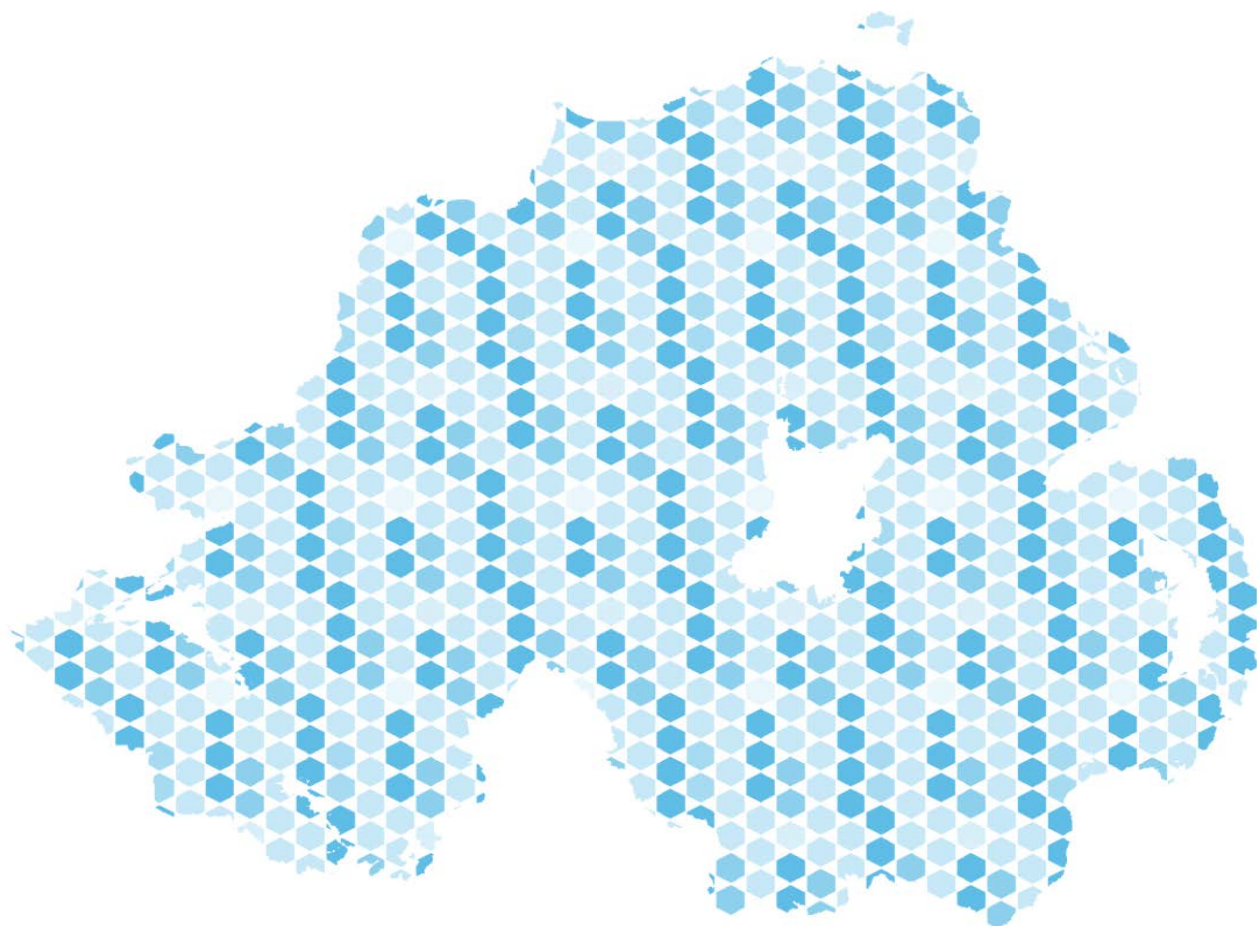


# PRIMARY INSPECTION



Education and Training  
Inspectorate

St Bernard's Primary School,  
Belfast

Maintained, Co-educational

Report of an Inspection in  
November 2016

*eti*

The Education and Training Inspectorate  
Promoting Improvement

Providing inspection services for:

Department of Education  
Department for the Economy  
and other commissioning Departments



## 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 Achievements 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.

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## **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: <https://www.etini.gov.uk/publications/together-towards-improvement-primary>.

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

Twenty-seven percent of the parents and half of the staff responded to the confidential questionnaires. The parents recorded their children's enjoyment of school, highlighting the extra-curricular and additional learning experiences; praised the leadership of the principal and the staff's care of and commitment to their children. A minority of the returns raised concerns in relation to aspects of communication. The staff's responses were highly affirmative about the life and work of the school. The ETI has reported to the principal and representatives of the board of governors the main issues emerging from the questionnaires and the discussions.

## **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; and
- quality of leadership and management.

## **3. Context**

St Bernard's Primary School is a maintained co-educational primary school situated in south Belfast. The majority of the children attending the school come from the Parish of St Bernadette. The enrolment has increased steadily over the last four years and the school operates at almost full capacity. Over the same period, the percentage of children entitled to free school meals has remained stable, while the proportion requiring additional help with aspects of their learning has decreased.

St Bernard's Primary School	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17
Enrolment	407	413	422	429
% School attendance	96.8	96.3	97.2	N/A
% NI Primary school average	95.6	95.4	N/A	N/A
FSME Percentage <sup>1</sup>	7.6	7	6.2	6.1
No. of children on SEN register	126	107	105	94
% of children on SEN register	31	26	25	22
No. of children with statements of educational need	7	11	13	13
No. of newcomer children	22	20	21	20

**Source:** data as held by the school.

\* fewer than 5

N/A not available

#### 4. Overall findings of the inspection

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	High level of capacity for sustained improvement
<b>Achievements and standards</b>	Very good
<b>Provision for learning</b>	Very good
<b>Leadership and management</b>	Very good

#### 5. Achievements and standards

- The children achieve very good standards in literacy. In the foundation stage, all of the children develop well their communication, self-management and early mark-making and writing skills. Their written work is of a high quality and is celebrated in attractive displays throughout the school. The children experience a wide variety of extended writing opportunities which, effectively supported by the use of information and communication technology (ICT), including the newly acquired tablets, develops well their research, drafting and editing skills. By the end of key stage (KS) 2, the children read with accuracy, confidence and with expressiveness that reflects empathetic understanding of the text.
- The children achieve very good standards in numeracy. They enjoy practical, problem-solving activities, using a range of resources, including ICT. Across the key stages, the children were observed working confidently within a wide range of mathematical concepts. By the end of KS 2, the most able children have very good flexibility in their mathematical thinking and can explain clearly their mathematical reasoning and the range of strategies they have used. They respond enthusiastically to additional challenge. Throughout the school, the children's work in numeracy is well presented and very good use is made of photographic evidence to record their range of experiences.
- The children are motivated, confident and articulate; they have well-developed personal and social skills, talk about their learning with confidence and engage readily with one another and with staff and visitors. They celebrate respectfully their own achievements and those of their peers.

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

## 6. Provision for learning

- Almost all of the lessons observed were good or very good. The teachers build effectively on the children's prior learning; there are well-planned opportunities for the children to work collaboratively in pairs and groups and to learn from one another. The teachers mark regularly the children's work; this is most effective when the written feedback incorporates suggestions as to how the children can improve further the quality of their work. This good practice needs to be more consistent across the school. The teachers' planning is comprehensive and while it includes identifying target groups, this needs to be refined to focus more on individual needs. The school has developed new personal learning plans for children who require additional support with aspects of their learning; these contain achievable targets that are reviewed regularly. There is good attention given to the early identification of needs and good quality withdrawal support for both literacy and numeracy.
- The school has an agreed approach to the children's acquisition and development of literacy skills including providing meaningful connections between the development of the writer's craft and the development of the children's reading skills. In the foundation stage, the children become familiar with different forms of print and experiment with informal mark making. The school has a special focus on the development of the children's handwriting skills linking this to enhanced proficiency in spelling. As they progress, the children experience a wide variety of writing activities across a range of forms. Reading, including for information, is both developed and resourced very effectively, through, for example, the reading schemes and the brightly refurbished central library.
- The planning for numeracy ensures progression across all areas of the mathematics curriculum. The well-structured mental mathematics sessions develop effectively the children's understanding and use of a range of strategies. The teachers focus appropriately on ensuring that the children can explain their thinking and reasoning. The children have very good opportunities to engage in practical activities which consolidate their numeracy learning. While the teachers provide the children with good opportunities to engage in problem solving, there is a need for more open-ended investigations in mathematics, to develop the children's creative thinking and their use of mathematics across the areas of learning.
- It is appropriate that the organisation of and the planning for play-based learning are being reviewed to provide clearer progression across the foundation stage and in activity-based learning in KS 1. The planning is most effective where the children have very good opportunities to develop further their skills in literacy and numeracy in both indoor and outdoor play. The staff are developing a more manageable and efficient tracking system for recording observations of the children's learning in literacy and numeracy along with the development of thinking skills and personal capabilities. There are plans to disseminate this good practice throughout the foundation stage and KS 1 which the inspection endorses.

- The quality of the provision for pastoral care in the school is very good, exemplified by the active engagement of the children in their learning and their excellent behaviour in and out of class. The mutual respect between the teachers and the children enables learning to take place within a positive environment. Through the wide choice available of extra-curricular activities, the children understand and enjoy the benefits of being active and involved in the life and work of the school.

## **7. Leadership and management**

- The senior leadership, supported effectively by the governors, has a clear, agreed vision for the strategic direction of the school. The senior leaders focus sharply and enthusiastically on all aspects of school's improvement, including the learning experiences provided for the children, the children's well-being and the standards they attain. Through appropriate support and monitoring and evaluation, the co-ordinators ensure their curricular areas are delivered effectively and consistently by all staff.
- The comprehensive school development plan is informed by effective self-evaluation, including analysis of performance data and meaningful consultation with parents, staff, governors and the children. The school can demonstrate that the agreed actions have led to improvement in the standards and learning experiences of the children.
- The school has meaningful links with the local and wider community which extend and support well the curriculum; for example, staff and children are benefitting from participation in the Shared Education Signature Programme. At the time of the inspection, the year 4 children enjoyed learning alongside their peers from the two partnership schools. The Parent-Teacher Association makes a valuable contribution to the life and work of the school.
- Based on the evidence available at the time of inspection, the ETI's evaluation is that there can be a high degree of confidence in the aspects of governance evaluated. The governors make an informed and effective contribution to school improvement through appropriate support and challenge.
- On the basis of the evidence available at the time of the inspection, the school has comprehensive arrangements in place for safeguarding children. These arrangements reflect the guidance issued by the Department of Education. In discussions with the inspectors, the children in years 5, 6 and 7 reported that they are happy and secure in school and know what to do if they have any concerns about their well-being.

## **8. Overall effectiveness**

St Bernard's Primary School has a high level of capacity for sustained improvement in the interests of all the learners. The ETI will monitor how the school sustains improvement.

**Health and Safety / Accommodation**

1. There is a need to review the use of circulation space to ensure unobstructed access to exits/fire doors at all times.



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