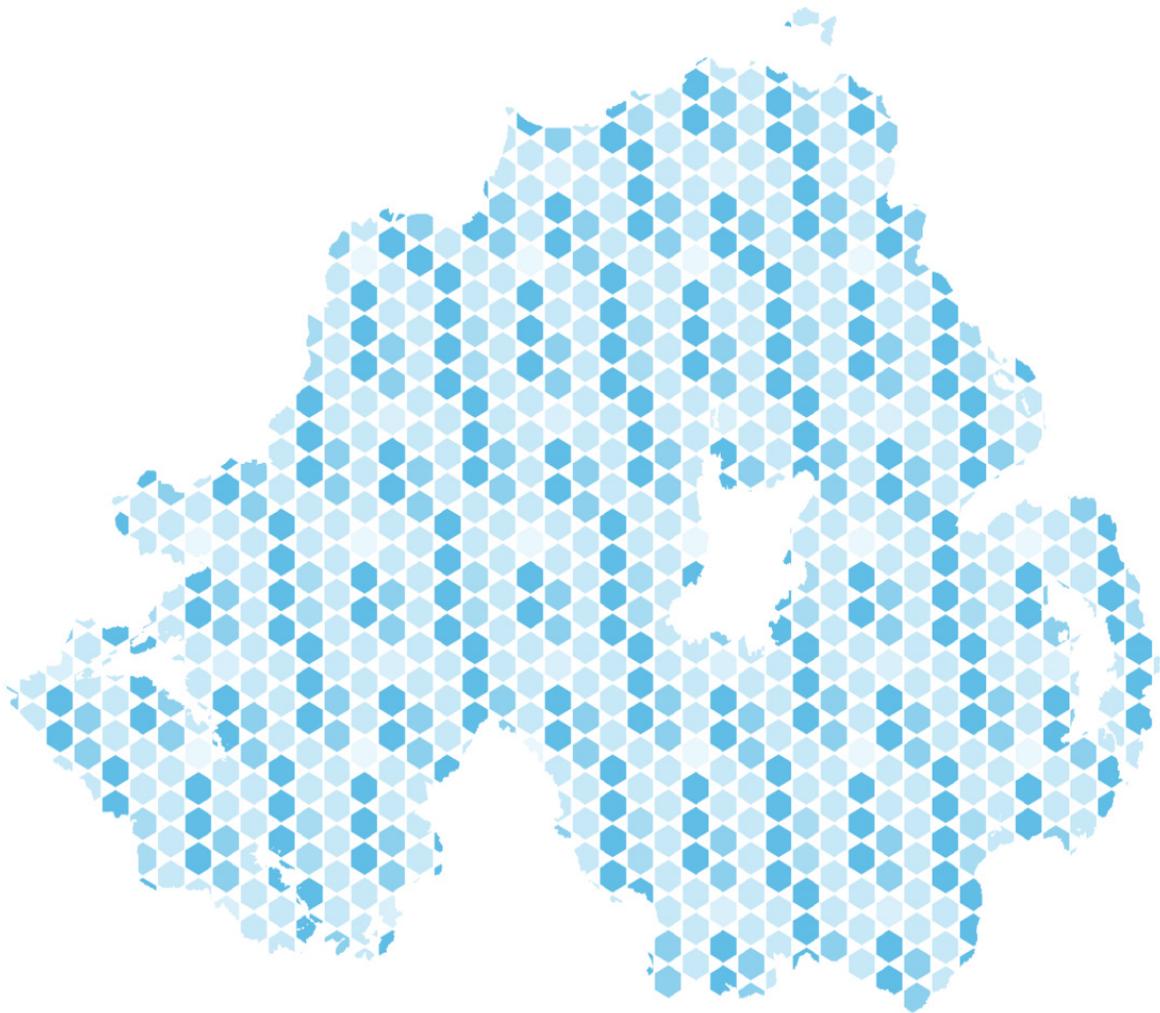


PRIMARY INSPECTION



Education and Training
Inspectorate

Birches Primary School,
Portadown

Report of an Inspection
in March 2012



Providing Inspection Services for
Department of Education
Department for Employment and Learning
Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure

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

DESCRIPTOR
Outstanding
Very Good
Good
Satisfactory
Inadequate
Unsatisfactory

BASIC INFORMATION SHEET (BIS) - PRIMARY SCHOOLS

- A. i. **School: Birches Primary** iii. **Date of Inspection: W/B 05/03/12**
 ii. **School Reference Number: 501-1174** iv. **Nature of Inspection: Focused**

B.

School Year	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
Year 1 Intake	15	18	19	16	24
Enrolments					
Primary	77	90	101	108	120
Reception	0	0	0	0	0
Nursery Unit	0	0	0	0	0
Special Unit	0	0	0	0	0
Irish Medium Unit	0	0	0	0	0

The enrolment for the current year is the figure on the day of notification of inspection. For previous years it is the figure in the annual return to the Department of Education.

The calculations at C and D should be based on the total of the primary and reception enrolments only.

- C. Average Attendance for the Previous School Year (expressed as a percentage): 95.7% **NI Avg Att: 94.7%**

Average Attendance for those children on the Special Educational Needs Register: 94.7%

Primary & Reception	Nursery Unit	Special Unit	Irish Medium Unit
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- D. i. Number of Teachers (including the principal and part-time teachers): 6.4 0 0 0
 (Full-time equivalent = 25 teaching hours)

ii. PTR (Pupil/Teacher Ratio): 20 NI PTR: 20.2

iii. Average Class Size: 20

iv. Class Size (Range): 17 to 24

v. Ancillary Support:

Number of Hours Per Week :	i. Clerical support:	20
	ii. Foundation Stage Classroom Assistant Support:	34
	iii. Additional hours of other classroom assistant support:	34

vi. Percentage of children with statements of special educational needs: 0%

vii. Total percentage of children on the Special Needs Register: 15%

viii. Number of children who are **not** of statutory school age: 0

ix. Percentage of children entitled to free school meals: 23.3%

x. Percentage of children at the end of Key Stage 2 for 2010/11 who attained level 4 and above in English and mathematics, and Irish (in Irish-medium schools):	English	Mathematics	Irish
	100%	100%	N/A

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 SCHOOL CONTEXT

Birches Primary School is located on Clonmakate Road, Birches, Portadown. The enrolment has increased steadily over the last five years and stands currently at 120 children. At the time of the inspection, approximately 23% of the children were entitled to receive free school meals and approximately 15% were identified by the school as having special educational needs.

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 and the staff to complete a confidential questionnaire prior to the inspection, as well as meetings with representatives from the Board of Governors (governors), a group of the children from year 6 and the school Eco Team.

Of the 79 questionnaires issued to the parents; approximately 49% were returned to Inspection Services Branch of which 23 contained additional written comments. Nearly all of the responses indicated an exceptionally high level of satisfaction with the school. In particular, the parents reported their high regard for the staff and the leadership of the school, the care and support provided by all of the staff for the children and the inclusive ethos of the school. The key messages from all of the questionnaires have been shared with the Principal and representatives of the governors.

The teachers and support staff completed the on-line questionnaire and submitted additional written comments. All of the responses were very positive and supportive of the work of the school; they reflected the happy atmosphere in the school and the positive working relationships with the parents and the community.

The governors praised the dedication of the staff, the high quality of the pastoral care, the very good quality of the Principal's leadership and the high standing of the school within the community. They reported that the Principal and the co-ordinators keep them well informed about the management of the school, the curricular developments and the standards achieved by the children.

In discussion with the year 6 children, they talked with enthusiasm about their experiences in school. They value the help and support of their teachers, they have great pride in their school and they enjoy the wide range of extra-curricular activities provided for them. The children know that the adults in the school listen to their views and they commented very favourably about the work of the Eco Team. The children indicated they are happy and secure in school and know what to do and who to turn to if they have any concerns about their work, or their safety and well-being.

1.4 PASTORAL CARE

The quality of the arrangements for pastoral care in the school is outstanding.

The working relationships are excellent at all levels; all the members of staff are highly committed to the care and well being of the children. A very good family and community ethos exists in the school and this is underpinned by caring, supportive and inclusive practices. The needs of the children are accorded paramount importance in the school and the holistic approach by the staff to the children's development meets their personal, social and emotional needs very well. The children are very welcoming and their behaviour, both in and out of class, is exemplary. A whole school approach to promoting and rewarding positive behaviour encourages the children to develop their talents as well as raising their confidence and self-esteem. In addition, the extensive range of extra-curricular activities and opportunities to participate in inter-school competitions enrich the children's learning experiences.

1.5 SAFEGUARDING

The school has very good and comprehensive arrangements in place for safeguarding children. These arrangements reflect the guidance issued by the Department of Education (DE).

1.6 HEALTHY EATING AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

The school gives very good attention to promoting healthy eating and physical activity, for example, through the provision of well-planned playground activities and the contribution of the 'Incredible Edibles Mini-Business' team to promoting healthy food choices, which encourage the children to adopt healthy lifestyles.

1.7 LINKS WITH PARENTS AND THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

The 'Friends of Birches' group, involving parents, teachers and other community representatives, provides valuable support to the school as well as raising funds to enhance the quality of the learning experiences for the children. The years 6 and 7 children are taking part currently in a well-planned CRED¹ programme with a local maintained primary school. The good links with a nearby pre-school centre assist the children with a smooth transition to the foundation stage (FS). The Eco Team has established good links with Craigavon Borough Council and local businesses to assist with the well-planned school environmental projects.

¹ Community Relations, Equality and Diversity in Education. The aim of the new CRED policy is to contribute to improving relations between communities by educating children and young people to develop self-respect and respect for others, promote equality and work to eliminate discrimination, and by providing formal and non-formal education opportunities for them to build relationships with those of different backgrounds and traditions.

2. ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS

2.1 LEARNING

The children are well-motivated and display very positive attitudes to their work. A significant strength is that the children take responsibility for aspects of their own learning; they co-operate well with one another, work effectively in groups and undertake independent tasks with confidence. On many occasions, the children reflect on their learning through plenary sessions or through peer or self-assessment. In the FS, the children's play-based learning experiences provide them with excellent opportunities to develop their problem-solving capabilities, greater independence and connected learning. Across the key stages, the children respond well to the high expectations set by the teachers, and they are provided with a wide range of opportunities to develop and apply their thinking skills and personal capabilities.

An analysis of the end of key stage (KS) 2 assessment data for English and mathematics shows a consistency in the standards achieved by the children in both literacy and numeracy. In the last four years, the school's performance in English and mathematics was significantly above the Northern Ireland (NI) average. When compared with schools in the same free school meals category, the levels of attainment in English and mathematics were significantly above the NI average. The school's internal performance information indicates that most of the children attain in line with their ability in English and mathematics.

The children's ICT skills are very good; by year 7, they use a wide range of ICT applications with confidence and make informed decisions about the effective use of ICT in English and mathematics. The teachers make good use of computer programs, interactive whiteboards, programmable devices and websites to support learning and teaching in literacy and numeracy.

2.2 ENGLISH AND LITERACY

The overall quality of provision in English and literacy is outstanding.

The school has developed a literacy rich environment to support the children's learning. Across all key stages, the children demonstrate enjoyment, confidence and increasing self-reliance in literacy. The children develop and use skills in talking, listening, reading and writing in meaningful contexts.

The children demonstrate excellent talking and listening skills. They talk confidently about their learning, share their views and value the opinions of others. Almost all of the children engage confidently and enthusiastically in class discussions and activities.

The children demonstrate an enthusiasm for reading and are keen to discuss their favourite books, authors and characters. They have regular opportunities to read for research, personal interest and pleasure. In the FS and KS1, the children develop an appropriate range of reading skills through the systematic use of a phonics programme, and through shared, modelled and guided reading practices; they read with increasing fluency and expression. As they progress through the school, the children access a broad range of texts including fiction, non-fiction and poetry. The children achieve very good standards in reading; by the end of KS2, the majority of children read at a level commensurate with their ability or above expectation.

The children achieve excellent standards in writing. Across the key stages, the children have very good opportunities to write in different forms and for a variety of purposes and audiences, for example, by publishing their work on the school web site. The children take pride in producing their best work and the teachers encourage them to edit and re-draft their work to improve the quality and presentation of their writing, including the children's very good use of ICT to present their work to a very high standard.

The literacy co-ordinator provides outstanding and enthusiastic curricular leadership ensuring that there is a holistic approach to the development of literacy through the meaningful integration of reading, writing, talking and listening. She monitors and evaluates effectively the quality of the literacy provision through, for example, the diagnostic analysis of performance data, sampling of the children's work and through class visits. The action plans for literacy are set within the context of the school development plan (SDP) and focus appropriately on ensuring consistency and progression in the children's learning and on improving further the children's standards and achievements.

2.3 MATHEMATICS AND NUMERACY

The overall quality of provision in mathematics and numeracy is very good.

The whole-school programme for mathematics is suitably broad and balanced. It provides a clear progression in the children's learning of mathematical concepts, skills and language. The very good and systematic development of mental mathematics across the key stages enables the children to use appropriate mathematical language to discuss the strategies they apply to arrive at their findings.

In the FS, the children develop their mathematical concepts, skills and language progressively through practical mathematical lessons and games. The children explore, investigate and make very good use of their mathematical knowledge through play-based activities.

In KS1, the children participate actively in a range of practical activities which develops a very good understanding of number, shape and handling data. The children use mathematics-based computer programs to consolidate further their understanding of important concepts and to extend their skill at problem-solving.

In KS2, the children consolidate and extend their mathematical understanding through well-planned activities, such as, paired and group practical work and open-ended, investigative work. By the end of KS2, the children achieve excellent standards in mathematics.

In discussion with the children in year 4, they demonstrated a very good knowledge of number, data handling and measures. The most able children in year 7 have a very good understanding of all areas of the mathematics curriculum. The children deployed a very good range of mental mathematics strategies to solve the problems posed and they were able to explain their thinking.

The numeracy co-ordinator provides very good leadership and has a clear understanding of the strengths and areas requiring further development in mathematics. The action plan identifies appropriately: the development of mathematical processes at all key stages; the systematic monitoring and evaluation of the revised medium and short-term planning; and the further development of strategies to challenge the more able children in mathematics.

3. THE QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING

3.1 PLANNING

The quality of the planning is very good and guides well the work of the school. The planning for literacy and numeracy provides a clear overview and facilitates continuity and progression in the children's learning. The teachers' medium-term planning and the weekly planning include relevant evaluations of learning which inform future learning and teaching. A significant strength of the planning across the school is the inclusion of the children's ideas through the planning boards. The evolving whole-school ICT planning needs to identify, in a progressive and manageable manner, clearly focused actions to raise further the children's ICT standards.

3.2 TEACHING

The quality of teaching in all of the lessons observed ranged from good to outstanding; most of the lessons evaluated were very good or outstanding. The lessons were well-structured with a clear focus on the progression in learning and the development of the children's knowledge and skills in literacy and numeracy. The intended learning was shared incrementally with the children throughout the lesson, and, at the end of the lesson there was effective review and consolidation of the learning. In all of the lessons observed, the teachers used skilful questioning to engage and challenge the children, and encouraged them to reflect on and explain their thinking using the appropriate vocabulary. The teachers employed an effective range of strategies to develop active learning. The development of purposeful paired and group work, through practical and well-planned follow-on activities, catered well for the wide range of the children's abilities and, in particular, developed very well their thinking skills and personal capabilities. The teachers were ably supported in their work by the skill and commitment of the classroom assistants.

3.3 ASSESSMENT

There are effective procedures in place to keep the parents well informed about their children's progress; these include written reports, formal parent-teacher consultations and opportunities are provided for parents to meet with the teachers as the need arises. The parents receive monthly updates on their children's progress and curricular information through the 'Check-Up Books' process whereby samples of work and the children's reward charts are shared with the parents. They are informed of their children's individual education plan (IEP), as appropriate. The annual reports on the children are detailed, informative and indicate clearly to parents how they can reinforce and contribute to the education of their child. They are kept well informed about the work of the school through, for example, the informative school website.

The children receive informative and constructive feedback from their teachers, both orally and in written form.

There is a coherent approach to the use of formative, summative and diagnostic forms of assessment throughout the school led by a highly competent co-ordinator who links effectively with the literacy and numeracy co-ordinators. The school implements effective processes for the continual assessment of all the children. The teachers evaluate effectively the children's progress and attainment through a comprehensive analysis of standardised and non-standardised tests, and identify appropriate whole-school targets for improvement in aspects of literacy and numeracy.

3.4 SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

The quality of the provision for special educational needs (SEN) is very good. The special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO) provides very good leadership. The children's needs are identified at an early stage and well-focused IEPs provide appropriate guidance for their work. The progress made by each child is monitored and reviewed regularly and adjustments made to planning by the SENCO and the teachers. The children benefit significantly from the in-class support that meets their individual needs. The school's internal performance data indicates that the majority of the children identified as having SEN make very good progress and achieve standards in line with their ability.

4. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

4.1 LEADERSHIP

The Principal provides very good leadership, and has a high regard for the well-being of the children and the staff. In addition to her leadership, management and administrative duties, she has responsibility for the pastoral care of the staff, teaching a class and co-ordinating an area of learning. The Principal, co-ordinators and staff have an effective collegial approach to the implementation and review of school development work that places the education and development of each child at the centre of its work. The culture of self-evaluation leading to improvement is an integral part of the staff's professional practice. The school has identified appropriately the need to review the roles and responsibilities of staff as a consequence of the increasing enrolment.

4.2 PLANNING FOR IMPROVEMENT

The whole school self-evaluation and school development planning processes are very good. The school gives very good attention to, meets the requirements of the School Development Plans Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2005, and has produced a wide range of associated action plans which are based on an audit of need. In preparation for the formulation of the new SDP, in line with the School Development Plans Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2010, the governors, the Principal and staff are consulting effectively with the children, parents and the local community.

4.3 RESOURCES, FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE

The governors contribute appropriately to the overall strategic planning and policy development for the school. They are well-informed about the key priorities in the SDP and they provide effective support for the Principal and the staff in the implementation of the action plans.

4.4 ACCOMMODATION

Very good use is made of all the available space in the school; the members of staff work together to create inviting learning environments in the classrooms and in the corridors, providing forums to celebrate the children's learning. The school is maintained well.

5. CONCLUSION

5.1 The strengths of the school include:

- the highly motivated children, who demonstrate a positive attitude to learning;
- the inclusive and supportive ethos of the school exemplified through the excellent working relationships at all levels and the outstanding quality of the pastoral provision;
- the high quality of the teaching, which was evaluated as very good or outstanding in most of the lessons;
- the excellent standards achieved by the children in English and mathematics;
- the very good provision for children with special educational needs; and
- the effective leadership at all levels and, in particular, the very good leadership of the Principal.

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

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