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## **Education and Training Inspectorate**

### **Report of a Focused Inspection**

**Benburb Primary School  
Co Tyrone**

**Inspected: November 2007**

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

1.1 Benburb Primary School is situated on the main road in Benburb village. The majority of the children come from the village and the surrounding area. The enrolment dropped significantly in the last year to its current figure of 22. Eighteen percent of the children are entitled to free school meals.

1.2 Prior to the inspection, the parents received a confidential questionnaire seeking their views about the work of the school. Approximately 70% of the parents returned the completed questionnaires to the Department of Education (DE). In addition six parents wrote additional comments; these were shared with the Board of Governors (governors) and with the Principal. The responses from the parental questionnaires indicated that they were generally happy with the work of the school. The arrangements for the inspection of pastoral care also included a meeting with the governors and with a group of children. A majority of the current governors who attended the meeting with the inspection team welcomed recent changes in the organisation and management of the school. They acknowledged the support that the school has from parents and they indicated that they are fully informed of school matters, including the school development plan and the overall attainment of the children. The children who met with the inspection team reported that they enjoy school; they mentioned in particular the range of extra-curricular activities which they participate in. They feel safe and know where to seek help if they have a concern about their safety or well-being.

1.3 The inspection focused on the quality of the work in English and information and communication technology (ICT) across the curriculum and the effectiveness of the school's special educational needs 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 teachers have created a bright and attractive environment for learning and teaching. They know the children well and celebrate their work and achievements through the many displays which enhance the classrooms and corridor. The children's learning and personal and social development are often promoted through the range of extra-curricular activities which include football, netball, hockey and swimming, through a variety of educational visits and from their cross-community programme.

2.2 The children generally behave very well; they are enthusiastic and willing learners and are friendly and courteous to visitors.

2.3 The school is well-maintained and the standard of caretaking and cleaning is excellent. The classroom assistants and other support staff make a valuable contribution to the life of the school. The teachers and governors value the help provided by the parents support group in raising considerable additional funds to support the children's learning and to enhance the school generally.

2.4 The school's programme for the promotion of health and well-being has strengths, with a developing commitment to encourage the children to eat healthily and be physically active.

2.5 The arrangements for pastoral care and child protection have a few strengths. There are, however, important areas for improvement which require prompt action to ensure that the policies and procedures are fully in line with the guidance outlined in the relevant DE Circulars. In particular, the school needs to review and update the policy documents and guidance materials for pastoral care and child protection. In addition the reviewed policies need to be communicated effectively to teaching and non-teaching staff, children, parents and governors. The District Inspector will return to the school, within a six week period, to ensure that these important issues are addressed appropriately.

2.6 The teachers are hard-working and display a high level of care and commitment to the children's education. Both of the teachers plan carefully to meet the range of age and ability in each class and they evaluate their half-termly units of work. The evaluations provide helpful comment on the success of the lessons and often outline further steps necessary to build on the children's current learning. There are plans to implement a common format for whole-school planning.

2.7 Each teacher has a composite class of three year groups; there are currently no year 6 children in the school. This arrangement of three year groups in each class places considerable demands on the teachers in terms of planning for the age range and ability of the children, the management and organisation of their learning and the monitoring and evaluation of their attainments. Both teachers give very willingly of their time beyond the school day to plan for the work of their class.

2.8 The quality of the teaching observed during the inspection was good; the teachers identified and shared with the children the intended learning outcomes for the lessons. In the best practice, the work was differentiated and challenging for all of the ability groups; the children were engaged in purposeful tasks that built on their previous learning. In addition, the teachers used a range of effective questioning strategies to stimulate the children's responses and to promote, extend and reinforce their learning.

2.9 During the inspection, the children in years 1, 2 and 3 experienced a range of practical activities which they clearly enjoyed; these activities helped to promote creativity and imagination and develop their thinking skills and personal capabilities. The staff have worked hard to provide new resources and organise areas of play for the children. The staff are aware of the need to extend further the range for role-play in order to enhance the experiences on offer throughout the year and ensure that the opportunities to promote the children's language and learning are exploited fully.

2.10 The school has begun the process of reviewing their whole-school literacy programme in order to promote consistency and progression during the primary years. It will be important that the whole-school guidance sets out lines of progression and development to ensure that the children's reading, writing and talking and listening are developed progressively and coherently across the curriculum. Both teachers place considerable emphasis on a planned and structured approach to learning to read and write. In addition, the children are encouraged to organise, express and share their ideas, opinions and views.

2.11 The children learn to read using a core reading scheme, Big Books, class novels and library texts. The strong focus on the teaching of phonics and exploring language is helping the children to acquire skills and strategies for recognising unfamiliar words. The children enjoy listening to stories and participating in group discussion about stories. They engage

enthusiastically with text; they have a positive attitude to reading and enjoy reading books. The older children talk about books they have read; they demonstrate a mature understanding of the characters in their class novels through their written character profiles and descriptions. Progress in learning to read is good and by year 7 almost all of the children read fluently and with understanding and enjoyment. Effective use is made of the central library and collections of books, in class, to support particular topics and themes.

2.12 The children have frequent opportunities to express their ideas and to ask questions in class. Through group work the older children share ideas, debate and agree outcomes based on reaching consensus. They have opportunities to share their learning with their teachers and with one another. The teachers provide effective support for individual children through focused questioning, access to additional resources, and during plenary sessions at the end of lessons. In the best practice, open-ended questions enabled the children to extend their thinking, to consider their use of vocabulary and to structure their response.

2.13 The children are encouraged to write in a variety of forms for a good range of purposes and audiences; in recent years some of the children have been successful in local competitions and have had their work published. In most year groups there are some examples of good quality writing; however, the quality of the children's writing across the school is variable. The children would benefit from greater opportunities to develop and apply their personal writing skills across the curriculum. There is undue emphasis on the completion of routine, isolated, and often low-level tasks where writing skills are not transferred, developed or applied directly in the children's work across the curriculum. The quality of the handwriting is largely satisfactory in key stage (KS) 1; it is appropriate that the school establishes an agreed handwriting style for the children in KS2. More attention should be given to the presentation of the children's written work.

2.14 Increasingly, ICT is being used for a variety of purposes in writing and for the presentation and display of work throughout the school. The digital cameras, together with some appropriate software packages and programmable devices, are used to good effect to support and improve the learning and teaching of English. The school has identified the need to update the ICT policy; the revised guidance should be used to inform subsequent action plans and to promote and support the further development of ICT across the curriculum.

2.15 The school has identified four children who require additional support with aspects of their learning. In addition to the support provided by the classroom teachers and assistant during the course of daily lessons, the school provides additional help for individuals on a withdrawal basis on three afternoons each week. Peripatetic support from an Outreach teacher of the Southern Education and Library Board is also available for some of the children. The class teachers and the Outreach teacher collaborate to prepare useful education plans to address the children's needs.

2.16 The teachers assess routinely the children's work in class and use appropriate strategies and tests to record their progress in English. Individual folders containing samples of work and school records are kept to build up a profile of each child's progress from year to year. The staff make good use of the benchmarking and end of KS data to support teaching and learning. The standards achieved by most of the children in talking and listening, reading and writing are generally good. The children's books are marked regularly; in the best

practice, the teachers add positive comments that affirm the children's work and provide some guidance on how the learning can improve further. Information on the children's progress is reported to the parents at a parent-teacher consultation in the second term, and through a written report in the third term.

2.17 The Principal and the assistant teacher work well together to share a number of day-to-day responsibilities for aspects of the life and work of the school. The teachers and governors are aware of the need to prepare whole-school guidance documents for important aspects of learning and teaching and pastoral care and child protection; this will require additional external support for the staff. Information relating to school policies and procedures should be shared with the parents.

2.18 The school has recently experienced a time of difficulty, unease and uncertainty, with changes in staffing and governors and a significant reduction in enrolment. It will be important that the new structures put in place to support the management and organisation of the school are embedded. The school community of governors, parents and teachers need to work together effectively to help ensure the smooth running of the school and that the children experience the best quality learning experiences. Further, it will be important that the employing authority, governors and the staff, plan for, and manage, issues related to the sustainability of the school provision and school budget, in order to address the current and future needs of the children and staff.

### 3. CONCLUSION

3.1 The strengths of the school include:

- the good quality of the learning and teaching observed;
- the standards attained by the children in English;
- the behaviour of the children and their positive attitude to learning;
- the good quality of the teachers planning and evaluation that are implemented effectively into classroom practice and used to inform future work;
- the commitment of the Principal and the governors to overcome recent difficulties within the school, and to provide the highest possible standards of care and education for the children; and
- the good quality of the accommodation and the stimulating atmosphere in class for learning and teaching.

3.2 Areas for Improvement

The school needs to ensure that:

- the key policies of Pastoral Care, Child Protection and Literacy are updated in order to guide the procedures, practice and curriculum; and

- the new structures put in place to support the management and organisation of the school are embedded and that the school community of governors, parents and teachers work together effectively to help ensure the smooth running of the school and that the children experience the best quality learning experiences.

3.3 In the areas inspected, the school has strengths in many aspects of its educational provision. The inspection has identified a few areas for improvement in important areas which need to be addressed 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.



**ACCOMMODATION AND HEALTH AND SAFETY ISSUES**

The main issues requiring attention are:

- The rear entrance door is not linked to the secure door access system; this should be reviewed to ensure the safety of the children and staff.
- The internal plaster work in the new staff room and disabled toilet is crumbling just above skirting board level.

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