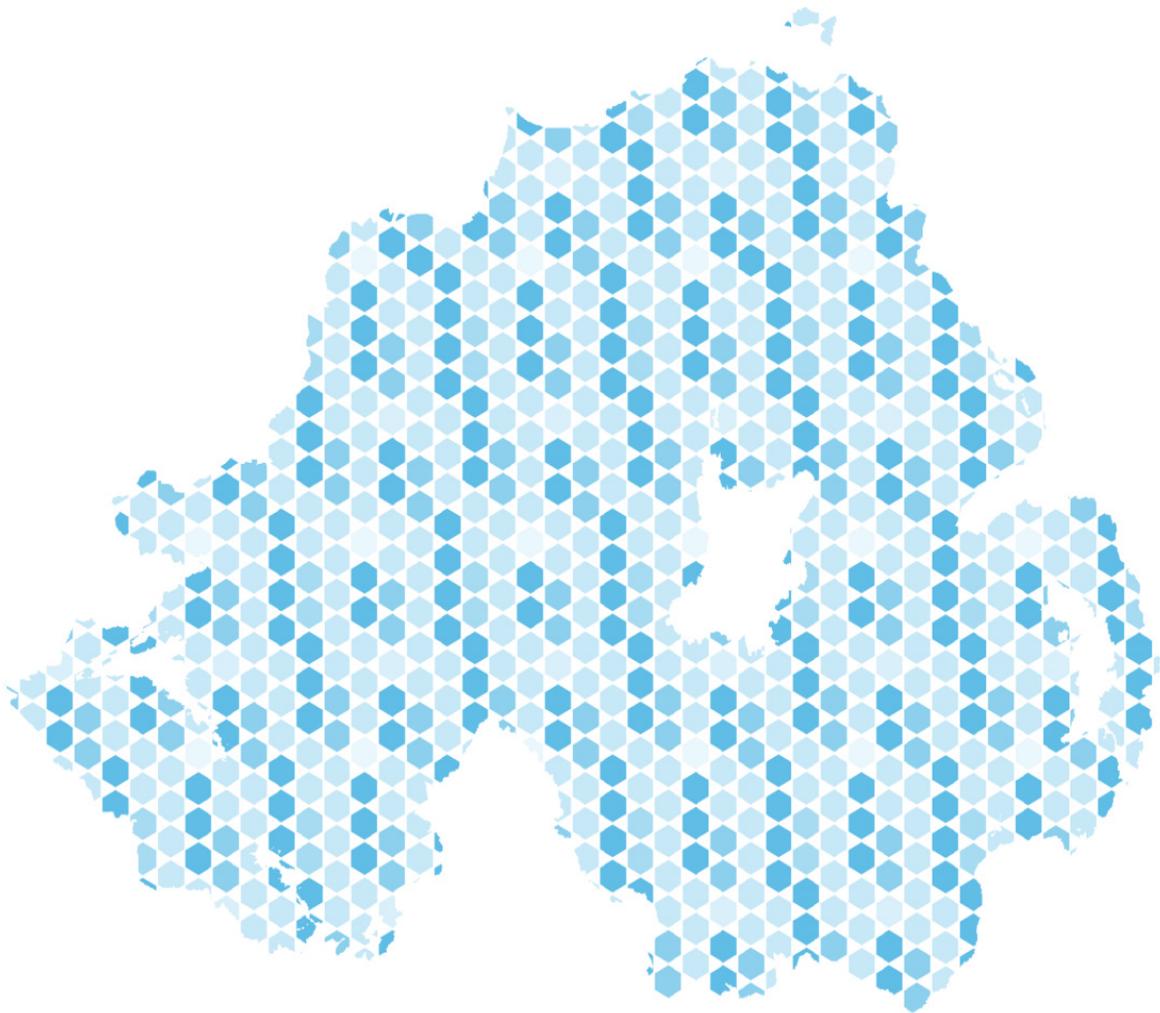


# PRIMARY INSPECTION



Education and Training  
Inspectorate

St MacNissi's Primary School,  
Newtownabbey

Report of an Inspection  
in April 2011



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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 MacNissi's Primary School is situated off the Manse Road, Newtownabbey. The majority of the children come from within a five mile radius of the school. The enrolment of the school has increased steadily over the past three years and currently stands at 169 children. Approximately 4 % of the children are entitled to free school meals. The school has identified 11% of the children who require additional support 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 teaching 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 the children from year 6.

One hundred and twenty one questionnaires were issued to parents within the primary school: approximately 45% were returned to Inspection Services Branch of which 30 contained additional written comments. Nearly all of the responses indicated a high level of satisfaction with the school. In particular, the parents emphasised the high quality of care and attention shown for the well-being of all the children by the dedicated and enthusiastic staff, the good educational progress made by the children both academically and socially and the variety of methods used to encourage the parents to be actively involved in the life and work of their child's education.

Seven teachers and three members of the support staff completed the online questionnaire; there were five written comments. The responses were wholly positive regarding their commitment to and involvement in implementing a range of school initiatives such as 'thinking maps' and in the support the Principal and the senior management team provide to their pastoral well-being and professional development.

The governors spoke very positively about the caring, inclusive ethos of the school and their appreciation of the work of all of the staff, their high levels of motivation and their commitment to the children. They reported that they were kept well informed, and involved in many school developments such as school development planning, the school budget, and the innovative approaches adopted by the staff to improve aspects of the school provision and school environment both indoors and outdoors.

The children in year 6 spoke openly, positively and with great enthusiasm about their experiences in the school. They value the help and support of their teachers, enjoy the range of after-school activities and the recent additions of equipment to play with during lunch and break times. The children indicated that they know what to do and who to turn to if they have any concerns regarding their work or their safety and well-being.

An analysis of the questionnaires and the written comments, and concerns expressed by a few parents was shared with the Principal and the governors.

#### 1.4 PASTORAL CARE

The quality of the arrangements for the pastoral care provision in the school is very good.

Among the strengths are; the contribution of all of the staff to all of the children to promote and maintain a well-organised and supportive environment for learning both indoors and outdoors; the opportunities for the children to explore values, talk about their feelings and to express these in a variety of contexts within and outside class; the arrangements in place for transition between the playgroup, foundation stage (FS) and (KS) 2; and the good opportunities provided through the School Council for the children to contribute to the decision making process which is in keeping with the school's inclusive ethos.

#### 1.5 CHILD PROTECTION

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

#### 1.6 HEALTHY EATING AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

The school gives very good attention to promoting healthy eating and physical activity, for example the emphasis placed on promoting healthy snacks and regular participation in physical activity, which encourages the children to adopt healthy lifestyles.

#### 1.7 LINKS WITH PARENTS AND THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

The school has worked hard to develop its links with the parents and with others in the community. The parents receive regular newsletters and information about events in the school. The school values the support of the Parent Association in raising considerable funds to further enhance the provision and experiences offered to the children. The school has developed excellent links with the local post primary schools and these links benefit the children transferring to the schools and the wider community.

### 2. **ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS**

#### 2.1 LEARNING

The children are friendly, courteous and well behaved and are very proud of their school. In all year groups the children are motivated and engaged in the learning process. Where classroom routines are well established and learning experiences are well matched to their needs and abilities, the children engage well in their learning and work collaboratively with their peers. In the best practice, children set personal targets for improvement, complete tasks co-operatively, enjoy many opportunities to interact with each other in group and paired work. There were examples of excellent learning opportunities through the play-based learning sessions.

The majority of all the children reach the standards of which they are capable and make good progress in English and mathematics.

An analysis of the key stage (KS) 2 assessment data over the past four years shows that in English and mathematics the school's performance is well above average for Northern Ireland (NI). Compared with similar schools in the same free school meals category, the children's level of attainment in English and mathematics is also well above the average.

## 2.2 ENGLISH AND LITERACY

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

The co-ordinator for literacy, who is also the vice-principal, provides highly effective curricular leadership. Under her direction, the teachers are currently reviewing the school's literacy programme to ensure greater coherence and progression and a sharper focus on differentiation within classes in order to improve further the standards in literacy throughout the school. They have appropriately identified the need to ensure that the children's handwriting and the presentation of their work is of a high standard throughout the school; the findings of this inspection endorse fully these developments.

The English and literacy programme is appropriately broad and balanced, the continuing development of the whole school programme ensures that all aspects of English and literacy are well integrated with each other to benefit learning across the curriculum. The current action plan for English outlines a number of key improvement strategies including the addition of supplementary reading materials in many areas of the curriculum, the continued development and tracking progress as a result of the Better Reading Partnerships programme and the implementation of Spelling and Grammar programmes into KS2.

The children have excellent opportunities to develop their listening skills and to talk to one another. In play-based learning in the FS, and in whole class group discussions in KS1 and KS2, the children interact well with one another, collaborate successfully and listen respectfully to the views of their peers. Good relationships and effective questioning by the teachers encourage all of the children to extend their vocabulary, to speak out and take active roles, to which they respond with enthusiasm. In many instances, they contribute mature oral responses, present persuasively, articulate and justify well-researched and well-expressed opinions. This has been enhanced by the whole school focus on developing the children's thinking skills through the use of 'thinking maps' which are used well throughout the school to develop and organise the children's mathematical and literacy ideas and language.

The children in FS are involved in a wide range of reading activities including those presented during play, through whole class story-telling sessions and through shared reading with the teacher. The children are taught to read systematically across the school through the use of a commercial reading scheme enhanced by a developing range of appropriate support materials such as novels, 'big books', story sacks and reference materials. In the foundation stage (FS) and key stage (KS) 1, the majority of the children are developing independent reading skills effectively and are able to read unfamiliar words with ease. At KS2, the children's interest in books is encouraged by the recent addition of a range of novels and non-fiction books which the school is appropriately continuing to extend. All of the children in year 3 who are involved in the Better Reading Partnership programme make good to significant progress.

The overall standard of the children's written work is generally good to very good. From the FS, the children are introduced to different forms of print and experiment with letter and word formation in many interesting ways and they are encouraged to 'have a go', and the most able children are encouraged to write words and to express their ideas and opinions in simple sentences. In KS1 the children's skills are further developed and they often write in a more extended manner responding to books, poems, school events and visits. There are very good opportunities for emergent and independent writing to develop and for the children to master a growing variety of written styles for different purposes and audiences. There are many examples of good quality, extended and imaginative prose and poetry; the standards of writing overall by the end of KS2 are high.

To help the children develop many aspects of their language and literacy, the children make use of a variety of devices, software, cameras and on line services, such as Learning NI, to research, to create, to communicate and to present. The school participate in the revised CCEA ICT accreditation scheme.

### 2.3 MATHEMATICS AND NUMERACY

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

The co-ordinator has been in post for four years and is effective and pro-active both in raising the profile of mathematics in the school and leading the staff in improving provision and raising standards. She has supported the teachers in reflecting on and evaluating the teaching of mathematics in the school and together with the principal and rest of the staff, she has made effective progress in analysing and using the school's data to inform target-setting and the teacher's planning for learning in all key stages.

The current action plan for Numeracy outlines a number of key improvement strategies including a detailed review of the transition of Number and Processes from KS1 to KS2 and the implementation of Thinking Maps to support and connect learning across the curriculum.

On the basis of the analysis of the school's range of internal data, the school has introduced numeracy target groups in each class to support those children whose learning outcomes could be improved further and a Numeracy Nurture withdrawal group to support a small number of the children in KS1 and KS2. The inspection team would endorse both of these important improvement actions.

The school's Mathematics and 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 all classes, the mathematics lessons incorporate a range of teaching approaches and practical activities; a very good range of resources is used well to support the learning and teaching. The teachers use skilful questioning techniques that allow the children to think and talk critically and confidently about their mathematical learning.

Throughout the school, the children demonstrate clear enjoyment of and enthusiasm for mathematics. In the FS, the children are developing a wide mathematical vocabulary and an understanding of mathematical concepts such as shape and number through a connected and stimulating range of practical activities including play-based learning. In KS1 and KS2, the children use appropriate mathematical language with increasing fluency and demonstrate very good understanding and thinking skills in number, measure, shape and space and handling data. They respond well in mental mathematics activities which feature strongly in the lessons and are able to articulate the various strategies they employ and

suggest alternative methods of working through mathematical processes. The children work very well in groups; in all key stages, they share and work through their ideas effectively and are able to select from a range of thinking maps to structure their reasoning in a logical way to develop further their mathematical thinking.

The teachers make effective use of ICT to support numeracy. The school is well equipped with interactive whiteboards and these are used well to engage the children and to stimulate their thinking in their mathematics learning.

### **3. THE QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING**

#### **3.1 PLANNING**

The teachers plan conscientiously, sharing their knowledge and understanding of the curriculum and of the planned programmes for year groups and individual children. The emotional health and well-being of the children is a priority throughout the school. In the best practice, the teachers have begun to complete more structured evaluations of the children's learning which they use effectively to inform their future practice and provision of appropriate 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 of all of the children within the class.

The school has developed detailed individual educational plans for the children with special educational needs (SEN); they have clear, realistic targets and include appropriate strategies to guide and inform the learning and teaching activities. The targets are monitored closely and reviewed regularly by the special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO) and more recently, the class teachers and the assessment data indicates that almost all children with special educational needs make good progress. The parents and the children, where appropriate, are all involved in the individual target setting process and they are kept well informed about the progress their children make.

#### **3.2 TEACHING**

The quality of the teaching observed was always good or better with the majority being very good or outstanding. In the best practice observed, the staff engaged very effectively with the children and generated their interest. In these lessons, very good use was made of incidental learning opportunities; the teaching was well-paced and provided all the children with appropriate levels of challenge and opportunities to develop their thinking skills through investigative and collaborative activities. The teachers made meaningful links with prior learning, discussed and agreed the learning intentions and success criteria with the children and revisited these effectively at various stages of the lesson. They focused carefully on the quality of the children's responses and turned these skilfully into opportunities for further learning. Across the key stages, effective questioning and discussion deepens and widens the children's language and understanding of key concepts.

#### **3.3 ASSESSMENT**

Overall assessment for learning is good. The teachers employ a range of appropriate strategies to assess the quality and extent of the children's learning and to inform their future practice, including a wide range of standardised testing to obtain information about the children's progress, to identify those who are underachieving, those in need of additional

support and those who would benefit from placement in a short term in-class target group. The teachers have identified appropriately the need to consolidate a more common approach to using the school's data and analysis of 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 and individual pupil level.

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 use the plenary sessions to focus the children's attention and to encourage them to reflect on the extent of their learning. There is a need to link the learning intentions more effectively with success criteria to better inform the marking of the children's written work. The parents are kept well informed about their children's progress through planned and informal meetings with the class teacher and through an annual written progress report which includes informative quantitative and qualitative data. In the best practice, the teachers provide concise, well-focused written comments for the children to help them improve the quality of their work. This good practice needs to be shared throughout the school.

### **3.4 SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS**

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

The school demonstrates a strong commitment to meeting the needs of all of the children and those with special educational needs are included fully in all lessons. The children's needs are identified early and a variety of effective programmes of support are in place to address the deficits in literacy and numeracy skills. This is provided by in class, individual and small group support provided by the SENCO and two trained classroom assistants. Within the classes, the classroom assistants play a valuable role in supporting learning.

The SENCO provides very good leadership and management of the provision. She maintains an overview of the school's policy and provision for SEN. She liaises well with class teachers, learning support staff and outside agencies to support those children who are having difficulty with aspects of their learning.

## **4. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

The Principal has been in post for 20 years. He provides very highly effective leadership which is underpinned by his commitment to promoting inclusion and the determination to meet the needs of and raise the standards for all the children in the school. He thinks strategically and has demonstrated clear evidence of leading improvement and effective self evaluation. He encourages a collegiate approach to decision-making within the school and provides very effective support and guidance in the professional development of the staff. There is clear evidence of the impact of the Northern Ireland Curriculum training being well embedded throughout the school. The Principal leads by example and is very effectively supported by the Vice-principal.

### **4.1 PLANNING FOR IMPROVEMENT**

The school has an appropriate school development plan (SDP) which sets out clearly the school's priorities and meets fully the requirements of the Department of Education School Development Planning Regulations/Schedule 2005/19.

## 4.2 ACCOMMODATION

The staff works diligently to create inviting, language rich learning environments in the classrooms and in the circulation areas providing forums to celebrate the children's illustrated writing, creative work and many aspects of their wider learning. The school is maintained well. However, given the steady increase in the enrolment there is a need for an economic appraisal of the adequacy of the existing accommodation.

## 4.3 RESOURCES, FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE

The governors are highly committed to the school and to the welfare of the children and their families. They support the Principal and the staff in the implementation of the school development plan and contribute effectively to the overall strategic planning and policy development for the school. They are well-informed about the work of the school.

## 5. CONCLUSION

5.1 The strengths of the school include:

- the very good behaviour of the children, their very positive disposition towards their learning and their involvement in all aspects of school life;
- the very good pastoral care provision within a highly inclusive learning environment;
- the very good quality of the provision for literacy and numeracy including the high standards achieved by the children by the end of KS2;
- the very high quality of the teaching observed, the majority of which was very good or outstanding;
- the effective culture of self-evaluation which promotes and develops the quality of the children's learning experiences and raises the standards achieved by all of the children; and
- the highly effective leadership of the Principal, very well supported by the Vice-principal, SMT and the governors.

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.

**HEALTH AND SAFETY**

- As the class sizes continue to increase the current accommodation will restrict the opportunities to provide aspects of the curriculum effectively.

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