

Sustaining Improvement Inspection of St Mary's Primary School and Nursery Unit, Cushendall, County Antrim (303-0894)

In the last inspection held in October 2012, St Mary's Primary School and Nursery Unit, was evaluated overall as good. A Sustaining Improvement Inspection (SII) was conducted on 1 March 2016. The purpose of the SII is to evaluate the extent to which the school and the nursery unit is capable of demonstrating that it has sustained its capacity to effect improvement through self-evaluation and effective school development planning. The school was asked to select, from the current priorities in the school development plan (SDP), two key priorities to demonstrate to the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) the effectiveness of the school's actions to sustain continued improvement.

One of the key priorities was an area for improvement identified in the inspection report of October 2012. The second area was selected by the school from the current SDP.

The two key areas identified for the inspection were:

- the development of a collegiate team approach and the establishment of more rigorous processes for consultation and self-evaluation in order to ensure that the school development planning processes are effective in raising further the quality of the provision and the standards attained by the children; and
- Literacy, in particular, the development of comprehension and effective questioning across the school.

Key findings

The improved processes for consultation and self-evaluation are informing more accurately the school development planning processes and the associated action plans. The further development of the co-ordinators' roles and responsibilities have resulted in a more cohesive and collegiate approach to school improvement. The strategic oversight by the school leadership team and the enhanced distributive leadership across the school ensure there is effective monitoring and evaluation of the quality of learning and teaching and the children's standards. The teachers have a greater input to and shared understanding of leadership at all levels.

The staff's improved approaches to comprehension and effective questioning, identified from a more accurate analysis of the school's internal data, make an important contribution to the development of the children's thinking skills and the high standards they attain in Literacy and numeracy. In the nursery unit and through the three key stages, the children use successfully a wide variety of strategies to understand words, phrases and ideas of increasing complexity and to ask, as well as answer, questions in their learning. The teachers' moderation of the children's written work demonstrates the impact of the enhanced teaching strategies across the school. Of particular note, is the significant professional development undertaken by the staff to improve their work in this area.

The quality of the teaching observed, on the day of the inspection, was always effective; two-thirds of the lessons were highly effective. All of the lessons reflected well the priorities in the school development plan.

Conclusion

St Mary's Primary School and Nursery Unit continues to demonstrate the capacity for sustained improvement in the interests of all the children. The ETI will continue to monitor how the school sustains improvement.