



*The Education and Training Inspectorate -
Promoting Improvement*



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

Belfast Hospital School

Inspected: March 2009

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STATISTICAL INFORMATION (SPECIAL SCHOOLS)

1.1 i. **School: Belfast Hospital School** iii. **Date of Inspection: W/B 09.03.09**

ii. **School Reference Number: 131-6560** iv. **Nature of Inspection: Focused**

1.2

School Year	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
Total Enrolment	104	103	89	83	80

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 Home Tuition Service: 30

1.4 i. Number of full-time equivalent Teachers in School: 24 Home Tuition Service: 5
(including the Principal and p/t teachers)
(f/t equivalent = 25 teaching hours)

ii. PTR (pupil/teacher ratio): 4.21

iii. Average Class Size: N/A

iv. Number of Classroom Assistants: 1

v. Ancillary Support:
Number of Hours per week:

Clerical Support: 25

vi. Percentage of children in receipt of free school meals: N/A

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Belfast Hospital School provides education for pupils receiving medical treatment within the Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children and Musgrave Park Hospital. The pupils attending the school come from across the province and include children of primary and post-primary age from the Republic of Ireland. A home tuition service is offered to convalescing pupils and pupils from across the greater Belfast area, who are out-of-school for other reasons, including school phobia and bullying. The current staffing is the Principal and 23 full-time equivalent teachers.

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). Eighty-three questionnaires were issued to the parents; 16% were returned to the Department of Education (DE) and nine contained additional written comments. The parental responses were very positive. At the meeting with the governors they expressed their commitment to the school and their support for the work of the staff. They also expressed their view that the teachers in the school provide excellent support to the children and work in close harmony with the key staff of the hospitals. The governors raised concerns relating to the inadequate teaching accommodation and to the poor cohesion of the senior management team (SMT) of the school. The Education and Training Inspectorate (Inspectorate) endorses the positive views of the governors; the Inspectorate also found the leadership and management to be inadequate, a matter requiring critical action by the Belfast Education and Library Board (BELB) and the governors. The pupils, in discussion with the inspection team, indicated their awareness of the arrangements to ensure their safety and security in school.

1.3 The focus of the inspection was on the quality of planning for, and management of, individual needs including the standards achieved by the pupils, the quality of the provision for learning, the leadership and management of the school and the arrangements for child protection and pastoral care.

2. ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS

2.1 In this report, the standards of achievement are judged in relation to the pupils' previous attainments, their individual abilities and, if appropriate, their special educational needs. When their medical problems allow, the pupils demonstrate a strong engagement in the learning process and show positive and effective involvement in their learning. The majority of the pupils find their time in the hospital classroom or during outreach lessons a worthwhile diversion from their worries about their medical conditions. The pupils feel valued and appreciate the praise received for their efforts. Overall, the one-to-one and small group lessons ensure that each pupil makes progress in his or her learning and in a minority of instances, significant improvement in literacy and numeracy is reported. The pupils benefit from the strong and respectful collaborative working relationships between the teaching staff and the medical/nursing staff; this collaboration ensures that the pupils' needs are met in a holistic and cohesive manner. Where appropriate the staff make arrangements for the pupils to sit external examinations or receive accreditation for their work during their time with the school.

2.2 The key standards and achievements observed during the inspection include:

- the good standards the pupils achieve in their learning and social interactions both in the hospital and in the home tuition settings;
- the pupils' motivation and responsive engagement with staff, particularly at key stage (KS) 3 and KS4 where in-depth discussion is more frequent;
- the pupils' enjoyment of their learning, particularly in the friendly and supportive climate for learning in the hospital settings;
- the pupils' positive participation in the activities prepared for them on home tuition;
- the good progress the pupils on outreach provision achieve in understanding their emotional difficulties and in developing the skills to cope with their needs; and
- the pupils' very good progress in the use of information and communication technology (ICT).

3. **QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING**

3.1 The quality of teaching in the hospital school is of a very good standard; some aspects of the work are of an excellent quality and are a testament to the high commitment and caring involvement of the staff with all of the pupils; this quality is evident in the excellent use of ICT to promote thinking skills and personal development, the careful consideration given to the pupils' emotional well-being within the education plans and the firm collaborative working between the teaching staff and the medical staff. In spite of the difficulties acknowledged within the SMT, the leadership and management of the Vice-principal in the Musgrave Park Hospital sets an excellent tone for the service; her collaborative approach is a positive cornerstone for the management of the school. Based on a thorough knowledge of the pupils' needs and discerning planning, the teaching throughout the school is well paced, flexible and personalised to each pupil. The warm, working relationships between the staff and the pupils, the encouragement to achieve, and the recognition of efforts made are common characteristics of all of the work. In contrast, the teaching accommodation in the hospitals is inadequate and restrictive and should be improved.

3.2 Overall, the home tuition service enables almost all of the pupils to maintain their engagement with education and to keep in contact with their mainstream schools and friends. The service has frequently contributed to improved relationships between the young person and his/her family and community. In almost all of the lessons observed, the teachers have established excellent working relationships with the pupils; the quality of pastoral care and attentive support for the pupils is highly appreciated by all of the parents. The teachers have developed a portfolio of suitable resources to support imaginative and interesting activities. Further work needs to be done by the school and the BELB to clarify and agree the strategic arrangements for the service to ensure that it has the capacity to meet the needs of the pupils, in the context of changing enrolment profiles and numbers, and is sufficiently prepared to

enable the re-integration of pupils into their mainstream schools. In this endeavour, important areas for consideration are: the target audience for the service; the model of provision; the re-integration of those pupils whose stay in hospital is longer than average; and a robust system for monitoring and recording pupil progress.

3.3 Classroom 2000 (C2k) has now been installed in areas of the hospital settings. The co-ordinator and staff have worked very hard with C2k in order to meet the particular and very broad needs of the hospital school. The staff have developed very motivating and appropriate creative partnership initiatives, including comic strips and video-conferencing which provide stimulating and worthwhile experiences for the pupils.

3.4 The school has satisfactory comprehensive policies and practices in place for safeguarding the pupils and these arrangements reflect the guidance issued by the relevant Department; however the location of the classroom beside an open adult ward at the Musgrave Park Hospital site is a cause for concern.

3.5 The quality of the arrangements for pastoral care in the school is good. The school has procedures in place which implement the guidance outlined in the relevant DE Circulars. The parents receive the pastoral care and child protection policies from the school before their child accesses the service. The governors, staff, 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 and include the caring and supportive ethos, the strong and effective leadership of the Vice-principal for pastoral care, and the effective work alongside other agencies.

3.6 The main strengths of the quality of the provision for learning in the hospital and home tuition service are:

- the good quality of the teachers' planning reflecting what the pupils do in their mainstream schools, their interests and what is practical;
- the staff's frequent and well-directed encouragement which enhances the pupils' sense of confidence and well-being;
- the strong links established with the pupils' mainstream schools, including video-conferencing and the sharing of information to promote consistency in the pupils' learning;
- the well-considered individual education targets which reflect the health and educational needs of the pupils;
- the effective emphasis on the use of ICT as a means of interesting the pupils in their learning and keeping contact with their school; and
- the impact of the one-to-one work and the reassurance this brings to the pupils' understanding and rate of progress.

4. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

4.1 The absence of effective SMT meetings and, with it, the lack of shared discussion and decision-making do not enable the staff to work together effectively as a whole nor to develop an effective system of self-evaluation. Despite ongoing and significant intervention by BELB officers and the governors, it is evident that the issue remains unresolved. The breakdown in the professional working relationship between some members of the SMT, identified in previous inspection reports, continues to inhibit the development and cohesion of the SMT of the school. It is crucial that the governors and the BELB address this issue and find a solution.

4.2 The inspection evidence indicates that the governors and the SMT, in collaboration with the BELB, need to address and improve:

- the poor working relationships in the SMT;
- the lack of professional SMT meetings and consequently the absence of shared information and decision-making around, for example, such current key areas as data analysis, the home tuition policy and accommodation;
- the absence of a whole-school evaluation and the need for a clearer definition of the key management roles and the deployment of senior staff; and
- the need to address the key strategic needs of the school within the school development plan which is currently focused largely on operational improvements.

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 high quality and supportive teaching;
- the achievements of the pupils, especially in ICT;
- the pupils' enjoyment of their learning and the teachers' enjoyment of their teaching;
- the consistent professionalism and sensitivity of the teachers, sometimes in adverse circumstances;
- the good collaborative planning by the health and education staff to meet the holistic needs of the pupils; and
- the appreciation shown by the parents for the support and help given by the staff.

6. AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

6.1 The inspection findings indicate that the following areas for improvement need to be addressed by the SMT, the governors and the BELB:

- the quality of the leadership and management;
- the planning for the strategic direction of the school; and
- the accommodation.

7. CONCLUSION

7.1 The inspection identifies and acknowledges the very good quality of the teaching and learning in the school, and the particular benefits of providing education within the hospital settings and at home. The positive working relationships among the teaching staff and the warm working ethos they promote in all of the teaching sessions have a significant and good impact on the pupils' well-being and learning. In contrast, the inspection identified significant inadequacies in the leadership and management which need to be addressed urgently if the school is to meet effectively the needs of all of the pupils. The Inspectorate will monitor and report on the school's progress in addressing the areas for improvement, over a 12-18 month period.

ACCOMMODATION

- The need to improve the teaching accommodation including the staff room, as a means of addressing more deliberately the needs of the pupils, especially those pupils with special educational needs or young pupils.

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