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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

Ardmore House School
Downpatrick

Inspected: April 2007

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STATISTICAL INFORMATION (SPECIAL SCHOOLS)

- 1.1 i. **School: Ardmore House School Downpatrick** iii. **Date of Inspection: W/B 23.04.07**
- ii. **School Reference Number: 431-0019** iv. **Nature of Inspection: Focused**

1.2

School Year	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07
Total Enrolment	25	28	28	12	12

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.

- 1.3 Number of Pupils in Outreach Programme: 208
- 1.4 Average Attendance for the Previous School Year: 67%
- 1.5 i. Number of Teachers in School: 6.5 on Outreach Programme: 2
 (including the Principal and p/t teachers)
 (f/t equivalent = 25 teaching hours)
- ii. PTR (pupil/teacher ratio): 1.8
- iii. Average Class Size: 4
- iv. Number of Classroom Assistants: 5
- v. Ancillary Support:
 Number of Hours per week:
- Clerical Support: 36
- vi. Percentage of children in receipt of free school meals: 60%

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Ardmore House School is situated in Downpatrick and serves a wide catchment area which includes County Down and the Ards Peninsula. It provides education for 12 key stage (KS) 3 pupils, with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. Prior to 2006 the school catered for KS3 and KS4 pupils. The pupils have a wide range of diverse and complex needs and, as a consequence, the school provides a highly specialised provision. The pupils are placed in Ardmore House School for one term with a full school timetable and nearly all return to full-time mainstream education.

1.2 The school provides an Outreach service to 208 pupils in 24 mainstream schools in the South-Eastern Education and Library Board (SEELB). All teachers in the school provide Outreach support in addition to teaching in the school. The Outreach service seeks to support the pupils in maintaining their mainstream school placement and plays an important role for pupils returning from Ardmore House School to their own schools.

1.3 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 and a group of pupils from the school. Of the 12 questionnaires issued to parents of the pupils who attended in term two, one was returned to the Department of Education (DE) and contained additional written comments. The parent was supportive of the school placement for their child.

1.4 Since the last inspection in 2001, the school has had refurbishments to the science room.

1.5 The focus of the inspection was on the quality of provision to meet the individual needs of the pupils and the arrangements for child protection and pastoral care.

2. ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS

2.1 Ardmore House School is an effective school with major strengths and no significant areas for improvement. There is appropriate emphasis on maintaining the pupils' access to the Northern Ireland Curriculum, on securing accreditation and on the priority given to personal and social education. Some of the pupils make substantial gains in their personal and social development and in their behaviour management. The staff and pupils, in visits to mainstream schools who receive an Outreach service from Ardmore House School, expressed their high regard for the behaviour support, advice and training provided.

2.2 The school gives consistently good attention to promoting health and well-being and has appropriate policies and programmes in place, which encourage the pupils to adopt healthy lifestyles. There is evidence of commitment on the part of staff to promoting healthy eating and to improving the pupils' eating habits. There are opportunities for all pupils to participate in a wide range of physical activities. The pupils demonstrate a good understanding of the importance of making healthy life choices.

2.3 The inspection findings indicate the following achievements and standards:

- the consistently good and, often very good, quality of the teaching and, in particular, the good practice in the team-work of the teachers and classroom assistants, planning and working together in the classroom for the benefit of each pupil;
- the strong, collaborative team-work which meets the needs of the pupil's with complex social, emotional and behavioural difficulties with dedication and a high level of commitment;
- the imaginative and well-prepared lessons;
- the depth of knowledge about the needs of the individual pupils and the skill of the staff in matching the work effectively to these needs and in providing the pupils with appropriate support;
- the consistency across the school in the maintenance and sharing of information and the very comprehensive and meticulous planning, record-keeping and assessments for each pupil;
- the school's development of technology to collate, analyse and report on the behaviour of the pupils;
- the consistently good and highly valued work of the Outreach service in supporting mainstream schools and pupils;
- the extensive range of experience and skills of the classroom assistants used effectively throughout the school; and
- the satisfactory behaviour of the majority of the pupils both in class and whilst using the local leisure facilities.

3. THE QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING

3.1 The quality of teaching and learning is good throughout the school and is reflected in the thorough and detailed planning and comprehensive assessment of the pupils' needs. The teachers collate relevant information, establish positive working relationships with their pupils, write appropriate individual education plans and achievable targets, and as a consequence, the pupils make progress. Overall, approximately 66% of the lessons observed were graded consistently good or better, including some 20% with outstanding features.

3.2 The school is implementing fully the guidance outlined in the relevant DE Circulars pertaining to child protection matters. The good quality of pastoral care is a significant feature of the school's work and makes a valuable contribution to promoting an atmosphere conducive to teaching and learning. Pastoral care systems are well-developed and communicated to staff to ensure a commonality of approach, and a school environment in which the welfare of the pupils is addressed. The pupils express confidence that the staff will respond sympathetically and appropriately to their concerns. Strenuous efforts are made to create positive partnerships with parents and relevant agencies.

3.3 The main strengths of the quality of provision for learning are:

- the effective use of a range of teaching approaches, including very good emphasis on active learning, practical activities and pupil involvement;
- the supportive and caring ethos which creates an environment conducive to re-engagement with learning;
- the strong sense of team-work and collaboration at all levels through the school;
- the effective focus on improving the pupils' behaviour through the analysis of the patterns of pupil behaviour, positive behaviour reinforcement strategies, counselling, art therapy and anger management training;
- the strong focus on the development of the pupils' social and personal skills through the use of the school curriculum, especially outdoor pursuits;
- the commitment of all the staff to promoting the highest possible levels of pupil achievement; and
- the successful re-engagement of the pupils in school attendance and routines;

4. **LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

4.1 The quality of the leadership and management of the school is very good. The Principal uses his experience and knowledge to lead effectively. He leads through example, including teaching in school and providing Outreach support, and has established strong and positive working relationships with the staff and the pupils. The Vice-principal ably supports the leadership and management of the school and has developed the effective electronic recording, monitoring and reporting system. The senior management team (SMT) bring a breadth of experience and provide valuable support, working well together towards continuous improvement. Self-evaluation of school practice could be further improved through the use of formal structures and instruments.

4.2 The main strengths of the leadership and management of the school are:

- the building of staff collegiality leading to their professional empowerment;
- the clear roles and responsibilities of staff;
- the well-established routines and procedures resulting in the smooth running of the school;
- the close and effective processes to facilitate communication links with parents;
- the Vice-principal and the SMT who support the Principal in the outworking of school policy and practice; and

- the excellent use of the electronic data based on fair, consistent and transparent behaviour management principles and approaches to inform school practice.

5. **OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS**

5.1 The overall effectiveness of the school is consistently good.

5.2 The main strengths of the provision are:

- the leadership of the Principal, supported by the staff, in promoting a strong, caring school ethos;
- the robust working relationships and team-work throughout the school;
- the detailed knowledge of the needs of the pupils by the staff ensuring appropriate planning and teaching;
- the consistently good quality of the teaching;
- the skill and experience of the classroom assistants;
- the extensive opportunities for the pupils to achieve external accreditation;
- the progress made by the pupils in their behaviour;
- the appropriate emphasis on physical education and outdoor pursuits; and
- the skills and experience of the teachers on Outreach in supporting, training and empowering teachers in some mainstream schools.

6. **AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT**

6.1 The inspection findings indicate that the overall effectiveness of the school presents many strengths with no significant areas for improvement. The inspection team recommends:

- the further development of the school's structures for self-evaluation.

7. **CONCLUSION**

7.1 In the areas inspected, Ardmore House School has major strengths in its educational and pastoral provision. The educational and pastoral needs of the learners are being well met. The parents and the SEELB can have confidence in the school's capacity for sustained self-improvement.

No follow-inspection is required.

APPENDIX

HEALTH AND SAFETY MATTERS RELATING TO ACCOMMODATION

- The flooring of the art room requires attention.
- The surface of the outdoor play area requires attention.

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