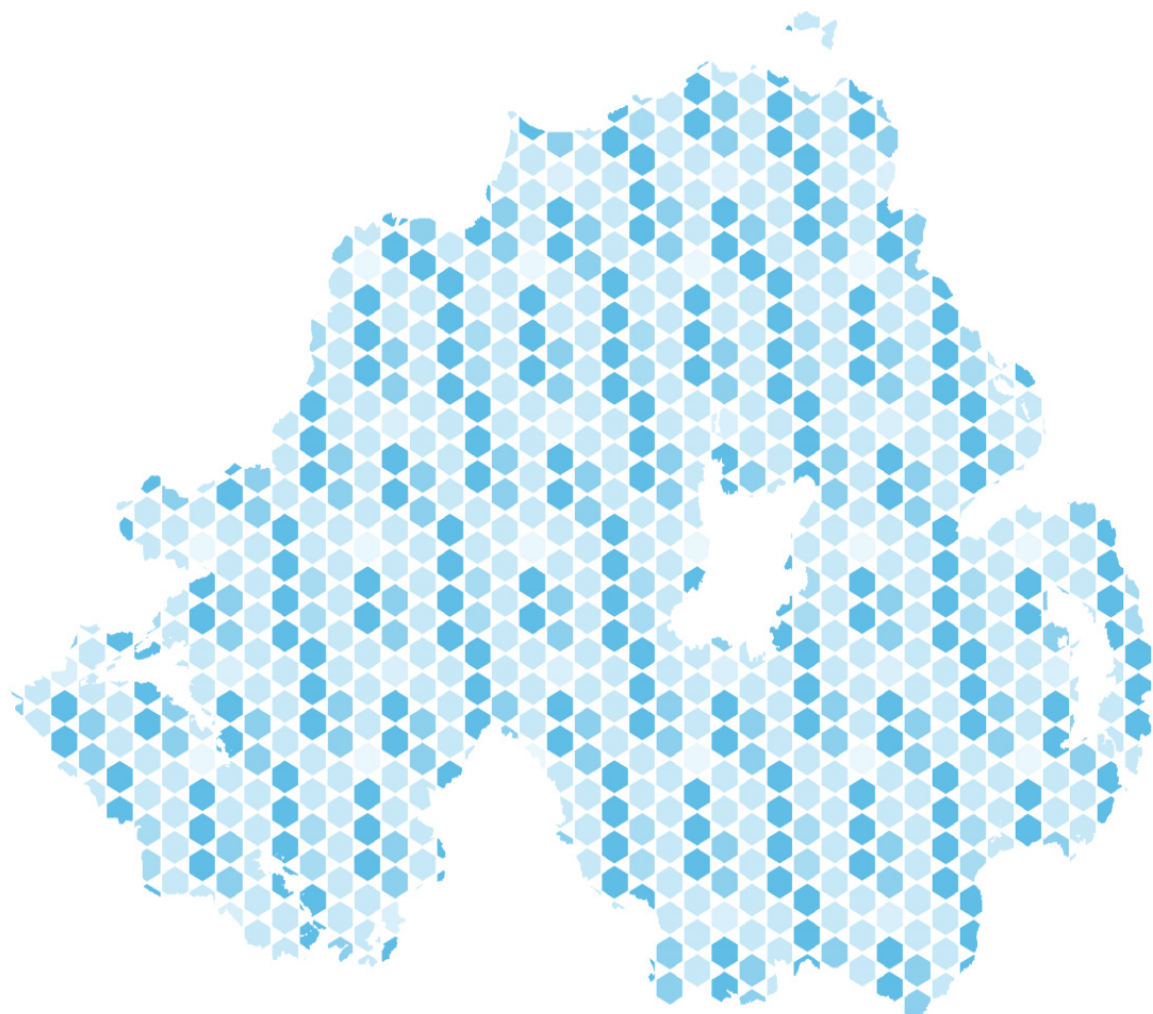


PRIMARY INSPECTION



Education and Training
Inspectorate

Methodist College Belfast
Preparatory Department
Downey and Fullerton House
Schools, Belfast

Report of an Inspection
in January 2011



*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



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE



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

BASIC INFORMATION SHEET (BIS) - PRIMARY SCHOOLS

- A. i. **School: Fullerton House Preparatory** iii. **Date of Inspection: W/B 31/01/11**
ii. **School Reference Number: 162-0022** iv. **Nature of Inspection: Focused**

B.

School Year	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
Year 1 Intake	28	19	23	25	19
Enrolments					
Primary	253	240	221	217	201
Reception	0	0	0	0	0
Nursery Unit	0	0	0	0	0
Special Unit	0	0	0	0	0
Irish Medium Unit	0	0	0	0	0

The enrolment for the current year is the figure on the day of notification of inspection. For previous years it is the figure in the annual return to the Department of Education.

The calculations at C and D should be based on the total of the primary and reception enrolments only.

- | | | | | | |
|----|---|--|------------------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------------|
| C. | Average Attendance for the Previous School Year
(expressed as a percentage): | | 97.1% | NI Avg Att: 94.9% | |
| | | | Primary &
Reception | Nursery
Unit | Special
Unit |
| | | | | | Irish Medium
Unit |
| D. | i. | Number of Teachers
(including the principal and part-time teachers):
(Full-time equivalent = 25 teaching hours) | 13.5 | 0 | 0 |
| | ii. | PTR (Pupil/Teacher Ratio): | 14.9 | NI PTR: 20.7 | |
| | iii. | Average Class Size: | 18.3 | | |
| | iv. | Class Size (Range): | 11 to 24 | | |
| | v. | Ancillary Support:
Number of Hours Per Week : | | | |
| | | i. Clerical support: | | 31.25 | |
| | | ii. Foundation Stage Classroom
Assistant Support: | | 27.5 | |
| | | iii. Additional hours of other
classroom assistant support: | | 30 | |
| | vi. | Percentage of children with statements of special educational needs: | | 1% | |
| | vii. | Total percentage of children on the Special Needs Register: | | 13.9% | |
| | viii. | Number of children who are not of statutory school age: | | 0 | |
| | ix. | Percentage of children entitled to free school meals: | | 0% | |
| | x. | Percentage of children at the end of Key Stage 2 for 2009/10
who attained level 4 and above in English and mathematics: | | English
93% | Mathematics
98% |

BASIC INFORMATION SHEET (BIS) - PRIMARY SCHOOLS

- A. i. **School: Downey House** iii. **Date of Inspection: W/B 31/01/11**
 ii. **School Reference Number: 162-0023** iv. **Nature of Inspection: Focused**

B.

School Year	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
Year 1 Intake	25	26	31	18	21
Enrolments					
Primary	244	232	229	208	196
Reception	0	0	0	0	0
Nursery Unit	0	0	0	0	0
Special Unit	0	0	0	0	0
Irish Medium Unit	0	0	0	0	0

The enrolment for the current year is the figure on the day of notification of inspection.
 For previous years it is the figure in the annual return to the Department of Education.

The calculations at C and D should be based on the total of the primary and reception enrolments only.

- C. Average Attendance for the Previous School Year
 (expressed as a percentage): 96.7% **NI Avg Att: 94.9%**
- | | Primary &
Reception | Nursery
Unit | Special
Unit | Irish Medium
Unit |
|--|------------------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------------|
|--|------------------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------------|
- D. i. Number of Teachers
 (including the principal and part-time teachers): 13.5 0 0 0
 (Full-time equivalent = 25 teaching hours)
- ii. PTR (Pupil/Teacher Ratio): 14.5 NI PTR: 20.7
- iii. Average Class Size: 17.7
- iv. Class Size (Range): 14 to 24
- v. Ancillary Support:
 Number of Hours **Per Week**:
- | | |
|---|-------|
| i. Clerical support: | 31.25 |
| ii. Foundation Stage Classroom Assistant Support: | 27.5 |
| iii. Additional hours of other classroom assistant support: | 30 |
- vi. Percentage of children with statements of special educational needs: 1.5%
- vii. Total percentage of children on the Special Needs Register: 13.3%
- viii. Number of children who are **not** of statutory school age: 0
- ix. Percentage of children entitled to free school meals: 0%
- x. Percentage of children at the end of Key Stage 2 for 2009/10
 who attained level 4 and above in English and mathematics:
- | | |
|----------------|--------------------|
| English | Mathematics |
| 100% | 100% |

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The preparatory department of Methodist College (the College) consists of two schools, Fullerton House and Downey House. Fullerton House is situated within the main campus of the College in South Belfast and Downey House occupies a spacious site within Pirrie Park in East Belfast. Each school serves a wide and different catchment area. The enrolment has decreased over the past five years, from 497 children in 2006 to the current figure of 397. At the time of the inspection approximately 1% of the children were entitled to free school meals and 13% of the children were identified as requiring help with aspects of their learning. There are 32 newcomer children who speak English as an additional language.

1.2 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.

The school was also selected as part of a sample to monitor the implementation of the healthy food in schools initiative.

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 groups of children from year 6 and year 7.

Of the two hundred and thirteen questionnaires issued to parents, 121 (60%) were returned to the Inspection Services Branch including 68 which contained additional written comments. Almost all of the responses from the parents indicated a high level of satisfaction with the educational and pastoral provision. In particular, they highlighted their appreciation of the caring and professional staff, the leadership of the Principal, the high educational standards, the wide range of extra-curricular activities and the inclusive ethos of the school. A small number of parents (9%) raised concerns about aspects of the teaching, pastoral care, accommodation and communication which are dealt with in the body of the report.

Twenty-three teachers and eight support staff responded to the questionnaires; five of the responses contained an additional written comment. The majority of staff responses indicated a high level of satisfaction with all aspects of school life. The responses indicated that staff enjoy working in the school, they are fully committed to setting high standards of attainment for the children and aim to work in close partnership with the parents. A small number of staff expressed less satisfaction with the levels of communication within the school and about the opportunities to contribute to decision-making, to work collaboratively and to engage in staff development relevant to their responsibilities.

In discussions held with small groups of year 6 and year 7 children, they spoke enthusiastically about the support they receive from their teachers, about their enjoyment of their lessons and about the wide range of enrichment activities available to them both within and after school. In addition, they expressed their appreciation of the focus the school places on promoting positive behaviour and the opportunities they have to take responsibility, for example, as prefects or members of the School Council. They also indicated that they know what to do if they have any concerns about their safety.

1.4 PASTORAL CARE

The quality of the arrangements for pastoral care in the school is very good. Among the strengths are the very good working relationships observed between the teachers and the children, the importance placed on the holistic development of the children and the strong ethos of respect for cultural diversity.

1.5 CHILD PROTECTION

The school has satisfactory arrangements in place for safeguarding children. These arrangements broadly reflect the guidance issued by the Department of Education but the following areas need to be addressed: the system for ensuring that all parents receive information relating to child protection needs to be applied more rigorously by all the staff, and risk assessments should be carried out for all school trips and visits.

1.6 HEALTHY EATING AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

The school gives good attention to promoting healthy eating. In the best practice there is a strong focus on encouraging the children to drink water and bring healthy snacks for breaks. The menu planning should comply with the compulsory nutritional standards for school lunches and the whole-school healthy eating programme needs to be monitored and evaluated.

The children have excellent opportunities to engage in a range of sports and physical activity as they progress through the school.

1.7 LINKS WITH PARENTS AND THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

The school has good links with parents. There is an active and valued Parent Teacher Association which assists the school with fund raising for additional resources.

The very good links with the College staff, combined with the use of its facilities, enhance significantly the range of sporting opportunities available to the children.

2. ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS

2.1 LEARNING

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 consistently well above the Northern Ireland average. Compared with schools in a similar free school meals category, the levels of attainment in English and mathematics are also well above the average.

The children are confident, articulate and highly motivated to learn. Most of the children, including those experiencing difficulty with aspects of their learning, make steady progress.

In the best practice, the children have opportunities to engage actively in their learning and to apply their skills and capabilities within a range of meaningful contexts. They are co-operative and can work collaboratively in pairs and small groups. More consistent opportunities should be provided for all of the children to work independently, develop creativity and to reflect on and evaluate their own work.

The youngest children enjoy learning through a range of appropriate play-based activities and are developing effective social, musical, language, mathematical and physical skills.

2.2 ENGLISH AND LITERACY

The overall quality of the provision for literacy is very good.

The literacy co-ordinator and recently appointed literacy team have developed relevant action plans which are in the early stages of implementation.

There is an appropriately high priority given to the development of children's language skills. Almost all of the children are confident, articulate and enjoy participating in class discussions. They are particularly motivated when the opportunities for talking and listening are linked to their personal experiences. A small number of the children need to improve their ability to listen to one another's views during class discussions. By the end of KS2 most of the children can engage in a very high standard of class discussion; they articulate their thoughts in a mature manner justifying their opinions and making reasoned arguments.

Most of the children enjoy reading a range of texts for information and enjoyment. A few children identified as requiring help with their reading should have a more consistently differentiated in-class approach. The children learn to read through the effective use of a range of teaching methods. Most children can use phonic skills competently to decipher unfamiliar words and, as they progress through the school, most develop an appropriate range of comprehension skills to understand new text. By the end of KS2 most of the children can read with a high degree of accuracy, fluency, expression and understanding.

The quality of the children's written work is of a consistently high standard. The small number of children experiencing difficulties are identified early and given appropriate support; most are making good progress.

The children are encouraged to develop their emergent and early writing through relevant topic work; they write for a good variety of purposes and audiences, and can research and record their findings. There is a high level of grammatical accuracy and neat presentation of their work. By the end of KS2 many of the children display a maturity of reasoning, empathy and high levels of creativity in their writing. A small number of the children should be provided with more consistently challenging and extended opportunities to use their writing skills independently.

The use of ICT to support the teaching and learning of English and literacy is underdeveloped.

2.3 MATHEMATICS AND NUMERACY

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

The numeracy co-ordinators have developed effective and collaborative working practices which are beneficial to both schools. In consultation with the numeracy teams, they have, appropriately, identified the need for more differentiated provision for learning and for the analysis of performance data in order to identify and meet, more fully, the needs of all of the children.

The school places a strong emphasis on developing the children's confidence and competence in mathematics. As the children progress through the school, they generally receive a wide range of learning experiences in number, shape and space, measures and data-handling. In a few classes, there is an imbalance in the programme with an overemphasis on number; the school recognises and accepts the need for a more consistent balance in the mathematics provision and that the use of processes needs to be further developed.

In the best practice observed during the inspection, the development of the children's mental agility was incorporated well within the lessons; the children engaged in practical activities which developed well their understanding of key mathematical concepts and language and they had the opportunity to apply their understanding to problem-solving and investigative activities. This included the effective use of appropriate play based activities for children in the foundation stage (FS). These aspects of the mathematics provision need to be developed and incorporated more consistently in all classes.

In discussions with the children, most were able to articulate their thought processes very competently using appropriate mathematical language. The presentation of their written work in mathematics is of a very high quality.

The standards attained by the children in mathematics are very good and by year 7 they are very sound in their understanding and application of all the key mathematical concepts.

The use of ICT to support effectively learning and teaching in mathematics is at an early stage of development.

3. THE QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING

3.1 PLANNING

The quality of the planning to support teaching and learning is satisfactory. The whole school planning for English and mathematics is, appropriately, being reviewed and developed to reflect more fully the requirements of the Northern Ireland Curriculum (NIC). Whilst the teachers' medium-term plans provide a useful overview of the content, they need to be developed further to include clearly defined learning intentions and teaching strategies. The emergent planning in the FS is consistently and appropriately focused on connected learning for the NIC. The staff use a thematic approach to plan for progression in the activities and the resources.

In a few of the classes the teachers reflect effectively on the quality of the children's learning and amend their planning accordingly. There is a need for this practice to be developed and implemented more consistently in order to ensure that the planning meets more effectively the individual learning needs and abilities of all of the children.

3.2 TEACHING

During the inspection, the quality of the teaching in the majority of the lessons observed was good or better. In almost one-fifth of the lessons the teaching was very good and in a small number it was outstanding. In almost one-third of lessons there was a need for improvement in the quality of the teaching.

In the best practice observed, the teachers created a stimulating learning environment and promoted a settled atmosphere; they built on the children's prior learning and had appropriately high expectations of what all of the children could achieve. They valued the children's ideas and used effective questioning to encourage them to provide extended oral responses, to justify their opinions and to explain their thinking.

In the less effective practice the learning activities were not matched sufficiently to the children's needs, there was an emphasis on the use of limited worksheet tasks and over-direction by the teacher which restricted the children's choice and development of their own ideas.

3.3 ASSESSMENT

The school uses the end-of-key stage results and the statutory standardised test outcomes to assess the children's levels of achievement in English and mathematics. Recently, the numeracy team has introduced a system to track the children's progress and to set targets for improvement. The co-ordinators and staff of both preparatory departments should continue to work collaboratively, to embed this process and to quality assure the standards attained by the children. They should also develop a shared understanding of how to use the data effectively to ensure that all of the children reach their full potential in English and mathematics.

The teachers mark the children's written work regularly and often add supportive comments. In the best practice, the teachers indicate how the children could improve the quality of their work. In a few classes a good start has been made in encouraging the children to assess their own work and that of their peers. This good practice needs to be shared, further developed and applied more consistently throughout all classes in the two preparatory departments.

There are appropriate procedures and records for keeping the parents well informed about their children's progress, for example, written reports, formal parent-teacher consultations and an open-door policy for informal consultations.

3.4 SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

The quality of the provision for special educational needs (SEN) is good.

The special educational needs co-ordinators (SENCOs) maintain an overview of the policy and provision for SEN and liaise appropriately with a wide range of medical and educational support agencies. The school has 13% of the children on the SEN register. A small number of these children are identified with moderate learning difficulties and physical needs and most of the children have additional learning needs.

A key strength of the provision is that the school uses the teachers' knowledge and experience, together with standardised test outcomes to identify early those children who are experiencing difficulties with aspects of their learning. The SENCO's implement the Code of Practice effectively in close liaison with the parents. In most instances, the children identified with additional learning needs are integrated effectively within their class group. In the majority of classes, they have the opportunity to work collaboratively with their peers and to contribute to whole-class discussions and activities.

The support for the children with special educational needs is provided through a combination of withdrawal and, or, in-class support by the class teacher or learning support teacher (LST). The class teachers take responsibility for the development and implementation of individual education plans (IEPs) and, or, learning support plans for the children on the special educational needs register and for those children who have been identified as in need of short-term support to boost their attainment in literacy and numeracy. In the most effective practice, the IEP's provide specific information about the child's strengths and areas of difficulty; they outline concise targets for improvement and they are reviewed regularly in consultation with the child and the parents. The school recognises the need for this good practice to be implemented more consistently throughout the departments and for the teachers to retain evidence of the children's progress in achieving the set targets for improvement and the rationale for exit from the SEN register.

The LST's maintains comprehensive plans and progress records for the children with whom she works. This good practice needs to be disseminated and adapted appropriately by the class teachers to ensure consistency in the quality of the withdrawal provision. The LST's records and the reviews of the IEP's indicate that the withdrawal sessions are effective in raising the children's levels of attainment, confidence and self-esteem.

4. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

4.1 LEADERSHIP

The overall quality of the leadership and management is good.

The Principal of the College liaises closely with the Head of the Preparatory Department (HoD) and takes a keen interest in the work of the department.

The HoD has been in post for approximately three years; he is committed to the ongoing development of the school and takes the lead in fostering a caring and pastoral approach in his work with the children, staff and the parents. He has, in consultation with staff, identified a range of appropriate areas for further development including the need for improved communication and collaborative working between the two schools and the need to monitor and evaluate more systematically, the quality of learning and teaching.

The two deputy HoD's, in conjunction with the HoD, oversee the management and day-to-day running of each school; together they make up the senior management team (SMT). The roles and responsibilities for all those in leadership and management positions need to be more clearly defined, monitored and evaluated to ensure a holistic and strategic approach to curriculum development.

As outlined in the body of the report a systematic approach needs to be developed to ensure collaboration and consistency of approach between the range of co-ordinators. It is timely that the school is due to review its policy on staff development; this should include an agreed strategic view on the future staff development for those in management, teaching and support roles.

4.2 PLANNING FOR IMPROVEMENT

The HoD has made a useful start to developing a culture of self-evaluation and reflection through consultation with the staff and, more recently, through engagement in the Investors in People award. During the inspection, there was evidence that the establishment of a SMT, the curricular integration of Personal Development and Mutual Understanding and the introduction of the Schools Council have led to improvement in the quality of management, teaching and learning.

There needs to be a stronger emphasis on improving action planning for all priority areas identified and more rigorous monitoring and evaluation of progress. The School Development Plan should be amended and developed in light of the inspection findings to include a more strategic and collaborative approach to curriculum development and staff development.

4.3 RESOURCES, FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE

The schools are adequately resourced to support learning and teaching. They are, appropriately, in the process of reviewing and updating the range of reading materials in the school libraries.

The governors take a strong interest in all aspects of the school's provision and are highly supportive of the work of the staff. They play an active role in planning for the school's development.

The overall accommodation in both buildings is very cramped. In particular, a number of the classrooms do not provide sufficient space for necessary practical and collaborative group work. The teachers work hard to create a stimulating and attractive learning environment within their classrooms. There is a need to develop a more secure and stimulating outdoor learning environment particularly in Downey House.

5. CONCLUSION

5.1 The strengths of the school include:

- the very good pastoral care;
- the very good standards attained by the children in literacy and numeracy;
- the confident, articulate and well-motivated children;
- the good integration of children from a diverse range of cultural backgrounds;
- the wide range of educational visits and opportunities for developing high standards in music and sport; and
- the hard-working, committed Principal and dedicated staff.

5.2 The areas for improvement include the need:

- for more effective differentiation within the lessons in order to ensure greater challenge or support to meet the children's wide range of needs; and
- to implement a more strategic, systematic and collaborative approach to curriculum planning for improvement.

In the areas inspected the quality of the education provided by this school is good. The school has important strengths in most of its educational and pastoral provision. The inspection has identified areas for improvement which the school has demonstrated the capacity to address. The Education and Training Inspectorate will monitor the schools progress in addressing the areas for improvement.

HEALTH AND SAFETY

- There is an urgent need to carry out a risk assessment of the access points to both school buildings and the school sites to ensure the safety of the children and the staff.

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