursery unit; and
- quality of leadership and management.

3. Context

Comber Primary School is a controlled primary school which is situated in Comber, County Down. The children attending the school come mainly from the surrounding area. The enrolment has remained relatively steady over the last four years and the school operates currently at its capacity. The percentage of children entitled to free school meals has remained relatively consistent in the past four years while the proportion requiring additional help with aspects of their learning has risen significantly. At the time of the inspection, one management post was vacant, three key co-ordinating positions were being filled in a temporary capacity and there were six temporary teaching appointments.

Comber Primary School	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16
Enrolment	328	331	334	345
Enrolment in the Nursery Unit	52	52	52	52
% School attendance	94.4	94.6	94.6	N/A
% NI Primary school average	94.9	95.6	95.4	N/A
FSME Percentage ¹	25.9	22.9	22.7	26.3
No. of children on SEN register	61	76	94	105
% of children on SEN register	18.5	22.9	28.1	30.4
No. of children with statements of educational need	9	8	8	12
No. of newcomer children	*	*	*	*

Source: data as held by the school.

* fewer than 5

N/A not available

4. Overall findings of the inspection

Overall effectiveness	Address important areas for improvement
Achievements and standards	Good
Provision for learning	Important areas for improvement
Leadership and management	Important areas for improvement
Nursery Unit	Outstanding

5. Achievements and standards

- The children are polite and friendly and in most of the lessons, they learn with enthusiasm. They work well in pairs and small groups and interact readily with their peers during learning activities. The children respond positively when presented with learning opportunities and activities that are linked to their environment. In a majority of lessons, the children are keen to talk, contribute well to the lesson and share their point of view with their peers and teachers.
- The school's performance data shows that most of the children, including those who require additional support with aspects of their learning, make good progress in English and mathematics at or above expectation. The school's data also indicates that a majority of the children identified as requiring support with aspects of their learning make progress in English and mathematics at or above expectation.
- The standards achieved by the children in literacy are good. In key stages (KS) 1 and 2, the children engage well in discussions and are able to express their ideas clearly and coherently. As the children progress through the school, they write to a good standard in a variety of forms and they plan, draft and edit their work with increasing competence and accuracy. They develop systematically a range of reading strategies and have a positive attitude to reading. By year 7, the most able children read with appropriate intonation and fluency, and can discuss their reading preferences with maturity.

¹ The term 'FSME Percentage' refers to the percentage of children entitled to free school meals.

- The children in the nursery unit are independent, secure in the daily routines, make choices of their preferred areas of play, and settle well to concentrated, purposeful learning. They have very well developed observational skills; they explore and experiment with high levels of curiosity. The children in the nursery gain a very good knowledge of early mathematical concepts whilst using the excellent range of play resources. Almost all of the children are developing appropriate speech and language skills, have very good mark-making and representational artwork skills. They are developing a self-reflective approach to their learning.
- The standards in numeracy are an important area for improvement. The books demonstrate an over-reliance on de-contextualised worksheets. There are too few opportunities to challenge and develop further the most able children and meet the needs of those requiring support with aspects of their learning, particularly in the foundation stage. In a significant minority of the numeracy lessons observed, the children engage well in practical numeracy activities and can apply their mathematical learning to real-life situations and to other areas of learning. The more able children in year 7 demonstrate flexibility in their mathematical thinking and have a good knowledge of the key mathematical concepts in number and measures.
- The children achieve very good standards in information and communication technology (ICT). The planned programme develops well the children's ICT skills as they progress through the school.

6. Provision for learning

- Almost one-quarter of the lessons observed had important areas for improvement in which the teachers focused on the completion of activities rather than the development of the children's skills. The opportunities to develop and extend further the children's thinking were not exploited and there was insufficient differentiation to meet the needs of all of the children. In the foundation stage, the children's learning was overly activity-based and teacher-directed which limited the children's creative, investigative and imaginative play. Most of the lessons observed during the inspection were good in developing the children's learning; a majority of the lessons were very good or better. In these lessons, there was appropriate pace and challenge, and the teachers' planning matched the children's interests and abilities.
- There is variation in the quality of the medium- and short-term lesson planning across the school and in the quality, rigour and use of the teachers' evaluations of the children's learning to inform teaching. The teachers' planning does not provide consistent, high quality learning across the school nor are the needs of all of the children being fully met.
- In the most effective literacy lessons, the children's vocabulary and talking and listening skills are developed well through paired and group activities, skilful plenary sessions and questioning by the teachers. In these lessons, the children apply their understanding of the writing techniques to their work across the curriculum; ICT is used to good effect to provide stimuli for discussions, and it enhances the opportunities for creativity. The effective development of phonics and the teaching of reading skills are improving the quality of the children's learning experiences and the reading and writing standards attained by the children.

- The provision for learning in mathematics is an important area for improvement. The school is reviewing currently the numeracy schemes of work; they do not ensure the appropriate balance and progression in content in all areas of the numeracy provision. In the foundation stage, the play-based programmes do not extend the children's mathematical processes and skills. The mental mathematics activities engage the children well as introductions to the lessons.
- The staff make appropriate use of a range of assessment data in literacy and numeracy to identify underachieving children and those requiring additional support with aspects of their learning. A range of intervention strategies, including withdrawal support, external specialist provision and effective classroom assistant support guides well the children's learning. The individual educational plans are, however, inconsistent in prioritising appropriate, measurable targets and in detailing the teaching strategies for each child.
- The provision in the nursery unit is of an outstanding quality. The use of outdoor learning and the local environment develops effectively the children's scientific awareness and imaginative role-play. The children's learning is well-led in the exemplary child-centred practice and the adult interactions with the children are outstanding. The highly effective pre-school programme is well-planned, the specific needs of the children are addressed individually and there is a very effective process of assessing and recording each child's progress and development.
- The quality of the provision for pastoral care in the school is very good. The child-centred ethos pervades the life and work of the school, where children are valued and their individual pastoral needs are met well. A key feature of the provision is the well-established and highly effective playground mentoring system which develops very well the children's emotional intelligence and leadership skills. The children's achievements are celebrated appropriately and are given a high priority across the school which is having a positive impact on the children's behaviour and disposition to learning.
- The school gives a high priority to promoting a healthy lifestyle through the curriculum and through the extensive and varied range of extra-curricular activities.

7. Leadership and management

- The leadership and management is an important area for improvement. The capacity of the senior and middle leadership to strategically identify and implement concise actions to promote improvement is limited. The rigorous monitoring and the evaluation of the measures of success are underdeveloped to raise further the standards the children attain.
- The school development plan² (SDP) has been informed by consultation with the parents, teachers and governors. The plan does not present a comprehensive school baseline position of key areas of the work of the school. There is a need, through more rigorous analysis of the available data, to establish, present and report appropriately the baseline statistics and standards for the children as they move through the school, particularly in literacy and numeracy.

² The school development plan partially meets the requirements of the School Development Planning Regulations (NI) 2010.

- The school has effective links with the parents who are informed regularly about their children's progress. The parents- teacher association contributes well to the work of the school.
- Based on the evidence available at the time of inspection, the ETI's evaluation is that there can be limited confidence in the aspects of governance evaluated. While the governors are very supportive of the school and are committed to the continued improvement, their challenge function is underdeveloped. In order to carry out more effectively their statutory responsibilities, they need to be better informed about the:
 - (i) quality of strategic leadership and management at senior management and co-ordinator level; and
 - (ii) standards the children attain in English and mathematics and the quality and consistency of the children's learning experiences.
- Based on the evidence presented at the time of inspection, the school has satisfactory arrangements in place for safeguarding children. The arrangements reflect broadly the guidance issued by the Department of Education. The following areas need to be addressed:
 - (i) the training for the designated governor and deputy designated teacher for child protection to be completed at the next available opportunity; and
 - (ii) the child protection policy and procedures to be reviewed, updated and communicated appropriately to the whole school community.
- In discussions with the inspectors, the children in year 6 reported that they are very happy and secure in school and know what to do if they have any concerns about their well-being.

8. Overall effectiveness

Comber Primary School needs to address important areas for improvement in the interest of all the learners.

The areas for improvement are to:

- strategically identify and implement concise actions to promote improvement, monitor regularly and evaluate with rigour the measures to success and raise further the standards the children attain; and
- develop further the teachers' planning to provide consistent high quality learning across the school and to ensure the needs of all of the children are fully met.

The ETI will monitor and report on the school's progress in addressing the areas for improvement. There will be a formal follow-up inspection in 12 to 18 months.

© CROWN COPYRIGHT 2016

This report may be reproduced in whole or in part, except for commercial purposes or in connection with a prospectus or advertisement, provided that the source and date thereof are stated.

Copies of this report are available on the ETI website: www.etini.gov.uk