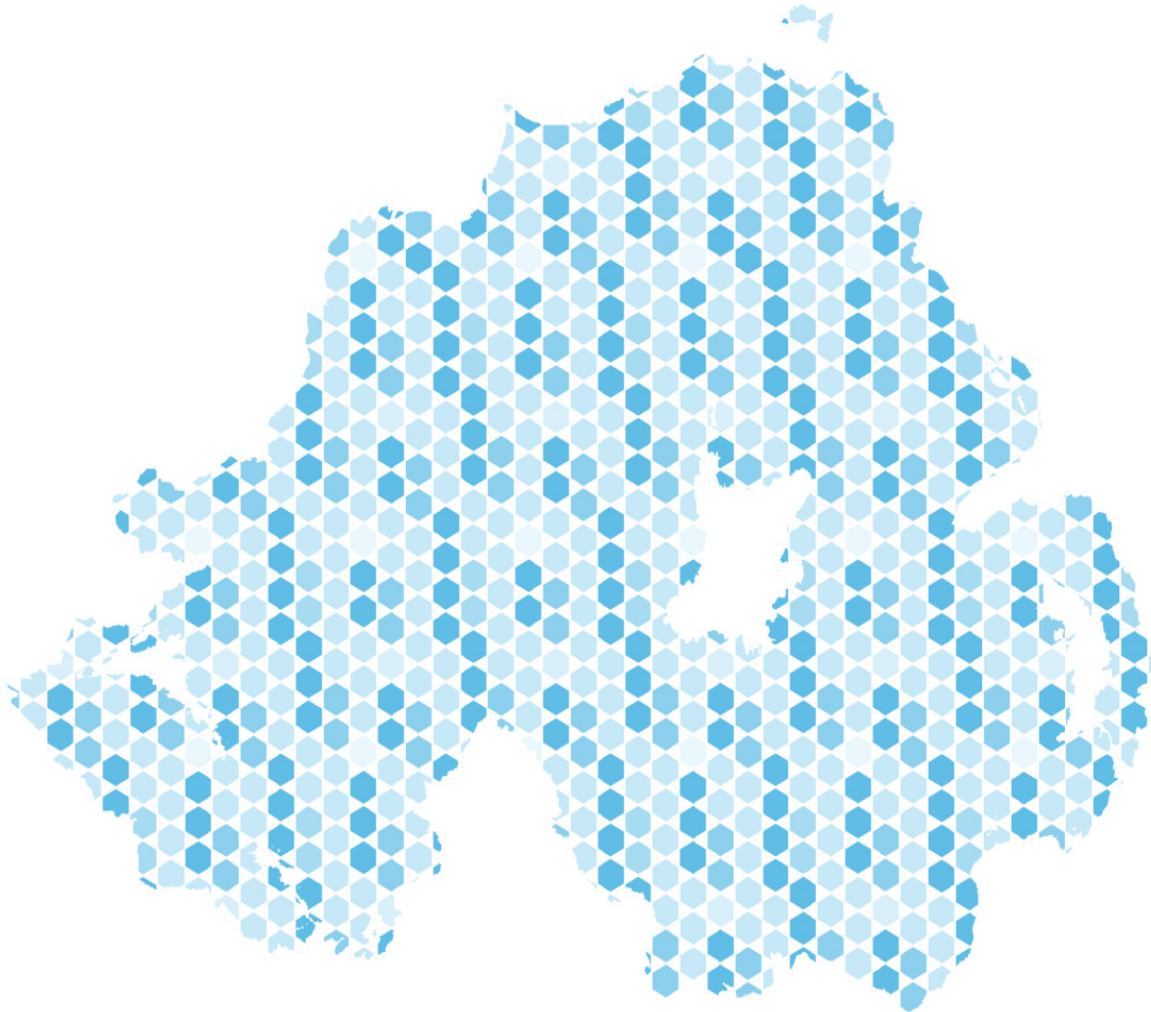


PRIMARY INSPECTION



Education and Training
Inspectorate

St John's Primary School,
Gilford, Craigavon

Report of an Inspection
in November 2010

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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%

In assessing the various features of the provision, Inspectors relate their evaluations to six descriptors as set out below:

DESCRIPTOR
Outstanding
Very Good
Good
Satisfactory
Inadequate
Unsatisfactory

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 SCHOOL CONTEXT

St John's Primary School is situated on Castle Hill in Gilford, Craigavon, County Armagh. The enrolment has fluctuated slightly over the past five years and currently stands at 133. Almost all of the children come from the immediate area. At the time of the inspection 30% of the children were entitled to free school meals and 23% of the children were identified as requiring help with aspects of their learning.

1.2 FOCUS

The inspection focused on:

- the children's achievements and standards in literacy and numeracy;
- the quality of provision for learning; and
- the quality of leadership and management.

In addition, the use of information and communication technology (ICT) to support learning, and the school's arrangements for pastoral care, including child protection, were evaluated.

1.3 THE VIEWS OF THE PARENTS, TEACHERS, GOVERNORS, SUPPORT STAFF AND CHILDREN

The arrangements for the inspection included the opportunity for the parents, the teachers and support staff to complete a confidential questionnaire prior to the inspection, as well as meetings with representatives from the Board of Governors (governors) and a group of children from year 6.

Of the eighty five questionnaires issued to parents 31 (36%) were returned to Inspection Services Branch, including ten which contained an additional written comment. Almost all of the responses from the questionnaires indicated a high level of satisfaction with the provision in the school. In particular, the parents valued the happy learning environment, the nurturing ethos within the school, the wide range of extra-curricular activities provided for the children and the dedicated and hard-working Principal, teachers and non-teaching staff. The very small number of concerns raised has been discussed with the governors and the Principal.

All of the teachers and support staff completed the questionnaire. Their responses were wholly supportive of the Principal and of the work of the school.

The governors expressed strong appreciation of the commitment of the whole staff to providing fair and equal learning opportunities for all of the children and of the high standards of care and support shown to them. They paid particular tribute to the Principal for her leadership and vision for the development of the school within the community.

In discussions held with the year 6 children, they spoke enthusiastically about how their teachers make learning enjoyable, about the support they receive from the teachers and about the wide range of after-school activities available to them. They also indicated that they feel safe in school and know who to speak to if they have any concerns.

1.4 PASTORAL CARE

The quality of the arrangements for pastoral care in the school is very good. Among the strengths are the excellent working relationships at all levels, the inclusive, 'listening' ethos, the importance placed on developing each child as an individual and the wide range of programmes for parents to enable them to support their children's learning.

1.5 CHILD PROTECTION

The school has very good, comprehensive arrangements in place for safeguarding children; these arrangements reflect the guidance issued by the Department of Education.

1.6 HEALTHY EATING and PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

The school gives good attention to promoting healthy eating and physical activity. This is evidenced through the range of sporting activities, the promotion of a healthy fruit-break and the planned nutritional programme for the children, parents and staff.

1.7 LINKS WITH PARENTS AND THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

The school has established very good links with the parents, local library, gaelic athletic club, Banbridge District Council and neighbouring primary schools. They are involved in a long-standing cross-community programme and have more recently participated in cross-cultural music workshops to extend the children's understanding of, and respect for, people from a diverse range of backgrounds.

A key characteristic of the school's provision is the importance which is placed on assisting parents and families to support their children's learning. A range of literacy and numeracy programmes, focused on supporting the children's learning, is organised annually. This year, the programme has been extended to include a 'Grandparents Reading Partnership' and healthy lifestyle programmes.

2. ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS

2.1 LEARNING

The children respond very positively to the high expectations set by all of the adults in the school; they settle quickly and enthusiastically to their work, are highly motivated and keen to talk about their learning. They think carefully about their learning tasks, ask well-reasoned questions and articulate confidently their chosen strategies for solving problems. Their behaviour is exemplary.

In the foundation stage (FS), the teachers skilfully blend the structured learning programme with play-based learning 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 interactions between the adults and the children are of a consistently high quality and the children are provided with purposeful contexts within which they can apply their knowledge and skills. The children's achievements are celebrated through the stimulating displays of their work. The school has appropriately identified the need to develop the outdoor environment in order to extend the children's learning experiences and to provide them with regular opportunities for energetic outdoor activities.

An analysis of the key stage (KS) 2 assessment data over the past four years shows that, with the exception of one year in which there was a small cohort with a high proportion of pupils with special educational needs, the school's performance in English and mathematics is consistently in line with or above the Northern Ireland average. Compared with schools in the same free school meals category, and with the same exception, the levels of attainment in English and mathematics are consistently above the average.

Whilst the standards achieved by the children at the end of KS2 are good, the school has, appropriately, identified the need to increase the numbers of children attaining higher levels in both literacy and numeracy.

2.2 ENGLISH AND LITERACY

The overall quality of the provision for English and literacy is very good.

The literacy co-ordinator has been in post for eleven years. She has led the staff in carrying out a review of the medium-term planning and of the quality of the children's written work and has begun to use the school's internal data to identify areas for improvement in KS1 classes. The action plan for literacy outlines a range of appropriate priorities for development including a planned whole-school audit of the provision in literacy and the development of the effective use of data to promote improvement. It will be important for the co-ordinator to record systematically the outcomes from the implementation of the action plan in order to evaluate effectively the impact on outcomes for the learners.

The teachers make effective use of the 'Framework for Literacy' produced by the Southern Education and Library Board in planning for Literacy provision. The children are provided with opportunities to develop and use their skills in talking, listening, reading and writing within meaningful contexts across the curriculum.

Most of the children demonstrate very good oral communication skills and speak confidently to peers, teachers and other adults in the school.

Most of the children achieve very good standards in reading. During the inspection, groups of children from years 4 and 7 read with fluency, expression and understanding. The children were enthusiastic about reading and valued the trips to the local library; they were able to discuss their text preferences, favourite authors and characters.

The school has implemented a number of effective programmes to support the development of the children's reading skills. These include a 'Paired Reading' programme for KS1 children and their parents and a year 4 'Reading Partnership' programme which is led very skilfully by the school's two learning support assistants (LSAs). By the end of KS2 a majority of the children are reading at a level above that which is appropriate for their age.

The standards of writing in the school are good. The children have opportunities to apply their writing skills in a wide range of contexts including poems, letters, reports, stories and instructions. There is a need for further staff development on the writing process in order to ensure teachers have a shared understanding of how to help the children improve the content of their written work, to develop their skill as writers and to raise their levels of attainment.

2.3 MATHEMATICS AND NUMERACY

The overall quality of provision in mathematics is very good.

The co-ordinator has been in post for 14 years. She has been pro-active in raising the profile of mathematics in the school and in leading the staff in improving the quality of teaching and learning. She has also provided staff training on Processes and parent workshops on the methodologies which the school uses to teach key mathematical concepts. Together with the Principal and Vice-principal, she has made an effective start to analysing and using the school's data to inform planning and target-setting at class level.

The current action plan for numeracy outlines a number of appropriate priorities for development including the review of planning and progression in the children's learning; the further analysis and use of assessment data; the introduction of the Numeracy Catch-up programme, the introduction of an after-school Maths Club and the increased use of ICT to support mathematical learning.

The school's numeracy programme ensures breadth, balance and progression in learning. The teachers work hard to provide appropriate levels of support and challenge for all learners. Problem-solving tasks, the use of real-life contexts and links to other curricular areas such as the World Around Us are used to promote mathematical thinking and to make the learning more stimulating for the children.

In the most effective practice, the teachers build on the children's prior learning; they focus appropriately on the quality of the children's mathematical responses and turn these skilfully into opportunities for further learning. In these lessons the teachers challenge and extend the children's mathematical thinking and provide them with opportunities to apply their knowledge and skills within meaningful contexts. Across the key stages, very effective questioning and discussion deepens and widens the children's understanding of key concepts.

Throughout the school, the children demonstrate enjoyment of and enthusiasm for mathematics; they use appropriate mathematical language with increasing fluency and demonstrate a very good understanding of number, measure, shape and space and handling data. During mental mathematics activities, they talk confidently about their chosen strategies and can suggest alternative methods of working.

Information and communication technology is becoming more integrated into teaching and learning activities. The teachers are becoming familiar with the newly installed interactive whiteboards and are using them effectively to motivate the children and to stimulate their thinking, particularly in numeracy.

The children use ICT effectively to draft and present their work.

3. THE QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING

3.1 PLANNING

The teachers plan very conscientiously as a team, sharing their knowledge and understanding of the curriculum and of the planned programmes for classes and individual children. They complete very comprehensive evaluations of the children's learning which they use effectively to inform their future practice and choice of learning activities. There is a need for the written planning to reflect more accurately, the quality of the teachers' discussions and evaluations and to outline more specifically how they plan to meet the varied needs within the class.

3.2 TEACHING

The teachers are dedicated, hard-working and focused on ensuring the holistic development of each child; they work very successfully to promote in the children a sense of enjoyment in learning.

During the inspection, the quality of most of the teaching observed was good or better; in approximately half of the lessons it was very good and in almost one third it was outstanding. In a small number of lessons there was a need for improvement in the quality of teaching.

In the best practice observed, the teachers had high expectations of what the children could achieve; they exploited all available opportunities to enrich the children's learning and they were creative in connecting the children's learning across the curriculum; they related the learning to practical contexts and nurtured within the children a sense of enquiry. In these lessons, the teachers listened attentively to the children, building skilfully on their contributions to consolidate and extend their learning. In the less effective lessons there was a lack of focus on learning and there was ineffective preparation and management of the learning resources. In most of the composite classes, there was an over reliance on differentiation by year group rather than to meet the wide range of ability within the class.

3.3 ASSESSMENT

The teachers employ a range of appropriate strategies to assess the quality of the children's learning and to inform their future practice.

In most of the classes the teachers make the intended learning explicit for the children; they revisit the learning intentions in the course of the lesson and during the plenary sessions to focus the children's attention and to encourage them to reflect on the extent of their learning. In a few of the classes, the learning intentions are used effectively as the basis for marking the children's written work. In these instances, the teachers provide concise, well-focused written comments for the children to help them improve the quality of their work.

The school uses a wide range of standardised testing to obtain information about the children's progress, to identify those who are in need of additional support and those who would benefit from one of the short-term 'booster' programmes. They have appropriately identified the need to carry out a more rigorous analysis of the outcomes from the testing to identify those children who are capable of attaining higher levels in literacy and numeracy and to inform their planning at whole-school level.

The parents are kept informed of their children's progress through planned and informal meetings with the class teacher and through an annual written progress report.

3.4 SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

The overall quality of the provision for special educational needs is very good.

The special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO), who is also the literacy co-ordinator, has been in post for eleven years. She maintains the special needs policy, register and records and effectively co-ordinates the day-to-day organisation of the special educational needs (SEN) provision. She liaises effectively with the class teachers, LSAs and a range of external support agencies to ensure that there is comprehensive transfer of information about the children's identified needs, targets for improvement, intervention programmes and progress. The current action plan identifies appropriate priorities for development to further enhance the quality of provision.

The school places high importance on the early identification of special needs and uses the teachers' professional knowledge and judgement, together with the outcomes from a range of standardised tests to identify those children who are experiencing difficulty with aspects of their learning and those who would benefit from participation in a short-term 'booster' programme.

Twenty-three percent of the children have been identified as requiring help with aspects of their learning. The class teachers take responsibility for developing, implementing and reviewing individual education plans (IEPs) for these children. In drawing up the IEPs the teachers consult with the SENCO, parents and the children, as appropriate. In most instances, the IEPs outline well-focused targets for the children's improvement and appropriate strategies to guide the work of the teachers and the LSAs.

The intervention programmes for the children are delivered through a combination of in-class assistance from the teacher or LSA and afternoon withdrawal support from a small team of teachers who are redeployed for this purpose. In addition, identified children from year 4 participate in a reading partnership programme which is led by the school's two LSAs. Evidence from the SEN register and the children's records indicates that most of the children make good progress against their targets for improvement and that the reading partnership programme is particularly beneficial in raising the children's attainments in reading. The LSAs are effectively deployed and make a very significant contribution to the provision for SEN.

4. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The overall quality of leadership and management is very good.

4.1 LEADERSHIP

The Principal has been in post for 13 years. She is enthusiastic, hard-working and committed to the continued development of the school. She sets high standards for all aspects of the school's provision and provides clear and realistic direction for the staff, the governors and the parents; she knows all of the children well and has high ambitions for their individual achievements.

The staff currently work as a team, under the direction of the Principal, to guide developments in teaching and learning. Whilst this approach has been successful in terms of creating a shared vision for the school, for promoting a collegial approach to school development and decision making and in ensuring high quality outcomes for the children, there is a need to develop further the generic role of the co-ordinator and to ensure the equitable distribution of accountability for curriculum and school development.

4.2 PLANNING FOR IMPROVEMENT

Professional discussion, consultation with parents and children and consideration of the school's internal data form the basis of the school's ongoing self-evaluation to promote improvement. During the inspection, there was evidence that the focus on the development of the children's reading and their understanding of phonics has led to improvements in the quality of their oral language, fluency in reading and in their written work.

The school development plan appropriately reflects the priorities identified through self-evaluation and is supported by a range of useful action plans to guide the school's development.

4.3 ACCOMMODATION

Within the recent past there have been significant improvements to the school estate; two additional classrooms have been provided within a purpose-built annexe; the children's toilets have been refurbished and upgraded to comply with current special educational needs and disability (SEND) legislation and an extensive new play area and car parking facility have been created. The Principal has appropriately identified the need to develop the outdoor play areas in order to exploit the opportunities to extend the children's learning.

The standards of caretaking and cleaning are excellent.

4.4 RESOURCES, FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE

The school is well resourced to support learning and teaching. The resources are well maintained, easily accessible and fit for purpose.

The governors are well-informed about all aspects of the school's provision and are highly supportive of the work of the Principal. They are aware of the school's current financial surplus and of the planned use of these resources.

The funding from the Extended Schools programme has been used very effectively to support the children's learning and to raise their levels of attainment.

5. CONCLUSION

5.1 The strengths of the school include:

- the excellent working relations at all levels, the exemplary behaviour of all of the children and their enthusiasm for learning;
- the very good teaching in most of the lessons observed;
- the consistently high provision for learning in the FS;
- the good standards achieved by most of the children in literacy and numeracy and the good progress being made by those children with additional learning needs;
- the very effective links with the parents to assist them in supporting their children's learning; and
- the dedicated, hard-working staff team and the very effective leadership of the Principal.

5.2 In the areas inspected, the quality of education provided by the school is very good. The school is meeting very effectively the educational and pastoral needs of all of the learners; and has demonstrated its capacity for sustained self-improvement.

HEALTH AND SAFETY

- The access to the main school building is not controlled. In the interests of the safety of the children and staff and in order to meet the requirements of current guidance, there is a need for this to be reviewed as a matter of urgency.

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