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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

**Beechlawn School
Hillsborough**

Inspected: January 2007

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STATISTICAL INFORMATION (SPECIAL SCHOOLS)

- 1.1 i. **School: Beechlawn School Hillsborough** iii. **Date of Inspection: w/b 22.01.07**
- ii. **School Reference Number: 431-0008** iv. **Nature of Inspection: Focused**

1.2

School Year	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07
Total Enrolment	267	200	256	243	236

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: 80
- 1.4 Average Attendance for the Previous School Year: 84.2%
- 1.5 i. Number of Teachers in School: 32 on Outreach Programme: 5
(including the Principal and p/t teachers)
(f/t equivalent = 25 teaching hours)
- ii. PTR (pupil/teacher ratio): 8.74
- iii. Average Class Size: 10
- iv. Number of Classroom Assistants: 15
- v. Ancillary Support:
Number of Hours per week:

Clerical Support: 72
- vi. Percentage of children in receipt of free school meals: 39

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Beechlawn School is situated in the village of Hillsborough, County Down, and provides education for 178 pupils, aged 11 to 16 years, with moderate learning difficulties. Approximately 58 pupils of primary age with specific learning difficulties attend the Reading Centre for three terms on a full-time basis, while a further 26 pupils attend on a part-time placement. There is an Outreach learning support team to support mainstream schools within the South-Eastern Education and Library Board 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 and groups of pupils from years 7, 10 and 12. Of the 120 questionnaires issued to parents, some 29% were returned to the Department of Education (DE) and 16 contained additional written comments. The concerns raised by the parents were discussed with the Principal.

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 Beechlawn School has many good features but there are some areas for improvement that require planned action to improve. There are important strengths in the provision including the good quality of the teaching and learning throughout the school, the very effective specialist teaching in science, art and design, technology and design and home economics, and, particularly, in the Reading Centre and in Outreach support. The areas for improvement include the need to improve the management arrangements with regard to the monitoring and assessment of the pupils' academic, vocational and pastoral progress within the main school, to review and address the appropriateness of current external examinations offered and to improve transition arrangements for the pupils.

2.2 The Reading Centre has a positive ethos in which the working relationships between the pupils and staff, are very good. The pupils behave well. The quality of teaching in the Reading Centre is consistently good and, often, excellent. The teachers undertake effective diagnoses of the pupils' needs and provide stimulating and interesting activities to address them. All of the pupils benefit from their time spent in the Reading Centre and make progress in their learning generally, and in their literacy skills specifically; for many pupils the progress made is excellent.

2.3 The school's Outreach team provides support to 80 pupils in 38 schools at key stages 2, 3 and 4. The service provided by the Outreach team is characterised by detailed initial assessment, good quality planning, strong links with mainstream schools and parents, very good quality teaching, a supportive team ethos and a genuine interest in, and commitment to, meeting the needs of pupils with specific learning difficulties. The work of the Outreach team is highly valued by the schools that access their support.

2.4 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, where appropriate, to participate in a range of physical activities. The pupils demonstrate a good understanding of the importance of making healthy life choices.

2.5 The inspection findings indicate the following achievements and standards:

- the high degree of empathy, encouragement and praise for the efforts of the pupils by the teachers;
- the good quality of teaching and learning throughout the school;
- the pupils attainment of individual educational plan targets;
- the healthy lifestyle choices made in school by most pupils;
- the positive attitudes to learning shown by the majority of the pupils;
- the often excellent progress made by pupils in their literacy skills in the Reading Centre;
- the consistently good and highly valued work of the Outreach team in supporting mainstream pupils and schools; and
- the General Certificate of Secondary Education results in art and design which are appropriately analysed and collated.

3. **QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING**

3.1 The teachers are committed to the pupils' learning and development. They know the pupils well and respond appropriately to their needs and interests. The quality of teaching varies across the school; in most of the lessons observed, it was good or better. Overall, approximately 77% of the lessons observed had many good features, 44% of all lessons observed were graded consistently good or better, including some 16% with outstanding features.

3.2 There are shortcomings in the school's provision for pastoral care and child protection, which require urgent action. The school does not have procedures in place, which implement sufficiently the guidance outlined in the relevant DE Circulars and this situation needs to be addressed urgently. The school needs to update its pastoral care and child protection policies.

It also needs to ensure that:

- all of the staff receive the required training in pastoral care and child protection matters;
- the arrangements for pastoral care and child protection are made known directly to parents at least once every two years;

- the pupils and parents have the opportunity to contribute to the revision of policies, in particular anti-bullying and discipline;
- the pupils are made more aware of the procedures to be followed in a child protection issue;
- appropriate records are kept of all complaints or information received; and
- the pastoral care policies in the classroom are monitored effectively with issues arising followed through to a conclusion.

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

- the positive working relationships amongst teachers, classroom assistants and pupils;
- the well-conceived and skilful use by some teachers of interactive whiteboards to interest and motivate the pupils;
- the effective sharing of expected learning outcomes with the pupils in some of the lessons observed;
- the frequent practical work with well-planned opportunities for independent writing in some lessons;
- the well resourced, practical, and suitably differentiated teaching of mathematics with planning clearly focused on developing the pupils' confidence and competence in key skills and preparation for life;
- the consistently good quality of teaching in science, home economics, technology and design and art and design with a majority of the lessons observed being outstanding;
- the development and use of effective learning and teaching strategies for pupils with an autistic spectrum disorder;
- the skilful technical support which enhances the pupils' learning;
- the good planning, lesson co-ordination and teaching of physical education with opportunities provided for the pupils to participate in external competitions and activities;
- the effective use of the extensive school campus and the local and wider environment in promoting learning and teaching across the curriculum and in raising the pupils' environmental awareness;

- the monitoring of pupil progress in literacy through regular assessments and tests; and
- the high expectations of some teachers regarding appropriate behaviour, supported by firm but sensitive handling of inappropriate behaviour.

4. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

4.1 Notwithstanding the commitment and hard work of the Principal and Vice-principal to the pupils and to ensure the smooth running of the school, it is evident that the management arrangements of the school need to be reviewed and improved. Currently, there are three vacancies on the senior management team that inhibit its effective development. The current arrangements do not ensure that the strengths and expertise of the co-ordinators and members of staff are deployed effectively to inform planning for improvement, address issues and raise standards. The Principal needs to clarify the roles and responsibilities of all staff and co-ordinators so that they are able to contribute more effectively to the work of the school, particularly, with regard to progressing the school development planning process, introducing effective systems for self-evaluation and the monitoring of resources and their impact on learning and teaching. There is a further need to review the management arrangements for the Outreach team ensuring that they have representation at management level and appropriate resources for their work. There are appropriate skills and expertise among senior staff to suggest that the necessary improvements can be achieved and it remains for the Principal to re-focus his drive and commitment and harness the many strengths of the staff, and, particularly, of the Vice-principal, to endeavour to set targets and achieve improvement.

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

- the orderly running of the school;
- the well-established and appropriate routines of the school day;
- the positive tone of the school assemblies where pupils achievements are celebrated; and
- the emphasis on the acquisition and use of information and communication technology in the classroom including the skilful use of interactive whiteboards.

5. OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS

5.1 The inspection has identified strengths in the teaching and learning throughout the school, the specialist teaching and especially in the Reading Centre and Outreach provision.

5.2 The main strengths of the provision are:

- the good standard of teaching and learning throughout the school;
- the often excellent progress made by the pupils in the Reading Centre;

- the quality of the Outreach provision to mainstream schools;
- the emphasis placed on promoting health and well-being by the school;
- the positive working relationships amongst staff and pupils;
- the good quality practical teaching and learning which develops the pupils' confidence and competence in preparation for life; and
- the celebration of the pupils achievements by all staff.

6. AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

6.1 The inspection findings indicate that the following important areas for improvement need to be addressed:

- the guidance outlined in the relevant DE Circulars for pastoral care and child protection must be implemented fully;
- the need to clarify the roles and responsibilities of leaders and co-ordinators;
- the development of systems for self-evaluation and monitoring within the school, the dissemination of the good practice within the school and the strengthening of improvement planning; and
- improving the assessment of pupils' academic, vocational and pastoral progress within the main school and ensuring appropriate accreditation and careers advice.

7. CONCLUSION

7.1 In the areas inspected, the school has strengths in its educational provision. The inspection has identified important areas for improvement, which need to be addressed promptly if the school is to meet effectively the needs of all the learners.

The Education and Training Inspectorate will monitor and report on the school's progress in addressing these areas for improvement.

APPENDIX

HEALTH AND SAFETY MATTERS RELATING TO ACCOMMODATION

- There is no electronic security system in the school allowing unobserved entry by visitors.

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