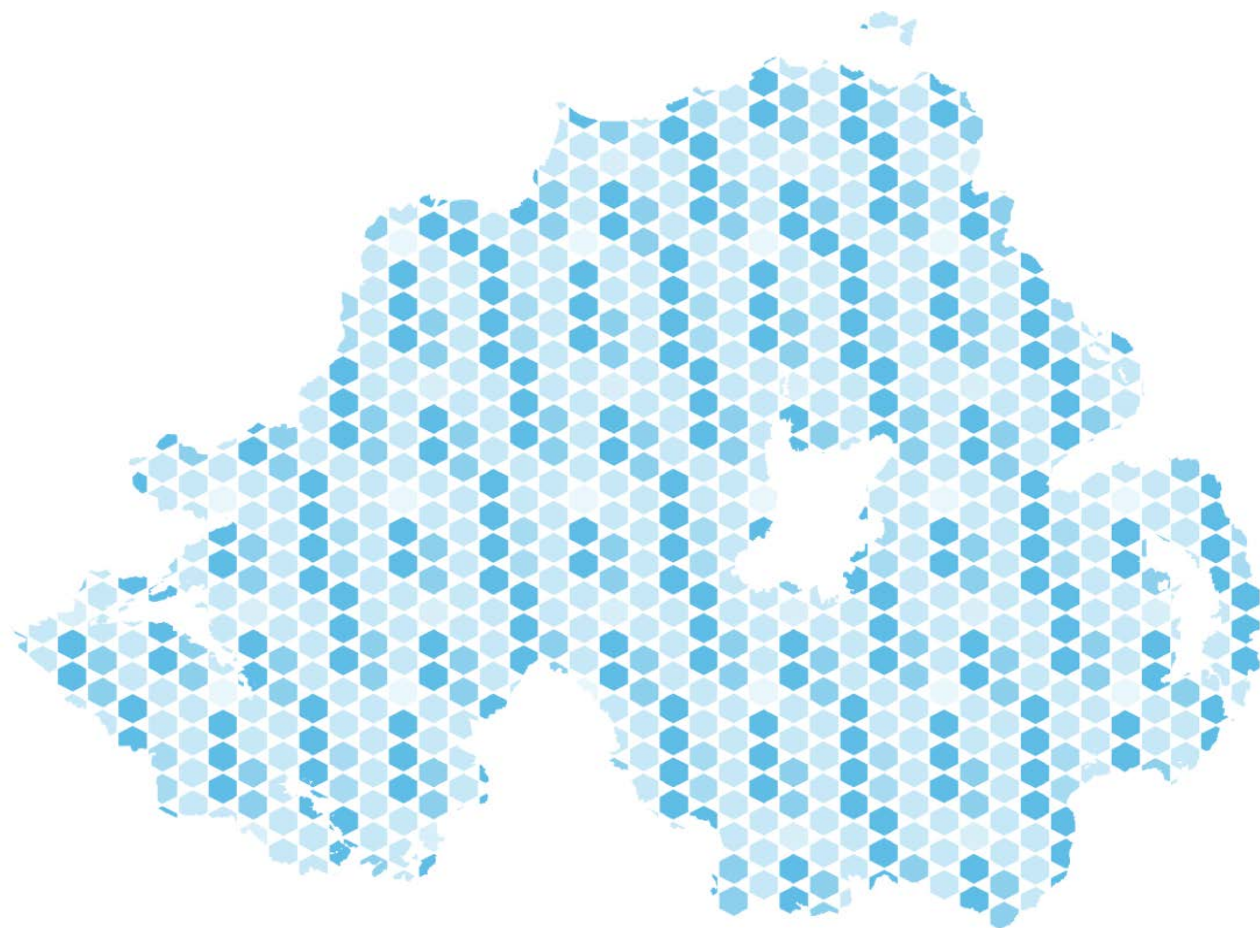


PRIMARY INSPECTION



Education and Training
Inspectorate

Ballydown Primary School,
Banbridge, County Down

Report of an Inspection in
February 2016



*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

CUSTOMER
SERVICE
EXCELLENCE



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 Achievement and standards, 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 the 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 primary 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-primary.htm>.

Inspectors observed learning and teaching, 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 a representative from the governors;
- meetings with groups of children; and
- the opportunity for the parents, teaching and support staff to complete a confidential questionnaire.

Thirty-four percent of parents and fifty-four percent of staff responded to the confidential questionnaire. The responses to the parental questionnaire indicated very high levels of satisfaction with the overall life and work of the school. In particular, the parents reported on the welcoming and supportive environment of the school and the hard-working, approachable staff who have the emotional well-being of the children at the centre of their work. A majority of the staff completed the questionnaire and their responses were wholly positive including the collegial approach that exists among the team with a clear focus on the children's welfare and attainment. In the discussion with the representative from the board of governors, she expressed their appreciation for the hard work and dedication of the principal and staff. The ETI has reported to the principal and the representative of the board of governors the main issues emerging from the questionnaires and the discussions, including a small number of concerns that were raised.

2. Focus of inspection

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

- children's achievements and standards in literacy and numeracy; including how the school is addressing low attainment and underachievement where applicable;
- quality of provision for learning in the school including the nursery unit; and
- quality of leadership and management.

3. Context

Ballydown Primary School is a controlled primary school situated in the townland of Ballydown, approximately two miles from Banbridge. Most of the children attending the school come from the surrounding rural area and Banbridge. The enrolment has been consistently steady over the last three years and the school operates at near capacity. The percentage of children entitled to free school meals has had a minimal increase in the past

four years while the proportion requiring additional help with aspects of their learning shows a declining trend. In addition, Ballydown Primary School has a nursery unit accommodated in its own purpose built unit attached to the main primary school and offers one full-time session to twenty-six children. The children participate in activities with the local social education centre, thereby developing their interpersonal and language skills; and the staff are building purposeful transition links with other schools.

| Ballydown Primary School | 2012-13 | 2013-14 | 2014-15 | 2015-16 |
|---|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Enrolment | 307 | 312 | 312 | 312 |
| Nursery unit enrolment | 26 | 27 | 26 | 26 |
| % School attendance | 96.7 | 96.7 | 97.2 | N/A |
| % NI Primary school average | 94.9 | 95.6 | 95.4 | N/A |
| FSME Percentage ¹ | 9.8 | 9.9 | 10.3 | 11.5 |
| No. of children on SEN register | 76 | 58 | 51 | 49 |
| % of children on SEN register | 24.7 | 18.6 | 16.3 | 15.4 |
| No. of children with statements of educational need | 9 | 9 | 9 | 10 |
| No. of newcomer children | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

Source: data as held by the school.
N/A not available

4. Overall findings of the inspection

| | |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| Overall effectiveness | High level of capacity for sustained improvement |
| Achievements and standards | Very good |
| Provision for learning | Very good |
| Leadership and management | Very good |
| Nursery Unit | Very good |

5. Achievements and standards

- The children are courteous and happy, engage readily with their peers and are respectful towards staff and visitors to the school. They are highly motivated to learn, organise themselves well and settle quickly to their work with independence and good levels of engagement in their learning. The children work well collaboratively in pairs and small groups; and are developing self-reflective skills.
- The school's internal performance data shows that most children, including those who require additional support with aspects of their learning, make progress in English and mathematics in line with their ability or above expectation. In addition, approximately one-quarter of the children make above expected progress in English and mathematics.

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

- The standards achieved by the children in literacy are very good. Throughout the key stages, the children express opinions and share ideas with confidence and clarity; by the end of key stage (KS) 2, most children are able to empathise with a character's role. The children in year 7 read with high levels of understanding; they speak enthusiastically about their enjoyment of a range of contemporary writers, read from a variety of texts and can discuss the writer's choice of language, recognising explicit and implicit meaning. From the foundation stage, the children write sentences with increasing independence and accuracy and, as the children progress through KS 1 and KS 2, they plan, edit and review their writing and present information in a number of forms, including digital texts, to suit the reader and audience.
- The standards achieved by the children in numeracy are very good. The children enjoy their mathematical learning and talk enthusiastically about their work. By year 7, the more able children can apply skilfully a range of mathematical strategies and can self-correct when appropriate. They can think flexibly in problem-solving tasks and can apply their mathematical knowledge and understanding in a range of contexts and use appropriate mathematical language to explain their reasoning.
- In the nursery unit, most of the children are making very good progress across all areas of the pre-school curriculum and are developing positive attitudes and dispositions for learning. They are confident and independent in their daily routines, they use materials creatively and maturely to express their own ideas and sustain high levels of involvement in activities throughout the session. The children are making very good progress in developing their attention and listening skills. A majority of the children use early mathematical language as an integral part of their play. The small number of children who require support with aspects of their learning and development are making good progress with adult support.
- The children use confidently a range of suitable information and communication technology (ICT) devices and software to support appropriately their literacy and numeracy, as well as other aspects of their learning. For example, the children can research and present their work through using 'Real Time Collaboration', video conferencing and 'Movie Maker'.

6. Provision for learning

- Planning, teaching and assessment were effective in promoting learning in most of the lessons evaluated. The teachers' planning ensured progression in the children's learning across the curriculum and was informed by the use of assessment data and, in the best practice, by increasingly focused evaluations. In almost one-half of the lessons observed, the most effective practice consisted of well-paced and purposeful opportunities for: collaboration; creative risk taking; active learning which reinforced previous understanding; and, the use of ICT to support the learning. Through effective questioning, the teachers challenged the children's thinking, deepened their understanding of key concepts and promoted the development of their oral and problem-solving skills. The staff need to share and embed this good practice to enable them to increase the consistency in the children's learning experiences across all year-groups. Where learning was less effective, in a minority of lessons, there was insufficient differentiation to meet the needs of all of the children. The teachers mark regularly the children's work; in the most effective practice, the teachers identified how children can improve their work.

- The children who require additional support with aspects of their learning are provided with small group or individual withdrawal for literacy and numeracy. There are suitably tailored programmes for those identified as underachieving, focusing on early intervention. The children's learning is monitored and evaluated regularly to ensure progression and to reduce barriers to learning. However, the school needs to ensure specific, measurable targets are set to enable the teachers to monitor and track more effectively the children's progress in their learning. Throughout the key stages, the learning support assistants make an important contribution to the children's learning and well-being.
- The school's planning for literacy ensures progression across the key stages in the areas of reading, writing, talking and listening. The children's oral skills and vocabulary are enhanced greatly by their study of the Ulster-Scots language and literature. The school has a systematic approach to the teaching of reading and the recent focus on guided reading is developing well the children's understanding of narrative and non-narrative texts. In the best lessons observed, in one-quarter of the literacy lessons, the teachers make use of stimulating, challenging resources to provide opportunities for the children's purposeful discussion that leads to their production of high quality writing. It will be essential that the staff extend the opportunities for the children to write creatively.
- The school's planning for numeracy is thorough and detailed and ensures continuity and progression in all aspects of the mathematics curriculum. The teachers make effective use of a range of practical materials, outdoor mathematics trails and mental mathematics activities to engage the children in authentic and relevant contexts and build on the children's prior knowledge to reinforce their mathematical thinking. A range of strategies is employed including activities which allow the children to work in groups and pairs. The teachers plan regularly to match the work and activities to the abilities of the children. In the most effective practice, this differentiated approach focused on varying the level of thinking and independence as well as the content in order to provide appropriate challenge for the more able children.
- A significant strength of the foundation stage is the high quality of the learning experiences provided by the teachers. The children are developing very well their confidence and independence. The wide range of carefully planned indoor and outdoor activities promotes the development of the children's language and early mathematical and creative skills. The environment is richly resourced and imaginative role-play areas are created skilfully using a range of natural and authentic equipment. Year 2 children are developing well their creative and observational skills; they display high levels of enthusiasm during their on-going involvement with an online art project. The teachers' processes of monitoring and evaluating the children's progress in the foundation stage are exemplary.
- The quality of the provision in the nursery unit is very good. The language-rich learning environment is well presented with accessible materials which encourage the children to explore and develop independently their ideas. The daily routines, such as snack and lunch, are managed effectively to promote learning. The staff are skilful in promoting the children's language and communication skills and extending their thinking and learning. The parent volunteers make a significant contribution to the effective management of the daily routines and the learning. It will be important for the leadership and management to keep the stability of staffing under close review to ensure continuity of care, learning and development for the younger children.

- The detailed planning and evaluations in the nursery unit inform effectively the implementation of a broad and balanced pre-school programme with a wide range of interesting and varied activities throughout the year. The staff's tracking of the children's progress needs to be more consistent across all areas of the pre-school curriculum and used to match the learning appropriately to the full range of the children's stages of development.
- The quality of provision for pastoral care is a key strength of the school and nursery unit. This provision is characterised by the supportive, child-centred environment and the very good working relationships amongst the staff and children, at all levels. The children have suitable opportunities to take on roles and responsibilities, through, for example, the School Council, the Eco-club and the 'Buddy System'; their opinions and views are sought and acted upon regularly. In discussions with the year 6 children, they spoke very positively about their learning experiences and the range of after-school activities offered to them.
- The school gives very good attention to promoting healthy eating and physical activity. For example, the school council, parents and members of the board of governors contributed to the Food in School policy. There is a suitable range of sporting initiatives within the curriculum which enrich the children's experience, develops well their confidence, and encourages them to adopt a healthy lifestyle. The teachers use effectively the outdoor environment to enhance the learning experiences of the children, for example, there are engaging activities for the children at the on-site, historical rath.

7. Leadership and management

- The strategic leadership team (SLT) has a clear, considered vision, which places an appropriate emphasis on the successful development of the curricular provision and the pastoral dimension of the school. The school improvement process is linked to a comprehensive school development plan² (SDP) underpinned by self-evaluation and inclusive consultative processes with the whole staff, the children and the wider school community. These consultations, along with the good quality of the analysis of relevant quantitative and qualitative data, are instrumental in the continuous improvement of the school's provision. The SLT has recognised the need to develop further the target-setting from the school's data in order to monitor and evaluate more closely the progression of learning for all children.
- The co-ordinators are effective and lead their teams well. They have a clear understanding of their roles and they evaluate effectively the provision and the children's progress, through the monitoring of the teachers' planning and children's books and the analysis of data. The school has prioritised the need to develop further the role of the co-ordinators to inform more effectively the self-evaluation processes in the school.

² The school development plan is compliant with the requirements of the School Development Planning Regulations (NI) 2010.

- A particular strength of the school and nursery unit is the links and partnerships with the parents and the wider community. The children are able to learn new skills and perform alongside a group of adults from the social education centre using sign language. The school participates successfully in cross-community events and competitions; it is forging links with local pre-school, primary and post-primary schools that provide useful opportunities for professional discussions and the sharing of practice.
- The governors are well informed about the life and work of the school through regular meetings with the co-ordinators and children; and they have exercised their challenge function to benefit the learning experiences of the children. Based on the evidence available at the time of inspection, the 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 has comprehensive arrangements in place for safeguarding children. These arrangements reflect the guidance issued by the Department of Education. In discussions with the inspectors, the children in year 6 reported that they are happy and secure in school and know what to do if they have any concerns about their well-being.

8. Overall effectiveness

Ballydown Primary 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.

Health and Safety

1. The board of governors and senior leadership team need to review further the safety arrangements pertaining to the playground and the school's close proximity to a busy road.

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