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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

Blythefield Primary School and Nursery Unit
Belfast

Inspected: January 2007

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BASIC INFORMATION SHEET (BIS) - PRIMARY SCHOOLS

- A. i. **School: Blythefield Primary School and Nursery Unit** iii. **Date of Inspection: W/B 22.01.07**
 ii. **School Reference Number: 101-6207** iv. **Nature of Inspection: FI/English/SEN & ICT**

B.

School Year	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07
Year 1 Intake	16	18	18	16	14
Enrolments					
Primary	158	144	134	121	112
Reception	0	0	0	0	0
Nursery Class/Classes	26	23	24	23	20
Special Unit	0	0	0	0	0

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.

The calculations at C and D should be based on the total of the primary and reception enrolments only.

- C. Average Attendance for the Previous School Year
 (expressed as a percentage):

87.63%

Primary & Reception	Nursery Unit	Special Unit
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- D. i. Number of Teachers
 (including the principal and part-time teachers):
 (Full-time equivalent = 25 teaching hours)

8	1	-
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- ii. PTR (Pupil/Teacher Ratio):

16	NI PTR: 20.5
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- iii. Average Class Size:

19

- iv. Class Size (Range):

13 to 25

- v. Ancillary Support:

Number of Hours **Per Week**:

- | | |
|---|------|
| i. Clerical support: | 35 |
| ii. Official Making A Good Start Support: | 20 |
| iii. Additional hours of other classroom assistant support: | 42.5 |

- vi. Number of children with statements of special educational needs:

1

- vii. Number of children who are not of statutory school age:

0

- viii. Percentage of children entitled to free school meals:

75%

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Blythefield Primary School is located in the inner-city district of Sandy Row in south Belfast. The children come from the surrounding area. The enrolment has declined over the past number years, having reduced from 158 children in 2002/03 to the current figure of 112. Seventy-five per cent of the children are entitled to free school meals.

1.2 At the time of the inspection, the Principal had just begun a period of secondment with the Northern Ireland Regional Training Unit. The recently appointed Vice-principal had assumed the role of acting Principal; in addition to her management responsibilities, the acting Principal teaches a class on three days each week.

1.3 The arrangements for the inspection of pastoral care and child protection included meetings with the Board of Governors (BoG) and a group of children in year 6. The parents' views on aspects of the life and work of the school were sought by means of a confidential questionnaire. Seventy-eight questionnaires were sent to the parents by the school; approximately 40% were returned to the Department of Education (DE). Seven of the responses also included a written comment. Nearly all of the parents who responded expressed satisfaction with the school's provision. The few issues raised by the parents were discussed with the BoG and the acting Principal. The BoG expressed their appreciation of the work of the school and referred, in particular, to the hard work and commitment of the teachers and the Principal. The BoG also spoke of their involvement in school policy making and financial planning. The children reported that they feel safe and happy in school and are aware of how to seek help if they have any concerns.

1.4 The inspection focused on English, including the contribution of information and communication technology (ICT) in promoting and supporting learning and teaching in English, the provision for special educational needs (SEN), and on the school's arrangements for pastoral care, including child protection. The inspection also included the quality of the provision in the school's nursery unit.

2. THE QUALITY OF THE CHILDREN'S WORK

2.1 The school provides a caring and supportive environment. There is a strong family ethos throughout the school and the teachers know the children well. The children are welcoming and friendly to visitors and work and play co-operatively with one another. The learning support staff make a valuable contribution to the children's development. In an attempt to boost further the children's confidence and self-esteem, some teachers have introduced a reward system to encourage and acknowledge the children's good behaviour, work and effort. This initiative should be developed further. The historic high level of absence of the children has been addressed effectively. An imaginative incentive scheme has been introduced and, at present, the attendance rates show a significant improvement from previous years.

2.2 There are many strengths in the quality of the arrangements for pastoral care and child protection. The school has procedures in place which implement the guidance outlined in the relevant DE Circulars and has identified appropriately a few areas for improvement, including the need to consult with parents and children on a review of the discipline and anti bullying policies as outlined in Circular 2003/13, and the need to update child protection

training for all staff. Among the strengths is the inclusion of Personal Development as a priority issue in the 2006/07 School Development Plan (SDP).

2.3 The school's programme for the promotion of health and well-being has many strengths. Attention is given to the development and implementation of programmes which encourage the children to adopt healthy life-styles, such as 'Snackfast', access to drinking water and tooth brushing; effective links with external agencies support this work well. There is a developing commitment to promoting healthy eating, and opportunities are provided for all the children to participate in a range of physical activities.

2.4 There is effective communication with parents; newsletters are issued regularly, parent/teacher meetings are held during the course of the year and parents are informed about their children's progress through an annual written report. It is appropriate that the school is working to identify opportunities to involve parents more fully in the life and work of the school. In a recent initiative, a group of parents formed a writing group to write and commercially produce a number of illustrated story books.

2.5 The teachers plan diligently for their lessons; medium term planning covers all aspects of the curriculum, including the main areas to be covered in talking and listening, reading and writing. In the best practice, the planning identifies clearly the intended learning and takes account of the different ability levels in the class. It is important that all of the teachers have a clear understanding of what they want the children to know, and that the activities planned are appropriate, evaluated and systematically built upon. At its most effective, this process includes the regular sharing of the intended learning with the children and providing time for them to discuss and reflect upon their work. The school is increasingly making use of the children's performance data to identify areas of difficulty in their learning, both at an individual and whole class level. In English, for example, the information is used well to identify targets for improvement in particular aspects of work, such as spelling or story writing.

2.6 The teachers are hard working and well organised. The quality of the teaching observed during the inspection varied. Overall, the teaching was satisfactory, and on occasions it was very good. There were, however, significant weaknesses in a minority of the lessons. In the best practice observed, the children had a clear understanding of the intended learning, the teachers used a variety of teaching approaches, and opportunities were provided for the children to discuss and build upon their learning. Where the teaching was less effective, learning opportunities were missed, and the activities were repetitive or failed to stimulate or challenge the children. In these instances, there was little consideration for the individual needs and abilities of the children. The examples of good teaching observed should be disseminated across the school.

2.7 The children generally settle quickly to their work and most are capable of focused and sustained effort; they co-operate well with one another, follow instructions and engage in the learning opportunities provided for them. Some children find it difficult to complete their tasks; their attention span is limited and their level of motivation is low.

2.8 A comprehensive policy and detailed scheme of work guides the school's programme for English. Many of the teachers, through the display of the children's work and by providing library corners and collections of topic-related books, have created an interesting and stimulating literacy environment within their rooms. The school's central library

contains a good selection of fiction and non-fiction texts. The recently appointed English co-ordinator provides effective support to her colleagues and has drawn up an appropriate action plan for the development of reading across the school.

2.9 There is variation in the ability of the children to talk confidently about their work or to listen well. In the early years classes, the teachers promote the children's oral skills through activities such as shared reading, play-based learning and circle time. As the children progress through the school, they are encouraged to talk about their work and their interests. While the majority of the children develop satisfactory levels of oracy, there are others who have neither the confidence nor the vocabulary to make extended contributions in class; these children, especially, require on-going opportunities and encouragement to talk about their learning and to express their views and feelings.

2.10 The teaching of reading is planned for systematically across the school. The children are introduced to books at an appropriately early stage and are given opportunities to talk about the stories they hear and to select books independently from book corners. Reading skills are developed through oral sessions and shared and guided reading activities; the children build up phonic awareness and use pictorial and contextual clues effectively. In a small number of the lessons observed, whole class phonic work proved difficult and confusing for some of the children. By the end of key stage (KS) 1, the children are attaining standards generally in line with their varying abilities. As the children move through the school, there is insufficient emphasis on the teaching of the skills necessary for effective reading. In some of the lessons observed in KS2, the children were engaged in mundane whole class activities such as de-contextualised comprehension exercises, copying out text or repetitive grammar practice. The children should have regular opportunities to enhance their understanding and enjoyment in reading through relevant and interesting activities, and which also integrate and promote their writing and talking and listening skills. It is appropriate that the school has identified the teaching of reading as an area for development. A targeted group of year 6 children has been involved in the Raising Achievement Programme. This work is focused on a novel and has provided the children with valuable language experiences and increased their interest in books.

2.11 The children's writing skills are developed progressively. In year 1, they are introduced to print, encouraged to experiment with informal mark making, and, through multi-sensory experiences, begin to form letters accurately. As their skills develop, the children, with teacher support when necessary, begin to record their own ideas in simple sentences and then through lengthier prose; ICT applications and modelled and shared writing activities are used effectively by the teachers to enhance the children's learning. By the end of KS1, most children are able to write accurately in their own words. As they move through KS2, the children's writing skills are built upon further and applied to a broader range of purposes; they write letters, poems and book reviews and describe procedures and retell events. While the children, generally, achieve satisfactory standards, they have insufficient opportunities to write creatively, or to apply their skills to other areas of work such as science and history. Too often this work is restricted to the copying of notes or to activities which require the filling in of missing words. All of the children, and particularly the more able, would benefit from more challenging activities such as extended free writing and note making. The standards of handwriting and general presentation are satisfactory.

2.12 The teachers' planning identifies opportunities for the use of ICT to support and enhance learning and teaching across the curriculum. The school has arrangements in place

to record the children's skills in ICT as they progress through the school, and the development of assessment arrangements is a priority of the ICT action plan. It will be important to monitor not only the children's acquisition of skills, but also the contribution of ICT in promoting and supporting English and to identify further opportunities to embed ICT into the learning and teaching of English.

2.13 The children in the early years classes receive regular sessions of indoor and outdoor play-based learning. The activities are well planned around suitable themes and provide the children with a broad range of experiences to promote their social, physical and cognitive development. In the sessions observed, the children interacted well together, made choices about their learning and were able to sustain lengthy periods of purposeful play. The children's learning was promoted effectively by skilful intervention from the adults present; through good questioning and prompting, they encouraged the children to think and talk about their work.

2.14 The school has identified 44 children who require additional support with aspects of their learning. The teachers are mostly responsible for meeting the needs of the children in class and they draw up educational plans in consultation with the recently appointed special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO). A small number of children are withdrawn from class and receive support from outreach agencies. The SENCO has provided teachers with useful information in relation to supporting children with special educational needs (SEN), including record keeping in line with the Code of Practice, target setting and teaching strategies. The school has produced a useful SEN information booklet for parents and parents are invited to attend reviews of their children's educational plans. It will be important to develop further the role of the SENCO in order to enable her to monitor the provision for SEN, and to provide on-going guidance and support to the teachers in meeting the needs of the children in class.

2.15 Detailed data on the children's performance is gathered and is being used increasingly to track the progress of individual children and year groups and to help identify areas of weakness in the children's learning. Detailed records are maintained for each child; individual folders contain year-on-year samples of work, test outcomes and copies of annual reports. The children's work is marked regularly, often with supportive comments and, at times, helpful advice on how the work can be improved. The developing work within the school on assessment to promote learning should help to develop further this good practice, and allow for the children to be more reflective about their learning.

2.16 The acting Principal is hard-working and conscientious. She has a clear vision for the school and is keen to develop further the existing structures and identified priorities of the school. In order to make best use of her expertise and experience it would be appropriate to review her roles and responsibilities.

2.17 The SDP is generally in line with statutory requirements and identifies a number of pastoral and curriculum developments for the current three year period. Detailed action and monitoring plans identify the evidence to be gathered and the procedures to be employed to evaluate the effectiveness of the planned improvements. Staff development and the use of non-contact time are well aligned to this work; the teachers report that the guidance received from members of the Belfast and Education Library Board Advisory Service has been beneficial. Given the local context of the school and the high number of children on the SEN register, the school's plan for SEN should be more explicit.

2.18 The school building is large and, in the areas used by the school, is generally well maintained. Consideration should be given to making use of the enclosed open areas to support the children's learning and social development.

3. CONCLUSION

3.1 The strengths of the school include:

- the friendly and welcoming children;
- the effective incentive scheme to promote better attendance amongst the children;
- the wide range of links with outside agencies and the classroom-based initiatives to support the health and well-being of the children;
- the hard-working and committed teachers;
- the quality of the teaching in the majority of the lessons observed;
- the contribution of the learning support personnel;
- the positive responses of most of the children;
- the good start made to the use of school performance data to inform learning and teaching;
- the commitment and hard work of the acting Principal to develop further the established structures and identified priorities of the school; and
- the support and commitment of the BoG to the work of the school.

3.2 The areas for improvement include the need to:

- develop a shared understanding of effective teaching and learning strategies and disseminate this good practice throughout the school; and
- focus more clearly on learning outcomes and classroom activities to ensure that the needs and abilities of all of the children are met effectively.

3.3 In the areas under focus, the school has strengths in many aspects of its educational and pastoral provision. The inspection has identified a few important areas for improvement which need to be addressed to meet effectively the needs of all the children.

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

4. THE NURSERY UNIT

4.1 The nursery unit is situated in converted accommodation within the Primary School. Since the last inspection, a teacher from within the primary school has transferred to the nursery class; she took up her post in September 2006. The permanent nursery assistant is currently on leave. At the time of the inspection 19 children attended the nursery unit; eleven of the children are underage.

4.2 The parents and staff were given opportunities to express their views about the nursery unit through the inspection questionnaires. Overall, the responses indicated a good level of satisfaction with the nursery unit's provision.

4.3 While the staff are aware of appropriate child protection procedures to safeguard the children, there is an urgent need for the unit to review and update the current written policy in line with DE Circulars and guidance.

4.4 The nursery unit demonstrates a commitment to promoting healthy eating habits among the children through the healthy snack routine. Good opportunities are provided for the children to participate in a range of appropriate physical activities.

4.5 The main strengths within the nursery's educational and pastoral provision are as follows:

- the playroom is well organised and is arranged into areas for learning;
- there are caring relationships between the staff and the children;
- there are good relationships with the parents;
- the early part of the session provides an appropriate period of uninterrupted play, which offers the children opportunities to make choices;
- the programme provides a satisfactory range of activities and some learning opportunities in all areas of the pre-school curriculum;
- the snack time is used to develop the children's conversational and social skills; and
- the staff are developing a sense of team spirit; they co-operate well in their day-to-day work.

4.6 The inspection identified areas for improvement. The following are the most important areas that need attention:

- during the inspection the activities were insufficiently developed to provide challenge and to meet the children's differing needs. The planning does not identify clearly the learning potential of the play activities or the ways in which

the children's experiences will progress over the year. The planning needs to be developed further to support the staff in their day-to-day work with the children;

- at present the staff do not make observations of the children's play; there are no records of the children's progress. The staff need to develop methods of assessment, which will ensure that effective links are made between the planning process and the monitoring of the children's progress, to ensure that the children's differing needs are met. The staff also need to ensure that the information is used to report accurately to parents on their children's progress. The information should be used to evaluate the programme;
- there is a need to improve aspects of the organisation of the day in order to ensure that all time is used more effectively for learning;
- during the inspection, there were some instances when the staff worked alongside the children and interacted sensitively with them. Often, however, opportunities for learning were missed. The roles adopted by some of the staff over-emphasise the organisation of materials and supervision of activities. The staff need to develop their expertise in order to stimulate play of good quality and foster the children's all-round development; and
- the Principal needs to ensure that adequate support is provided for the staff and that the work of the nursery unit is evaluated more rigorously.

4.7 The nursery unit has been going through a period of instability due to the changes in staff. The staff have not yet begun to develop approaches to self-evaluation. Recently, an action plan has been drawn up which identifies appropriate targets for improvement.

4.8 The nursery unit has a few strengths in its educational provision. The inspection has identified important areas for improvement, which need to be addressed promptly if the nursery unit is to meet effectively the needs of all the children.

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

**STATISTICAL INFORMATION ON BLYTHEFIELD PRIMARY SCHOOL
NURSERY UNIT**

1. Details of Children

Number of children:	Class 1	Class 2
Attending full-time	19	
Attending part-time	0	
Under 3 years of age*	11	
With statement of SEN**	0	
At CoP stages 3 or 4***	1	
At CoP stages 1 or 2***	1	
With English as an additional language	0	

* On 1 July.

** Special Educational Needs.

*** The stages refer to those set out in the Code of Practice for the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs.

Percentage qualifying under DE admission criteria 1 or 2.	74%
Average attendance for the previous year.	78.7%

2. Duration of Sessions

Full-time	Part-time: am	Part-time: pm
4½ hours		

3. Details of Staff

Number of:	Full-Time	Part-Time
Teachers	1	
Nursery Assistants	1	
Qualified Nursery Assistants	1	

Number of: *****	
Students	0
Trainees	1

***** Total placements since September of current year

4. Parental Questionnaires (to be completed by Inspection Services Branch)

Number issued	19
Percentage returned	
Number of written comments	

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