

PRIMARY INSPECTION 2014-15



Education and Training
Inspectorate

Stranmillis Primary School
and Nursery Unit, Belfast

Report of an Inspection in
September 2014



Providing Inspection Services for

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

CUSTOMER
SERVICE
EXCELLENCE



Quantitative terms

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 in reports:

DESCRIPTOR
Outstanding
Very Good
Good
Satisfactory
Inadequate
Unsatisfactory

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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 Education and Training Inspectorate's (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 teaching and learning, 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.

Twelve percent of parents and 57% of staff (teaching and non-teaching) in the primary school and nursery unit responded to the questionnaires. Overall, the responses to the parental questionnaires indicated high levels of satisfaction with the life and work of the school. In particular, the parents expressed their appreciation of the approachable, caring and hardworking staff, the diversity of opportunities for the children to extend their learning within an inclusive learning environment and the dedicated, effective leadership of the principal. Over half of the staff completed questionnaires and their responses were very positive. They emphasised the high quality of the working relationships at all levels, their meaningful involvement in decision-making processes and their valued links with the parents and wider community. ETI reported to the principal and a representative of the board of governors the main issues emerging from the questionnaires and the discussions.

2. Focus of inspection

The inspection focused on:

1. the children's achievements and standards in literacy and numeracy, in particular, how the school is addressing low attainment and underachievement where applicable;
2. the quality of provision in the school, including the nursery unit; and
3. the quality of leadership and management.

3. Context

Stranmillis Primary School and Nursery Unit is situated off the Stranmillis Road in South Belfast. The enrolment of the primary school remains steady at 413 children, with an additional 52 children in the nursery unit. The children come from the surrounding local and wider area. The school prides itself on its international and inclusive ethos, including 56 children whose first language is other than English. At the time of the inspection, about 6.5% of the children were entitled to free school meals (FSM) and approximately 12% of the children had been identified by the school as requiring additional support with aspects of their learning.

Stranmillis Primary School and Nursery Unit	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
Enrolment	459	455	454	465
% Attendance (NI Average)	97%	97%	98%	-
FSME Percentage ¹	4%	3%	5%	6.5%
% (No) of children on SEN register	12% (55)	13% (59)	12% (54)	12% (56)
No. of children with statements of educational needs	9	7	6	7
No. of newcomers	71	66	71	56

Source: data as held by the school.

* fewer than 5

4. Overall findings of the inspection

Overall Performance Level	Outstanding
Achievements and Standards	Outstanding
Provision	Very good
Leadership and Management	Outstanding
Nursery Unit	Outstanding

5. Achievements and standards

- From the earliest stage in the nursery unit to year 7, the children are inquisitive and engage enthusiastically in all aspects of their learning; almost all have high levels of self-awareness and independence in how they approach their work. Most of the children are articulate in explaining their thinking, giving well-reasoned, extended responses in discussions with their peers and the adults and formulating further lines of enquiry to broaden their learning. Across the school, the quality, content and presentation of the children's written work, including their independent writing, is of a very high standard. The children show maturity in their ability to evaluate key aspects of their learning.
- The school's performance data shows that almost all children, including those who require additional support with aspects of their learning, make very good or outstanding progress in English and mathematics in line with their ability or above expectation. The teachers share high aspirations for the children which, together with the standard of the children's achievements, enable them to progress successfully to the next stage of their learning.

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

- The children work confidently on their own, in pairs and in groups, using their talking, listening and thinking skills to deepen their understanding and improve the quality of their written work. By year 7, the children attain outstanding standards in English: the most able children read and talk assuredly and enthusiastically about a wide range of increasingly challenging texts. From an early stage, they select and combine various strategies skilfully to read and comprehend unfamiliar words and phrases; they empathise with characters, compare and contrast plots, settings and the different writing styles of various authors.
- In mathematics, across all stages, the children's well-developed thinking skills enable them to make choices and decisions during mathematical investigations and to explain and justify the strategies they use in problem solving. By year 7, the children attain outstanding standards in mathematics. The children are very secure in their knowledge of important mathematical ideas and concepts; they use mathematical language precisely and apply their mathematical understanding flexibly in real and relevant contexts across the curriculum.
- The children in the nursery unit are very well settled for the time of year and are becoming familiar with the various routines of the nursery. They are happy to explore and investigate the many interesting activities on offer in the attractive and stimulating learning environment. A majority of children spend lengthy periods in sustained and purposeful play and express their thoughts and ideas in a representational form.
- The children are highly skilled in using a wide range of information and communication technology (ICT) devices and software to extend and express their learning across the curriculum; this work includes working with images, interactive design, online communication and desktop publishing.

6. Provision

- The teachers' planning is comprehensive and increasingly well informed by their thorough evaluation of the children's previous learning and detailed knowledge of their individual needs. In the most effective practice, in most of the lessons observed, the learning activities contained very good pace, challenge and progression and took close account of the children's needs and interests. In these lessons, the teachers structured the tasks to enable the children to take greater responsibility for key aspects of their own learning and used effective questioning to draw out more detailed responses, thereby deepening the children's understanding.
- The children who require additional help with aspects of their learning, including those in the nursery unit, are identified early and supported very well to be motivated and to experience success. Individualised support programmes, including skilfully planned withdrawal sessions for literacy and numeracy, the involvement of a wide range of external agencies, and the provision of well-matched learning activities are used effectively to support the children's varying needs. As a result, the children are confident and achieve very positive learning outcomes.

- The teachers provide a stimulating literacy environment and integrate literacy well across the curriculum to provide meaningful and purposeful contexts for learning. The school has implemented a systematic and coherent approach to the development of reading and writing and has embedded effectively a wider variety of teaching strategies. In all classes, the children write to a very high standard for a variety of purposes and audiences across the curriculum. An important feature of the numeracy provision is the focus on problem solving to extend the children's reasoning and to encourage them to apply their knowledge of mathematical processes. As a result, the children's well-developed thinking skills enable them to make choices and decisions during mathematical investigations and to explain and justify the strategies they select and use.
- In the nursery unit, the staff use appropriate themes and topics to plan a varied and progressive programme that takes account of the children's differing needs and interests. Every opportunity is used effectively to develop the children's language and learning and the quality of the interaction between the staff and the children is consistently of a very high standard.
- The quality of the arrangements for pastoral care in the school, including the nursery unit, is outstanding. Amongst the many strengths of the school's provision are the high quality working relationships at all levels, the school's welcoming and inclusive ethos which celebrates diversity, the outstanding arrangements for special educational needs and the positive ways in which the staff take account of the children's views from the earliest stage.
- The school gives a high priority to promoting a healthy lifestyle through the curriculum and through the varied range of extra-curricular physical activities available to the children. As a consequence, the children understand and enjoy the benefits of being active and involved in games and sports.

7. Leadership and management

- The principal, vice-principal and senior leadership team provide outstanding strategic leadership which focuses on the continuous improvement of the school's provision and sustaining and improving further the high standards attained by the children. They work closely with the staff regarding the implementation of a realistic school development plan (SDP). The co-ordinators, including the teacher-in-charge of the nursery unit, are knowledgeable and skilled in leading change and monitoring and evaluating the impact on provision and standards within and across their areas of responsibility.
- The school operates robust and well-conceived processes for self-evaluation leading to improvement; these processes make rigorous and methodical use of a wide range of qualitative and quantitative data to identify and set suitable targets in the school development plan (SDP). The school's high-quality staff development programmes compliment the action plans well and increase the teachers' capacity to bring about further improvement in the provision.

- The school has outstanding links and partnerships with the parents and the wider community which enrich and extend the children's learning experiences. The staff value the parents as partners in developing their children's learning and encourage their participation in all school events and programmes. There are appropriate procedures in place to keep parents informed about their child's progress.
- The governors collaborate effectively with the principal and staff in developing school improvement; they support and challenge thoroughly and thoughtfully the progress of the actions which are carried out in the implementation of the SDP. Based on the evidence presented at the time of inspection, ETI's evaluation is that there can be a high degree of confidence in the aspects of governance evaluated.
- On the basis of the evidence available at the time of the inspection, the school and nursery unit have comprehensive arrangements in place for safeguarding children. These arrangements reflect the guidance issued by the Department of Education. During the inspection, the inspectors met with a group of year six children. In discussions, the children spoke highly of the support they receive from their teachers and the wide range of sporting, cultural and social activities which they enjoy. They state that they feel safe and cared for in school and are aware of what to do if they have any concerns about their safety or well-being.

8. Conclusion

In the areas inspected, the quality of education provided by this school and nursery unit is outstanding; the quality of pastoral care is also outstanding. The school has demonstrated its capacity for sustained self-improvement.

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