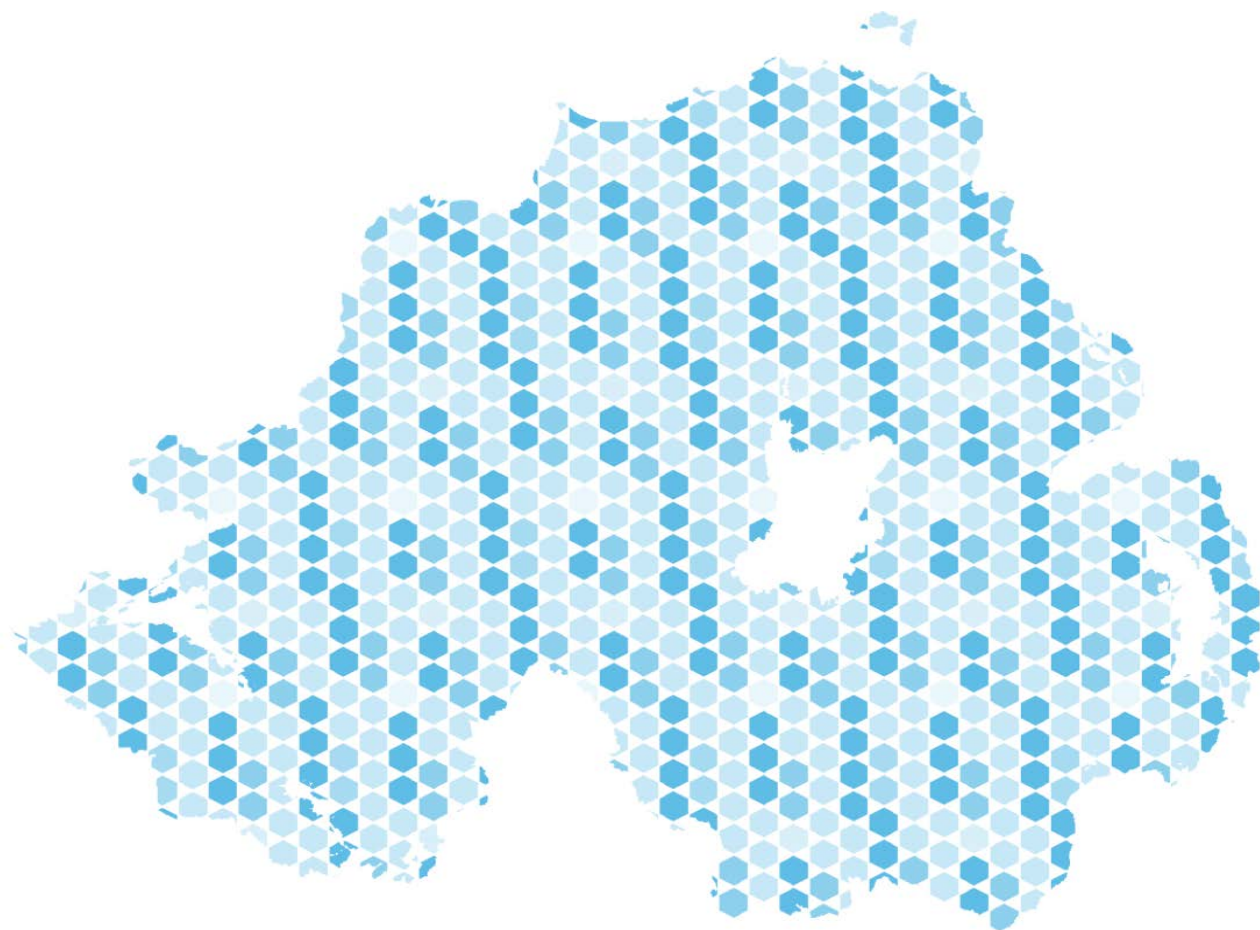


PRIMARY INSPECTION



Education and Training
Inspectorate

Victoria Primary School,
Newtownards, County Down

Report of an Inspection in
January 2016



Providing Inspection Services for

Department of Education
Department for Employment and Learning
Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure



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 three 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 parents responded to the questionnaire. Their responses were generally supportive of the life and work of the school. In particular, the parents praised the helpful and approachable staff and their children's enjoyment of learning. Almost all of the teaching staff and a minority of the non-teaching staff completed questionnaires and their responses were very positive. They emphasised: the effective leadership, the progress that the school has made in self-evaluation and the safe and happy learning environment. 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

Victoria Primary School is a controlled primary school situated in East Street, Newtownards. While most of the children attending the school come from the town, the catchment area has widened significantly in recent years with children attending from Conlig, Bangor and Millisle. The enrolment has increased over the last four years, as has the percentage of children entitled to free school meals, the number of newcomer children and the proportion requiring additional support with aspects of their learning. Since September 2014, the school has experienced significant changes in staffing, including the appointment of a principal, the composition of the middle and senior management teams and the appointment of five new permanent members of the teaching staff. At the time of the inspection, there were four temporary teachers employed in the school.

Victoria Primary School	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16
Enrolment	515	532	527	553
% School attendance	94.7	95.0	94.7	N/A
% NI Primary school average	94.9	95.6	95.4	N/A
FSME Percentage ¹	28	27.6	28.5	30.9
No. of children on SEN register	118	121	92	129
% of children on SEN register	22.9	22.7	17.5	23.4
No. of children with statements of educational need	10	12	15	22
No. of newcomer children	8	11	13	22

Source: data as held by the school.

* fewer than 5

N/A not available

4. Overall findings of the inspection

Overall effectiveness	Capacity to identify and bring about improvement
Achievements and standards	Good
Provision for learning	Good
Leadership and management	Very good

5. Achievements and standards

- The children are friendly and courteous, interacting confidently with staff and visitors to the school. Almost all of the children demonstrate a positive attitude to their learning. They work well individually and, when given the opportunity, can collaborate effectively with a partner. During the inspection, the children's behaviour was commendable.
- The school's performance 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.
- The children achieve good standards in literacy. Across the key stages, most of the children are articulate and can express their ideas and opinions with confidence. During the inspection, the most able children in year 7 read with fluency and expression, spoke knowledgeably about a wide range of authors and had a very good understanding of the books that they were reading. The children generally present their written work very well and can write to a good standard using a range of forms.
- Overall, the children achieve good standards in numeracy. The majority of the children engage enthusiastically in mental mathematics activities and use appropriate mathematical language to discuss their learning. By year 7, the most able children are secure in their knowledge of key mathematical concepts, confident and flexible in their thinking across all the areas of mathematics and able to justify their answers using accurate mathematical language.

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

- Recently, the school has invested significantly in information and communication technology (ICT). With increased access to a range of ICT devices, software programmes and tablet technology, the children are developing well their competence in using their ICT skills to support and enhance their learning, particularly in literacy and numeracy.

6. Provision for learning

- Recently, the teachers' medium-term planning has been reviewed by all staff and a new format has been created to help ensure a more consistent approach to learning and teaching across the school. In going forward, there is a need to: integrate more explicitly opportunities for the children to develop their thinking skills and creativity to meet better the wide range of abilities within each classroom; connect the learning across the curriculum; and, ensure evaluations of the children's learning are rigorous and inform future planning more effectively.
- In the majority of the lessons observed the learning and teaching was effective and, in almost one quarter of the lessons, highly effective. In the most effective practice the children were engaged fully throughout the lesson and the teachers used skilful questioning to extend their thinking. Where the teaching was less effective, in a minority of the lessons observed, the learning was over-directed by the teacher, the lessons were not differentiated appropriately to meet the needs of the children, and the plenary sessions were not used effectively to consolidate and extend the learning. All of the teachers mark the children's work regularly and supportively; in the best practice, the marking provides helpful feedback to direct the children on how to improve their work.
- The school gives a high priority to supporting children who have difficulty with aspects of their learning. Key strengths of the special educational needs provision include the early identification of need, effective individualised learning programmes and good quality withdrawal sessions for both literacy and numeracy. The format of the children's individual education plans has been reviewed recently, providing a comprehensive overview of the needs of the children and taking account of their views. In going forward, it will be important for the staff to include more focused targets in order to monitor the effectiveness of the intervention strategies and track the children's progress.
- A good start has been made to the monitoring of the literacy programme; the recent focus on improving the quality of reading throughout the school has led to a systematic, whole school approach to the planning and teaching of reading. The children read a wide range of fiction and non-fiction books which is contributing to their enjoyment of reading. When provided with the opportunity to do so, the children work competently in pairs, sharing and developing their ideas. It will be important for the children to have the opportunity to work in larger groups to develop further their ability to work with others and take on a variety of roles. By the end of the foundation stage, the children are developing well their phonological awareness and are confident in 'having a go' to express their ideas through, for example, writing simple sentences. As they progress through the school, the children use spelling, punctuation and grammar with increasing accuracy and write competently for a range of purposes and audiences. The staff now need to develop an agreed policy for the development of writing across the key stages to ensure progression in the writing forms and to increase the children's opportunities to write more extended pieces in meaningful contexts across the curriculum.

- There is a whole-school coherent approach to the teaching of mental mathematics. In the most effective practice, the teachers use well the mental agility starter activities to develop the children's mathematical language. Throughout the school, the teachers need to: broaden their teaching approaches in mathematics to provide further opportunities for stimulating and practical learning experiences; link the children's learning experiences to real life situations; and, where appropriate, connect the learning more effectively to other areas of the curriculum. The school has identified appropriately the need to develop further the long- and medium-term planning for numeracy to ensure progression and consistency in all aspects of the mathematics curriculum and to meet more effectively the individual needs of all children.
- The provision for the play based programme provides many interesting opportunities for the children to consolidate their learning. The availability of an appropriate range of writing tools and materials provides the children with good opportunities to develop their experimental writing skills. Overall, the play programme needs to take more account of the children's previous learning and ensure that the activities on offer provide sufficient challenge as the children progress through the foundation stage. It will be important for the staff to develop a more systematic method of recording the children's responses to the planned activities in order to inform their future planning and to take account of the children's individual learning needs.
- The quality of the arrangements for pastoral care in the school is good. A key strength of the provision is the good quality working relationships between the staff and the children that promotes a caring ethos. The school is developing the children's voice, in and out of class, through the very good work of the recently established Eco and school councils, the children's involvement in the anti-bullying initiative and through the responsibility taken by the mature and confident year 7 playground mentors. Going forward, it will be important that the staff develop further the personal capabilities of the children and extend the strategies to help staff working with those children who have particular barriers to their learning.
- The school gives very good attention to promoting healthy eating and physical activity through a wide range of extra-curricular activities and programmes that encourage the children to adopt healthy lifestyles.

7. Leadership and management

- Since her appointment in September 2014, the principal has inspired confidence and respect through her strategic leadership, which is focused on raising standards through addressing the pastoral needs of the children and the staff. Over the last year, the newly established senior leadership team, working in partnership with the school governors, has developed a clear management structure through the appointment of year group leaders and learning co-ordinators. Significant resources have been allocated to implementing a comprehensive staff training programme, which is developing well the expertise and confidence of middle management in carrying out their roles and responsibilities.

- The school development plan² has been created through extensive consultation with the children, staff parents and governors. Very good use has been made of self-evaluation through whole school audits and information gained through questionnaires to identify appropriate areas for improvement. The strategic actions taken by the leadership and management to promote improvement, including the development of mental mathematics strategies throughout the school and the focus on reading, have been successful in raising standards. In going forward, it will be important to ensure that evaluations are robust and outline clearly the impact of the improvement work on the achievements and standards of all of the children.
- The school has effective arrangements in place for communicating with parents through regular newsletters, a recently established parent-teacher association and through the parental involvement in the mental mathematics homework books. The school has established very good links with external organisations that add value to the pastoral programme; the links with a counselling service is much valued by 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 are actively involved in the school development planning process, participating in staff development and meeting regularly with learning co-ordinators to review action plans. They provide high levels of support, coupled with challenge, in relation to the use of financial resources.
- 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 year 6 children spoke maturely about their enjoyment of school life and reported that they feel secure in school and know what to do if they have any concerns about their well-being.

8. Overall effectiveness

Victoria Primary School demonstrates the capacity to identify and bring about improvement in the interest of all the learners. The ETI will continue to monitor how the school sustains improvement. In particular, the need to:

- ensure that the teachers plan for, implement and evaluate the use of a range of learning strategies in order to meet more effectively the needs of all of the children and raise further the standards that they attain; and
- develop the role of the learning co-ordinators in monitoring and evaluating the impact of learning and teaching strategies on the standards the children attain.

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

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