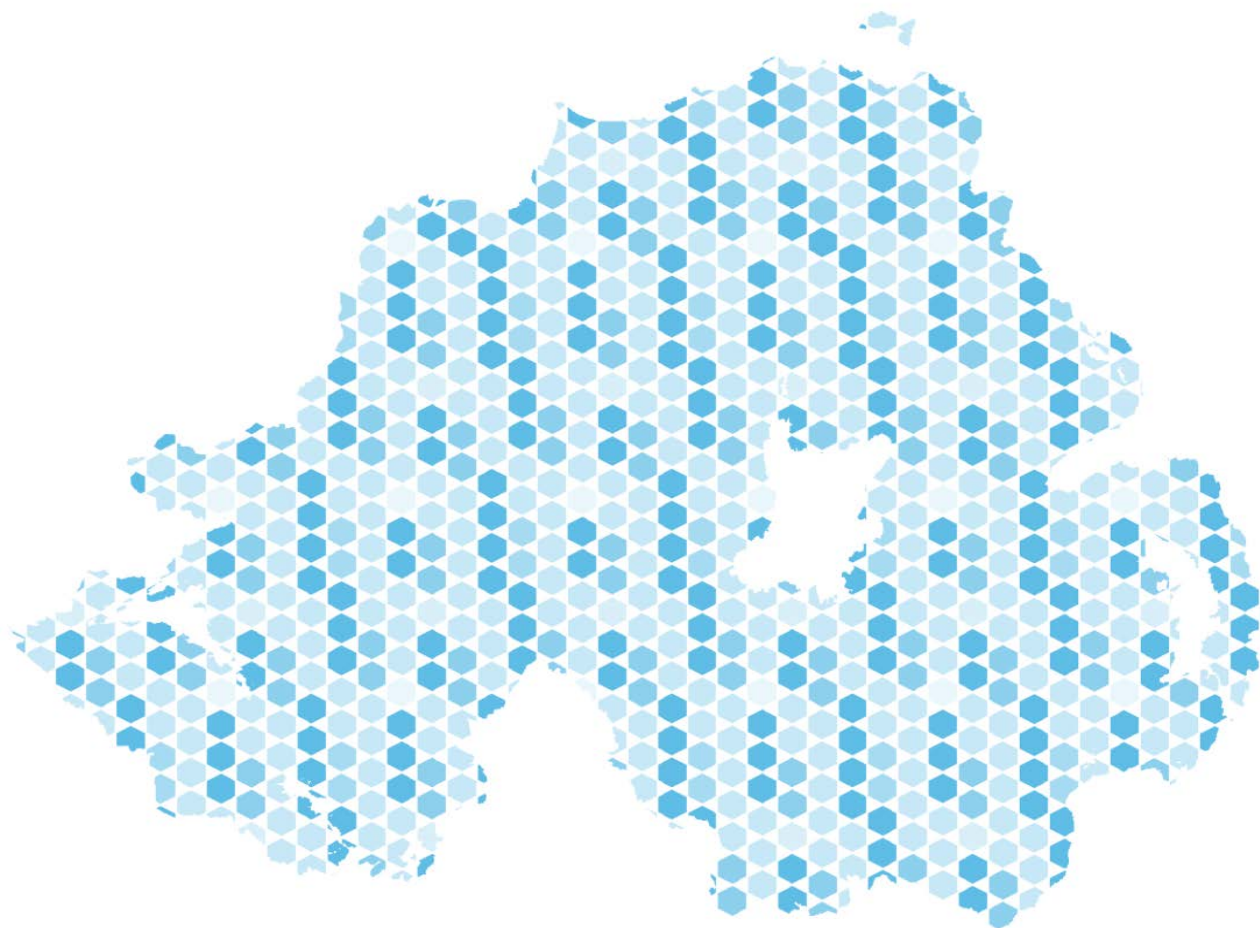


PRIMARY INSPECTION



Education and Training
Inspectorate

Strandtown Primary School,
Belfast

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

Nine percent of parents and almost all of the staff responded to the confidential questionnaire. The responses to the parental questionnaire indicated high levels of satisfaction with the life and work of the school. In particular, the parents highlighted the dedicated teachers, the well-managed transition from the feeder schools and the good range of learning opportunities beyond the classroom. The staff responses were very positive; they emphasised their commitment to the school and highlighted, in particular, how well the staff work together to plan for, monitor and evaluate the children's learning. The ETI has reported to the principal and a representative of the board of governors the main issues emerging from the parent and staff questionnaires and the discussions with the children.

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

Strandtown Primary School is a controlled primary school situated in East Belfast. The school comprises of classes from year 4 to year 7 for children aged from 8 to 11 years. The majority of the children travel by car or walk to school. The total enrolment has risen by nearly 6% in the last five years. Over this period, there has also been a twelve percent increase in the number of children entitled to free school meals. The percentage of the children on the special educational needs register and the number of newcomer children has increased slightly. The school has well-established links with a local maintained school and very close links with the three infant schools from which the vast majority of the children transfer.

Strandtown Primary School	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16
Enrolment	915	910	934	939
% School attendance	96.4	96.1	96.7	N/A
% NI Primary school average	96.1	97.3	95.4	N/A
FSME Percentage ¹	16.2	17.1	18.1	20
No. of children on SEN register	216	234	205	217
% of children on SEN register	23.6	25.7	22.0	23.2
No. of children with statements of educational need	27	20	23	26
No. of newcomer children	10	10	8	12

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

- The children are confident and well-motivated in their learning. They work well in pairs and demonstrate a clear understanding of their role within group work. The children are well behaved and respectful of their teachers and of one another. Their thinking skills are developing well, and, when provided with challenging learning opportunities which promote critical enquiry, they can provide articulate and well-reasoned responses.
- 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.
- Throughout the school, most of the children are highly articulate and engage enthusiastically with their peers and the adults. By year 7, the most able children express an enjoyment of reading and speak knowledgeably about a wide range of authors and books, including classic literature. They are fluent and expressive readers who use a wide range of reading strategies to discuss confidently the texts. In key stage one and two, the children write to a good standard using different forms and for a variety of purposes.
- In mathematics, the children are flexible in their thinking and talk confidently about a range of mental mathematics strategies using the appropriate mathematical language. By year 7, the most able children have a very secure understanding of all areas of the mathematics curriculum. They express an enjoyment of applying their learning in numeracy across other areas of the curriculum and using mathematics in real-life situations.

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

- The children who require additional support with aspects of their learning are making good progress in meeting the targets outlined in their individual education plans.
- The children achieve good standards in information and communication technology (ICT). They are developing well their competence and confidence in using interactive software and tablet technology to support their learning and to research, plan and present their work.

6. Provision for learning

- The teachers have made considerable progress in developing detailed planning to ensure consistency across the year groups. There is a clear focus on differentiated activities to meet the needs of all the learners and the staff make appropriate connections for the children across the curriculum. The teachers make detailed evaluations of the children's learning which are used by the planning teams to inform the next stage of planning. During the inspection, the quality of most of the teaching observed was good or better. The most effective lessons were characterised by the teachers' skilled use of effective questioning to develop the children's thinking skills and a very good use of plenary sessions which allowed them to reflect on their learning. In a minority of lessons, the less effective practice was typified by lessons which lacked pace and challenge, were overly teacher-directed and did not engage all of the learners. The joint planning approach restricted the teachers' creativity and confidence to personalise the lessons and this resulted in missed opportunities for the children's learning. The curriculum leaders and year heads have identified appropriately the need to develop further the effective use of marking for improvement. The children require more time to respond to the teachers' comments and make improvements to their work.
- A key strength of the special educational needs (SEN) provision is the effective way in which the SEN team, supported well by the classroom assistants, use their detailed knowledge of the children to inform the well-conceived intervention strategies. The implementation of a well-planned and innovative social skills programme provides the children with excellent opportunities to develop important life skills which support well their learning. The teachers make very good use of ICT-based games and challenges to enhance the children's enjoyment of and learning in literacy and numeracy. The SEN team analyse skilfully the qualitative and quantitative data and they monitor robustly the arrangements to ensure that the very effective use of the resources is meeting the individual needs of the children.
- The literacy programme provides a good range of opportunities for the children to express their ideas both orally and in written form. The recent focus on the development of the children's reading has resulted in the provision of well-planned reading sessions and the introduction of the school-designed 'Reading Detectives' sessions; both of which are developing effectively the children's higher order comprehension skills. The well-stocked school library is used successfully by the staff to extend the children's research and library skills. The literacy team are providing further ways in which to foster the children's enjoyment of reading, including: reading competitions; a reading for enjoyment room; and, designated areas in the library to appeal to children's specific interests. While most of the children have appropriate opportunities to write independently, the staff need to provide more opportunities for creative writing to improve further the standard of children's writing across the curriculum.

- A key feature of the numeracy provision in all classes is the school-designed 'number talk' sessions at the beginning of numeracy lessons. When used well, in most of the lessons observed, these activities motivate and challenge the children to use a range of mental mathematics strategies to solve problems which they then share and discuss with each other. In the best practice in numeracy, in the majority of lessons observed, the children are provided with very good opportunities to apply their mathematical knowledge in deciding how to manage information and how to organise and present their work. The teachers need to provide all children with more consistent opportunities to problem-solve, problem-pose, and engage in open-ended mathematical investigations.
- The quality of the provision for pastoral care is outstanding. The staff are highly committed to the care and well-being of all of the children; they work together to create a positive, supportive learning environment. The children are proud of their school. During discussions with the year 6 children, they spoke very positively of their enjoyment of learning and the many opportunities they have to contribute to decision-making within the school, through the well-established school council and the 'pupil focus' groups. The children's successes in all areas of school life are valued and celebrated. There is a wide range of support and extra-curricular activities that develop very well the children's confidence and social skills alongside their creative and sporting skills. The children's concern and empathy for others is demonstrated by their support for local, national and international charities, many of which the children select in consultation with the wider school community.
- 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 provides high quality strategic direction and embodies the school's mission statement to create a school where children 'build interest, creativity and knowledge and realise their potential.' They have worked diligently to establish effective communication amongst all members of the school community. The members of the senior leadership team have prioritised the building of leadership capacity at all levels and promote a distributed form of leadership and management through the school's leadership structures. They have created successfully a whole-school culture where innovation and professional development is highly valued. Through the introduction of pathfinder groups, new curricular initiatives are implemented and evaluated by a small number of staff before they are presented to the whole school. The year heads and curricular leaders of the school have taken part in the 'Developing Quality Teachers' programme which has resulted in the promotion of a culture of reflective practice, informed by research and development, and has led to networks of collaborative practice being established across a number of schools.

- The school development plan² is underpinned by consultation among the whole school community and by rigorous self-evaluation; it is supported by action plans which are monitored systematically. The senior leadership team makes very good use of the school's performance data and the teachers' professional judgement to track low, under and high attainment. While appropriate priorities have been identified, there is a need for the curricular leaders to reduce the number of associated targets in the action plans. The year heads and curricular leaders need to achieve greater consistency in the quality of their evaluations and ensure that these lead to further improvements in the quality of the provision and the standards achieved by the children.
- The school has very effective arrangements in place for communicating with parents. They are well informed about their children's progress and personal development through written reports, twice-yearly parent-teacher interviews and regular curriculum evenings. The parents' views are sought regularly through questionnaires and the 'Parent Focus Groups'. The school is supported by a large and very active parent-teacher association that contributes significantly to many aspects of the life and work of the school. The school has extensive links with the local and wider community as well as international connections, such as, twinning with a primary school in China, all of which enrich the children's educational experience and understanding of the world.
- 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 are highly committed to the work of the school, support the principal and exercise their challenge function. The governors have attended training sessions with staff and have taken part in observations of classroom practice. Members of staff update regularly the governors on the progress of the targets in the school development plan.
- 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 year 6 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

Strandtown Primary 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.

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

Health and Safety / Accommodation

1. The classrooms in the main building are too small which impacts negatively on the children's ability to engage with active learning opportunities.
2. There is no controlled access to the mobile classrooms at the side of the school.
3. All of the mobile classrooms have significant issues with damp, humidity, security and there are no toilet facilities; these matters may impact on the staff and children's health and well-being.
4. There is no pedestrian walkway at the front of the school.

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