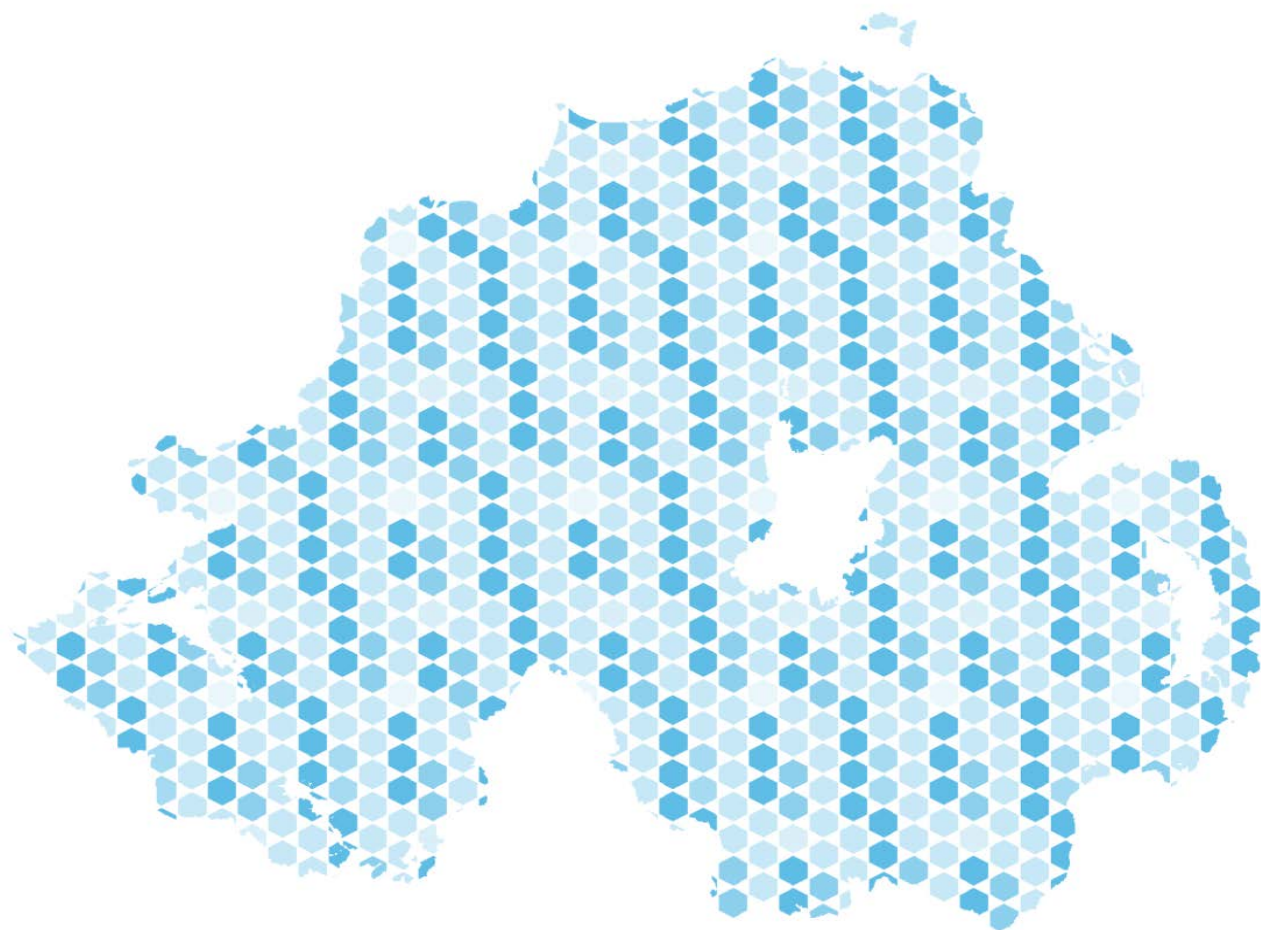


# PRIMARY INSPECTION



Education and Training  
Inspectorate

St Comgall's Primary School,  
Antrim

Report of an Inspection in  
March 2016

*eti*

*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

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.

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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: <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 a confidential questionnaire.

Thirty-four percent of parents (120 in total) responded to the confidential questionnaire. Their responses indicated very high levels of satisfaction with the life and work of the school. In particular, the parents highlighted: the commitment of the staff to the pastoral and educational needs of the children; the welcoming, inclusive ethos; and the strong leadership of the principal. Eighty-nine percent of staff (42 in total) responded to the confidential questionnaire. Their responses were very positive; they emphasised the child-centred approach to all aspects of decision-making in the school and the improved links with the parents and wider community. The ETI has reported to the principal and the chair of the board of governors the views expressed in the parental and staff confidential questionnaire.

## **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 Comgall's Primary School is a maintained primary school situated close to the centre of the town of Antrim. Almost all of the children attending the school come from the local and surrounding areas. The enrolment has increased by 20% in the last three years and the school now operates at full capacity. The percentage of children entitled to free school meals has decreased for this academic year, while the proportion of children requiring additional help with aspects of their learning has decreased over the past three years. The school has embarked recently on a Shared Education programme with the local controlled primary school; the plans for this programme include joint professional development opportunities for the staff of both schools and increased participation in shared learning experiences for the children. The school is also part of the 'Moving Forward Together' partnership, whose objective is to promote good relations between children and the wider communities in the Antrim and Randalstown areas.

St Comgall's Primary School, Antrim	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16
Enrolment	421	451	482	529
% School attendance	95.2	95.7	95.7	N/A
% NI Primary school attendance average	94.9	95.6	95.4	N/A
FSME Percentage <sup>1</sup>	21.6	22.8	21.5	14.3
No. of children on SEN register	120	107	112	88
% of children on SEN register	28.5	23.7	23.2	16.7
No. of children with statements of educational need	*	*	*	*
No. of newcomer children	92	105	123	134

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

\* fewer than 5

N/A not available

#### 4. Overall findings of the inspection

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

#### 5. Achievements and standards

- Across all key stages, the children have excellent dispositions towards learning. From the foundation stage, the children's independence is fostered well; they are encouraged to settle quickly to their work, manage and reflect on their own learning and to work cooperatively with one another in pairs and in groups. The children are very courteous to one another and to the adults who work in the school, displaying high levels of empathy to the different social, emotional and educational needs of their peers.
- The school's performance data and the standards in the children's books show that almost all of the children, including those who require additional support with aspects of their learning, make progress in English and achieve in line with their ability or above expectation. In mathematics, most of the children, including those who require additional support with aspects of their learning, make progress and achieve in line with their ability or above expectation.
- From an early age, the children acquire a broad range of literacy skills and demonstrate very good early reading and emergent writing skills. The children are able to apply their learning by adding text to representational drawings. In outdoor play sessions, the children enjoy reading words related to the environment. As they progress through the school, the children's oral communication skills develop very well; they are able to express their ideas clearly and coherently and their use of subject-specific vocabulary is excellent. The children's writing at all key stages is very well-crafted; they write independently and proficiently for a range of purposes and present their written

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

work attractively; the quality of the writing produced by the children is high. The children develop well as effective readers; they interpret and empathise with characters and plots and are able to use evidence from their reading to support their oral and written responses. During the inspection, a group of children engaged meaningfully in discussions with inspectors about their reading and their favourite authors and genres; they read with fluency and demonstrated a very good understanding of books.

- In the foundation stage, the children develop increasing confidence in handling money and can sort, count and investigate time and shape using a variety of practical strategies and authentic resources. During, and at the conclusion of, play sessions, the children communicate well using appropriate mathematical language to talk about their learning. As the children progress through the school, they develop appropriate mathematical knowledge and skills across all areas of the mathematics curriculum. In discussion with inspectors, a group of year 7 children demonstrated their ability to use appropriate strategies to solve mathematical problems and were able to identify situations where they could apply their knowledge and understanding of mathematical concepts to real-life situations and to other areas of learning.
- The children who require additional support with aspects of their learning make good progress. The school's most recent review shows that most of the children met the targets outlined in their individual education plans. The newcomer children also make good progress through their engagement in well-planned opportunities for developing their vocabulary, pronunciation and communication skills.
- The children achieve good standards in information and communication technology (ICT). They use a variety of programmes to enhance their learning and enjoyment of reading. They present well their ideas in digital form; for example, in researching information, programming digital devices and recording their mathematical understanding and interpretation of data.

## **6. Provision for learning**

- During the current school development planning cycle, the teachers have focused on improving the quality of planning across all areas of learning. The outworking of the planning for learning is evident in the consistently high quality of the lessons observed: almost all of the lessons were good or better, with three-fifths of the lessons observed being very good or outstanding. The children are provided with well-planned opportunities to consolidate and develop further their literacy and numeracy skills and their creativity and enjoyment of learning is evident across all areas of the curriculum.
- In the most effective practice observed: the lessons were set in real, meaningful contexts informed by the personal interests of the children; the teachers asked open-ended questions which provided opportunities for the children to explain their thinking and to demonstrate the extent of their understanding; and learning activities were appropriately challenging and afforded the children opportunities to develop their perseverance and resilience. In the few lessons where practice was less effective, the work was not tailored sufficiently to meet the learning needs of all of the children and consequently, there was insufficient progress in learning for some of the children.

- The school's internal performance data is used very well to identify whole-school, class and individual targets which are shared in a meaningful way with the children. This work is supplemented through improved marking practices to ensure children are aware of their strengths and what they can do next to improve their work.
- The support for children who have special educational needs and the newcomer children is provided effectively through in-class differentiation and withdrawal support. The needs of the newcomer children and the children who require support in literacy and numeracy are identified well through effective consultation between the class teachers and the teachers who provide the withdrawal support. The individual education plans guide well the work of the teachers in tailoring the in-class provision to meet the individual needs of the child. The expertise of the classroom assistants is deployed effectively to support and guide the children's learning. There are regular and well-targeted staff development opportunities and meaningful, collaborative engagement with parents and external agencies to support the steady progress of the children. At times, the nature of the literacy and numeracy withdrawal support is not aligned closely enough to the learning needs of the child. There is, therefore, a need to review the provision and to monitor more closely the quality of the children's learning experiences.
- Significant work has been undertaken to improve the provision for language and literacy; this work has resulted in very good provision in this area. The literacy lessons develop effectively the children's skills in reading, writing and talking and listening, as do the play-based sessions for younger children. The recent addition of an outdoor learning area is improving further the quality and breadth of the children's learning experiences. Reading is developed well throughout the school by the very good phonics and reading provision which is complemented well by the Accelerated Reading programme for the children in key stage 2. The children engage in a variety of interesting reading, research and class novel activities which develop well their understanding of language.
- There is effective provision for developing the children's talking and listening skills through a range of paired and group activities, plenary sessions and skilful questioning by teachers which develops well the children's oral responses. A particular strength of the school's literacy provision is the consistent approach to the teaching of writing; this is now embedded across the school and enables the children to understand very well the process of writing and acquire a range of writing skills which are appropriate to their age and stage of development.
- The whole school programme for mathematics is underpinned by detailed long- and medium-term planning which guides effectively the work of the teachers, providing balanced coverage across the core areas of mathematics and appropriate progression in the children's learning. Planned mental mathematical activities are used as challenging introductions to lessons to develop mathematical agility and reasoning. There is rigorous monitoring and regular opportunities for self-evaluation of planning, learning and teaching, which has enabled the sharing of good practice between the teachers. In order to raise standards further, the school needs to ensure that the lessons are tailored appropriately to meet the learning needs of all of the children.

- Throughout the school, the teachers use the interactive whiteboards and ICT with varying levels of competence; staff development in this area is ongoing. Issues with connectivity due to the school's infrastructure have been addressed recently and the staff are now well-placed to implement further the planning for ICT within the short-term planning and to monitor more closely the breadth and balance of the children's ICT learning experiences to support the development of their ICT skills.
- The highly effective arrangements for pastoral care are evident in the nurturing and inclusive ethos which permeates the school; this ethos is well embedded in classroom management strategies. The school has developed well its policies and practice to support the safety and well-being of children and staff; these policies are thorough and reviewed regularly. The school raises the awareness of e-safety and anti-bullying practices through the involvement of children, parents and staff in national campaigns. In discussions with the inspection team, the children talked very positively about their learning experiences and were enthusiastic about their participation in the school council and the Eco-council. The extensive range of extra-curricular activities and opportunities to participate with their peers within the community enrich the children's learning experiences. The children's behaviour throughout the school is courteous and thoughtful and is acknowledged appropriately through the reward system.
- The school gives very good attention to promoting healthy eating and physical activity, thereby encouraging the children to adopt healthy lifestyles.

## **7. Leadership and management**

- The senior leadership team, through effective consultation with staff, governors, parents and children, has developed a clear, shared vision for improvement underpinned by excellent professional knowledge and high expectations of, and for, the children and all staff. Through the creation of a school development plan<sup>2</sup> which identifies appropriate areas for development, the senior leaders have led well the improvement work in a timely and effective manner. The improvement agenda has been supported by a comprehensive programme of targeted and appropriate professional development opportunities for all staff. A culture of robust self-evaluation and highly reflective practice is being fostered within the school, empowering all staff, but in particular those who hold a post of responsibility to lead effectively and collegially their respective areas. This practice is enabling staff to recognise where improvement is needed and to evaluate accurately the effectiveness of the actions taken.
- To support the school's revised motto, 'With faith, family and friends... anything is possible', the school has developed further its links with parents including through the creation of a new school website and the introduction of a text messaging service to parents. The school has developed recently a new reporting system with the aim of providing comprehensive information for parents on their child's progress and how as parents they can best support their child's learning; this system remains under review. The active parent-teacher association encourages parents to play a valuable role in the life of the school; in particular, the parents of newcomer children are supported sensitively to become active members of the school community.

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<sup>2</sup> The school development plan meets the requirements of the School Development Planning Regulations (NI) 2010.



- Based on the evidence available at the time of inspection, ETI's evaluation is that there can be a high degree of confidence in the aspects of governance evaluated. The governors are well-informed about all aspects of the life of the school through their engagement in school events, their involvement in school development planning and the regular review of the children's standards. They have a varied skill-set which supports well the pastoral and educational needs of the children and the improvement work of the school. It is evident that the governors provide appropriate support and challenge when necessary, making decisions which keep the children's pastoral and educational needs as central to all that they do.
- 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. The school has attained recently an external accreditation for their safeguarding practices; this involved the participation of all teaching and non-teaching staff in relevant training. In discussions with the inspectors, the children in year 6 reported that they feel very happy and secure in school and know what to do if they have any concerns about their well-being. The children spoke confidently and enthusiastically about all aspects of school life.

## **8. Overall effectiveness**

St Comgall's Primary School Antrim 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.

**Health and Safety / Accommodation**

1. The school needs to carry out a risk assessment of the slide in the outdoor play area in order to assess fully the potential risks arising during its use and the need for a safety surface.
2. While the school is using well the available space, there is insufficient space to meet effectively the learning needs of the children in small group situations, such as special educational needs, newcomer support, and peripatetic support. There are also limited additional learning spaces to support indoor play and activity-based learning.
3. Given the school's enrolment, the provision for staff and visitors' parking, and safe access to parking, are inadequate.
4. There is no access for persons with a disability to the junior building or to the upper floors of either school building.
5. The multi-purpose hall is not fit-for-purpose; it is inadequate in size relative to the school's enrolment resulting in three dining sittings at lunchtime and limits the opportunities for whole school celebrations.

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