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*The Education and Training Inspectorate -
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Education and Training Inspectorate

Report of a Focused Inspection

Beechgrove School
Ballymena

Inspected: March 2007

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Beechgrove School provides education for pupils aged three to eleven years who have physical disabilities and associated medical and additional learning difficulties. The school also provides Outreach support for 35 pupils attending mainstream schools, although this provision was not seen as part of the inspection and does not therefore form part of this report. The school is situated on a shared site with Dunfane School in the outskirts of Ballymena.

1.2 The arrangements for the inspection of pastoral care included the completion of questionnaires by the parents as well as meetings with members of the Board of Governors (governors) of the school and with the oldest pupils. Approximately half of the parental questionnaires issued were returned to the Department of Education (DE) and two-thirds of these included a written comment. Most of the responses were very positive and supportive of the work of the school; the few concerns expressed were brought to the attention of the governors and the Principal. The governors expressed their strong support for the school; they commented particularly on the high quality of the leadership of the Principal, the hard-working and dedicated staff and the very positive ethos of the school. The inspection findings endorse these views. In discussions with the inspection team, the pupils spoke appreciatively of their teachers and classrooms assistants.

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

2. ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS

2.1 Beechgrove School is a good school where outstanding care, guidance and support help the pupils to make good progress in their personal development and academic work. The parents are very supportive of the school and appreciate the work it does in giving their children a good standard of education and in caring for them.

2.2 The school's programme for the promotion of health and well-being has many sound features. Attention is given to the development and implementation of programmes which encourage the pupils to adopt healthy lifestyles. There is a developing commitment to promoting healthy eating and opportunities are provided for the pupils to participate in a range of physical activities.

2.3 The inspection findings indicate the following strengths in achievements and standards:

- the staff are very successful in providing the care and encouragement needed to enable the pupils to be confident and enthusiastic learners; and
- a culture of success, where the achievements of all pupils are highlighted and celebrated, permeates the life and work of the school.

3. QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING

3.1 The climate of the school is very friendly and welcoming and enables the pupils to flourish and participate well in the tasks set for them by their teachers. The teachers work hard to create an attractive learning environment. During the inspection, the quality of all the teaching observed had many good features and the majority of the lessons seen had major strengths.

3.2 The school has procedures in place which implement fully the guidance outlined in the relevant DE 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 helpful policies which guide the work of the school.

3.3 The inspection findings indicate the following strengths in the quality of the provision for learning:

- the teachers are conscientious in their planning and individual education plans are comprehensive;
- the working relationships at all levels are exemplary and the pupils' contributions to lessons are highly valued;
- the good quality teaching in all the classes is underpinned by the teachers' thorough knowledge of the individual needs of the pupils;
- the pupils' personal development is excellent; starting in the first class, they make steady progress in learning how to take care of themselves, understand rules and how to be considerate of others;
- information and communication technology (ICT) is used very well to enable the pupils to communicate, to access the curriculum and to enrich their learning experiences; and
- the school provides regular opportunities for the parents to discuss the progress and welfare of their children.

4. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

4.1 The quality of the leadership and management is good. The Acting Principal gives a clear direction and sets a positive tone to the life and work of the school and to the well-being of the pupils. She is ably supported by the Acting Vice-principal and the staff. Improvements are prioritised and need to take further account of the future amalgamation and changing situation facing the school.

4.2 The staff consider and share their views about the progress of individual pupils both formally and informally; this provides a useful basis for how self-evaluation might be developed further to lead to whole-school improvement.

4.3 The inspection findings indicate the following strengths in the leadership and management:

- the Acting Principal is committed to improving the school and is supported effectively by all the staff;
- there is an effective and efficient management system to ensure a common approach to assessment;
- there are good quality and appropriate staff development opportunities focused on improving the learning and teaching throughout the school;
- best use is made of the expertise of the individual members of staff; and
- the members of the Board of Governors are kept fully informed of the work of the school.

5. **OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS**

5.1 The pupils love coming to school, work conscientiously to improve their skills and engage enthusiastically in the wide range of activities that are offered to them. Whatever their starting point or their capabilities, the pupils make good progress and achieve well.

5.2 The inspection has identified many strengths in the school. These include:

- the warm, welcoming and positive ethos, and the very good relationships at all levels in the school;
- the excellent quality of the provision for pastoral care;
- the quality of the teaching, the majority of which had major strengths;
- the staff's thorough knowledge of the pupils' needs;
- the effective leadership provided by the Acting Principal, ably supported by the Acting Vice-principal and staff;
- the hard-working staff who are committed to the well-being of the children;
- the sense of collegiality among all the staff;
- the quality of the pupils' experiences in ICT to support and enhance the learning and teaching;
- the quality of the support, involvement and commitment of the members of the Board of Governors to the development of the school; and
- the strong support of the parents for the work of the school.

6. **AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT**

6.1 The inspection findings indicate the following areas for improvement:

- the need to build on the already good partnerships between the teachers and the therapists through more formal consideration of the planning arrangements to achieve the collaborative working standards and indicators of best practice; and
- the need to continue to develop the system for self-evaluation in order to further inform and improve the quality of the learning and teaching.

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 minor areas for improvement which the school has the capacity to address.

The school's progress on the areas for improvement will be monitored by the District Inspector.

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