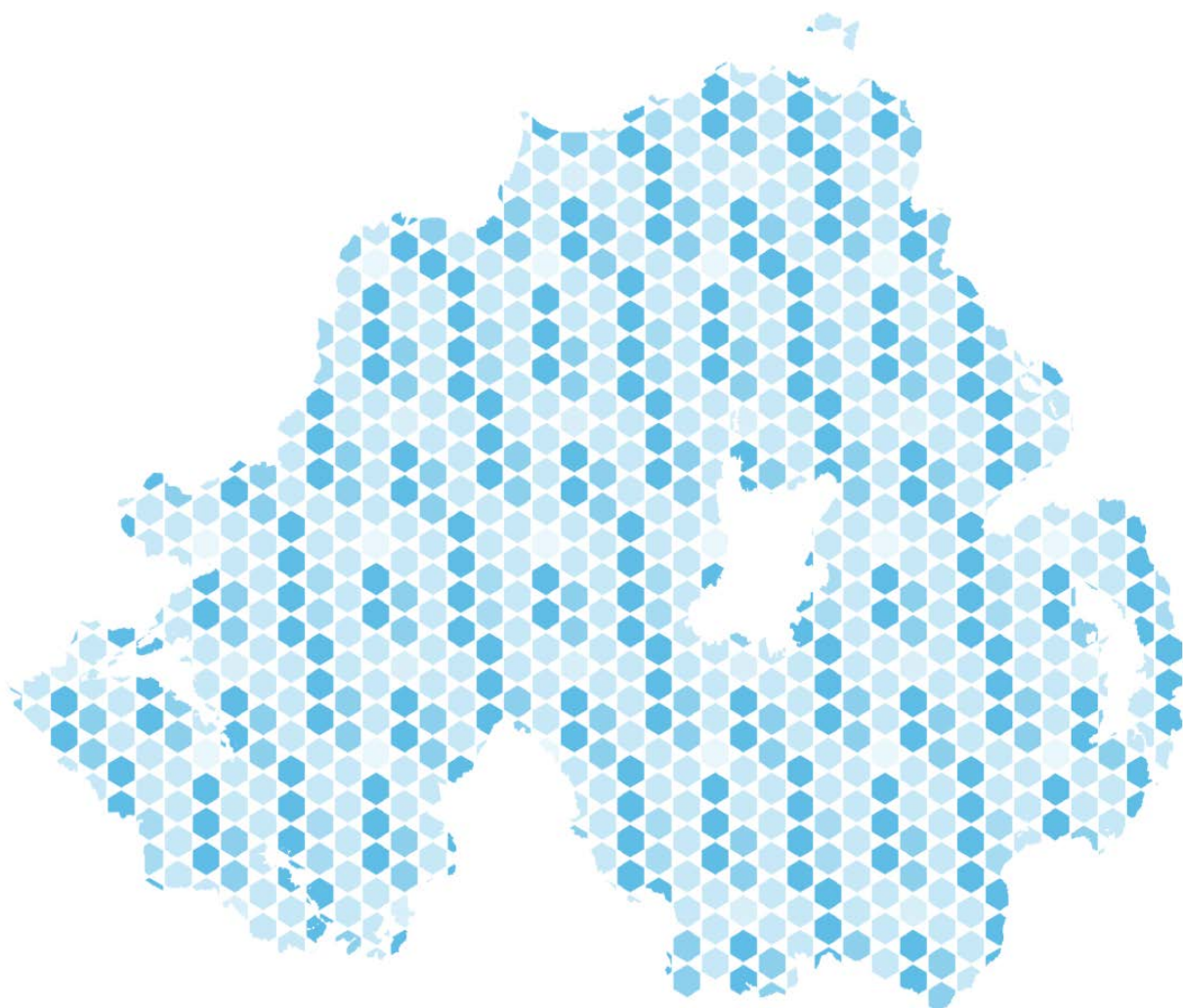


PRIMARY INSPECTION



Education and Training
Inspectorate

St Joseph's Primary School
and Nursery Unit, Bessbrook,
County Armagh

Report of an Inspection in
November 2015

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

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

A small number of the parents and a majority of the staff responded to the questionnaires. The responses to the parental questionnaires indicated high levels of satisfaction with the life and work of the school. In particular, the parents highlighted how happy their children are at the school and how well the staff support the care, dignity and well-being of the children. The staff who completed questionnaires were very positive about their work. They emphasised: the strong collegiality of the staff; the hard work of the staff in caring for and supporting the children; and, their feeling of being valued by the senior leaders. The governors expressed their appreciation for the hard work and dedication of the principal, vice-principal and staff. The ETI has reported to the principal, and representatives of the board of governors, the main findings 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 including the nursery unit and the learning support centre; and
- quality of leadership and management.

3. Context

St Joseph's Primary School and Nursery Unit is situated in the village of Bessbrook. A majority of the children live in the village and the surrounding area, and the remainder come from the South Down and South Armagh areas by taxi and car. In addition to the nursery unit, which has 54 children attending full-time, the school has a learning support centre, which has currently 30 children arranged in three classes and an autistic support class with eight children. The total enrolment, including those attending the nursery unit, has risen by 14% over the last four years and currently stands at 362 children. Over the last four years, the percentage of children entitled to free school meals and the percentage of children on the special education needs register have fluctuated slightly. The number of newcomer children has increased significantly during the last two years and currently stands at 19. The school promotes shared education through a 'Music Pathway Programme' with a local controlled primary school.

St. Joseph's Primary School	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16
Total enrolment (years 1-7; including learning support centre)	263	287	294	308
Nursery unit	54	54	52	54
Learning support centre	29	34	35	38
% School attendance	91.1	91.2	93.3	N/A
% NI Primary school average	96.1	97.3	96.6	N/A
FSME Percentage ¹	46	45	45	41
No. of children on SEN register	95	96	97	114
% of children on SEN register	30	28	28	31
No. of children with statements of educational needs	40	44	47	50
No. of newcomers	*	*	8	19
No. of Irish traveller children	19	21	15	22

Source: data as held by the school.

* fewer than 5

N/A not available

4. Overall findings of the inspection

Overall effectiveness	Address urgently the significant areas for improvement
Achievements and standards	Requires significant improvement
Provision for learning	Requires significant improvement
Leadership and management	Requires significant improvement
Nursery Unit	Requires significant improvement
Learning Support Centre	Important areas for improvement

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

5. Achievements and standards

- The children are happy and most of them are well-motivated. The behaviour of most of the children is very good, both in class and as they move around the school. In particular, when given engaging and challenging activities, most of the children settle quickly to their learning, can work individually, in pairs and in groups, and respond positively to the work provided by their teachers.
- The school's internal assessment data shows that most of the children, including those who require additional support with aspects of their learning, make progress in English and mathematics in line with their ability or above expectation. However, the first-hand evidence from the work in the children's books and the children's responses during the lessons indicates that progression in their learning requires significant improvement.
- Overall, the standards achieved by the children in literacy require significant improvement. When given the opportunity, most of the children develop well their spoken communication and listening skills through whole class discussion and role-play. The most able children in year 7 enjoy reading fiction texts from well-known contemporary authors; they read with fluency and are able to discuss a range of language techniques used by authors. However, the teachers need to develop further the children's comprehension skills, particularly the higher order thinking skills linked to class novels and guided reading books. Across all year groups, the children's writing is underdeveloped. There is variation in the quality of handwriting and the standard of the presentation of the children's written work.
- Overall, the standards achieved by the children in numeracy require significant improvement. The attainment of the children in mathematics, as demonstrated by the work in their books and assessment folders, discussions with year 7 children and observation of the children in class, indicates that a significant minority of the children are challenged insufficiently, have limited flexibility in their mathematical thinking and do not reach the standards of which they are capable.
- The achievements and outcomes of the children in the learning support centre are varied. There is evidence that the children's social skills are developing well. In the best practice, occurring in a minority of the cases, the children's progress is tracked meticulously through teacher assessment and diagnostic assessment.
- In the nursery units, the children enjoy collaborative play in the construction and home areas. A majority of the children lack concentration and motivation to sustain productive play in the nursery units. They require positive behaviour management strategies to promote an awareness of themselves and others. The children's language skills are varied and a majority of the children require support to develop further their listening, attention and speaking skills within a more enriched language environment. The more able children are challenged insufficiently to improve and develop further their early language and literacy skills. A majority of the children show awareness of number, shape and space and most follow the instructions of the staff and can sort for colour and size. The children's application of mathematical understanding and language through freely chosen play requires significant further development. In the best practice observed, the children displayed good spatial awareness and understanding of the properties of three-dimensional shapes.

6. Provision for learning

- The quality of the planning urgently needs reviewed. In particular, the medium-term and daily planning lack sufficient detail, are task orientated and do not focus sufficiently on the learning outcomes for the children. The teachers need to incorporate differentiated teaching approaches so that the full range of the children's needs is addressed. Evaluations of the children's learning are too generic and descriptive to guide future planning for effective classroom practice.
- During the inspection, one-half of the lessons observed were good or very good. In the most effective practice, the lessons had appropriate pace and challenge, the children were engaged actively in purposeful learning activities and opportunities were provided to develop their talking and listening skills. In the less effective practice, there was a poor focus on learning and the work did not sufficiently match the needs of all the children. The lessons were teacher-led and did not end with appropriate plenaries through which the children consolidate their learning. Consequently, a minority of the children became disengaged with their learning which led to low level disruptive behaviour. The marking for improvement needs to improve: the teachers' comments are often perfunctory and the children are not provided with sufficient opportunities to engage in self- and peer-evaluations.
- The planning, learning, teaching and assessment for literacy across all key stages require significant improvement. The programme for literacy provides appropriate curricular breadth. The children's involvement in school performances and the local feis present them with opportunities to communicate with a wider audience. However, there is a need to provide further regular and well-planned opportunities to develop the children's oracy through collaborative class activities, such as, group work, paired activities and presentations. In going forward, it will be important that all staff develop further a literacy-rich learning environment, with well-chosen reading materials, incorporating a wider range of non-fiction and media texts, to develop the children's enjoyment of reading and comprehension skills.
- The teachers have identified appropriately the need to improve the standard of the children's writing and have developed a whole school spelling programme, focusing on using a range of strategies to spell key words. This programme is supporting well the children's phonological development. Throughout the school, the teachers need to ensure that the children are given a wider range of opportunities to develop the children's writing skills. In particular, the children need to write extended pieces of work in a range of forms, set in meaningful contexts, and have regular opportunities to improve their written work through the re-drafting process. Overall, the teachers need to raise further the standards in literacy for all the children.
- The planning, learning, teaching and assessment for mathematics across all key stages require significant improvement and there were important areas for improvement in the majority of the mathematics lessons observed. In these lessons, the teachers' expectations for the children's learning were too low, there was an over-reliance on worksheets and there was insufficient challenge in the activities, especially for the more able children. Across the school, the children have too few opportunities to engage in investigative and problem-solving work in order to develop their thinking skills and use mathematics in meaningful real-life contexts. The teachers need to work as a team to develop the long- and

medium-term planning to ensure progression within and across the three key stages and extend the opportunities for the children to engage in differentiated active learning activities. Further, they need to assess the strengths and areas for improvement in the children's mathematical knowledge and understanding, set challenging targets at individual and class level and track the progress of the children against their targets.

- The children who require additional support with aspects of their literacy benefit from well-planned and effective withdrawal support from a specialist teacher and through the reading partnership programme. However, the teachers need to establish a more rigorous system of monitoring and evaluating the range of additional support provision throughout the school in a cohesive way in order to track more carefully the children's progress. In addition, more effective use needs to be made of the information obtained from assessments, combined with the teachers' knowledge of the children, to adapt the teaching strategies employed in the classroom to meet the learning needs of all of the children. The individual education plans across the school are not specific enough and have too many targets set to progress the children's learning.
- The provision for the children in the learning support centre is an important area for improvement. There is an over-reliance on worksheet activities, poorly organised play-based learning and insufficient development of the children's independence skills. There is also a lack of individualised planning, with robust evaluations, to inform the children's progress. The teachers need to develop further the planning for, and monitoring of, the children's integration experiences so that the children from the learning support centre benefit from meaningful opportunities for participation in the mainstream classes. The specialised support for the children with autism is a strength of the provision. There is well-differentiated individualised support, with an appropriate focus on a multi-sensory approach to learning and the use of visual prompts. Appropriately, rigorous tracking informs the review of the children's individual education plans. The classroom assistants work closely with the teachers to plan and provide appropriate support. There is a need to disseminate this effective practice within the learning support centre and across the mainstream classes. There will be a formal follow-up inspection of the learning support centre in 18-24 months.
- In the foundation stage and key stage 1, the provision for play-based and activity-based learning requires significant improvement. While the children enjoy the activities, there are insufficient opportunities to promote the children's sense of enquiry, to support the development of their language and communication skills and to develop their early mathematical skills, language and concepts. The teachers need to review urgently the planning so that the children benefit from a more challenging and progressive programme which is informed by regular observations of their learning and so meets their needs more effectively.
- The provision in the nursery unit requires significant improvement. The children and their parents are welcomed on arrival to the nursery unit. The staff prepare activities based on the *High/Scope* methodology and have reflected on various methods of planning and assessment to improve the quality of the provision. When developing further the pre-school programme, it will be important that they follow the requirements of the Pre-School Curricular Guidance and plan for breadth and balance in the six key areas of learning. In particular, the promotion of personal, social and emotional development requires planning to develop

further the children's independence. The assessment of the children's progress is too narrowly related to the testing of the children's knowledge and there is insufficient account taken of the children's ages and stages of development. The organisation of the day is fragmented and there is a need to ensure that all the time is used for learning by planning more carefully for the snack, dinner and other transitions. The staff need to review the observation, planning and assessment methods to support a more child-centred pre-school programme. There will be a formal follow-up inspection of the nursery unit in 18-24 months.

- The quality of the arrangements for pastoral care in the school and nursery unit is good and is characterised by a caring and supportive ethos. The children's views are sought, particularly through the effective school council, Eco Committee and the more recently appointed class councils. The children in year 6 spoke positively about their experiences in school, emphasising that they are proud of their school and appreciate the support they receive from their teachers. The staff need to improve further the pastoral care provision by ensuring that all of the children's needs are being met more fully in lessons and that all of the children are provided with opportunities to develop their independence and leadership skills.
- The staff give good attention to promoting healthy-eating and physical activity through the curriculum and the varied range of extra-curricular physical activities available to the children, thereby encouraging them to adopt healthy lifestyles.

7. Leadership and management

- Since September 2014, the school has undergone major changes in its leadership and management. The newly appointed senior leaders are hard-working, fully committed to the education and welfare of the children and have begun to change major aspects of the work of the school, for example, a more rigorous use of data in the tracking of the children's attainments. The new co-ordinators have taken on their responsibilities and appropriately, the senior leadership team has been enlarged. The transition to new ways of working has been considered, planned for and implemented carefully. However, the leadership at all levels needs to implement improvements more quickly. In addition, the senior leaders need to have a greater overview of, and quality assure, the work of the nursery unit and the learning support centre.
- The school development planning process is in place and is underpinned by consultation with staff, governors and parents. The evaluation of last year's action plans has informed appropriately the priorities for this year, which is the first year of the new three-year cycle. There are currently too many action plans; a majority address operational matters rather than developmental areas. It will be important in the future for the leadership at all levels to re-focus the action plans on the learning experiences and outcomes of the children, particularly using rigorous self-evaluation based, where appropriate, on qualitative and quantitative measures of performance, in order to effect improvement.
- The school has effective links and partnerships with the wider community which enrich and extend the children's learning experiences. Appropriately, the school has plans in place to involve parents more in their child's education.

- The governors have been recently reconstituted. They are supportive of the work of the school and committed to the welfare of the children. Based on the evidence presented at the time of the inspection, the ETI's evaluation is that there can be limited confidence in the aspects of governance inspected. The governors need to become better informed of the quality of provision in the nursery unit, the learning support centre and the mainstream classes, in order to provide a sufficiently robust challenge function for the work of the senior leaders.
- On the basis of the evidence available at the time of the inspection, the school and nursery unit have satisfactory arrangements in place for safeguarding children. These arrangements reflect broadly the guidance issued by the Department of Education. The following areas need to be addressed:
 - (i) the intimate care policy needs to be revised; and
 - (ii) there needs to be more comprehensive arrangements for consulting with parents when developing policies.

In discussions with the inspectors, the year 6 children reported that they feel very secure in school and know what to do if they have any concerns about their well-being.

8. Overall effectiveness

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 areas for improvement are:

- the poor quality of learning and teaching, with a particular emphasis on the urgent need to improve the quality of planning;
- the low standards achieved by the children in literacy and numeracy, with a particular focus on improving the quality of reading, writing and mathematical thinking; and
- the leadership's slow progress in implementing improvements, including the need to quality assure the work in the nursery unit and learning support centre.

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 18-24 months.

Health and Safety

The Nursery Unit

1. During the inspection, the gate into the outdoor play area was left unsecured on the first day of the inspection.
2. There is a need to risk assess the slide and ensure it is supervised at all times when in use by the children.
3. The procedures for handling and serving food need to be more hygienic and risk assessed to maintain a safe lunch routine.
4. On a small number of occasions, the supervision of the children fell below the adult-child ratio within the four zones of the learning environment.

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