

Education and Training Inspectorate

PRIMARY INSPECTION



St Colmcille's Primary School, Downpatrick, County Down

Maintained, co-educational DE ref no (403-6182)

Report of a Sustaining Improvement Inspection in February 2019



The Education and Training Inspectorate
Promoting Improvement

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Sustaining Improvement Inspection of St Colmcille's Primary School, Downpatrick, County Down (403-6182)

Introduction

The previous inspection in December 2011, evaluated the overall effectiveness of St Colmcille's Primary School as very good¹. The school took part in the pilot of the sustaining improvement inspection (SII) in June 2015. Since the SII, a new vice-principal, numeracy co-ordinator and designated teacher have been appointed. The enrolment has increased significantly, by 25%, over a four-year period and currently stands at 273 children. During the same period, the percentage of children entitled to free school meals has decreased by 10%. Over one third of the children attending the school have a level of need meeting statutory assessment criteria. A third Learning Support Centre has also been established. In the intervening period, the school has been accredited with: a Digital School Award in 2016; a Green Flag Award through the Eco-Schools Programme in 2017; the Marjorie Boxall Quality Mark Award for nurture in 2017; and a Coding Club Northern Ireland Mentoring School in 2018. A sustaining improvement inspection (SII) was conducted on 7 and 8 February 2019.

Focus of the inspection

The inspection focused on evaluating the extent to which the school is capable of demonstrating its capacity to effect improvement through self-evaluation and effective school development planning. The school also provided evidence of provision for safeguarding as part of the inspection.

The line of inquiry during the SII was:

- to raise further the quality of the children's learning experiences and outcomes in numeracy, with a particular focus on handling data, measures and shape and space, through effective use of information and communication technology (ICT).

Key findings

- The highly professional and strategic senior leadership team and staff work collegially to create an inclusive and nurturing school community where all children are enabled to achieve. The school development plan, and the associated action plans, have been informed by a well-embedded and rigorous self-evaluation process with meaningful consultation at all levels. The recent focus on improving the learning experiences for the children in numeracy using ICT has resulted in a further reduction in underachievement in numeracy. Pivotal to this improvement work has been the considered approach to auditing and addressing the professional development needs of all staff alongside ongoing support for parents through, for example, problem-solving and ICT workshops.
- Within the classes, the staff use effectively a range of well differentiated learning activities and educational software to scaffold the children's learning. Throughout the school, the children use, where appropriate, educational technology to record and present their findings when, for example, handling data. Targeted intervention programmes for numeracy and the use of 'The Sunflower Suite'² support the development of a 'growth mind-set'³ and meet very effectively the differing needs of the children. In discussion with a group of year 7 children, they spoke enthusiastically about their learning and, in particular, highlighted the positive impact of educational technology on their learning.

¹ From September 2015, the overall effectiveness of a school evaluated previously as outstanding or very good has been reported as a school demonstrating a high level of capacity for sustained improvement.

² 'The Sunflower Suite' is the school's nurture unit. Its purpose is to support children to manage their social, emotional and behavioural skills and to engage positively in their learning environment.

³ 'A growth mindset' is the belief that children can develop their talents and abilities through positive strategies and support from others.

Safeguarding

During the inspection, the school provided evidence that the arrangements for safeguarding children reflect the guidance from the Department of Education. The year 6 children, with whom the inspector met, reported that they feel safe in school and are aware of what to do if they have any concerns about their safety or welfare. Specifically, the children articulated how the staff in the school are attuned to their needs and are proactive in sharing appropriate and relevant messages, equipping the children with the necessary skills they need to stay safe.

Conclusion

St Colmcille's Primary School continues to demonstrate a high level of capacity⁴ for sustained improvement in the interest of all the learners. The ETI will continue to monitor how the school sustains improvement.

⁴ From September 2015, the overall effectiveness of a school evaluated previously as very good is evaluated as having a high level of capacity for sustained improvement.

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