



*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

Education and Training Inspectorate

Report of a Focused Inspection

Abbey Primary School and Nursery Unit Newtownards

Inspected: March 2009

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BASIC INFORMATION SHEET (BIS) – PRIMARY SCHOOLS

- | | | | | |
|----|-----|--|------|---|
| A. | i. | School: Abbey Primary
Newtownards | iii. | Date of Inspection: W/B 23.03.09 |
| | ii. | School Reference Number: 401-6399 | iv. | Nature of Inspection: Focused |

B.

School Year	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
Year 1 Intake	87	73	85	85	84
Enrolments					
Primary	583	569	571	566	569
Reception	0	0	0	0	0
Nursery Class/Classes	51	52	52	52	52
Special 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): 94.7%

Primary & Reception	Nursery Unit	Special Unit
---------------------	--------------	--------------

- | | | | | | |
|----|----|---|----|---|---|
| D. | i. | Number of Teachers
(including the principal and part-time teachers):
(Full-time equivalent = 25 teaching hours) | 25 | 1 | 0 |
|----|----|---|----|---|---|

- ii. PTR (Pupil/Teacher Ratio): 22.8 NI PTR: 20.8

- iii. Average Class Size: 27

- iv. Class Size (Range): 25 to 29

- | | | | |
|----|----------------------------------|------|--|
| v. | Ancillary Support: | | |
| | Number of Hours Per Week: | i. | Clerical support: 60 |
| | | ii. | Official Making A Good Start Support: 50 |
| | | iii. | Additional hours of other classroom assistant support: 190 |

- vi. Percentage of children with statements of special educational needs: 2.3%

- vii. Total percentage of children on the Special Needs Register: 13.4%

- viii. Number of children who are **not** of statutory school age: 0

- | | | |
|-----|---|-----|
| ix. | Percentage of children entitled to free school meals: | 12% |
|-----|---|-----|

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 SCHOOL CONTEXT

Abbey Primary School is situated in Newtownards, County Down. The enrolment of the school currently stands at 569; a further 52 children attend the nursery unit. Most of the children come from the surrounding area. At the time of the inspection, approximately 12% of the children were entitled to free school meals and 13.4% of the children were on the special educational needs (SEN) register.

1.2 FOCUS

The inspection focused on the quality of the children's experiences in literacy and numeracy, the effectiveness of the school's SEN provision, the use of information and communication technology (ICT) in promoting and supporting learning and teaching and the school's arrangements for pastoral care, including child protection.

1.3 THE VIEWS OF THE PARENTS, TEACHERS, GOVERNORS 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 of the Board of Governors (governors), and groups of children from years 6 and 7.

One-hundred and fourteen questionnaires were issued to parents; approximately 47% of these were returned to the Department of Education (DE). Nineteen returns contained additional written comments. Most of the responses indicated a high level of satisfaction with the provision in the school. In particular, the parents highlighted the school's very positive ethos, including the caring, happy learning environment, the opportunities afforded to the children to engage in a wide range of extra-curricular activities, the hard-working teaching and non-teaching staff, the support provided for children with special educational needs and the information provided to parents on their children's progress. The parents and nursery staff were also given opportunities to express their views about the nursery through the inspection questionnaires. The responses from these questionnaires were also highly positive with parents commenting on the caring, friendly staff and the range of activities on offer to support their children's learning. The small number of concerns that were raised by the parents have been discussed with the governors and the Principal.

Twenty-two teachers completed the online questionnaire. Their responses were highly affirmative of the work of the school.

The governors spoke very positively about the welcoming, family atmosphere within the school, the good working relationships which exist at all levels and the Principal's and staff's continuous hard work in the interests of the children and the wider community.

The children in year 6 reported that they feel happy and safe in the school; that they enjoy being in the playground and that they know who to speak to if they have any concerns.

1.4 PASTORAL CARE

The quality of the arrangements for pastoral care in the school is excellent. There is a team approach to creating a very stimulating learning environment for the children. The vision statement for the school is firmly embedded in the pastoral care provision; the positive working relationships at all levels foster an inclusive and supportive family ethos throughout the school. The children are friendly and courteous, and respond well to the staff's high expectations; their behaviour is excellent. An effective reward system has a positive impact on the children's work and levels of motivation. There are strong links between the school and the wider community; for example, the children worked with a local residents' committee on the development of a new mural to represent emigration. There is very good support from the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) who raise significant funds which are used to enhance all aspects of the work of the school. The school places a strong emphasis on developing links with parents and external agencies. Many of the children benefit from a wide range of extra-curricular activities, educational visits and school performances. In addition, a school council has recently been introduced to encourage the development of personal responsibility and to increase the role of the children in the decision-making processes within the school.

1.5 CHILD PROTECTION

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

1.6 HEALTHY EATING AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

The school gives very good attention to promoting healthy eating and physical activity, for example reward charts for healthy breaks and a range of after-school activities are provided which encourage the children to adopt healthy lifestyles.

2. ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS

2.1 LEARNING

In all year groups, the children are highly motivated and engaged in the learning process; almost all of the children settle quickly to their work; there is appropriate promotion of independent thinking and learning skills. The teachers have appropriately high expectations of the children which is evident in the high standard and quality of the presentation of the children's work.

The majority of the children make good progress in their learning. In almost all cases they experience a range of appropriately challenging tasks and activities.

In the foundation stage (FS) the children clearly enjoy the play sessions; they are engaged actively in the learning process, have opportunities to interact effectively with one another and to apply their learning in a variety of contexts.

The key stage (KS) 2 assessment results, supported by the school's own analysis of its internal performance data, indicate that the school is performing well in comparison with both the Northern Ireland (NI) and the South-Eastern Education and Library Board averages. By the end of year 7 the majority of the children achieve very good standards in both English and mathematics.

2.2 ENGLISH AND LITERACY

The quality of provision for English and literacy is very good. The literacy co-ordinators provide effective strategic leadership. Regular meetings, collaborative planning and, in conjunction with the assessment co-ordinators, consistent and thorough monitoring and evaluation of the children's work contribute to the high standards achieved across the school in English. The school recognises the need to review and update the literacy policy including detailed action plans that will inform future school development planning.

In the FS and KS1, the children are encouraged to listen carefully when the teacher is explaining tasks or reading from the Big Books. Activities such as play-based learning, the use of 'thinking time', drama circle time and encouragement to 'have a go', help promote thinking skills and oracy. Effective use is made of ICT to promote learning, with children accessing confidently literacy-based programs on computers and interactive whiteboards which promote further word recognition. The children are engaged and keen to talk about their learning.

The children enjoy reading and show a keen interest in books; for example, the children in the FS respond positively to the use of Big Books and in both key stages, pupils engage readily in silent reading. The school has introduced a systematic approach to the acquisition of reading skills; phonological awareness is developed through a phonics and spelling system. Throughout the school, the children experience a variety of approaches including shared, guided and independent reading. Parents also receive a useful guide to supporting their children's reading. In the best practice, guided reading takes place in small groups where the children have the opportunity to discuss texts at varying levels and the activities promote both reading and thinking skills. Class teachers have usefully levelled and colour coded the wide range of fiction and non-fiction books in class libraries and reading records are maintained; this helps to ensure the progression and development of reading skills. There is also a central library area which is well stocked with a variety of reference books. Class novels are used effectively as stimulus for writing activities and they also provide structure and context for basic grammar tasks. By the end of KS2, the majority of the children are reading with fluency, understanding and for pleasure.

The school has adopted a systematic and coherent approach to writing. The quality of the presentation of the children's written work is given a high priority throughout the school. The children are provided with opportunities to write for a variety of purposes and audiences across the curriculum and this includes a wide range of creative writing. Information and communication technology is used effectively to encourage the children to edit and redraft their work and the children readily use dictionaries and thesauri. The school has introduced digital animation which is also used to support creative writing. By the end of KS2 the standards achieved by most of the children are excellent.

2.3 MATHEMATICS AND NUMERACY

The overall quality of the provision for numeracy in the school is very good. The co-ordinators provide effective and visionary leadership, supporting their colleagues in implementing the programme and monitoring and evaluating the children's mathematical learning through, for example, classroom visits, sampling of books and analysis of data.

The scheme of work for numeracy provides helpful guidance on progression in the children's mathematical learning. Teachers make very good use of a range of practical equipment and educational games to develop the children's mathematical understanding and to make learning exciting and interesting. In the FS, for example, the children are given many good opportunities through play-based learning to explore mathematical concepts such as long and short; at KS1 and 2 a range of structured apparatus is used to help children develop a secure understanding of place value.

Mental mathematics skills are developed very effectively; in the lessons observed the pace was good, activities were motivational and, when appropriate, the teacher used good questioning techniques to challenge children's thinking and encourage them to explain their strategies. Meaningful opportunities are provided for children to engage in a variety of problem-solving and investigative mathematics. These developments need to pervade all elements of the children's mathematical experience; there is currently an over-emphasis on repetitive, routine calculations.

The use of mathematics in a range of different contexts across the curriculum is very well embedded throughout the school: in year 6, for example, the children use a range of graphs and charts to present data collected as part of a local river study. Information and communication technology is used very effectively, with teachers making good use of interactive whiteboards, websites, programmable devices and computer programs to motivate children and support learning and teaching in mathematics.

During the inspection, the children demonstrated their ability to think mathematically at an appropriately high level. By the end of KS2, almost all the children achieve or exceed the expected level of attainment in mathematics for children of their age, with the majority achieving the highest level of attainment.

3. THE QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNERS

3.1 PLANNING

The teachers plan their work consistently and effectively in the medium- and short-term. The short-term plans identify clearly the intended learning outcomes, the resources and the assessment strategies to be used. Most of the teachers complete useful evaluations of the quality of the children's learning. In the best practice these evaluations are used to inform future planning and to ensure that provision meets the needs of all of the children.

3.2 TEACHING

The teachers have worked hard to create stimulating, well organised classroom environments. There are many interesting displays in classrooms and corridors which record and celebrate the children's achievements across the curriculum. The school is developing a whole-school approach to positive behaviour management which is setting high standards for the children and enhancing the teachers' classroom management.

During the inspection, almost all of the teaching observed was good or better and in a minority of the lessons it was outstanding. Overall, the lessons were well paced and most of the teachers used skilful questioning to stimulate and extend the children's thinking. In addition, the planned activities met the needs of all the learners; there were opportunities for independent, paired or group work and links were made to learning in other areas of the curriculum.

3.3 ASSESSMENT

The three key stage assessment co-ordinators work well together to provide highly effective strategic leadership and a whole-school approach to assessment. The school uses a suitable range of standardised and non-standardised testing to assess the children's level of attainment in English and mathematics and to identify areas for development. They monitor the internal and external performance data regularly along with samples of the children's work. Comprehensive feedback on the analysis of the data is given to the class teachers which helps to guide the learning and teaching throughout the school. There is evidence that this thorough practice is having a positive impact on the children's progress. The teachers mark the children's written work regularly; in the majority of cases the marking is of a supportive nature with extended and evaluative feedback provided. The children have opportunities to be involved in both peer and self-assessment and some can set their own goals and targets for learning. The parents are kept well informed regarding their children's progress through regular parent teacher meetings and annual reports.

3.4 SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

Thirteen per cent of the children are on the Register for Special Needs in the school; 2.3% have statements of SEN.

The school's provision for SEN is well planned and co-ordinated to meet the needs of the children identified as requiring additional support. The learning support staff are hard working and skilled in planning, teaching and assessment. There are very good working relationships and a positive and supportive ethos amongst the staff and the children. There are withdrawal sessions for literacy where the children enjoy the work and attain good standards commensurate with their ability. The members of the learning support staff also work alongside class teachers providing purposeful and well-targeted activities across the curriculum planned to meet the specific needs of groups of children. There is appropriate differentiation in most classrooms for the children's broad range of abilities. All children are included well in school activities and feel content and valued. Classroom assistants are used well throughout the school and work hard to support both the learning and the physical needs of the children.

4. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

4.1 LEADERSHIP

The Principal has achieved much since taking up her post four years ago; she has a clear vision, which places an appropriate emphasis on the successful development of the curricular provision and on the pastoral dimension of the school. She has a sound knowledge and understanding of the needs of the school and the wider community. The Principal has worked purposefully to create a collegiate approach to school development; she involves the staff in the auditing process, which informs the comprehensive School Development Plan (SDP). She sets the tone for the school and sets appropriately high standards for herself and the whole-school community; she is caring and supportive of her staff. The school's management team, guided by the purposeful direction of the Principal and ably and effectively supported by the Vice-principal, provide strong and successful leadership in the implementation of the pastoral and curricular areas of the SDP. The Principal and her colleagues work well together and, at all levels, constitute an effective management team.

4.2 PLANNING FOR IMPROVEMENT

The improvement process is linked clearly to a well-devised SDP. There are very good opportunities for consultation about the SDP within the school community; the parents and governors are involved in the process of school improvement. There is efficient use of data and effective target-setting based on the outcomes of internal standardised tests and the external DE benchmarking data. Appropriate policies and action plans are in place which support effectively a culture of review and development for school improvement. The school gives very good attention to, and meets fully, the requirements of the School Development Plans Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2005.

4.3 STAFF DEPLOYMENT AND DEVELOPMENT

All of the staff are deployed appropriately. A strong sense of team-spirit pervades the work of the school. The classroom assistants support the teachers and provide additional help for individuals and groups of children in the classes; they make a valuable and worthwhile contribution to the children's learning.

4.4 RESOURCES, FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE

The school governors make positive contributions to the life and work of the school; they regularly attend training and ensure that all aspects of the life and work of the school are kept under review. They are fully committed to engaging with the Principal, staff, and the wider school community in the best interest of the children. The teaching staff report to the governors on improvements made to the areas under focus. The school budget is effectively kept under review. The quality of the cleaning and caretaking in the school is of a very high standard.

5. **CONCLUSION**

5.1 The strengths of the school include:

- the excellent quality of the pastoral care which is exemplified through a strong family ethos and the children's very good behaviour;
- the very good quality of provision for children with special needs;
- the quality of teaching observed, almost all of which was good or better and in a minority of the lessons it was outstanding;
- the very good standards in English and mathematics attained by the children and the very good use of ICT to support the teaching and learning in literacy and mathematics;
- the effective leadership of the Principal; ably assisted by the Vice-principal and Senior Management Team and supported by the hard-working teaching and non-teaching staff; and
- the strong and effective links established with the governors and parents and the high standing of the school in the local community.

In the areas inspected, the quality of education provided by 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.

6. THE NURSERY UNIT

At the time of the inspection the teacher-in-charge of the nursery unit was absent. The temporary teacher deployed in the nursery had been in post a very short time; she was ably assisted by two nursery assistants. The main strengths within the nursery's educational and pastoral provision are as follows:

- there is a positive ethos which helps to promote the children's confidence, self-esteem and good behaviour. Good use is made of the space available to create an attractive and interesting learning environment;
- the pre-school curriculum provided offers satisfactory or good opportunities for learning in all areas of the curriculum. During the inspection, the promotion of the children's oral language and listening skills, early science ideas, and the regular opportunities for physical play outdoors were particular strengths of the programme;
- there is a well organised daily timetable which provides a good balance of free play and activities organised by the staff. The children have opportunities to make free choice and to explore the range of activities provided;
- the staff make good efforts to address the needs of those children identified as requiring additional support with aspects of their learning;
- during the inspection, the interaction between the staff and the children encouraged them to engage in concentrated and co-operative play; and
- there is a caring and enthusiastic approach to their work demonstrated by the staff.

The inspection identified areas for improvement. The following are the most important areas that need attention.

- The staff need to develop further the planning to ensure an appropriately broad, balanced programme of activities for the children that progresses steadily throughout the year.
- They need to develop a systematic method of assessing and recording the children's learning and ensure that the information gained is used more effectively to inform the planning.

The nursery has a development plan which identifies relevant targets for improvement. The staff have consulted appropriately with the parents to seek their views on aspects of the quality of the provision and have begun to involve the parents more fully in the education of their children. It will be important that the work of the nursery is given a higher priority in the school's next SDP.

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

STATISTICAL INFORMATION ON ABBEY PRIMARY SCHOOL NURSERY UNIT, NEWTOWNARDS

1. Details of Children

Number of children:	Class 1	Class 2
Attending full-time	0	0
Attending part-time	26	26
Under 3 years of age*	0	0
With statement of SEN**	0	0
At CoP stages 3 or 4***	1	1
At CoP stages 1 or 2***	0	0
With English as an additional language	0	0

* On 1 July.

** Special Educational Needs.

*** The stages refer to those set out in the Code of Practice for the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs.

Percentage qualifying under DE admission criteria 1 or 2.	9.6%
Average attendance for the previous year.	90.2

2. Duration of Sessions

Full-time	Part-time: am	Part-time: pm
-	2½ hours	2½ hours

3. Details of Staff

Number of:	Full-Time	Part-Time
Teachers	1	0
Nursery Assistants	0	0
Qualified Nursery Assistants	1	1

Number of: ****	
Students	1
Trainees	0

**** Total placements since September of current year

4. Parental Questionnaires (to be completed by Inspection Services Branch)

Number issued	52
Percentage returned	52%
Number of written comments	10

HEALTH AND SAFETY

- The car parking arrangements in the school grounds are inadequate.
- There is limited space for the children to play.
- At the start and end of the school day there is serious congestion outside the school gate.

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