



*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

Arvalee School and Resource Centre Omagh

Inspected: February 2008

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STATISTICAL INFORMATION (SPECIAL SCHOOLS)

1.1 i. **School: Arvalee School and Resource Centre, Omagh** iii. **Date of Inspection: W/B 25.02.08**

ii. **School Reference Number: 231-6661** iv. **Nature of Inspection: Focused**

1.2

School Year	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07
Total Enrolment	-	-	148	133	125

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: 53

1.4 Average Attendance for the Previous School Year: 83.3%

1.5 i. Number of Teachers in School: 20 on Outreach Programme: 4
(including the Principal and p/t teachers)
(f/t equivalent = 25 teaching hours)

ii. PTR (pupil/teacher ratio): 7.8

iii. Average Class Size: 8

iv. Number of Classroom Assistants: 22

v. Ancillary Support:
Number of Hours per week:

Clerical Support: 54

vi. Percentage of children in receipt of free school meals: 59%

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Arvalee School and Resource Centre is situated in the Hospital Road in Omagh and provides education for 125 pupils with learning difficulties from Omagh and the surrounding areas. The school replaced Heatherbank Special School and Cranny Special School and the amalgamation included pupils with severe learning difficulties, moderate learning difficulties and profound and multiple learning difficulties. In addition, the school has developed an Outreach Service for pupils with moderate learning difficulties or with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties in the Western Education and Library Board area; just over 50 pupils receive individual outreach support across 32 primary and four post-primary schools in the Omagh area.

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 two groups of pupils from across the school. At the meeting with the governors they expressed their commitment to the school and their support for the work of the staff. The pupils, in discussion with the inspection team, indicated their awareness of arrangements to ensure their safety and security in school.

1.3 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 In this report, standards of achievement are judged in relation to the pupils' previous attainments, their individual abilities and their special educational needs. The pupils in the school are achieving well and good progress is made by those pupils supported by the outreach provision. Where the pupils' achievements are particularly good, for example, at post-14, the focus is very clearly on raising standards, providing opportunities for accreditation and ensuring that the teaching supports the pupils in their transition to adult and working life. Given the significant changing profile of the pupils, greater emphasis is needed to ensure that the individual needs of those with severe learning difficulties are met through detailed planning and continuing professional development. To this end, it would be important to share the existing good practice across the school.

2.2 The school gives very good attention to promoting health and well-being, including opportunities for healthy eating and physical activity. There are effective programmes in place, for example, a breakfast club, water provision, the promotion of healthy breaks and feedback from the student council, which encourage the pupils to adopt healthy lifestyles.

2.3 The inspection findings indicate the following achievements and standards:

- the pupils are keen to work and engage well with staff, particularly in the older classes;
- the pupils supported by the outreach provision, make good progress in their literacy skills and self-esteem;

- the pupils gain appropriate accreditation in their transition to adult and working life;
- the good quality working relationships evident in the classrooms and during break, lunch and extended school activities;
- the pupils' health and well-being throughout the school is well promoted; and
- the pupils benefit from opportunities to learn alongside their peers from neighbouring schools.

3. QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING

3.1 The teachers are hard-working and committed to developing their pupils' learning. Teaching and learning are effective in the majority of classes. Overall, 70% of the lessons seen had many good features and 46% were consistently good or better. The outreach support is of a very high standard and is much valued by the local schools. The transition classes offer a wide range of experiences very well suited to the individual needs of the pupils. The challenge for the school is to focus on the best way to work with the growing number of pupils who have complex needs and to empower staff to develop the capacity to meet the needs of all the pupils. Consideration should also be given to promoting more effective collaborative working arrangements between the teachers and speech and language therapists.

3.2 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 Department of Education circulars. The governors, staff, parents and pupils are fully aware of the school's procedures and have had the opportunity to contribute to a range of effective policies which guide the work of the school. Among the strengths are the policy and procedures for encouraging positive behaviour and friendships, the consultation with, and involvement of, the pupils in pastoral care, the weekly counselling and workshops provided by the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC), and the establishment of a school council. A small number of parents indicated that they would value further opportunities to meet with teachers throughout the school year.

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

- the good quality of the majority of the teaching and learning;
- the strong focus on improving the quality of the teaching and learning;
- the very good focus on appropriate accreditation and the attention and priority given to transition to adult and working life;
- the excellent behaviour of the pupils throughout the school;
- the effective team-work between teachers and classroom assistants;

- the very good quality displays celebrating the pupils' achievements and illustrating their experiences, both in school and in the community;
- the positive partnerships with parents; and
- the strong links with the schools and local community in Omagh.

4. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

4.1 The Principal has been in post for just over three years and the quality of his leadership and management is very good. He shows commitment, dedication and has a strong vision for the school. There is a sense of collegiate purpose among the leadership team closely aligned to the clearly written aims and objectives for the school.

4.2 The improvement process is clearly linked to a well-constructed school development plan (SDP). There are very good opportunities for consultation about the SDP within the school community, effective target-setting and bench-marking and good quality staff development. Policies and programmes are in place which effectively support a culture of school improvement. The school gives excellent attention and meets fully the requirements of the Education (School Development Plans) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2005.

4.3 The inspection found some outstanding features in the leadership and strategic management of the outreach provision. The co-ordinator of the Outreach Service has established very good values, aims and objectives that are shared by team members and reflected in the effective work of the service. The commitment, good skills and expertise of the staff and the team-work that is evident throughout ensures that all pupils benefit from high quality support and provision to meet their needs.

4.4 There is a need to develop a more formalised and agreed system to monitor and evaluate the quality of the teaching and learning, as envisaged in the SDP, and to empower the newly-appointed middle managers and co-ordinators to progress and agree an understanding of what constitutes good quality teaching in the various areas of the school. The school is well placed to move on this.

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

- the strong commitment and dedication displayed by the Principal as he plans for the future development of the school;
- the high quality strategic leadership provided by the Principal, ably supported by the two Vice-principals; and
- the good sense of team-work emerging in the recently formed school departments.

5. OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS

5.1 The overall effectiveness of the school shows strengths in many aspects of the areas inspected. The inspection has identified the following strengths:

- the strategic leadership and the strong commitment and dedication of the Principal;
- the attention and priority given to the transition to adult and working life;
- the atmosphere of engagement with staff and the keen and motivated learners, particularly in the older classes;
- the good progress made by the pupils supported by the outreach provision; and
- the strong focus on raising standards and ensuring good quality teaching and learning.

6. AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

6.1 The inspection findings indicate that the following areas for improvement need to be addressed by the staff led by the management team:

- the need to develop further, with the help of external support, the school's capacity to meet more effectively, the needs of a growing number of pupils with more severe and complex needs; and
- the need to progress a whole-school programme for self-evaluation in order to monitor the quality of provision and inform improvement across the school.

7. CONCLUSION

7.1 In the areas inspected, the school has important strengths in most of its educational and pastoral provision. The inspection has identified important areas for improvement which the school has the capacity to address. The school's progress on the areas for improvement will be followed-up by monitoring visits conducted by the District Inspector.

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