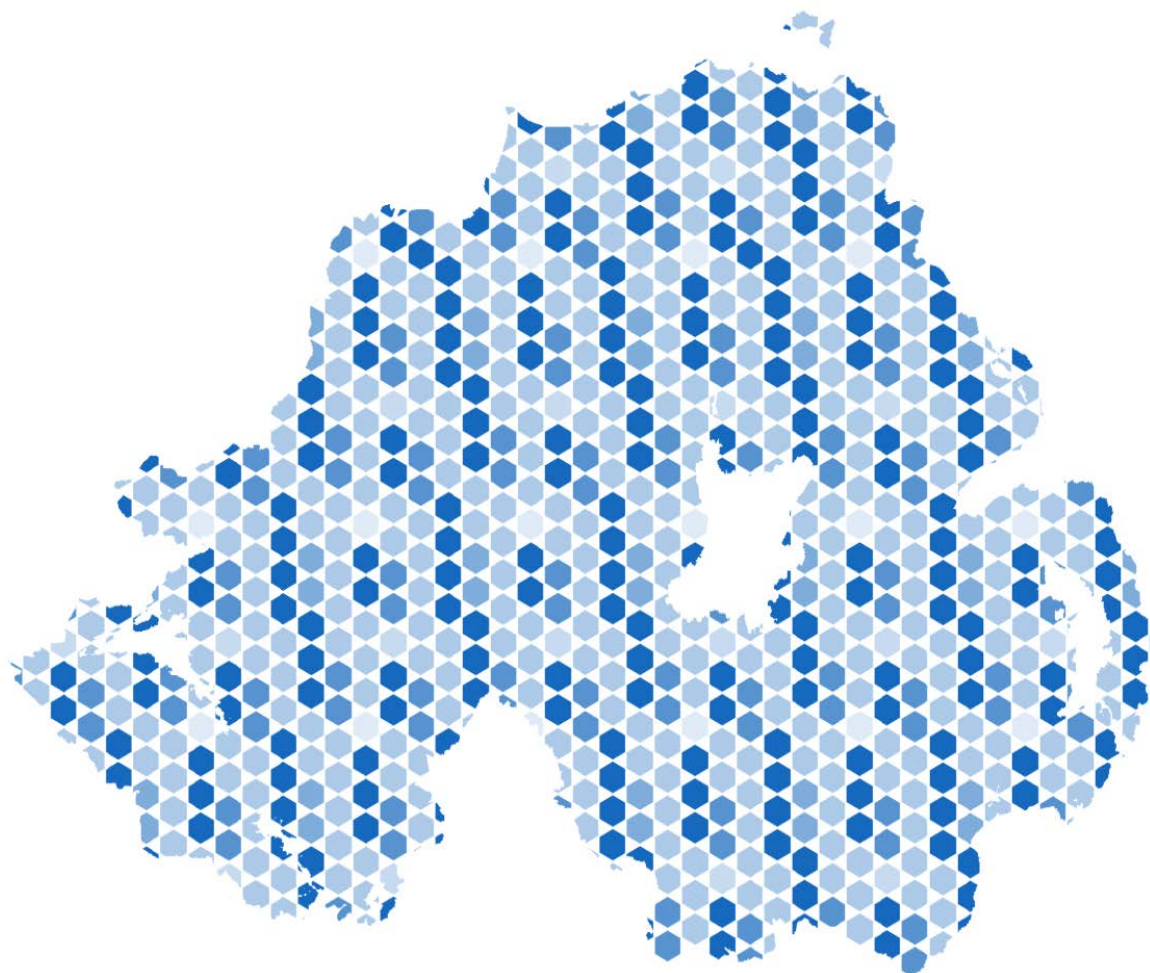


SPECIAL SCHOOL INSPECTION



Education and Training
Inspectorate

Oakwood School and
Assessment Centre, Belfast

Report of an inspection in
October 2016



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 outcomes, 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 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 special 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-special-education.htm>

Inspectors observed learning and teaching, scrutinised documentation and the children's written work and held formal and informal discussions with children (individually and as a group), teachers and staff with specific responsibilities.

The arrangements for this inspection included a meeting with representatives from the governors and the opportunity for all parents, teaching and support staff to complete a confidential questionnaire.

A small number of parents (seven) and thirty seven percent of staff (26) responded to the questionnaires. The parental replies indicated satisfaction that the staff know and care for their child. However, concerns were expressed that occupational therapy was no longer provided to the children and the lack of communication received from the school about their child's progress was discussed. A majority of the staff who completed the questionnaires highlighted the team approach of the school, and the emphasis placed on professional development. Issues regarding staff concerns within the school were discussed with the governors and senior leaders.

2. Focus of inspection

In order to promote improvement in the interests of all children, the purpose of inspection is, through effective linking of internal and external approaches, to:

- evaluate the quality of the provision and the outcomes for the children;
- evaluate the school's leadership and management and its capacity to effect and sustain improvement in its provision and outcomes; and
- inform the school's planning for improvement.

3. Context

Oakwood School and Assessment Centre provides education for 109 children with severe, profound and multiple learning difficulties from nursery to year four; it is situated off Harberton Park in south Belfast. The school enrolment has remained consistent for the past four years.

Oakwood School and Assessment Centre	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16
Enrolment school	107	107	108	109
% Attendance	88.9	91.2	89.9	89.9
Teachers	19	19	19	19
Classroom assistants	15	15	14	16
General assistants	33	33	33	36
FSME Percentage ¹	60.7	68.2	64.2	59.6
Newcomers	*	*	*	8

Source: data as held by the school.

* fewer than 5

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

4. Overall findings of the inspection

Overall effectiveness	Address urgently the significant areas for improvement
Achievements and outcomes	Good
Provision for learning	Requires significant improvement
Leadership and management	Requires significant improvement

5. Achievements and outcomes

- Most of the children demonstrate positive attitudes and dispositions and are very well behaved. The children are at ease with the staff and interact well with the adults in the classroom.
- Most of the children engage well with learning and are developing “turn taking” skills, and their ability to persist with tasks and activities. In the most effective practice observed, the children take on roles and responsibilities within the school; for example, as class helpers.
- From the observations of children in class, the quality of the work achieved by a majority of them in literacy and numeracy is good. By the end of key stage one (KS1) a significant minority of the children are developing well their reading skills and can talk about their activities, when prompted. During structured activity sessions, the children can use a range of resources and games effectively to support their development in the key mathematical concepts such as shape, counting, weight, measurement, time and problem solving. As they progress through the school, a significant minority of the children display a positive attitude to numeracy and cooperate well with their teachers in one-to-one practical tasks.
- Importantly, there is insufficient monitoring and evaluation of the children’s progress to demonstrate clearly their achievements and outcomes. In addition, further collaborative work is required with the children’s appropriate receiving schools to facilitate more effectively their transition to the next stage of education.

6. Provision for learning

- The planning for learning requires significant improvement. The short-term planning across and between year groups is disjointed and does not evidence sufficiently the learning potential from the activities and associated resources provided. The strategies to maximise the children’s use of language, literacy and numeracy are not consistently clear in the planning for learning. The use of information and communication technology (ICT) to stimulate, extend and consolidate the children’s learning is not documented within the planning or evident in the classroom practice. Overall, the review and evaluation of the planning is not detailed or specific enough to inform effectively the next stage of the children’s learning.

- The assessment system requires significant improvement. While a number of new assessments to inform the progress of the children have been introduced their impact on planning for learning is ineffective. There is a lack of appropriate clarity across and among the staff regarding the rationale for assessments, the information required to track effectively the children's progress and the use of assessment systems to inform their future learning.
- During the inspection, a majority of learning and teaching observed was good or better. In these lessons there were effective working relationships between teachers and assistants to support the children in their learning, appropriate emphasis was placed on meeting the sensory needs of the children, and there was a well-chosen range of strategies which engaged and maintained the attention of the children. In contrast, in almost one third of the lessons, there was a lack of focus on the intended learning outcomes, the pace of the lesson was too slow, ICT was not incorporated into the learning activities, and there was ineffective communication between the teachers and assistants which resulted in missed opportunities for learning and skills development for the children. Also, the timetables demonstrate a lack of balance in the curriculum provision and a majority of the lessons are too lengthy and do not adequately sustain the children's engagement and interest, resulting in missed opportunities for learning.
- In a significant minority of the lessons observed there was a lack of effective and consistent strategies to support the children with communication difficulties. The staff were not proactive in promoting and enabling the children to use their individual communication systems effectively, for example, to show preferences during play and work sessions, and to indicate when they need to access calming activities. The underdeveloped use of communication systems and aids impacted on the children's ability to participate fully within the lesson.
- In the nursery and foundation Stage, rhymes and songs are used effectively to introduce the children to suitable vocabulary, early number and counting skills. There are good opportunities to develop the children's language skills through appropriate labelling of items and through the staffs' interactions with the children during play. Timers are used well to help the children bring their activities to a close.
- In KS1, during structured mathematics activity sessions, the children use well a range of mathematical resources and games to support their development in the key mathematical concepts and problem solving. However, it is important to ensure that all classes and children have equitable access to the resources. The teachers engage the children well through story time to develop their talking, listening and reading skills. They make good use of songs and percussion instruments to develop the children's respective communication and music making skills.
- The quality of the arrangements for pastoral care is good. The teaching and support staff provide a warm atmosphere and a caring environment for the children's learning, encouraging them often to develop self-confidence. In discussion with the inspection team, the children reported that they feel happy and enjoy their activities in the school. The regular classroom sessions of circle time activities, provide a supportive framework for the development of the children's empathy and friendships with each other. The teachers and assistants work effectively in these sessions to develop the children's self-esteem through praise and rewards. More consistent and effective use by the school of support

and advice from relevant agencies, including allied health, is required to enhance the teachers' skills and support the children's learning. The school uses home school diaries to communicate with parents; however consulting with the parents on the content covered would enhance their value.

- By the end of KS1, the children talk enthusiastically about the range of fruit they enjoy at break times and are aware of the importance of healthy eating. The children have regular opportunities for outside play.

7. Leadership and management

- While the leadership team of the school was restructured in January 2015, and a majority of its members demonstrate enthusiasm and commitment to their areas of responsibility, a distributive approach to leadership is not evident. In particular, roles and responsibilities have not been delegated effectively, and consequently the leadership team has had limited impact on whole school improvement. A shared understanding of an agreed and coherent direction for the school, based on focused curricular audits and the rigorous monitoring and evaluation of learning and teaching, has not been established.
- The co-ordinators have engaged in planning and year group meetings but have not been enabled to carry out effectively the responsibilities for their area of co-ordination. Opportunities for co-ordinators to work within teams to manage whole school areas such as literacy, numeracy and ICT across the key stages have not been provided. There has been a lack of relevant training, and related opportunities to disseminate effective practice across the school.
- Based on the evidence presented at the time of inspection, the ETI's evaluation is that there can be limited confidence in the areas of the governance evaluated. There are aspects of governance to review, namely to:
 - develop their challenge and support function regarding the leadership and management of the school to improve the quality of the provision and the outcomes for the children; and
 - ensure the senior leadership team work cohesively to establish more effective systems for monitoring and evaluating the quality of learning and teaching.
- The school development plan does not meet the requirements of the Department of Education. A robust system for consultation, with parents and governors in particular, has not been established by the school leadership team. There is insufficient monitoring and evaluation of action plans, and consequently the school is unable to demonstrate the impact of previous work or its capacity to effect and sustain improvement.
- On the basis of the evidence available at the time of the inspection, the school has satisfactory arrangements in place for safeguarding children. These arrangements broadly reflect the guidance issued by the Department of Education. The following areas need to be addressed:
 - the designated and deputy designated teachers need to be located in the school on a full-time basis; and
 - the governors need to ensure that their safeguarding training is updated regularly as specified by the Department of Education.

8. Overall effectiveness

The school needs to address urgently the significant areas for improvement identified in the interest of all learners. It requires external support to do so. The ETI will monitor and report on the school's progress in addressing the need to:

- review the balance of the curriculum provision to improve the learning opportunities for the children and facilitate more effectively the transition to their next stage of education;
- implement rigorous planning and assessment processes, with robust systems of monitoring and evaluation at all levels to improve further the progression and outcomes for the children; and
- articulate clearly the roles and responsibilities of senior leaders and co-ordinators to build their capacity to identify school priorities, and actions to effect improvement.

There will be a formal follow up inspection in 18-24 months.

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