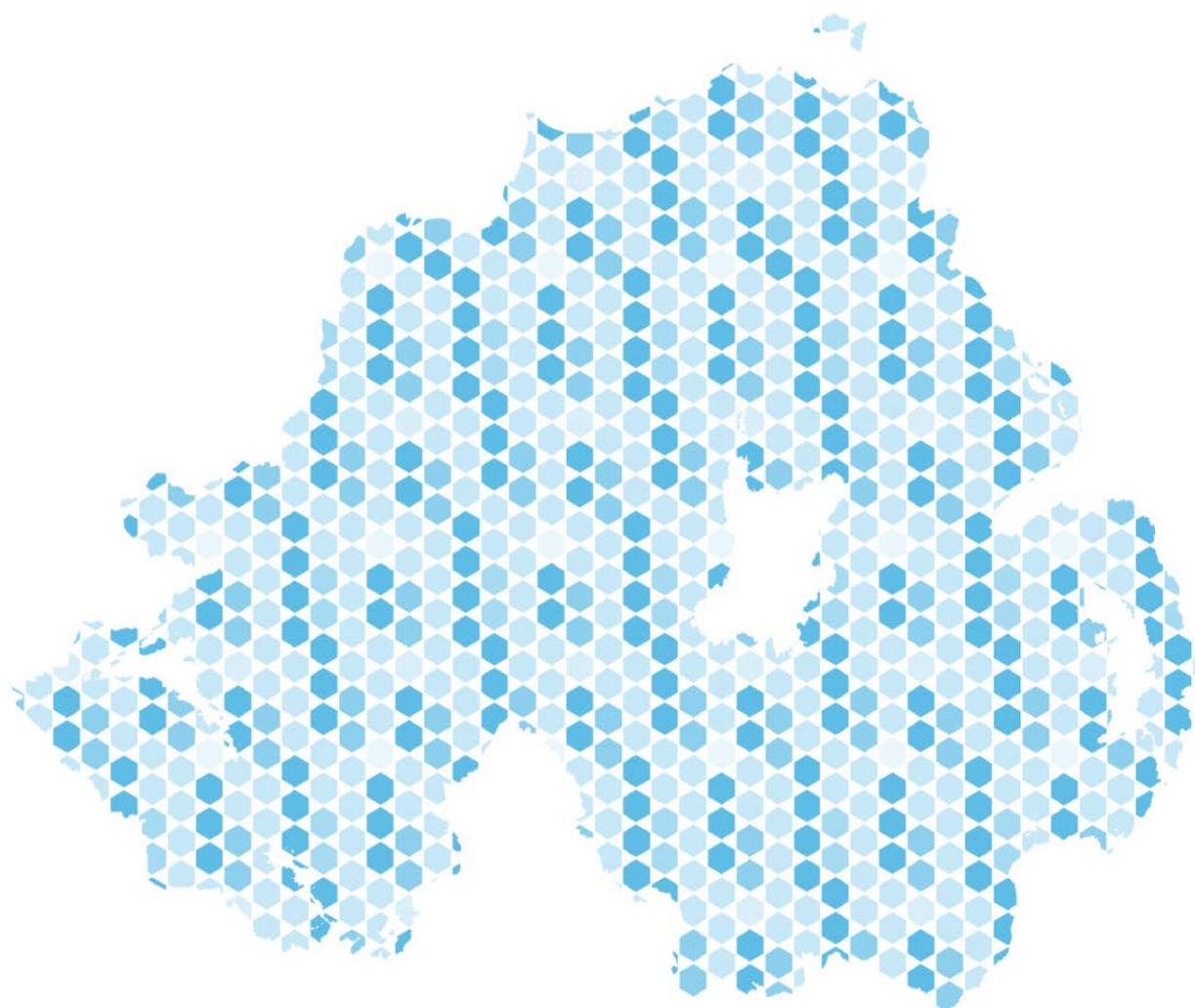


PRIMARY INSPECTION 2014-15



Education and Training
Inspectorate

Holy Cross Girls' Primary
School, Belfast

Report of an Inspection in
March 2015

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

CUSTOMER
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Quantitative terms

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 in reports:

DESCRIPTOR
Outstanding
Very Good
Good
Satisfactory
Inadequate
Unsatisfactory

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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 Education and Training Inspectorate's (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 teaching and learning, 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;
- a meeting with a group of children; and
- the opportunity for the parents, teaching and support staff to complete a confidential questionnaire.

A small number of parents and almost all of the staff, teaching and non-teaching, responded to the questionnaires. The responses to the parental questionnaires indicated very high levels of satisfaction with the life and work of the school. In particular, the parents highlighted their appreciation of the friendly, family atmosphere of the school and the good progress made by the children. The staff responses were very positive; they emphasised the highly effective pastoral care practices of the school and the good team work amongst the staff. ETI has reported the outcomes of the questionnaires to the principal and to the representative of the board of governors.

2. Focus of inspection

The inspection focused on:

1. the children's achievements and standards in literacy and numeracy, in particular, how the school is addressing low attainment and underachievement where applicable;
2. the quality of provision for literacy in the school; and
3. the quality of leadership and management.

3. Context

Holy Cross Girls' Primary School is situated in the Ardoyne area of Belfast; most of the children come from the Parish of Holy Cross. The enrolment has increased over the past four years and is currently 168 children. The school has undergone significant and recent refurbishment to the school building and playgrounds which enhances greatly the learning environment.

Holy Cross Girls' Primary School	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
Enrolment	153	170	168	168
% Attendance (NI Average)	93.5%	93.3%	94.6%	95.3%
FSME Percentage ¹	77%	74.4%	75%	77.38%
% (No) of children on SEN register	20.58%	22.61%	22%	28%
No. of children with statements of educational needs	*	*	*	6
No. of newcomers	*	*	*	*

Source: data as held by the school.

* fewer than 5

4. Overall findings of the inspection

Overall Performance Level	Outstanding
Achievements and Standards	Outstanding
Provision	Outstanding
Leadership and Management	Outstanding

5. Achievements and standards

- The children have very good levels of motivation and are able to work well independently and in groups with others. The behaviour of the children is exemplary; they are polite and helpful to each other, and to visitors. The children demonstrate excellent personal and social skills, supporting each other in class and at play.
- The school's performance data shows that most of the children, including those who require additional support with aspects of their learning, make very good progress in English and mathematics in line with their ability or above expectation.
- Overall, the standards achieved by the children in literacy are very good. During the inspection, a small group of the most able children from year 7 read fluently, expressively and with very good comprehension. The children enjoy discussing their favourite authors and the types of books they enjoy most. They communicate very well orally, and, through the very well-planned opportunities, explain their thinking and share their ideas. Informed by the teachers' regular evaluations of the children's written work, there is appropriate progression in the quality of the writing. As a result, the children write with accuracy and flair for a range of audiences and purposes; the standard of writing in the children's books and on display is consistently very high.
- Almost all of the children who require additional support with aspects of their learning make very good progress and are able to work well in class for increasingly sustained periods of time.

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

- The children demonstrate high levels of competence in information and communication technology (ICT) and there are many displays of their skilful work throughout the school.

6. Provision

- In the effective classroom practice, the teachers' planning is comprehensive and very well informed by extensive and skilful monitoring and evaluation of the children's previous learning. The lessons are well planned and differentiated appropriately for the wide range of individual needs within the classroom, with very good pace and progression. The classroom assistants support the children's learning very well.
- The senior leadership team, working in close collaboration with the key co-ordinators and the whole staff, have embedded a highly effective cycle of self-evaluation designed to improve the standards across the school and ensure that each child reaches her full potential. Drawing upon a wide range of qualitative and quantitative data, first-hand observations of the children's learning and regular evaluations of the quality of the work in the children's books, the teachers plan effectively, set targets, plot progress and celebrate the children's achievements.
- The literacy co-ordinator, working in co-operation with the teachers, has planned a well-targeted, whole-school approach to linking the development of the children's reading, writing and spelling skills. From the foundation stage, an appropriate focus is placed on the development of the children's talking and listening skills. This work provides a firm foundation for the development of the children's literacy skills as they progress through the key stages. The children have outstanding opportunities to develop further their talking and listening skills through meaningful class discussions and group and paired work. In response, the children enjoy activities in which they justify their opinions and ideas, evaluate and make inferences and draw appropriate conclusions. Throughout the school, the teachers ensure that the children have a wide range of opportunities to develop their writing skills in real life contexts. The very skilful use of a range of ICT resources helps develop and extend the children's literacy skills.
- The children who require additional support with their learning are identified at an early stage through extensive assessment using standardised tests and teacher observation. The teachers write clear targets for the individual education plans that are implemented well in the classroom, and in a range of additional support lessons, from the very highly skilled support team. Additional support for the children's literacy skills include a progressive system of Reading Recovery, Paired Reading, Reading Partnership and Accelerated Reading. The children gain self-confidence in their skills, and are involved well in individual target setting, regularly evaluating their progress and achievements. The staff track carefully the effectiveness of the interventions and the resulting information is used well to inform further planning for support and learning strategies.

- The quality of the provision for pastoral care is outstanding; the school environment is nurturing with frequent and regular whole-school celebration of the children's achievements. The children benefit from the positive working relationships at all levels, the strong family ethos and the holistic support for each child. They contribute well to the decision-making processes within the school, for example, through the eco-council and the school council. In the meeting with the year 6 children, they spoke of their enjoyment of school and the many opportunities for after-school clubs and activities, including music, dance, science and Irish. The children reported that they feel safe and secure in school and know what to do if they have any concerns about their safety or well-being; they can access a counsellor within the school if they require additional support.
- The school gives very good attention to promoting healthy eating and physical activity, thereby encouraging the children to adopt healthy lifestyles; it has developed links in sporting activities with Wheatfield Primary School.

7. Leadership and management

- The leadership and management team has a clear strategic vision for school improvement and promote an effective collegial working ethos. There is a firmly embedded system of self-evaluation and the leadership team monitor thoroughly the extensive system of planning and assessment for learning within the school, providing challenge and support for staff. The improvement process is highly inclusive of the school community, and makes outstanding use of the extensive internal school data; there is ongoing professional discussion amongst the staff relating to learning and teaching, with the provision of help and guidance for newly appointed staff. The teachers, led effectively by the principal, analyse, level and evaluate collectively the quality of the children's work and share effective practice within the school.
- The co-ordinators are highly effective practitioners who provide skilful leadership in their respective areas of responsibility. They use competently a broad range of evidence of the children's learning, the progress they make and the standards they attain.
- A part-time school family support worker encourages parental involvement in their children's learning and organises well-supported Essential Skills courses within the school. The staff have very well-established links with the local post-primary and primary schools; for example, they maintain an e-partnership with Blackmountain Primary School. The key stage 2 children participate in a healthy lifestyle programme with the Ardoyne - Shankill Partnership. The school has a well-established international link with St Theresa's School in Uganda including a regular teacher exchange programme, which has resulted in the school achieving International Development School status.
- Based on the evidence presented at the time of inspection, ETI's evaluation is that there can be a high degree of confidence in the aspects of governance evaluated. The governors provide rigorous scrutiny of the school development plan, policies and school finance. They provide an appropriate challenge function regarding the further development of teaching arrangements within the school.

- 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 broadly reflect the guidance issued by the Department of Education.

8. Conclusion

In the areas inspected, the quality of education provided by this school is outstanding; the quality of pastoral care is also outstanding. The school has demonstrated its capacity for sustained self-improvement.

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