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**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

**Ballyhackett Primary School
Castlerock**

Inspected: January 2007

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Ballyhackett Primary School is situated on the Altikeeragh Road, Ballyhackett, Castlerock, seven miles west of Coleraine and overlooking the North Coast. The majority of the children who attend the school come from the villages of Castlerock and Articlave and the surrounding rural area. The enrolment has remained steady over the last five years. Approximately 9% of the children are entitled to free school meals. Fourteen 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 (BoG) and groups of children from year 6 and year 7. Thirty-seven questionnaires were issued to parents; almost 57% were returned to the Department of Education (DE) of which 17 contained additional written comments. The responses from the questionnaires indicated that the parents are strongly supportive of the work of the school. The BoG expressed their appreciation of the dedicated and hardworking staff in the school, commenting particularly on the good educational provision, the supportive parent/teacher relationships, the welcoming and caring ethos and the high esteem in which the school is held within the local community. The children talked confidently about the wide range of creative and sporting activities, the achievement scheme and the learning and pastoral support given by the Principal, teachers and support staff. The children are aware of what to do if they have any concerns about their safety and well-being. The Education and Training Inspectorate has provided the Principal and representatives of the BoG with feedback from the questionnaires and the discussions. The inspection findings confirm that the confidence expressed in these aspects of the school's work is well-placed.

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 (SEN) 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 The children learn within a caring and supportive environment; a strong sense of community pervades the life and work of the school. They are friendly, well-behaved and welcoming to visitors and, along with the staff, show a pride in the school. The extensive and attractive displays throughout the school enhance the learning environment and place value on the children's work. The support staff contribute significantly to the positive ethos and the smooth running of the school. The BoG appreciate the high level of interest and the material support provided by the parents and local community, through, for example, the work of the "Friends of Ballyhackett".

2.2 The school gives excellent attention to promoting health and well-being and has appropriate policies and programmes in place including "Healthy Breaks", "Healthy Lunchbox Charter" and unrestricted access to drinking water which encourage the children to adopt healthy lifestyles. There is evidence of commitment on the part of the staff to promoting healthy eating and to improving the children's eating habits. All the children have

opportunities to participate in a wide range of physical activities, such as Gaelic football, hurling, camogie, soccer and swimming. They demonstrate a very good understanding of the importance of making healthy life choices.

2.3 The high quality of the arrangements for pastoral care and child protection is a significant feature of the school. The school has procedures in place which implement fully the guidance outlined in the relevant DE Circulars. The BoG, staff, parents and children are fully aware of the school's procedures and have had the opportunity to contribute to a range of helpful policies that guide the work of the school. There is good communication with parents and the BoG; excellent working relations are encouraged effectively among all the children. The teacher in charge of pastoral care and child protection demonstrates particularly effective leadership.

2.4 The whole-school policies and medium-term planners for the areas under focus provide detailed guidance for the teachers. Their written planning identifies clearly the intended learning outcomes which take account of the range of abilities within the composite classes and link appropriately the classroom activities and the practical resources. The work of the classroom assistants is well-planned to provide the children with a variety of good learning experiences. The teachers evaluate the effectiveness of their teaching and use the information as a basis for future planning.

2.5 Most of the teaching ranges from very good to excellent. The lessons are well-structured and resourced creatively; in the best practice there is a clear learning partnership between the teachers and the children. The teachers explain the intended learning outcomes at the beginning of the lessons and the activities and resources are well-matched to the children's abilities. School trips and visitors to the school provide a valuable context to enrich the children's interests and learning.

2.6 The children display high levels of interest in their work. They are very responsive and work well on independent and co-operative tasks. Further, the children are developing effective peer-evaluation skills in order to improve their work in a positive and collaborative manner, through the consistent implementation of the assessment for learning programme in each year group.

2.7 The children's experiences in play-based learning, in the early years, contribute very well to their personal and social development. The teachers make available a wide choice of appropriate and challenging activities based around class themes through which the children are encouraged to observe, explore, and be imaginative and creative. The size of the key stage (KS) 1 classrooms, however, fall short of current standards for activity-based learning. The teachers and support staff interact effectively with the children, providing sensitive intervention, and extending the children's language and ideas. It is appropriate that the school is reviewing currently the provision for outdoor physical play.

2.8 There are two children, who have not attained the statutory school age, and are enrolled in the Reception class. Whilst their presence adds to the demands on the teacher, in terms of planning appropriate experiences for this group, the children engage in valuable discussion about their play activities. The children participate extensively in sustained and purposeful play.

2.9 The teachers place a systematic and effective emphasis on encouraging the children's talking and listening skills, for example, in Circle Time and as they contribute during class discussion. In general, the teachers use skilful questioning to encourage the children to share ideas, to offer opinions, to explain their learning and to listen to the views of others. Consequently, many of the children express their ideas confidently.

2.10 The children learn to read through an appropriate range of experiences which are well-integrated across the curriculum. There is an important emphasis on reading for interest and understanding and the "Reading is Fun" initiative has been successful in ensuring each child reads a range of books, both fiction and non-fiction. The children read confidently and expressively and show a lively interest in books. Appropriate novels provide a good stimulus for the children's learning experiences across the curriculum. During the inspection, a number of good examples of the use of ICT were observed; for example, the children use appropriate Internet sites, often independently, to promote effectively their understanding of text and research skills.

2.11 In the early years, the children have good opportunity to write their own accounts of events and observations; for example, they recorded good extended descriptions of animals as part of a zoo project. In KS2, when the children write in context about events, they demonstrate good standards using a wide vocabulary, style and empathy. For example, a recent school trip to Downhill Beach stimulated some good quality empathetic writing on a day in the life of a seagull. The children have regular opportunities to use ICT to support the presentation of their writing. Drama is used highly effectively as a stimulus for writing; for example, work with a local drama company has encouraged the children to write a number of excellent poems about the sea. The children have written good quality letters as part of a pen pal link with the United States of America. In general, however, the children need to achieve higher standards of personal writing. Their work needs to be extended to build on these good experiences and to provide more frequent opportunities for the children to extend and apply their writing skills across the curriculum.

2.12 The continuing development of ICT to enhance learning and teaching across the curriculum has been identified in the school development plan (SDP) as a whole-school priority; an appropriate action plan has been prepared already. This is an appropriate area for further development and has the potential to extend the good provision which already exists. The school has made a useful beginning to the monitoring and evaluation of the quality and range of the children's experiences in all strands of ICT.

2.13 There is good provision for children identified as having special educational needs. There is appropriate and early identification of those who experience difficulty with aspects of their learning and each child is provided with supportive and sensitive help which is matched to their needs, often within the classroom setting. The children enjoy their experiences and make good progress. Useful education plans are maintained in co-operation with the special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO), class teacher and parents. The school has drawn up an appropriate SEN policy that includes an action plan identifying suitable areas for development.

2.14 The teachers monitor the children's work frequently; they mark for improvement by highlighting to the children the strengths of the work and identifying how improvement on the quality of the work can be made. The school has useful procedures in place for recording and reporting the progress of the children to their parents. Detailed records of the children's

progress, which include samples of their work, are maintained. In recent years, the staff have worked hard to develop strategies for assessing the standards of the children's work and to set appropriate targets for improvement.

2.15 The Principal has a full-time teaching responsibility; she gives clear and effective leadership in all aspects of the school's work. In particular, she leads by example in the quality of her teaching and planning. Her vision for the school is exemplified well through the SDP that sets out priorities for a wide range of appropriate areas for development. She demonstrates strong commitment to the life and work of the school and to the well-being of the children and staff. She is very ably supported by the senior teacher and other staff. There is a strong collegiate approach to the management and organisation of the school that places the education and development of each child at the centre of its work. The staff are well-deployed to make use of their expertise to support the children's learning. The culture of self-evaluation is an integral part of the staff's professional practice; the school is well-positioned to address the areas for further development identified in the report.

3. CONCLUSION

3.1 The strengths of the school include:

- the excellent working relationships at all levels;
- the friendly, well-behaved and responsive children;
- the promotion of collaborative and independent learning strategies;
- the approaches adopted to promote a healthy lifestyle among the children;
- the very good to excellent quality of most of the teaching;
- the good quality provision for SEN;
- the effective leadership of the Principal, her vision for the school and commitment to curricular development;
- the strong collegiate approach to the management and organisation of the school which places the child at the centre of its work;
- the systematic planning and self-evaluation; and
- the valuable contribution made by the parents, support staff and the BoG to the life and work of the school.

3.2 The areas for improvement, which have already been identified in the SDP, include:

- the need to develop and integrate further the use of ICT to support and extend the children's learning; and
- the need to extend the standard and range of writing across the curriculum.

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

The District Inspector will monitor the school's progress in the areas for improvement.

HEALTH AND SAFETY

- There is a need for a footpath for use by the children in the drop-off zone at the side of the road adjacent to the school.

ACCOMMODATION

- The size of the KS1 classrooms fall short of current standards for activity-based learning.
- The assembly hall is inadequate for physical activities.
- There is a need to develop accessibility to the school building in line with the Special Educational Needs Disability Order legislation.
- The lack of sufficient storage space.

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