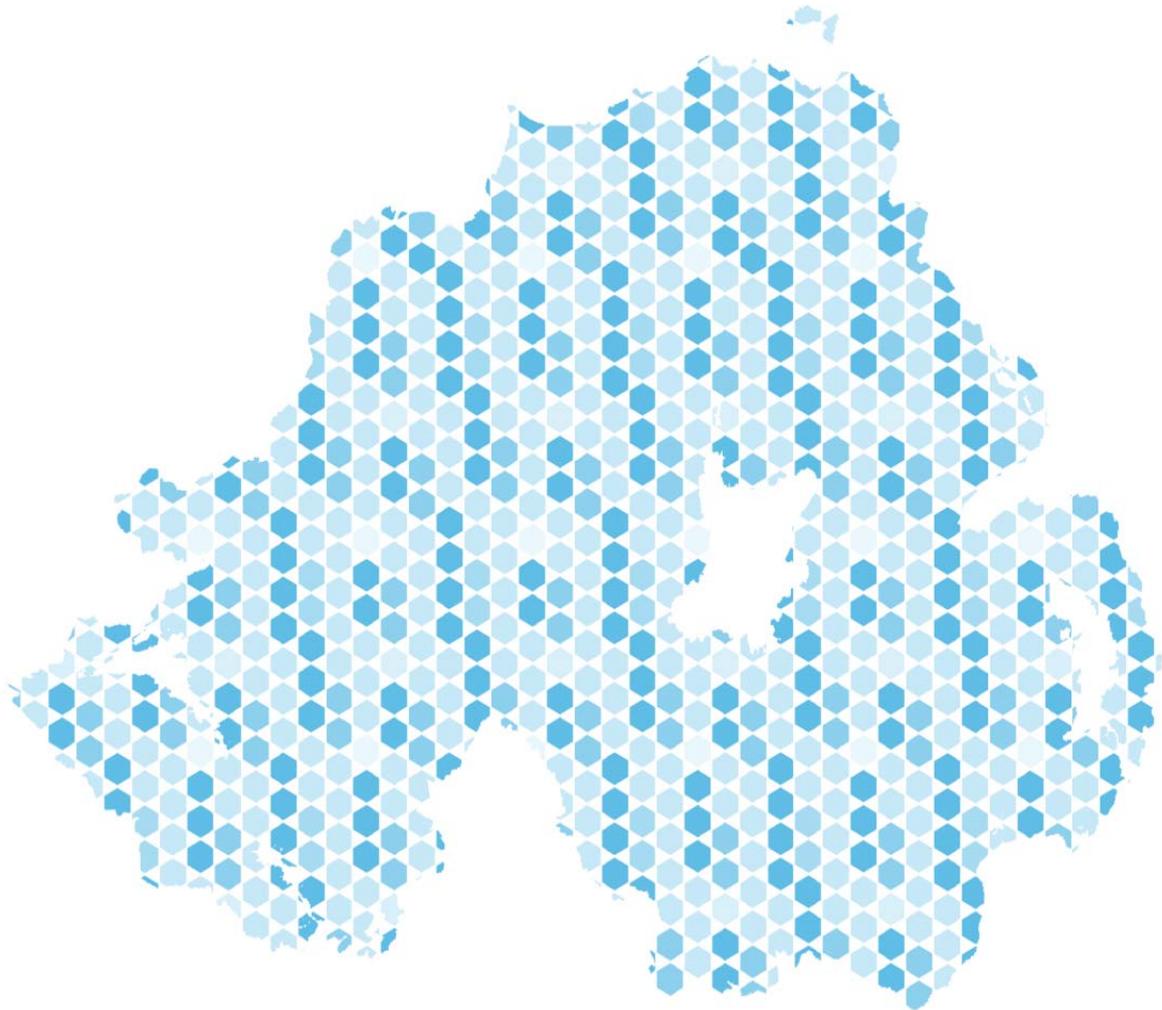


PRIMARY INSPECTION



Education and Training
Inspectorate

Fair Hill Primary School,
Kinallen

Report of an Inspection
in February 2010

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



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE



CUSTOMER SERVICE EXCELLENCE

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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, the Inspectorate relate their evaluations to six descriptors as set out below:

DESCRIPTOR
Outstanding
Very Good
Good
Satisfactory
Inadequate
Unsatisfactory

1. INTRODUCTION

SCHOOL CONTEXT

Fair Hill Primary School is a controlled school which is situated on the Tullinisky Road in the village of Kinallen, Co Down. The enrolment has increased steadily over the past five years and currently stands at 229. Most of the children come from the rural areas surrounding Gransha, Carnew and Kinallen. At the time of the inspection 6% of the children were entitled to free school meals and approximately 15% of the children were identified as requiring help with aspects of their learning.

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.

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

The arrangements for the inspection included the opportunity for the parents and the teachers 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 110 questionnaires issued to the parents; 75 (68%) were returned to the Inspection Services Branch (ISB), including 31 which contained an additional written comment. Almost all of the responses indicated a high level of satisfaction with the provision in the school. In particular, the parents valued the wide variety of learning opportunities available to their children, the encouragement and support for the children to try new experiences and the school's approach to promoting positive behaviour. In addition, they paid tribute to the Principal and staff for their dedication and commitment to meeting the children's needs. The very small number of concerns that were raised by the parents have been discussed with the governors and the Principal.

Ten of the 12 teaching staff completed the questionnaire. They were wholly supportive of the Principal and of the work of the school.

The governors expressed strong appreciation and support for the work of the school; in particular, they praised the teaching and support staff for their professionalism and hard work and the Principal for her guidance and unwavering commitment to the development of the school.

In discussions held with the year 6 children, they spoke confidently and enthusiastically about their experiences in school and about the wide range of extra-curricular activities on offer to them. They also indicated that they feel happy in school and know what to do if they have any worries about their safety.

PASTORAL CARE

The quality of pastoral care in the school is very good. This is evidenced through the excellent working relationships at all levels and the strong emphasis on promoting healthy minds and bodies for all members of the school community. It is further enhanced through the buddy system for supporting the younger children in the dining hall and playground and the celebration of the children's personal and academic achievements. The children have very good opportunities to express their opinions about the life and work of the school through class discussions and the school's council. They are also exposed to a wide range of experiences to raise their awareness of employability and skills for life.

CHILD PROTECTION

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

LINKS WITH PARENTS AND THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

The school has effective links with the parents and benefits from a very active parental support group that has raised significant funds to supplement learning and teaching resources. There are strong links between the school and the wider community; for example, the children wrote persuasive letters to petition against the closure of a local residential home. In addition, the multi-purpose pitch is used by the community throughout the year. The children's learning is enriched through links with local businesses, the local post-primary school, Sentinus, the 'Eco-Schools' award scheme, and a range of visiting speakers. The well-established cross-community links also provide an opportunity for the children to explore issues around diversity and inclusion.

2. ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS

LEARNING

The children are confident, articulate and very keen to talk about their learning. They are aware of the contribution they can make to the life and work of the school and display high levels of initiative, creativity and independence. From an early stage they take responsibility for their learning, make decisions about the most appropriate resources to use for a particular task and can discuss possible ways to improve the quality of their work. They work together collaboratively, showing respect for the opinions of others and for the school environment. Their behaviour is exemplary.

At Foundation Stage (FS) the children learn through a very effective balance of formal and play-based activities; they organise themselves quickly and effectively to their work, contribute to the planning for their learning and engage in a wide range of independent and collaborative problem solving activities. The children's rich experiences in FS are further enhanced in early Key Stage (KS) 1 where the provision for activity-based learning is outstanding.

The children's learning is also very effectively supported by the dedicated team of classroom assistants who have a clear understanding of the planned learning intentions, methodologies and language to be developed.

Most of the children make very good progress in their learning and by the end of KS2 their standards in literacy and numeracy are very good. The school has identified a small number of children who are under-achieving and is taking appropriate action to identify and address their particular needs.

An analysis of the KS2 assessment data over the past four years shows that in English and mathematics, the school's performance is consistently above the Northern Ireland average. Compared with schools in a similar free school meals category, the school's levels of attainment in English and mathematics are consistently above the average.

ENGLISH AND LITERACY

The overall quality of provision for literacy is very good.

The development of literacy has been given a high priority within the school. This is evidenced by the clear planning for progression, the consistent approach to the teaching of phonics, the emphasis on guided reading across the key stages and the recent establishment of a literacy team with representatives from each key stage.

The children have very good opportunities to develop their skills in talking and listening through, for example, a range of drama activities, stimulating class discussions and play-based learning. They talk and listen to each other well, are keen to ask questions and provide extended responses to the teachers' open-ended questioning.

Reading skills are taught systematically across the school. Guided reading sessions, reading records, book fairs and links with authors are used imaginatively to engage the children in their reading. The children benefit from a literacy-rich environment and have very good access to a varied stock of fiction and non-fiction books, including texts to promote boys' interest and confidence in reading. The children read with increasing fluency, accuracy and understanding as they progress through the key stages and speak with enthusiasm and interest about the books they are reading. The school provides effective support for those children who require help with their reading and as a result, by the end of KS2 most of the children are reading well and in line with or above their chronological age.

The quality of the children's written work is very good, including a wide range of creative writing. The children are able to write for a variety of purposes and audiences and the use of real-life contexts makes this work more meaningful to them. There is a strong focus on the children planning, drafting and editing in order to improve the quality of their work. The teachers provide very good opportunities for the development of literacy through connected learning in Personal Development and Mutual Understanding, numeracy and the World Around Us. A particular strength of the literacy provision is the effective marking for improvement to improve standards in the children's writing. This includes the precise use of learning intentions, well-constructed success criteria often negotiated with the children and opportunities for children to assess their own work and to engage in peer assessment. The staff development on marking for improvement has been very effective in identifying and sharing good practice in order to raise standards in the children's work.

MATHEMATICS AND NUMERACY

The overall quality of provision in mathematics is outstanding.

The development of quality learning and teaching in mathematics is given a high priority throughout the school. There is a comprehensive mathematics policy to guide the teachers' practice, the programme ensures progression in learning in each area of the mathematics curriculum and there is a strong emphasis on using mathematics to solve problems in a wide

range of mature and purposeful contexts. In addition to providing the children with opportunities to apply their knowledge, skills and understanding, the whole-school focus on developing problem solving strategies has been an effective vehicle for professional dialogue, agreement on standards and progression and the dissemination of good practice.

The teachers model and promote positive attitudes towards mathematics; they plan very effectively for the creative integration of mathematics across the curriculum and they make very good use of routines and incidental opportunities to promote mathematical thinking and learning. In almost all of the classes the teachers have high expectations of what the children can achieve; they encourage them to be flexible in their thinking, to ask logical questions and to use appropriate mathematical language to articulate their thinking processes. Common features of the most effective practice observed were the use of well-focused practical activities to achieve the planned learning outcomes for the children, the well-considered range of activities planned to meet the needs of all the children and the challenge for the children to apply their understanding of a range of mathematical concepts to complete tasks. In a very small number of lessons there was insufficient pace, challenge and differentiation to meet the range of all of the children.

The children's mathematical knowledge, language and skills are developed systematically as they progress from FS through to KS2. Most of the children make very good progress in their learning and by the end of KS2 they have a very secure understanding of all aspects of the mathematics curriculum; they speak enthusiastically and confidently about their preferred areas of learning in mathematics and the presentation of their written work is exemplary.

ICT is used very effectively to support learning and teaching across the curriculum. In the FS, the children use ICT to record data and to support the development of reading and independent writing. The teachers use interactive whiteboards effectively to investigate visual note-making techniques and to provide audio and visual cues to engage the children in their learning. By year 7, the children access the news desk of Learning Northern Ireland to post e-mails in response to current issues in the news and engage in digital story-telling.

3. THE QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING

PLANNING

The teachers plan conscientiously for all aspects of the curriculum. In literacy and numeracy there are clear long-term plans to ensure consistency and progression in the children's learning. In the best practice, these long-term plans are translated into sharply focused medium-term plans which clearly identify the planned learning outcomes, the learning activities and the strategies to be used to meet the range of needs within the class. The school has appropriately identified the need to build on this good practice in order to ensure that the planning is of a consistently high quality and that all the teachers have adequate planning to guide their day to day work with the children.

The teachers complete regular and often very detailed evaluations of their planning. In the most effective practice these evaluations provide comprehensive information about the quality and extent of the children's learning and clear guidance for future planning for individuals and small groups. This good practice should be shared and further developed across the school.

TEACHING

During the inspection the quality of the teaching observed ranged from satisfactory to outstanding; in most of the lessons observed it was good or better and in approximately one quarter of the lessons it was very good; in nearly one-fifth of the total lessons observed the quality of the teaching was outstanding.

The teachers are dedicated, hard-working and highly reflective in their work.

In the best practice observed, the teachers were creative in connecting the children's learning across the curriculum; they related the learning to practical life choices and nurtured within the children a sense of enquiry; they built effectively on the children's previous knowledge and experience, used skilful questioning to extend their thinking and drew on the experiences of people in the local community to capture and sustain the children's interests. In these lessons all available opportunities were exploited to enrich the children's learning and to promote the development of their social and personal skills; the plenary sessions were used effectively to assess the children's learning and to encourage them to reflect on how they might improve the quality of their work. In the less effective lessons, there was a lack of pace, the learning activities were insufficiently matched to the varied needs and abilities of the children and there was over-direction by the teacher.

ASSESSMENT

The teachers use a wide range of strategies to monitor the children's progress, to assess their levels of attainment and to promote improvement in the quality of their work.

In most of the classes the teachers make the intended learning explicit for the children; the children have a clear understanding of what they need to do to achieve the desired outcome and the plenary sessions are skilfully used to encourage the children to engage in peer and self assessment and to set targets for themselves.

The teachers are developing effective strategies for marking the children's written work, particularly in literacy; these strategies are clearly understood by the children and the parents and have been significant in bringing about improvement in the standards achieved by the children.

The school uses a wide range of standardised testing to obtain detailed information about the children's progress. The outcomes from these tests are rigorously analysed and used to identify individual children's needs, to set targets for improvement, for benchmarking and for whole school target setting in literacy and numeracy. The information has also been used very effectively to identify priorities for whole-school development and has formed the basis of extensive staff development.

The parents are kept well informed of their children's progress through parental interviews and annual written reports.

SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

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

A part-time learning support teacher works under the guidance of the SENCO to provide a combination of in-class support for those children who are experiencing difficulties with aspects of their learning in literacy and release for the class teacher to work with those children. Whilst the SENCO, who is also the Vice-principal, was absent at the time of the inspection, the records of the children's programmes and progress and the whole-school documentation for special educational needs were both effective and up to date.

The individual education plans outline appropriate targets for the children's improvement together with appropriate strategies to support the work of the teacher and classroom assistant. Evidence of the children's work towards meeting their targets is retained to support and inform the regular review of the IEPs and to identify further areas for development.

The in-class provision for the children with special needs works very effectively in most classes, with the teachers and classroom assistants gaining valuable staff development from observation of the support teacher. There is a need for this approach to be adopted in all classes to ensure the consistently effective use of the support teacher's time. The good practice and expertise demonstrated by the learning support teacher during the inspection should be disseminated more strategically amongst the staff to further increase capacity building within the school.

The IEP reviews, the children's written work, tracking records and observations of the learning support provision indicate that most of the children make good progress in their learning. There is a small number of children, however, who would benefit from intensive small group or one-to-one support.

4. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

LEADERSHIP

The Principal has been in post for nine years. She is enthusiastic, hard-working and committed to the continued development of the school. She has a clear understanding of the primary curriculum, promotes a shared understanding of pedagogy and is imaginative and creative in ensuring the best provision within the school for the children and the staff. She provides informed leadership and is outstanding in promoting the highest standards in teaching and learning.

The staff currently work in curricular teams, under the guidance of the Principal and Vice-principal, to guide developments in teaching and learning. Whilst this has been effective in ensuring high quality outcomes for the children, there is a need for the governors to review the management arrangements within the school in order to ensure a more equitable distribution of responsibility for curriculum and school development.

PLANNING FOR IMPROVEMENT

A culture of reflection and self evaluation permeates all aspects of school life. The school has used a wide range of strategies and consultations with parents to identify the key strengths of the provision within the school and to identify areas for future development. The school development plan is compliant with the Department of Education School Development Plan Regulations/Schedule 2005/19.

ACCOMMODATION

The accommodation is bright and attractive and provides a stimulating learning environment for the children. Effective use is made of all of the available space and the standard of caretaking is excellent.

RESOURCES, FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE

The school is very well resourced to support learning and teaching in all areas of the Northern Ireland Curriculum. The resources are well maintained, easily accessible and fit for purpose.

The governors are well informed about all aspects of the work and life of the school; they have a clear understanding of the school's priorities and challenges and take an active role in the management of the school. They are very supportive of the Principal.

5. CONCLUSION

The strengths of the school include:

- the confident, well-behaved children who display high levels of engagement in their learning;
- the very effective links with the local community in enriching the learning experiences and outcomes for the children;
- the very good standards achieved by the children in literacy and numeracy and the outstanding provision in numeracy;
- the good quality of the teaching in most of the lessons observed and the outstanding practice in one fifth of the lessons;
- the work of the very creative and reflective teaching and non-teaching staff who connect the learning for the children within practical and purposeful contexts; and
- the outstanding contribution of the Principal to the development of all aspects of the school and, in particular, to the quality of learning and teaching.

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 the learners; and has demonstrated its capacity for sustained self-improvement.

HEALTH AND SAFETY

- There is a need for a risk assessment to be carried out on the traffic management within the site, particularly at key drop-off and pick-up times.

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