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*The Education and Training Inspectorate -
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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

**Altayeskey Primary School
Draperstown**

Inspected: March 2007

CONTENTS

Section		Page
	STATISTICAL INFORMATION	
1.	INTRODUCTION	1
2.	THE QUALITY OF THE CHILDREN'S WORK	1
3.	CONCLUSION	4
	APPENDIX	

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Altayeskey Primary School is situated in the townland of Tullybrick, County Londonderry. The children who attend the school live in the surrounding rural area. The enrolment has generally remained steady over the last five years and currently stands at 32. There are no children entitled to free school meals. Nineteen per cent of the children have been identified as requiring additional support with aspects of their learning.

1.2 The arrangements for the inspection of pastoral care and child protection included the opportunity for the parents 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. Twenty questionnaires were issued to the parents; approximately 90% were returned to the Department of Education (DE) of which 10 contained additional written comments. The responses from the parental questionnaires indicated strong support for the school and they valued its positive ethos. At the meeting with the governors, they expressed their appreciation of the dedication and hard work of all the staff. No concerns were raised by the parents.

1.3 The inspection focused on the work in English and information and communication technology (ICT) across the curriculum and the effectiveness of the school's special education needs provision. The inspection also evaluated the school's procedures for pastoral care, including child protection.

2. THE QUALITY OF THE CHILDREN'S WORK

2.1 A welcoming, caring ethos permeates the work of the school; the atmosphere is orderly with working relationships at all levels very good. The children are friendly and courteous; they co-operate willingly and respectfully with one another and with their teachers. The behaviour of the children is very good. Despite the limitations posed by the age and size of the building, the teachers are successful in ensuring that the learning environment in the classrooms supports the children's learning.

2.2 The school establishes and maintains effective links with the parents. The prospectus and regular notes provide important information on the work of the school. The parents are very supportive of the school; through fund-raising events, organised by the Parent-Teacher Association, they have provided additional educational resources that support the children's learning.

2.3 The school ensures that the children's experiences are enriched through a range of extra-curricular activities that includes hurling, football, camogie and swimming, some of which are organised with local schools. The introduction of a weekly Youth Club through funding from the Lottery provides additional opportunities in drama, music and art. These activities help the children develop their social skills and sense of inter-dependence.

2.4 The school has a range of policies on pastoral care, including guidance on promoting positive behaviour. These policies place a strong emphasis on developing the children's self-confidence and self-esteem; the school's effective implementation of the policy documents have contributed to a setting in which the children feel safe and secure. In addition the school places a strong emphasis on promoting good behaviour and has introduced an effective system of rewards to celebrate the children's efforts, good behaviour

and achievements. The children know and accept the standards of behaviour expected of them; the reward system is having a beneficial effect on the children's learning. The school policies and procedures are shared with the governors, staff, parents and children. The school now needs to develop more opportunities for the parents and the children to contribute to the review and design of relevant school policies which guide the future work of the school.

2.5 The quality of the arrangements for pastoral care and child protection in the school is very good. The school has procedures in place which implement fully the guidance outlined in the relevant DE Circulars. There is effective monitoring of the implementation of the pastoral care systems to ensure that they support the good working relationships and the good quality of the learning and teaching. There are regular opportunities for the staff to receive training and updates on pastoral care matters.

2.6 The school's programme for the promotion of health and well-being has many strengths. Attention is given to the development and implementation of policies and programmes, such as a healthy break, water provision and the promotion of informed practical cooking skills, all of which encourage the children to adopt healthy lifestyles. The children demonstrate a good understanding of the importance of making healthy life choices. There is commitment within the school to promoting healthy eating through talks, projects and competitions. Opportunities are provided for all the children to participate in a range of physical activities both during and after school.

2.7 The teachers prepare conscientiously for their lessons and there is a good match between this planning and the classroom practice. The documentation reveals a good emphasis on the intended learning outcomes which are shared with the children.

2.8 The quality of teaching is consistently sound and often very good. In the best practice, the work is appropriately paced, staff used open-ended questions skilfully, they are imaginative and work is matched effectively to the needs and abilities of the children. A suitable range of teaching strategies is used effectively to develop opportunities for the children to work independently, in pairs and in small groups. The teachers and classroom assistants are hard-working and conscientious; they work together as a team in the interests of the children.

2.9 In key stage (KS) 1, the children learn to read with the help of a core reading scheme. In recent years this has been complemented successfully with the introduction of a systematic phonics programme. As the children progress through KS2, they are introduced to novels; the teachers have produced resources which complement the novels and give the children opportunities to relate various literacy activities to the stories they read. The children's understanding would be developed further through having more opportunities to discuss collectively the shared texts they read. The reading material for the older children is chosen carefully to link meaningfully with work in other areas of the curriculum; their present group novel, for example, is based on the experiences of child evacuees and gives extra relevance to their study of World War II in history.

2.10 Talking and listening are promoted well in both classes. Drama is often used to provide a stimulating context in which the children's oral skills are developed. The recent introduction of Circle Time provides opportunities for the children to discuss in pairs and small groups their views and opinions on a range of pertinent matters.

2.11 The youngest children's early writing is planned through themes and is based appropriately on their personal experiences. They use ICT effectively to compose some of their pieces directly on screen and are increasingly competent in embellishing their work through the importing of art clips and digitally taken photographs. As the children progress through the school they are introduced to increasingly complex writing tasks and are provided with opportunities to write in a wide variety of forms. The school recognises the importance of an audience as a motivator and the older children write stories for and read them to the younger children. In general, the children's writing skills are promoted well through work in other areas of the curriculum; there is scope to develop this further still. Within KS2, the children use ICT competently to support their learning in English. By the end of year 7, the majority of the children achieve good standards in English.

2.12 The children in years 1, 2 and 3 have regular sessions of play-based learning. The staff have identified appropriately the need to develop further this area of the programme in preparation for the introduction of the Northern Ireland Revised Curriculum. The children have good opportunities to take part in interesting and highly motivating activities that promote learning within the composite class. The teacher, ably supported by the classroom assistant, provides effective and skilful support. They now need to develop further their recording of the children's involvement and progress. The sessions are used well to promote the children's language, thinking skills, confidence and self-esteem. The children enjoy these activities and show a high level of engagement.

2.13 The provision for those children who require additional support with their learning is given priority. The school uses an appropriate range of screening and diagnostic tests, together with the teacher's observation, to identify from an early stage those children who require support. The needs of these children are being met through classroom activities with effective support provided by two additional classroom assistants. The school has identified six children who are in need of additional learning support in English. Good use is made of the expertise of the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator, who liaises with the Principal to develop detailed and focused individual educational plans and to set appropriate targets for improvement. These targets are reviewed regularly throughout the year.

2.14 The teachers mark the children's work regularly, adding supportive and often personalised comments which acknowledge the efforts the children make. They are introducing imaginative processes such as peer marking to encourage the children to have a greater awareness of the quality of their written work. Their marking could be developed further by indicating to the children how their work could be improved.

2.15 The teachers use a variety of processes to monitor the children's progress including the use of standardised tests, analysis of the children's books and regular summative assessments. In ICT, the children are set challenges relevant to their age. Progress in literacy and numeracy is tracked individually and used as a basis for reporting orally to the parents in term two, and in a written report in term three. In addition, the parents may avail of opportunities to discuss their child's progress with the teachers at any time throughout the year.

2.16 The Principal, who has been in post for twenty-five years, is ably supported by her assistant teacher. She is dedicated to the work and life of the school, knows the children well, and has worked hard to develop a strong team. She deals effectively with the daily organisation and management of the school. She has worked with the staff and agreed a

school development plan (SDP) to guide the curriculum and the overall work of the school. The SDP identifies appropriate priorities for improving the curriculum and for enhancing aspects of the general provision in the school.

2.17 The accommodation is historic and is surrounded by countryside in which the children enjoy exploring. One of the classrooms is used as the dining area which results in some disruption each morning. The school is well maintained.

2.18 The staff have benefited from staff development sessions which are related to the SDP. Staff directed time is used well and school based in-service training sessions are focused on supporting current educational developments.

3. CONCLUSION

3.1 The strengths of the school include:

- the very positive ethos;
- the hard-working and conscientious staff;
- the high quality of pastoral care provided for the children;
- the well-behaved, courteous and friendly children who settle to their work and co-operate well with the staff;
- the effective support provided by the classroom assistants;
- the quality of the teaching observed which was consistently sound and often very good;
- the good links established with other schools and with the immediate and wider community;
- the good support provided by the parents and the governors;
- the dedication and commitment of the Principal to the school; and
- the good standards achieved by the majority of the children in English.

3.2 In the areas inspected, the school has major strengths in its educational and pastoral provision. The educational and pastoral needs of the children are being well met. The parents and local community can have confidence in the school's capacity for sustained self-improvement.

No follow-up inspection is required.

APPENDIX

HEALTH AND SAFETY

The governors and Principal reported their concerns with the speed of some traffic on the recently widened road which runs adjacent to the school playground.

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