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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Education and Training Inspectorate

Report of a Focused Inspection

**Ballycarrickmaddy Primary School
Lisburn**

Inspected: October 2007

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Ballycarrickmaddy Primary School is situated just off the road from Lisburn to Glenavy, about six miles from the centre of Lisburn. Nearly all of the children attending the school come from a large surrounding area. The school's enrolment currently stands at 160. Five percent of the children are entitled to free school meals.

1.2 As part of the arrangements for pastoral care, parents were invited to complete a confidential questionnaire. Of the 105 questionnaires issued, 52 were completed and returned to the Department of Education (DE); 21 of the questionnaires included extended written comments. During the inspection, the inspectors met with representatives of the Board of Governors (governors) and a group of year 6 children. Nearly all of the staff completed a confidential on-line questionnaire. Almost all of the parents' and all of the governors' responses expressed strongly their satisfaction with the work of the school. The responses highlighted, in particular, the very good leadership of the Acting-Principal, the caring, family ethos, and the hard-working and conscientious staff. The few important matters raised were discussed with the governors and the Acting-Principal and are commented on in the body of the report. The children talked enthusiastically about the many aspects of school, including extra-curricular activities, that they enjoyed. From the discussions, there is evidence that they are aware of what to do if they have any worries about their safety and well-being. The inspection findings endorse the favourable comments made by the governors, the parents, the teachers and the children.

1.3 The inspection focused primarily on the quality of work in English, the effectiveness of the school's provision for special educational needs (SEN), and pastoral care, including the arrangements for child protection. The inspection report also makes reference to the contribution of information and communication technology (ICT) in promoting and supporting learning and teaching in English.

2. THE QUALITY OF THE CHILDREN'S WORK

2.1 The school encourages the children to work hard and support one another. The teachers are hard-working, conscientious, and committed to the welfare and education of the children. An orderly and supportive ethos permeates the life of the school. There is a strong sense of community and team-work, and working relationships at all levels are excellent.

2.2 The children's behaviour is very good; they respond well to their teachers, co-operate positively with one another, and are most welcoming to visitors. The foyer area, corridors and classrooms are bright and cheerful, with attractive displays of the children's recent work, including work in English, mathematics, and art and design.

2.3 The school gives very good attention to promoting health and well-being, including opportunities for healthy eating and physical activity. Appropriate policies and effective programmes are in place, for example brain gym, a healthy cookery club and merits for healthy eating, which encourage the children to adopt healthy lifestyles. The children demonstrate an excellent understanding of the importance of making healthy life choices.

2.4 A wide programme of extra-curricular activities is developed which provides the children with valuable additional educational experiences through, for example, sports, music, residential and school trips. These play a useful part in developing the children's self-esteem and confidence. The school contributes annually to selected charities.

2.5 The quality of the arrangements for pastoral care and child protection has important strengths. A secure, supportive environment is provided for learning. The school has procedures in place which implement the guidance outlined in the relevant DE Circulars, and has identified appropriately a few areas for improvement which it is currently implementing. Among the strengths are the commitment to reviewing and monitoring the pastoral care provision, and the opportunities for parents to contribute to the range of school policies. A range of appropriate merit systems is in place which is valued highly by the children. There is clear evidence of the reward systems having a positive impact on the children's motivation and work in class. Morning assemblies are well-planned during which the children participate enthusiastically in, for example, public speaking and singing. The areas for improvement identified include the need to update and review the training for staff and governors.

2.6 The teachers' written planning is thorough, with intended learning outcomes identified well, and linked appropriately to classroom activities and resources. The quality of teaching seen was always satisfactory; in most of the lessons, it was very good, and, in a few, excellent. In the best practice, the learning outcomes expected were displayed and explained, and assessed well by both children and teacher at the lesson's conclusion. This good practice needs to be disseminated to all the classes. The most effective teaching approaches often challenged the children to think, to reason and to organise their thoughts and responses.

2.7 In the foundation stage (FS), the comprehensive planning integrates the areas of learning well, and provides clear guidance for teachers and support staff. Appropriately, the teachers are developing further this planning, to ensure adequate progression in the children's learning experiences across the year groups. The regular play-based activities encourage the children's creativity and support their language development. In the most effective practice, the children actively plan, review and reflect on their learning; they take responsibility for the setting out and safe tidy-up of resources, and have the opportunity to show others the outcomes of their play. There is a need for a consistent approach to observing and recording each child's progress in learning, to inform future planning and provision.

2.8 Overall, the work in English is developing well. Under the effective guidance of the literacy co-ordinator, the staff work closely together to agree approaches to literacy, and to ensure that the teachers adopt a common approach to their planning. The literacy co-ordinator has identified appropriately the need to update the literacy policy to include a consistent approach to the teaching of phonological awareness.

2.9 In almost all of the lessons observed across the FS, and key stage (KS) 1 and KS2, the teachers provided good opportunities to encourage the children to listen and to respond orally, often through the adept use of open-ended questioning which encouraged children to use thinking skills and give extended responses. However, these opportunities rarely extended beyond the range of short questions and answering, and there was insufficient paired or group work observed. The school has appropriately identified talking and listening as an area for development.

2.10 The programme for the teaching of reading is coherent and promotes progression; it is taught through the use of commercial reading schemes, supplemented by other reading materials such as novels, 'Big Books', relevant ICT software packages and reference material. The teachers often read to the children to develop their interest in language and books. Reading for enjoyment is given a high priority, and is encouraged through the use of class novels and 'Home Read' books. The teachers promote the use of books for accessing information; many of the children use dictionaries, thesauri and reference books competently. Most of the children reach very good standards in reading. A minority who need additional support are making slow progress; this aspect has already been identified as an area for improvement by the school.

2.11 The development of the children's writing is integrated well with the other aspects of the English curriculum. In line with the children's ability, the development from emergent to extended and independent writing is promoted effectively throughout the school. Some of this work reaches a high standard, with children writing in a wide variety of forms across the curriculum. The children make effective use of word-banks, thesauri and dictionaries.

2.12 Information and communication technology is used effectively by most of the teachers and children in promoting and supporting learning and teaching in English. The children become increasingly competent and confident in their use of computers. Examples of the children's writing from across the curriculum, often using ICT, are attractively displayed in the classrooms and in the corridors. The ICT co-ordinator has appropriate plans for the further embedding of ICT in English, and the inspection endorses this as an important priority. In year 7, samples of the children's work contribute to the school's participation in the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment ICT accreditation scheme. This participation could usefully be spread to other year groups as a way of enhancing further their learning experiences and applying their ICT skills.

2.13 The special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO) administers the support programme effectively; the class teachers, SENCO, and classroom assistants collaborate well to compile appropriate and detailed education plans, which identify strategies and targets to promote improvement. The children's learning needs are identified at an early stage through a combination of observations and the use of standardised tests. The sessions of in-class support are supportive and well-managed; the children respond well to the teacher; they are gaining confidence, self-esteem and are making progress in developing their literacy skills. While the additional support for those children identified by the school as having reading difficulty is presently given a high priority, the school has a substantial budget deficit, and the School Development Plan (SDP) indicates that this may limit the funding available to support the special education needs programme. The inspection findings and the school's own data from standardised testing show that there are a significant number of children who have difficulty learning to read effectively.

2.14 The school maintains regular communication with the parents about school events and curricular matters, for example, through the regular distribution of an informative newsletter. The parents are kept well-informed of their children's progress through parental interviews and written reports. All of the teachers mark the children's work regularly. In the best practice, the work is marked with supportive and helpful comments, which often allow the children to improve aspects of their performance. There is an active Parent Teacher Association which supports the school through fund-raising and through a variety of social activities.

2.15 The Acting-Principal has provided very good leadership; her dedication and hard work are evident, and she has led the school successfully through a difficult and challenging recent period. She has managed actions to redress a substantial budget deficit and made significant and appropriate changes to the SDP. The South-Eastern Education and Library Board (SEELB) Curriculum Advisory and Support Service has provided excellent support and advice in the recent work on the SDP. The school is administered very well.

2.16 To develop further the existing culture of self-evaluation, there is a need to make more extensive use of performance data, including standardised tests and benchmarking information, to inform decision-making by the governors and senior management team (SMT), and to improve further the standards which the children attain. The teachers and co-ordinators need to use the analysis of the school performance information to set appropriate targets for improvement. Much work has gone into a recent revision of the SDP which is comprehensive and sets out in useful detail an appropriate set of priorities for the medium- and longer-term. To make this process more manageable, the school should consider prioritising and reducing in number the priorities already set out in the present and previous SDP. The staff and governors should take account of the inspection findings, including the need for ongoing monitoring and evaluation of the quality and effectiveness of learning and teaching and the standards attained by the children

3. CONCLUSION

3.1 The strengths of the school include:

- the hard-working children whose behaviour is very good;
- the caring, orderly and family ethos;
- the strong sense of community and excellent working relationships at all levels;
- the very good quality of the teaching in most of the lessons observed, and excellent teaching in a few lessons;
- the work in English which is developing well: very good standards in reading attained by most of the children, and the high standard of some of the writing, with children writing in a wide variety of forms across the curriculum; and
- the very good leadership provided by the hard-working, committed, Acting-Principal.

3.2 The areas for improvement include the need to:

- make a more extensive use of performance data, including data available on the children's performance in various standardised tests and DE benchmarking information, to inform decision-making by the governors and SMT, and to improve further the standards.

In the areas inspected, the school has important strengths in most of its educational provision. The inspection has identified minor areas for improvement which the school has the capacity to address.

The school's progress on the area for improvement will be followed-up by monitoring visits, conducted by the District Inspector.

APPENDIX

A stronger focus should be placed on meeting consistently the food-based standards for school meals by the SEELB.

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