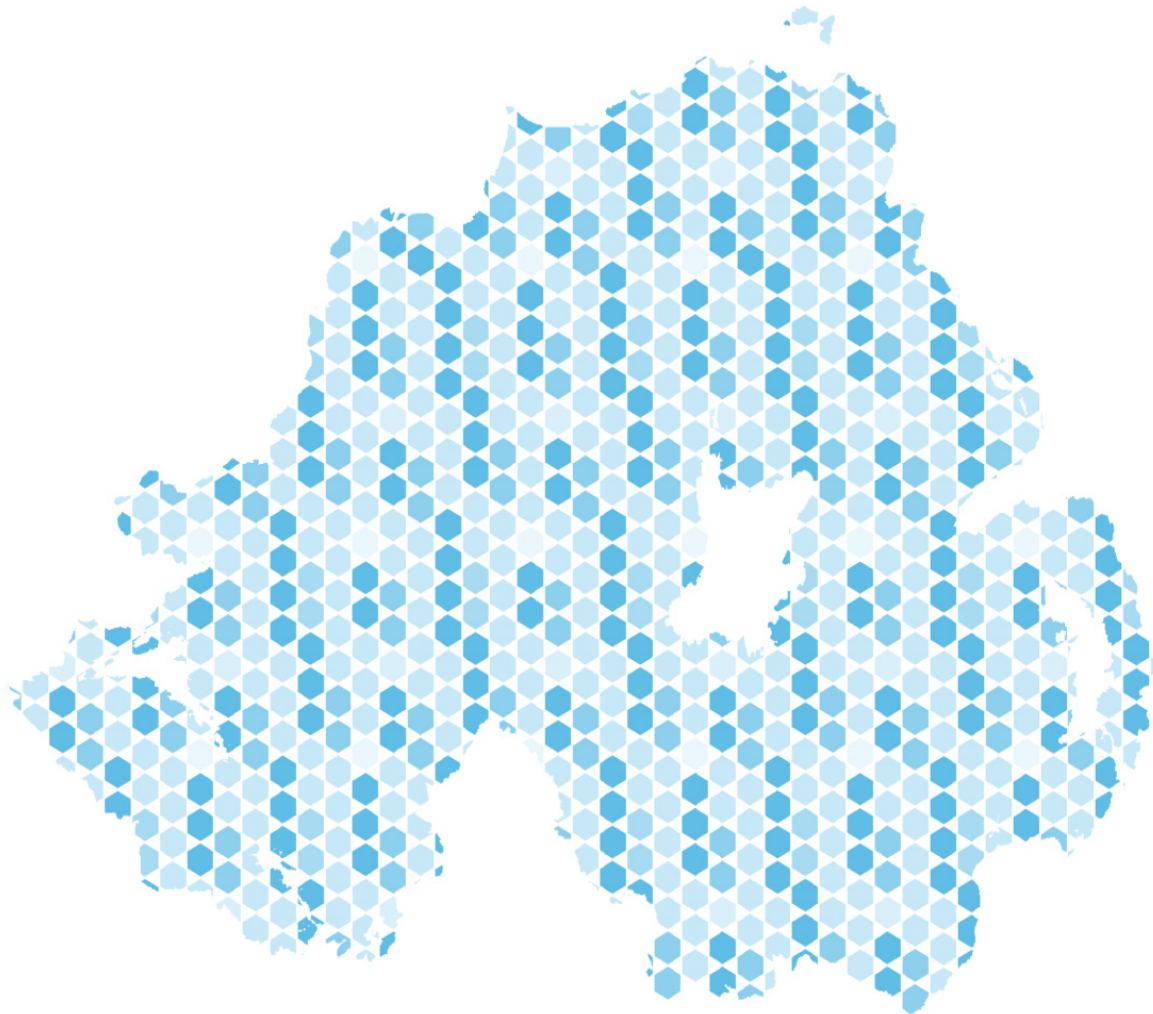


# PRIMARY INSPECTION



Education and Training  
Inspectorate

Our Lady's Primary School,  
Tullysaran

Report of an Inspection  
in November 2010

*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



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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



## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 SCHOOL CONTEXT

Our Lady's Primary School is situated in the town land of Artasooley in County Armagh. The enrolment has decreased slightly over the past five years and currently stands at 123 including three children of reception age who are funded by the Department of Education (DE). Almost all of the children who attend the school come from the local and surrounding rural area. Approximately 18% of the children are entitled to free school meals (FSM). The school has identified 9% of the children as requiring 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 and the teaching 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.

Just over 51% of parental questionnaires were returned to Inspection Services Branch. Twenty-one returns included additional written comments. The parents expressed a high level of satisfaction with the educational and pastoral provision provided by the school. In particular, they acknowledged the professional and hard-working staff, the excellent communications established between the school and the parents, and the opportunities provided for the children to participate in extra curricular activities and projects with other schools.

Three of the teachers and seven members of the support staff responded to the online questionnaires. Almost all of these responses were very positive and highly affirmative of the work of the school.

The governors expressed strong support for the school. In particular they commented on the high standing in which the school is held in the local community and the excellent links that exist between the school, the parents and the local post-primary schools.

In discussions, the children in year 6 reported that they feel very safe and secure and are aware of what to do if they have concerns about their safety or well-being. They talked happily and enthusiastically about their experiences in school; in particular the children appreciate the wide range of activities that they can take part in including drama productions.

#### 1.4 PASTORAL CARE

The quality of the arrangements for pastoral care in the school is outstanding. The staff have worked hard to provide a welcoming and supportive ethos that promotes positive working relationships and mutual respect between the teachers and the children. The children are friendly and mannerly and their behaviour both in and out of class is exemplary. The wide range of extra-curricular activities enriches the children's learning experiences.

#### 1.5 CHILD PROTECTION

The school has very good comprehensive arrangements in place for safeguarding children. These arrangements reflect the guidance issued by the DE.

#### 1.6 HEALTHY EATING AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

The school gives very good attention to promoting healthy eating and physical activity. The healthy breaks and regular opportunities for the children to engage in energetic outdoor play and sports encourage the children to adopt healthy lifestyles.

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

The links with the parents and the local community are given a high priority within the school. The parents are kept well informed about all aspects of school life and are encouraged to become actively involved in supporting their children's learning and the life and work of the school. There is an active parent support group which helps to raise school funds for the acquisition of additional resources. The school supports a range of charities, and promotes the community use of the school facilities for a variety of sporting activities. Effective links established with several post-primary schools are helping to ensure that the children are supported appropriately as they transfer to the next stage of their learning.

### 2. ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS

#### 2.1 LEARNING

The children are highly motivated and demonstrate very good levels of engagement in their learning. Throughout the school, there is an emphasis on promoting the children's independent thinking and learning and raising their confidence and self-esteem. The children are actively involved in the lessons, and are encouraged to extend their responses in group discussions. When presented with more challenging activities they demonstrate the ability to solve problems and the perseverance to complete investigations. The teachers set high standards for the children and have realistic expectations of what they can achieve.

An analysis of the key stage (KS) 2 assessment data over the past four years shows fluctuation in the school's performance in English and mathematics. Overall, it is above the Northern Ireland (NI) average in mathematics and just below the average in English. When compared with schools in the same FSM category, the levels of attainment in English are above average at level 5, but below average for level 4. The levels of attainment in mathematics are above the average for similar schools.

The school's internal data indicates that, when comparing the children's standardised scores in English and mathematics with tests of innate ability, in English and mathematics, the majority of the children are achieving at a level in line with their ability.

Appropriately, the school has prioritised, in the school development plan (SDP), the need to improve standards in literacy.

## 2.2 ENGLISH AND LITERACY

The overall quality of provision for English and literacy is good.

The development of literacy is a high priority within the school evidenced by the clear planning for progression, the consistent approach to phonics, and the recent emphasis on guided reading and extended writing across the key stages. The literacy co-ordinator provides effective guidance and has a clear vision for the development of literacy across the school. Through a recent audit of the provision, he has identified appropriate areas for improvement and action plans are in place to support the development of literacy in order to raise further the standards attained by the children.

The children have very good opportunities to develop their skills in talking and listening. The children talk and listen to each other well and they show enthusiasm and engagement in their learning. In the foundation stage (FS), the teachers develop the children's oracy skills effectively through play-based learning, shared reading, songs and dramatised stories. In KS1, the children talk confidently in response to a range of poetry and the teachers use a wide range of drama strategies across the key stages. By KS2, the children give extended responses to the open-ended questions posed to them by their teachers in stimulating class discussions and are keen to ask as well as answer questions. The children develop further their oral skills through the valuable participation in school assemblies and performances in school plays.

The children develop their reading skills systematically across the school. The teachers use guided reading sessions and a range of reading activities to engage the children in their reading. The children benefit from a literacy-rich environment and have appropriate access to a varied stock of fiction and non-fiction books. The children read with increasing fluency, accuracy and understanding as they progress through the key stages. In KS2 they demonstrate an understanding of the characters, plot and setting and a genuine enthusiasm for reading. By the end of KS2, the majority of the children are reading in line or above their chronological age.

The quality of the children's written work, including a wide range of creative writing, is good. In the FS, the children become familiar with different forms of print and experiment with early writing skills. In KS1, the children's independent writing is developed and by the end of KS2, the children can write for a variety of purposes and audiences. The teachers provide very good opportunities for the development of the children's written work through connected learning in the World Around Us and mathematics. In the best practice observed, the children's written work is marked against set criteria and there is detailed feedback on how the children can improve their written style. It is appropriate that the school has developed a handwriting policy to ensure consistently high standards of presentation.

The teachers use ICT effectively to develop the children's language and literacy skills; for example, in KS1, the children use voice recordings to record their poems and in year 6, the children are able to access the Newsdesk of Learning NI to write responses to current issues in the news.

## 2.3 MATHEMATICS AND NUMERACY

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

The co-ordinator has worked hard to raise the profile of mathematics in the school and has led the staff in improving provision, monitoring the range of activities and raising standards. He has implemented a number of effective initiatives such as the introduction of an after school Maths Club (for year 5 and 6 pupils) and an activity-based learning programme on financial capability in upper KS2.

The current action plan for Numeracy outlines appropriately a number of key improvement strategies including a detailed review of the school's Numeracy Policy and planning; and the next stage in the school's analysis and use of assessment data to ensure that all of the children's needs are fully met.

The school's Mathematics and Numeracy programme provides 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. Mathematical displays and a range of practical activities observed during the inspection link directly to the children's current interests and other learning topics.

In the best practice observed, the teachers make clear links with prior learning, discuss and agree learning intentions and success criteria with the children and revisit these during the lesson. They focus carefully on the quality of the children's mathematical responses and turn these into opportunities for further learning. The lessons are also well-paced and incorporate careful questioning and strategies for self-assessment which consolidate and extend the children's mathematical thinking and application of skills. In some classes, the most able children are provided with additional challenge activities to further refine and extend their mathematical competence.

Throughout the school, the children exhibit clear enjoyment of and enthusiasm for mathematics. In the FS, the children are developing a good understanding of number and other mathematical concepts such as shape and space and using money through a connected and stimulating range of practical activities including play-based learning. In KS1, the children use appropriate mathematical language with increasing fluency and show good understanding and thinking skills in number, measure, shape and space and handling data. In KS2, the children demonstrate very good mental flexibility; they respond well in mental mathematics activities and are able to articulate the range of strategies they employ in working through mathematical processes.

In all key stages, the children demonstrate very good ICT skills in relation to various aspects of their mathematics learning, most notably data handling. The school is equipped with a small number of interactive whiteboards and these are used effectively to stimulate the children's interest and enhance their learning.



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

#### **3.1 PLANNING**

The teachers plan conscientiously for all aspects of the curriculum. In literacy and numeracy there are clear long-term plans to ensure consistency and progression in the children's learning. The teachers translate these long-term plans into sharply focused medium-term plans, which clearly identify the planned learning outcomes, the learning activities and the strategies to meet the range of needs within the class.

The evaluation of planning is at an early stage. The school needs to develop the use of evaluation to provide comprehensive information about the quality and extent of the children's learning and use the information more effectively to inform future planning for individuals and small groups.

#### **3.2 TEACHING**

During the inspection, the quality of the teaching observed ranged from good to very good; in the majority of the lessons observed it was very good.

The teachers are dedicated and hard working; they have high expectations of the children's learning and they plan lessons to ensure appropriate pace, challenge and differentiation. The teachers nurture within the children a sense of enquiry; they build effectively on the children's previous knowledge and experience and use skilful questioning to extend their thinking. They use a wide range of effective strategies to engage the children actively in their learning; they make connections for the children's learning across the curriculum and relate the learning to practical life choices.

Special educational needs (SEN) is given an appropriately high priority by the school. The special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO) works diligently with the teachers in identifying need and agreeing the provision for those children requiring help with aspects of their learning. The individual educational plans are written in consultation between the class teacher and the SENCO and include specific targets which are reviewed regularly. The support for the children with special educational needs is provided through both in-class differentiated teaching and withdrawal sessions for literacy and numeracy. The information available indicates that the children on the SEN register make good progress and are achieving standards in line with their ability. Good use is made of appropriate ICT programmes to enhance and consolidate the learning of children with additional needs.

#### **3.3 ASSESSMENT**

In most of the classes the teachers use a range of assessment strategies to find out the extent to which the children understand the intended learning and they revisit the learning intentions in the course of the lesson. In the best practice, the teachers also employ self and peer assessment strategies to enable the children to focus on the nature and extent of their own progress. More widespread use of plenary sessions would help the children to reflect further on the nature and quality of new learning that has taken place.

The school uses an appropriate range of standardised testing to obtain information about the children's progress, to identify those who are in need of additional support and those who would benefit from one of the short-term 'booster' programmes. The school has made a good start to using data to identify those children in need of further support and to put into place a range of interventions to improve their achievements. It is appropriate that the current SDP has identified this as a priority for the school.

## **4. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

### **4.1 LEADERSHIP**

The overall quality of leadership and management in this school is very good.

The quality of the leadership provided by the Principal is very good. He combines well his teaching role with the administration of the school and is supported ably by the dedicated Vice-principal and hardworking staff. He has an appropriate vision for the school with a clear understanding of how to achieve this. His commitment to the life and work of the school and his concern and care for the children and the staff is evident.

### **4.2 PLANNING FOR IMPROVEMENT**

The Principal and the staff have worked hard to create a culture of reflection and self-evaluation, including audits of provision which contribute to setting priorities for improvement. An effective SDP is in place and is clearly focused on raising further the standards achieved by the children in literacy and numeracy. The school gives good attention to and meets fully the requirements of the Education (School Development Plans) Regulations NI 2005 Order.

### **4.3 RESOURCES, FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE**

The school governors make a very positive contribution to the life and work of the school; they support effectively the Principal and staff in the implementation of the SDP. The school has a wide range of resources to support the children with their learning and plan to develop further the resources for ICT.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

5.1 The strengths of the school include:

- the quality of the teaching observed, the majority of which was very good;
- the high levels of motivation and the very positive engagement of the children in their learning;
- the very good standards achieved by the children in mathematics;
- the very good leadership of the Principal and the commitment of the staff to raising further the children's attainments in English and mathematics;
- the outstanding quality of the pastoral care provision which includes highly effective links with the parents and wider community; and
- the good use made of data to identify priorities for improvement.

5.2 In the areas inspected, the quality of education provided in 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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