



*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

**Belmont House School
Londonderry**

Inspected: November 2008

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STATISTICAL INFORMATION (SPECIAL SCHOOLS)

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| 1.1 | i. | School: Belmont House School Londonderry | iii. | Date of Inspection: W/B 17.11.08 |
| | ii. | School Reference Number: 231-0015 | iv. | Nature of Inspection: Focused |

1.2

School Year	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
Total Enrolment	193	179	183	176	163

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.

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|-----|--|--|---------------------------|
| 1.3 | Number of Pupils in Outreach Programme: | 87 | |
| 1.4 | Average Attendance for the Previous School Year: | 92.1% | |
| 1.5 | i. Number of Teachers in School:
(including the Principal and p/t teachers)
(f/t equivalent = 25 teaching hours) | 31 | on Outreach Programme: 11 |
| | ii. PTR (pupil/teacher ratio): | 8.2 | |
| | iii. Average Class Size: | Pre-school: 6; ASD: 7; KS1-2: 10; KS3-4: 12+ | |
| | iv. Number of Classroom Assistants: | 29 | |
| | v. Ancillary Support:
Number of Hours per week: | | |
| | Clerical Support: | 30.6 | |
| | vi. Percentage of children in receipt of free school meals: | 59% | |

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Belmont House School, which caters for pupils with moderate learning difficulties aged from three to 17 years, is situated in Londonderry and shares a site with Foyle View Special School and Belmont Nursery School. As well as making provision for pupils with moderate learning difficulties, the school also caters for children of primary age with speech and language difficulties in its Woodlands Language Unit and for children with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties in the Little Oaks Behaviour Unit. The school also provides outreach support for mainstream primary and post-primary schools for pupils with a range of special educational needs.

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) and two groups of pupils, one group from year 7 and the other representative of the older pupils, including members of the Student Council. One hundred and fifty-seven questionnaires were issued to the parents; 27% were returned to the Department of Education (DE) and 27 of these contained additional written comments. The responses from the parental questionnaires indicated that all of the parents regard highly the care and support provided for their children. They strongly support the very welcoming and inclusive ethos of the school and the positive response by the staff to the needs of all the pupils.

1.3 The governors expressed their appreciation of the hard work and commitment of the staff and the high quality of pastoral care within the school. They also raised concerns about the lack of progress in providing a new school building and the need for the commencement of formal consultation regarding the future role of the school. The Western Education and Library Board (WELB) should continue to ensure that the governors and DE are kept fully informed and involved about any reconfiguration of the school. In this regard, the amassed skills and expertise of the staff should be maximised to support those pupils attending the school and other pupils supported through outreach.

1.4 Both groups of pupils talked enthusiastically about the school and their teachers, and they are aware of what to do if they have any worries about their safety and well-being. The Education and Training Inspectorate (Inspectorate) has reported to the Principal and representatives of the governors the main findings emerging from the questionnaires and the discussions.

1.5 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, standards of achievement are judged in relation to the pupils' previous attainments, their individual abilities and their special educational needs.

2.2 Belmont House School is a good school where the pupils achieve well. The staff are committed to the school and have high expectations for the pupils both in school and as they learn alongside their peers in further education. In classes, there is clear evidence of

achievement: the pupils display good standards in personal development and mutual understanding, thinking skills and personal capabilities, information and communication technology (ICT) and in their literacy. All the pupils make good progress against their individual targets; they are growing in confidence and self-esteem and are developing basic personal and social skills which enable them to be more independent, to manage their behaviour positively and to interact appropriately with their peers.

2.3 Since the last inspection in 2000, the school has worked extremely hard to cater for the vocational, technical and academic needs of the pupils at key stage (KS) 4 and at post-16 level. The range of courses on offer is impressive and the documentation supporting the provision is of a high standard. For example, the school has produced a high quality prospectus of its KS4 and range of post-16 provision. Importantly, the established and accredited courses on offer are attracting great interest in the local learning community and acknowledging the excellent efforts of the school as a lead partner in the wider learning community.

2.4 The school gives very good attention to promoting healthy eating and physical activity, for example, a popular breakfast club and policies to guide and support whole-school healthy eating programmes, which encourage the pupils to adopt healthy lifestyles.

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

- the pupils make good progress in their learning through achieving the targets set in their individual education plans (IEPs);
- the pupils demonstrate an increasing ability to work independently and in groups as they progress through the school;
- the pupils are well motivated and engage enthusiastically in all the planned activities; they are developing key personal and social skills which enable them to co-operate with their peers and to treat one another with respect;
- individual pupils respond well to the teaching sessions provided by the outreach teachers. The pupils know their work and efforts are valued and they take increasing responsibility for their behaviour and learning;
- the pupils' overall health and well-being is well promoted throughout the school; and
- the pupils achieve well in the range of accredited courses at KS4 and in the post-16 programme in the Pennyburn Learning Centre and also demonstrate increasing skills, independence and confidence to help them in the transition to adult and working life.

3. QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING

3.1 Almost all the teaching, approximately 90% including outreach, is of a consistently good quality, with nearly 60% of the lessons observed ranging from very good to outstanding. The teachers and classroom assistants have realistic expectations of the pupils

and achieve an appropriate balance between challenging and supporting them in their learning. The pupils develop key concepts and understanding within meaningful contexts and through well planned practical activities. The staff have embraced effectively the Northern Ireland Curriculum (NIC). Despite the very poor accommodation, the staff provides an enriching and stimulating learning environment, often with very effective use of the internal and external environment of the school. Good use is made of ICT to support learning across the curriculum. The school has made good progress in developing further the ICT infrastructure, for example, with the provision of interactive whiteboards in many classes.

3.2 The quality of teaching observed on outreach is consistently good; particular features are the good working relationships between the outreach teachers and the class teachers, the effective use of practical strategies, especially for pupils with behavioural difficulties and the appropriate learning targets and practical strategies that enable the pupils to make progress. The work is enhanced further by the very detailed planning and assessment undertaken and the strong trust evident between the teachers and the pupils.

3.3 The quality of the arrangements for pastoral care in the school is outstanding. This is reflected in the inclusive, caring and supportive ethos within the classrooms and throughout the school, the high quality of the working relationships at all levels and the priority given to the emotional health and well-being of the staff and the pupils. The school communicates effectively with the parents and the governors. Other strengths include the policy and procedures for encouraging positive behaviour, the weekly counselling sessions provided by the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children and the good communication with the pupils through the Student Council.

3.4 The school has very good arrangements in place for safeguarding the pupils. These arrangements reflect the guidance issued by the relevant Department circulars. The governors, staff, parents and children 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. However, due to the open nature of the school's campus, there is a need for the school and the WELB to carry out a risk assessment regarding the arrangements for access to the site and school. The WELB needs to address this as a matter of urgency.

3.5 The inspection findings indicate the following strengths in the provision for learning:

- the very good quality of the teaching, the excellent planning for learning and the comprehensive assessment and recording of the pupils' progress;
- the positive climate for learning, the high expectations of the staff and their commitment to promoting the highest possible level of pupil achievement;
- the culture of success throughout the school where the achievements of all of the pupils are recognised and celebrated;
- the very good use of ICT and the strong emphasis on practical activities to support and enrich learning experiences;
- the classrooms assistants who provide invaluable support to the pupils' learning;

- the KS4 vocational curriculum and the year 13 programme which are appropriately matched to the needs, interests, vocational and social development of the pupils;
- the effective inter-disciplinary collaborative working, evident in the planning and sharing of information; and
- the regular opportunities provided for the parents to discuss the progress and welfare of their children.

4. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

4.1 The Acting Principal and the Acting Vice-principal have been in post since September 2007. The Acting Principal has provided very good leadership to the staff and pupils. Under her leadership, the school has developed further a strong learning culture and positive approach to celebrating the staff's skills and promoting opportunities for professional development. The school, for example, has achieved a range of awards including recognition in ICT and has acted on the recommendations of the last inspection report by entering the British Educational Communications and Technology Agency self-evaluation process. The school's ICT co-ordinators have provided good quality leadership. As a consequence, the school is well-placed to implement further the changes planned within the NIC. The Acting Principal has worked hard, in particular, to support and empower the co-ordinators of each of the learning centres in the school and to lead the implementation of a number of new initiatives.

4.2 The school's process for development and planning has many strengths. There is a developing commitment to action planning and there are some effective policies and programmes in place, for example, as produced by each department to guide their work, as well as whole-school policies in particular areas such as ICT. The Messines, Hampstead and Woodlands Centres have developed effective action plans and collaborated to develop a common approach regarding the implementation of the NIC. The inspection findings indicate the need for the learning centres to share further their good practice to ensure the effective dissemination of ideas and approaches. In addition, the senior management team need to develop a strategic overview of the quality and impact of provision across the school to inform and raise standards further. The inspection also finds that the current roles of the senior managers should be reviewed to ensure a more equitable distribution of duties and accountability.

4.3 There are effective policies and procedures in place to guide the planning, monitoring and evaluation of the pupils' attainments and experiences within each learning centre. Further work is necessary to promote this practice across the centres and achieve greater cohesion and whole-school planning. Self-evaluation is at an early stage of development and should be progressed as part of the development of whole-school planning.

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

- the very good leadership provided by the Acting Principal and the strong emphasis she places on empowering the staff;

- the effective staff development programme which provides very good opportunities for further training and professional development;
- the very good quality of the leadership provided within each of the learning centres;
- the effective team-work throughout the school between the teachers, the classroom assistants, the therapists and others;
- the strong and effective links with the external providers and the effective ongoing monitoring and evaluation of courses through the local area partnership to enhance the options available to the pupils including the strong network of external links, both national and international, which enrich and enhance the life of the school; and
- the strong commitment, interest and support of the members of the Board of Governors.

5. OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS

5.1 The inspection has identified many strengths in the school which include:

- the very good leadership provided by the Acting Principal and the strong positive ethos and sense of collegiality throughout the school;
- the very good quality of the teaching, the excellent planning for learning and the comprehensive assessment and recording arrangements;
- the good progress the pupils make in their learning which enhances their self-esteem, confidence, creativity and independence;
- the thorough preparation for the transition to adult and working life, including the successful addition of post-16 provision;
- the effective staff development programme which provides very good opportunities for further training and professional development; and
- the commitment, interest and support of the parents and the members of the Board of Governors to the school.

6. AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

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

- to develop further the strategic overview of the work of the school to ensure greater cohesion and co-ordination across the learning centres including the more effective dissemination of ideas, approaches and good practice; and

- to develop the self-evaluation process in a more systematic and formal way in order to monitor and evaluate more effectively the quality and the impact of the provision on the pupil's learning.

7. CONCLUSION

7.1 In the areas inspected, the quality of the education provided by the school is good. The school has important strengths in most of its educational and pastoral provision. The inspection has identified areas for improvement which the school has demonstrated the capacity to address. The Inspectorate will monitor the school's progress on the areas for improvement.

HEALTH AND SAFETY

- There is a need for the school and the WELB to carry out a risk assessment regarding the arrangements for access to the site and school. The WELB needs to address this as a matter of urgency.

ACCOMMODATION

- There is a need to redesign the home economics department in line with current regulations.
- The governors raised concerns about the lack of progress in providing a new school building.

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